

Urban Identity and the Rise of Professional Baseball

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A basic premise of symbolic interactional thought on the nature of urban imagery and urban identification follows Robert Park's notion that the "city is a state of mind." Building on that premise given objects in the city can become symbolically representative of the city and can serve as a source of personal identification for the inhabitants. Further, the shared social world of urban dwellers is linked by shared symbolization and networks of communication that transcend local contacts and involvements and allow people to belong to it. This paper is concerned with a social historical analysis of professional baseball as a shared social world and as a source of urban imagery and identification. The rise of professional baseball in the last quarter of the nineteenth century coincided with America's transformation from a predominantly rural agricultural society to an increasingly industrial one. Baseball is shown to be one form of urban landmark that drew people together, became a source of subjective identification with the larger community, and also contributed to the rapid industrialization of the city.