

The New York Yankees as an American Cultural Icon, 1940-1970

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Abstract

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The New York Yankees baseball club, arguably the United States' most successful and well-known sports franchise, have acquired many cultural connotations over the years, meanings transcending the immediate world of on-field sporting contest. This study argues that by the 1940s, the Yankee's success in the previous decades and their representation in popular culture caused a coherent set of cultural meanings to crystallize around the club to create an American icon. This icon served as an emblem for a set of interrelated mid-century mainstream American values, namely the American dream of upward mobility, heroic masculinity, and a narrative of national success.

The meanings, perspectives on, and uses of this mid-century Yankees cultural icon have not been homogeneous, but have shifted generally with the team's on-field performance and broader historic changes, as well as with the perspectives of individual cultural producers and audiences. In particular, increasingly throughout the 1950s and '60s, a general shift towards a negative perspective on the Yankees icon emerged in cultural texts of the era, one that increasingly saw the American values they embodied in a negative light. In these texts, representations of the Yankees as elitist, greedy, racist, too-tradition-bound, and overly-corporate are utilized to convey a critique of these values. This general shift in perceptions and uses of the Yankees icon parallels and is part of the broader cultural conflict and shift occurring between World War II and the end of the 1960s.

Methodologically, this study draws on Roland Barthes application of semiotic theory to cultural communication in a broader sense. It draws on baseball history and general cultural

history and seeks historical readings of texts from literature, film, popular music, journalism, and sports fan culture. In particular, *The Pride of the Yankees* (1942), Joe DiMaggio's autobiography *Lucky to Be a Yankee* (1946), Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), Mark Harris's *The Southpaw* (1953), Douglass Wallop's *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* (1954), *Damn Yankees* (1955 Broadway, '58 film), Simon and Garfunkel's "Mrs. Robinson" (1968) and Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* (1970) are analyzed for the way they represent and use the Yankees.

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Introduction

There is no shortage of evidence for the strength of Americans' devotion to following collegiate, Olympic, and particularly, professional sports. Most local newspapers have an entire six-to-eight-page section devoted to sporting events. ESPN (Entertainment and Sports Programming Network), a twenty-four-hour sports channel, has become easily one of the most popular networks on cable television since its 1979 inception. The National Football League's annual championship game, the Super Bowl, has become the most-watched television broadcast every year. Following Raymond Williams's suggestion that "culture is ordinary" (6), the sheer ubiquity of sports consumption and fandom since the turn of the century suggests that sport is certainly a topic worthy of academic inquiry as part of the pursuit to understand the shifting and varied values and experiences of the American past and present.

While the working-class, populist connotations of American sport in the twentieth century delayed scholarly examination for several decades, the study of sport has ridden the wave of change in the academy's approach to culture, pioneered by scholars such as Williams and Stuart Hall forty years ago, to become an important and growing scholarly field. Within this field, significant attention has been devoted to prominent athletes—such as baseball's Babe Ruth or boxer Muhammad Ali—as cultural icons representing the values of a particular historical moment, geographic place, or subculture. Somewhat overlooked, however, is the way that entire sports teams or franchises have done similar cultural work, acquiring connotations and meaning

to become icons in their own right, often representing certain ideals, values, and experiences across a longer chronological period than a single athlete could.

This study explores one of the United States' most prominent and successful sports franchises, the New York Yankees, and the popular meaning they have amassed as a cultural icon. Between 1920 and the mid-1960s, this New York baseball team rose to a level of unparalleled success and prominence. During this time period, the word "Yankees," the images of the team logos and their famous pin-striped jerseys, as well as the names and images of their prominent players all acquired, more so than any other baseball team, and perhaps any sports team in general, certain *cultural connotations*. In other words, if a man in a bar in 1952 overheard a stranger mention the Yankees, not only the specific team and its players would come to the man's mind, but *an idea* as well.

To better understand the iconic status the team acquired, I will analyze mass-media baseball narratives for the cultural meanings they attribute to the Yankees. While the Yankees' iconic cultural status obviously is rooted in the team, its players and their performance on the field, it is often in texts peripheral to on-field performances and their immediate journalistic reporting—that is, baseball-related films, novels, popular biographies, and popular music—that the link between the team and values or ideas that transcend sport is most clear. Broadly speaking, I will argue that in the 1940s, a coherent set of cultural meanings associated with the Yankees crystallized in popular texts whose portrayals of the club and its players were built on the foundation of their on-field success of the 1920s and '30s. In these texts, the Yankees stand as an icon of a collection of related mid-century American values: heroic masculinity, the American dream of upward mobility, and the pursuit and celebration of success that paralleled the nation's own political, military, and economic victories in the twentieth century.

During the following decades, however, an increasing number of baseball-related mass media texts take an oppositional perspective on the Yankees icon, frequently using negative portrayals of the baseball club as a way to critique one or more of the mid-century American values with which they have been affiliated. This trend became particularly prominent in the later 1960s as part of the broader cultural shift and generational transition that saw the “Baby Boom” generational cohort rejecting many of the values of their parents’ World War II generation. Throughout the thirty-year period of cultural transition treated in this study, the Yankees icon and the varying ways it is portrayed and utilized provide keen insight into the diverse and changing attitudes, dreams, and self-perceptions of twentieth-century Americans.

A Very Brief History of the Yankees (1901-1940)

Among American sports franchises no team has quite established the cultural profile that the New York Yankees have. While there are certainly other teams that have achieved a high level of success in their own spheres, such as professional basketball’s Boston Celtics or the University of Notre Dame’s football team, the Yankees have arguably been the most dominant and have had the advantage of achieving their substantial success in Major League Baseball—the first and paradigmatic iteration of popular team sport fandom in U.S. culture. Furthermore, this dominance occurred during one of baseball’s most culturally dominant eras: roughly the 1920’s through the mid-1960s.

During this period, the Yankees appeared in exactly twenty-nine meetings of the league’s championship competition, the World Series, winning twenty of them. That means that in a league of sixteen teams (excepting the end of this period, when the league expanded to twenty teams), during this era when baseball’s popularity and cultural influence were significant, over forty percent of the championship titles were won by one team. During this same period, the

second-most successful baseball club was the St. Louis Cardinals, who in their own right were often very good, but “only” appeared in ten World Series, winning seven.

These statistics highlighting the Yankees’ dominance during this period are not cited to examine the franchise’s success from a strategic standpoint either as an athletic or business model, but to help give us an idea of the significant presence the team developed in the local and national mass media outlets, and thereby the popular consciousness. This is particularly true of the thoughts and imaginations of baseball fans—a significant portion of the American populace—whether they loved, loathed, and/or envied the New York ballclub. One might say the same could be said for any baseball team in any era, but I would argue that this is more frequently and unquestionably true for the Yankees than for any of the other clubs. Within the broad mainstream of American popular culture, the Yankees meaning was and is bigger, broader, and longer.

While the focus of this project will be on the use and shaping of the Yankees icon in the culture of the mid- to late-twentieth century, because cultural connotations are so tied to history, a brief overview of the Yankees’ earlier historical period is necessary. The Yankees did not always have their iconic status in American culture. In the first decades of the twentieth century and of the American League, the Yankees (called the Highlanders until 1913) were an unremarkable baseball club, particularly when compared to New York City’s more established and successful National League franchise, the Giants, who were led by their colorful and intense manager John McGraw. This relationship between the two teams was symbolized during much of this era by the fact that the Yankees were tenants to the Giants, renting their ballpark, the Polo Grounds, when the Giants were playing out of town.

But the Yankees' fortunes began to change in 1915 when the club was purchased by a German-born heir to a brewery fortune, Colonel Jacob Ruppert. Ruppert's wealth most dramatically shaped the Yankees with the December, 1919 purchase of the heavy-hitting pitcher-turned outfielder George "Babe" Ruth from the Boston Red Sox. Ruth was a Herculean figure both on and off the baseball field, and though newspapers often did their best to suppress unseemly news items concerning "the Babe," he became almost as well known for his substantial appetites of every sort as he did for the new power-hitting, home-run-focused style of play he brought to the game. The arrival of Ruth and a host of other Ruppert acquisitions significantly improved the Yankees on-field success, helping them win the 1921 and '22 American League pennants, pitting them against their cross-town rivals and landlords, the Giants, in both years. The histories of the two clubs and their style of play colored the way those World Series were viewed, with the storied Giants representing established tradition with their old-style of play focused on speed and strategy and the Yankees, featuring Ruth and power-hitting, playing the role of the brash, iconoclastic up-and-comers (Spatz and Steinberg xv-xix). While by this time, Ruth had helped the Yankees out-draw the Giants in terms of fan attendance, the Giants put these upstarts in their place by defeating them in both the '21 and '22 World Series, and to add insult to injury, demanding they move out of the Polo Grounds.

Ruppert and the Yankees responded by building the bigger and more luxurious Yankee Stadium in time for the 1923 season, which ended in another rematch of the Giants-Yankees rivalry. But this time the upstarts emerged victorious. The Yankees continued to enjoy success throughout the decade and, with the addition of big-hitting players like Earle Combs, Tony Lazzeri, and particularly Lou Gehrig, the dominant Yankee team of 1927 earned the nickname

“Murderer’s Row,” a hyperbolic moniker befitting the brute force of the power-hitting Yankees and their charismatic leader, Ruth.

While the team gained the reputation as baseball’s most formidable team during Ruth’s career, winning pennants in 1921, ’22, ’23, ’26, ’27, ’28, and ’32, World Series championships in ’23, ’27, ’28 and ’32, the Yankees arguably became even more successful after Ruth’s departure and retirement. Yankee teams managed by Joe McCarthy and paced by a Hall of Famers Lou Gehrig and Joe DiMaggio won four World Series in a row from 1936 to ’39, a feat no baseball team had come close to accomplishing previously, and earned the additional nickname “the Bronx Bombers.” It was perhaps during these years that the Yankees status as an American icon became solidified as the team’s cultural connotations shifted from what they had been during the Ruth era. During Ruth’s career with the Yankees, by association, the team took on much of that slugger’s persona in the public mind—they were initially the rambunctious upstarts challenging the tradition and soon became dominant, larger-than-life intimidators, as evidenced by the application of the “Murderer’s Row” nickname. But after Ruth’s departure, the public figureheads of the Yankees became the strict, demanding, but fair manager McCarthy, and even more importantly, Gehrig and newcomer Joe DiMaggio. While Gehrig and DiMaggio were, like Ruth, publicly known for their ethnic working-class background, both of the two later Yankees players fostered more subdued public images on *and* off-the-field. Both were also known and still remembered more for the dependability and consistency of their playing style—Gehrig for playing in 2,130 consecutive games, and DiMaggio for hitting safely in 56 consecutive games—than for the sheer immensity of their physical prowess like Ruth, who could hit a lot of towering home runs, but also had down years and struck out frequently. These contrasting personae, combined with the fact that the Gehrig-and-DiMaggio-era teams, in their

own minds as well as the public's, were building on their past success, had something of a refining influence on the Yankees' cultural connotations. By the end of the thirties they embodied a different, more conservative kind of success than the earlier teams did, they began to represent a *tradition* of winning that must be upheld and respected with a more-controlled version of male heroism. In short, as the 1930s turned into the '40s the Yankees cultural connotations had coalesced into an icon that was consistent with and reasserted some of the most prominent cultural myths of the twentieth-century middle class.

1940-1970 as a Historical Focus

The 1942 film *The Pride of the Yankees* can be viewed as a culminating moment of the gradual formation of the Yankees icon. This MGM movie directed by Sam Wood and written by sportswriter and novelist Paul Gallico tells the heroic story of Yankees first baseman Lou Gehrig, who had recently lost both his livelihood and his life to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis in 1941. The details of the film itself will be attended to later, but presently the important issue is the title, which evokes the Yankees franchise rather than Gehrig himself. With regard to the film's title, that all-important marketing tool intended both to pique potential moviegoers' interest and give them a clue as to what the film will be about, it is telling that MGM's marketers chose to rely on the signifier "Yankees" as a gesture towards the film's content and as an attempt to attract audiences. Obviously, this word denotes baseball, which, in addition to being crucial information for their potential audience, indicates Yankees' renown among baseball clubs. A movie studio of this era would never think of naming a film "Pride of the Browns," "Pride of the Phillies," or probably not even *Pride of the Athletics*, *Red Sox*, or *Giants*—teams that had won more frequently in this era. But even a relatively uninitiated, middle-aged American woman would have known that "Yankees" meant baseball. (Indeed, the movie was marketed to women

as well as men.) But, perhaps more importantly, the signifier “Yankees” meant more than just baseball, connoting and embodying many of the central plot points and themes of this biographical film, namely manly heroism, the myth of the American dream, and the national ideology of success.

In this way, the film *The Pride of the Yankees* is perhaps the first significant mass-media chronicle of the mythic cultural meanings the franchise had amassed through its unmatched and consistent on-field success and the public biographies of star players, Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio. As suggested by its title, *The Pride of the Yankees* leads its viewers to the idea that the Yankees stand for something. Thus, it does not merely *reflect* the cultural meaning the club had acquired on the field and through sports writers and broadcasts, but also *actively participates* in its creation and the shaping of its content.

The 1942 film certainly would not be the last cultural text to draw on and to simultaneously shape the cultural myth of the New York Yankees. The Bronx Bombers have been featured in or alluded to in a vast number of novels, films, television programs, and popular songs. They are likewise well-represented in the abundance of popular sports biographies for young readers that have proliferated since the turn of the century as well as the wealth of pseudo-academic popular baseball histories, biographies, and memoirs for adults. It is this realm of baseball cultural production that I will investigate and analyze for its creation and use of the various shifting meanings of the Yankees icon with particular attention to the changes and additions to the meaning made most prominent through time.

While such texts have certainly been produced through the end of the twentieth century and into the next, my study will focus on the period starting with *The Pride of the Yankees*,

roughly the beginning of the World War II era through the end of the 1960s. My reasoning for this historical focus is essentially two-fold. For one thing, in the following decade the Yankees were purchased by wealthy and demanding owner George Steinbrenner, who oversaw the team for most of the period from 1973 through his death in 2010. Steinbrenner, a towering, plutocratic and egocentric figure, did much to shape the way the Yankees were perceived and the role they played in the cultural production surrounding the game of baseball, making the period of the last quarter of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century worthy to be studied on its own.

Furthermore, the major historical shift in the most prominent perspectives on the Yankees' cultural meaning from the World War II period through the end of the 1960s strongly parallels, *and is in fact part of* the major cultural shift that occurred in the United States during that period. Essentially, the most prevalent cultural meaning of the Yankees franchise through the early 1950s was, as evident in *The Pride of the Yankees*, as a positive iconic articulation of what many in that patriotic period would have considered the most "American" of values: heroism, loyalty, and the related American dreams of upward mobility and success. But beginning in those same 1950s, the ballclub and its myth began to be interpreted more and more commonly by cultural critics and the rising generation as a negative symbol of everything that was wrong with America—the old-guard-empowered "establishment" that had controlled and dominated American political, economic, and cultural life, and whose way of doing things led to the increasingly common sticking-points, the toleration of racism and sexism, and the use of military force in Korea and especially Vietnam.

The historical parameters of this study, 1940-1970 encapsulate a crucial picture of the broad strokes of American twentieth-century cultural history—of a generational transition and

the sociocultural changes that accompanied it. The beginning of the 1940s was chosen as a rough starting point not only because it encapsulates the United States' participation in World War II, but also the death of Lou Gehrig in June of 1941 and the release of the important text, *The Pride of the Yankees* the following summer. Similarly, a rough end date of 1970 not only makes for a round thirty-year span but also brackets the late 1960s, a period characterized by two important trends for this study: the rapid on-field decline of the Yankees, and the flowering of the "hippie" counterculture. With this historical focus, this project is able to become something of a longitudinal study of the way Americans have perceived and utilized the Yankee icon as part of the shifting values of this crucial period of the mid-twentieth century. What follows is an overview of the specific texts and themes that will be examined in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Overviews

The first chapter will establish the theoretical foundations of the study, particularly Roland Barthes application of the linguistic field of semiotics to the world of cultural signs that transcend written or spoken language. Barthes's theories delineate how an entity like the Yankees can acquire connotative meanings to become icons of American cultural values. This chapter will also review the existing academic literature focused on both the study of sports teams and baseball and outline where this study will situate itself in those sub-fields.

The second chapter will begin the analysis of the Yankees icon in a shifting historical context, dealing primarily with the 1942 MGM film, *The Pride of the Yankees*. As a broad-reaching mass-media text, this film crystallizes the Yankees' iconic cultural meaning for a popular audience. Through its biographical portrayal of Lou Gehrig, the Yankees' star first baseman who was tragically diagnosed with the career-ending, and eventually fatal

neuromuscular disease, *The Pride of the Yankees* celebrates the Yankees' real-life success and links them to themes of the American dream of upward mobility, populism, and courageous masculinity. Released in the first year of American involvement in World War II, this Samuel-Goldwin-produced and Sam-Wood-directed movie, ties Gehrig's courage, sacrifice, and work ethic to that of U.S. soldiers, effectively nationalizing the values it associates with the Yankees, and rendering the ballclub an icon of the very best America had to offer.

Chapter three builds on and continues with the themes explored in *The Pride of the Yankees* by examining the popular cult surrounding star centerfielder Joe DiMaggio in the 1940s and early '50s. This chapter argues that the popular reception and portrayal of DiMaggio continued and strengthened the Yankee affiliations with the American dream of upward mobility, courageous masculinity, and success by way of populist work ethic. But to this, the presentation of the DiMaggio-led Yankees adds a distinct mythic dimension to the centerfielder's on-field heroism and his team's success, transforming DiMaggio into an archetypical hero of the type Joseph Campbell identified and celebrated, and giving an air of destiny to the Yankees' success. This mythically heroic depiction of DiMaggio and his Yankees is present in a diverse array of cultural texts, such as his own ghost-written autobiography for young readers, *Lucky to Be a Yankee* (1946), Ernest Hemingway's canonized novella, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), and in the prose of articles in the sports pages and general interest magazines like *Life*. This popular celebration of the DiMaggio-era Yankees and their dramatic achievement of seemingly-predetermined victory paralleled the nation's postwar exceptionalist, triumphalist ideas about its own way of life, destiny, the part it played in the global conflict, and its new role as world power.

The fourth chapter makes a small departure in methodology, focusing on a localized community of fans rather than broadly-reaching mass media cultural texts. Specifically, it examines the culture of Brooklyn Dodgers fans and how they used their local rivals, the Yankees, as symbols of wealth and elitism to craft and celebrate their own identity of working-class underdogs. Drawing on Lawrence Grossberg's concept of "mattering maps" within fandom, this chapter argues that Dodgers fans advocated an alternate set of values by embracing a perspective on the Yankees that ran counter to their national icon common in most popular texts at the time. And as they faced and lost to the Yankees numerous times in the World Series during the 1940s and '50s, their interpretation of the Yankees as the privileged tyrants of baseball was increasingly disseminated throughout the national popular culture at large. Complicating matters further was the issue of race. Compared to the Dodgers, leaders of integration, the Yankees were slow to desegregate, challenging their status as icons of the American dream for many. Class-conscious and racially heterogeneous, in the postwar period the Dodgers and their fans challenged the Yankee cultural icon and the national values it represented, promoting a national identity of the scrappy, perennial-bridesmaid underdog at a time when celebrating economic plenty and national military victory were a major part of the mainstream cultural consensus.

Chapter number five builds on the postwar Dodger fans' alternate perspective on the Yankees icon as it returns focus to mass-media cultural texts distributed nation-wide. The chapter focuses on two novels published in successive years in the first half of the 1950s that, like Dodgers fans, use the Yankees as a symbol of the things that were perceived as wrong with mid-century America, rather than as the celebrated icon of an American essence. In Mark Harris's *The Southpaw* (1953), a fictionalized version of the Yankees organization acts as a

dehumanizing, homogenizing corporation that the novel's hero must defy in order to live freely. In Douglass Wallop's comedic baseball fantasy, *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* (1954), meanwhile, a slightly exaggerated version of the Yankees that never loses the pennant motivates a middle-aged Washington Senators fan to strike a Faustian bargain with the devil, only to learn that he has been double-crossed and that this demonic figure is the source of the Yankees power. Both these widely different texts use the Yankees as an empowered enemy against which a solitary underdog must struggle, bringing the ethos of Brooklyn Dodgers fan culture to national popular discourse, particularly as Wallop's novel was adapted into a successful Broadway stage musical and film with the evocative title *Damn Yankees*. The portrayal of the Yankees in these novels is complimented by the sudden appearance of articles in sports and general interest magazines describing a backlash against the Yankees among baseball fans. In both the novels and the journalistic pieces, the increased profile given to this perspective that treats the Yankees as the embodiment of a hegemonic power structure gives voice to the experience of fans of less successful teams. But more importantly, as these texts challenge the established mass-media image of the Yankees as heroic, all-American icons of success, they participate in an emerging broader cultural rebellion against patriotic postwar consensus, and faith in "the American way," joining a broad array of texts such as the writings of the Beats, early rock and roll music, and existentialist-influenced literature.

The sixth and final chapter examines the Yankees icon in 1960s, when the broader cultural shifts seemed to be paralleled by the sudden on-field decline of the Yankees in the second half of the decade. The textual focus of this chapter will be ex-Yankee pitcher Jim Bouton's controversial memoir written during the 1969 season, *Ball Four*. This memoir is best remembered for the compromising information Bouton revealed about Mickey Mantle, the

current torch-bearer of Yankee heroism, and heir to Ruth, Gehrig and DiMaggio, causing a minor scandal and tainting Mantle's and the team's public image. More importantly, in *Ball Four*, as part of his attempt to affiliate himself with the emergent counterculture, Bouton characterizes the Yankees as baseball's version of "The Establishment," or the outdated ruling power structure of the previous generation. In *Ball Four*, the values the team was celebrated for embodying in texts like *The Pride of the Yankees*, are portrayed as problematic and passé. What once would have been seen as manly heroism is dismissed as self-repressive macho posturing. The team's iconic representation of American success becomes an embodiment of American tyranny. This portrayal of the Yankees as an icon of the passing values of the previous generation is supplemented in a more mournful way by Simon and Garfunkel's 1968 hit pop song "Mrs. Robinson" which asks the question, "Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio?/ A nation turns its lonely eyes to you." In these texts the Yankees' iconic representation of mainstream American values in the '40s and '50s is turned on its head presented from a critical, iconoclastic point of view as part of the broader cultural shifts occurring at the time.

Chapter One

Theoretical Groundwork and Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will attempt to lay a foundation for the more specific analyses of particular texts that will follow. As such, it will outline cultural theories that will be utilized in this analysis, particularly semiotic theory, as well as reviewing the existing scholarship relevant to the academic dialogs I hope this project will enter, including perspectives on baseball-related cultural narrative, scholarship focused on sports teams, and the so-called “baseball ideology.”

The Yankees as Semiotic Signifier

The Yankees franchise’s cultural connotations are perhaps best understood by what semiologist Roland Barthes calls “myth.” While in popular usage, as in many academic disciplines, a myth is first and foremost a story, for Barthes, who focuses on unspoken communication through cultural symbols, this is not necessarily so. For Barthes (1915-1980) and the semioticians that followed him, a cultural myth, which might be evoked or implied by an icon such as the Yankees, is a combination of ideology and overarching cultural practices and values. Myth, according to Barthes, is always shaped by—and serves as the vehicle for—history and cultural values. It is an oft-unspoken or implied ideological narrative that is given a “natural and eternal justification” (*Mythologies* 143) within a particular culture through the popular

circulation of more specific iterations—be they in images, stories, or other forms of signification—of the key ideas and values of the myth. Specifically, the Yankees have often been presented and interpreted as a cultural icon that simultaneously gestures towards and “proves” the broader American cultural myths of heroic masculinity, the American dream, and the national success story.

Roland Barthes built his theory of myth on Ferdinand de Saussure’s concept of language as a symbolic system of “signs” linking vocalized sound or its printed representation, the “signifier,” with the concept or thing it represents, the “signified” (Saussure 646-647). Barthes applied this semiotic structure to communication beyond the strictly linguistic, and to the culturally accumulated connotations of words, icons, symbols or visual cues as well as their literal denotative meanings.

Myths achieve their cultural power through the linkage of a signifying cue—an article of clothing, a combination of colors, a type of food, or, for us, a sports team—with ideas beyond the literal, denotative meaning commonly associated with this cue by members of a given culture, or as Barthes puts it, “with a type of social *usage* which is added to pure matter” (109). As an example, Barthes writes about roses signifying “(his) passion” (113). Barthes describes this culturally, historically-rooted *connotative* communication as “second order” to distinguish it from the more basic “first order” symbolic system of the literal or *denotative* meaning of language (114). The connotative second order is “chosen by history” (110), or is produced by historical context and thus can become tied up in broader cultural ideology.

Thus, the “first order” meaning of the word “Yankees” (in a baseball context) is the professional American League team based in the Bronx, New York City. Meanwhile, because of

the unique history of the club, its prominent players, and because of the values most commonly held by those around the sport of baseball during the Yankees' formative years in the first half of the twentieth century, the "second order" connotative meaning of Yankees communicates, essentially, a certain standard of male heroism, the American dream of upward mobility, and a triumphal concept of America tied to its mid-century economic and military success.

While these concepts will be visited and discussed in much greater detail in the chapters that follow, here we will define the American dream as essentially the notion that through hard work, one can improve his or her economic and social status. Heroic masculinity, meanwhile, will be defined as the idea that a "real" man must prove himself through dramatic acts in high-pressure situations to gain a literal or symbolic victory. Finally, the triumphal America refers specifically to the optimistic perspective on and rhetoric about the American nation and its role in the world that was particularly prominent in the wake of victory in World War II, during mid-century domestic prosperity (Rader 305-311, 313-14, 317-318). These three concepts tied to the Yankees as cultural connotations in the middle of the twentieth century are not only interrelated, but generally mutually supportive. And like Barthes's roses, the Yankees can convey their meaning without conscious thought. This mythic meaning of the Yankees can be evoked by a mere mention of the team name, or the physical representation of their team logos, or their iconic pinstriped uniforms. When featured or alluded to in any sort of creative text, the Yankees can act as a cultural shorthand for those ideologies and values that have become part of their connotative meaning over time.

In semiotic terms, the New York Yankees could be said to be an *icon* of the myths of the American dream, heroic masculinity, and national success. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), another semiologist working largely independently from Saussure and Barthes, but in a similar

vein, defined an icon as something representing a separate object “by virtue of a character which it possesses in itself, and would possess just the same though its object did not exist” (170).

Working from Peirce’s definition, the Yankees baseball club constitutes a popular icon of the broader cultural myths of the American dream, heroic masculinity, and national success (whether or not, as Peirce suggests, those myths “exist,” which we could extend to encompass whether or not they are “correct” or “true”). The team achieves this iconic status by “possessing” the “characters” of those myths “in itself”: through its own consistent on-field success and “clutch” performances, and through the stoic, dependable public demeanor and rags-to-riches biographies of its key players. In this capacity to serve as a tangible microcosm of those larger cultural ideologies the Yankees become mythic icons, not only representing those myths, but dramatizing their narratives and, as Barthes would say, making them seem like a “natural” part of American life (*Mythologies* 143).

Since any connotative meaning, as Barthes states, is “chosen by history,” however, the cultural connotations of the Yankees are neither singular nor static. While the Yankees’ most prevalent cultural meaning remains the team’s embodiment of heroic masculinity, the American dreams of upward mobility, and national prosperity and power, societal changes over time inevitably reshape popular perspectives on these values. In many texts that I will examine, for instance, particularly some of those from the 1960s, when many Americans sought to break away from the values and ideologies of the previous generation, the Yankees are portrayed in a negative light, essentially becoming a symbol of perceived problems with the values embodied by the “classic” version of the Yankees icon: that the American dream narrative is either a lie or socially problematic and racially biased, that concept heroic masculinity is culturally damaging, that American prosperity and power is harmful to both American citizens and the people of the

world. These texts contributed to the association of Yankees with this counter-narrative that has become commonplace enough within American culture to be considered a myth in its own right, an example of Barthes's suggestion that the "denunciation, demystification (or demythification)" of these ideologically-charged narratives have "become in some sort mythical" in themselves (*Image, Music, Text* 166). Today this counter-narrative stands parallel to the primary mythic narrative associated with the Yankees, arguably having nearly as much cultural currency as the more laudatory, earlier perspective on the Yankees icon.

But broad historical change is not necessarily the only means of reshaping a cultural myth. For instance, in any creative text prominently featuring the Yankees in its structure or plot—film, novel, or popular song—the team can be imbued with meaning slightly different from the most standard version of the cultural myths of the American dream and of heroic masculinity, or perhaps emphasizing certain aspects of them. For example, in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), the Yankees icon is evoked in a way that de-emphasizes its cultural ties to the "rags-to-riches" American dream narrative and emphasizes their associations with the manly, heroic attributes of self-sacrifice and, in Hemingway's phrase, "grace under pressure" (qtd. in Parker 29). Thus, while there exist both a standard meaning of the Yankees icon and as an opposite pole, the aforementioned counter-narrative, many variations on these connotative meanings for the Yankees also exist and will likely continue to be created in American culture.

Baseball and Narrative

My survey of Yankees-related cultural texts from this selected historical period will be especially focused on those texts that are more peripheral to the game and sports journalism:

books, films, and, to a lesser extent, music. My decision to focus on these more “creative” and “artistic” texts rather than the on-field action, or the reporting and broadcasting of the games and seasons, is largely motivated by the concept of narrative. Historical events, including sports contests, acquire meaning for the public only when they are made into a narrative: a story with conflicts and resolutions, causes and effects. Economist and sports fan Michael Mandelbaum has likened a fan’s viewing of a particular ball game and an entire season to a grand epic narrative (5), a suggestion I value and appreciate, but the fact remains that any such season-long epic journey of a sports team does not exist in its own right, but only if connections are made between events in the minds of participants or fans. The individual fan’s and fan community’s perspective will be particularly examined in my third chapter that will draw on oral histories and fan memoirs to consider the way the Yankees were imagined by the fans of the cross-town rivals, Brooklyn Dodgers, their frequent World Series foes in the post-WWII era.

Along with the cultural narratives created on the local and individual level within fans and fan communities, there also exists a broader national level of narrative creation from the raw material of sport performances in the form of widely-circulating mass-media texts. This group of narratives includes not only the cause-and-effect descriptions or recreations of a sports contest in broadcasting or journalism, but popular histories and biographies as well as sports-history-influenced fictional literature and film, a substantial body of texts with regard to baseball-related culture, with its films and books that often feature historical figures, events, and organizations, sometimes deliberately mixed with fiction. Examples of such historically-shaped baseball fiction include Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*, Mark Harris’s *The Southpaw* (1953), and Douglas Wallop’s *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* (1954), and its Broadway and film

musical adaptation, *Damn Yankees* (Broadway 1955, film 1958), all of which will be analyzed as part of this study.

David McGimpsey emphasizes the close relationship between this world of baseball fiction and the professional game itself, asserting that “the production of baseball fiction takes place within the production of American professional baseball rather than safely outside” (26). While a note of deterministic Marxism that sometimes too sweepingly addresses the whole of baseball literature and film as if it were only the propaganda wing for the corporation of Major League Baseball somewhat compromises McGimpsey’s argument, his assertion regarding the strong link between the game and its cultural texts is worth noting. We should consider baseball-related literary fiction, film, television, music, and any “creative” texts as a crucial element of national sports narrative.

In some respects, many of these texts can be considered the narrative voice of baseball fans amplified and broadcast nationally, sometimes showing the influence of local fan communities, as is the case with Douglas Wallop’s novel *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*. Wallop’s depiction of the Yankees was influenced by the local fan cultures of the Washington Senators (of which the author himself was certainly part) and Brooklyn Dodgers. While these mass-media texts, including print fiction, biography, popular history, film and even some pop music, represent or are shaped by fan experience and imagination, the converse is also true, as these nationally-distributed texts can provide a model for how fans can interpret the sports contests they view.

This body of narratives, be they in a single fan’s imagination or distributed nationally through mass media, can be separated into two distinct but not mutually-exclusive levels of

semiotic meaning derived from Barthes's "first" (literal) and "second orders" (mythic) of representation. The first level of representation and meaning in sports narrative corresponds to the *denotative* or "literal" meaning of semiotic signs, while the second level of narrative is rooted in and related to *connotation*, or the "mythic" or *cultural* meaning of signs. Furthermore, the nature of the meaning generated by these narratives crafted from the events of history—be they in newspapers, novels, movies, or the mind of a single individual observer—always depends on the needs and the interests of the narrator and the audience.

For sporting events, the first level of narrative creation—generally, the voiceover of television and radio broadcasters or the reported accounts in newspapers or on televised sports news programs—speaks largely to an audience mainly wishing merely to know the outcome of a particular sporting event and what specific actions or moments made that contest turn out the way it did. Yet, just as Barthes eventually asserted that even that meaning which might appear to be entirely denotative still contains connotation, still contains culture (*Image-Music-Text* 166), such narratives are certainly not free of cultural meaning. The way a writer or broadcaster describes a particular athlete or the kinds of performances that are credited with making the difference in a contest can definitely provide insight into the values of the culture they represent. For this reason, I will attempt to devote some time to investigating, for example, the way general trends of Yankee success or lack thereof are described and by sports writers and the manner in which prominent Yankee players are discussed in news reports.

With regard to the generation of narrative from sports-related history, however, some audiences and narrative producers are much more invested in the creation of cultural meaning than the producers and consumers of a rudimentary game report or broadcast. This body of texts that I think of as being the second level of sports narrative creation, is more varied than the first

level and can include texts ranging from a personal profile of Yankee legend Joe DiMaggio in *Life* magazine, to his ghost-written autobiography directed at young boys, to his appearance in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. In each case, the author of the text attempts to place DiMaggio and the Yankees in a cultural context much broader than a baseball game or season. The creators of such texts consciously affiliate the ballplayer and his team with values, traditions, or ideologies they seek to celebrate, criticize, or comment upon. For this reason, I will devote most of my energy and space to analyzing these "second level" texts in my evaluation of the various and shifting meanings and uses of the Yankees myth.

While some of these texts are directly about the Yankees ball club, its stars and legacy, such as *The Pride of the Yankees*, or Douglas Wallop's Faustian baseball fantasy novel, *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*, other texts feature baseball and the Yankees a bit more peripherally like Hemingway's novella about a Cuban fisherman, *The Old Man and the Sea*, and Simon and Garfunkel's "Mrs. Robinson," whose evocation of Joe DiMaggio is a small, but key part of the song's engagement with the American past. Whether at the center or more toward the margins, in each of these texts the Yankees icon is utilized for its cultural currency, for the ideas affiliated with its signifiers in the popular mind. But even as it is used for its past connotations, in any given text, the meaning of the Yankees icon is simultaneously being reshaped, if only subtly and slightly, by the role it plays in that same text.

The Study of Sports Narrative as an Academic Field

The study of sports-centered narrative—be it written, recorded, or imagined by fans, journalists, historians, novelists or Hollywood filmmakers—has become a growing academic field in the past several decades. Though much illuminating scholarship has been done,

unfortunately, too often academic studies of sport have been too compartmentalized, drawing on traditional academic disciplines to essentially reproduce them with a sports focus: sports history, sociology of sport, sports literature, sports film studies. A few scholars have done work that draws on several of these areas simultaneously. I hope to position this study similarly, drawing on fiction writing, film, and the narratives of baseball history to analyze the Yankees' cultural meaning.

While hardly thinkable a mere fifty years ago, the academic study of sports has become tremendously popular in several fields and disciplines of scholarship in recent years. This likely has much to do with and is built upon the spread of the anthropologist's *descriptive* (rather than *proscriptive*) definition of culture throughout the humanities and social sciences. Rather than describing an established body of knowledge and texts in the fields of literature, visual art, music, and drama thought to have a refining influence on the audience and deepen its understanding of civilization, morality, and the human condition, culture has come to mean something quite different than this honorific, nineteenth-century use of the word. For example, cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1921-1988), insists that "culture is ordinary," made up of the shared "meanings and directions" of a society in which individuals live their everyday lives (6). Under this "ordinary" definition, sports—a major focus of popular attention, time, energy, and money in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—is clearly a site for the examination of culture, a fact that an increasing number of scholars are realizing.

The study of sport in literature was one of the first sports-related trends to surface in academia. Also, since much of my investigation is tied up in the analysis of literary fiction as well as films—the academic study of which has drawn not exclusively, but extensively on the established traditions and methods of literary studies—the field of sports literature is especially

important to the work I will do. With regard to baseball, some scholarly attention was quickly devoted to the analysis of Bernard Malamud's 1952 novel *The Natural*, which enticed literary minds with its many Medieval and Classical mythic allusions mixed with references to the history of baseball and a baseball plot. Studies that focused more exclusively on sport followed a few decades later including work by Leverett T. Smith and Christian K. Messenger who both focus on the concept of "play" and spend significant time analyzing the use of sport in the works of American modernists Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner. Then in 1988, Coredeia Candelaria published a monograph devoted to baseball literature, arguing for an increasing complexity and diversity that parallels developments in American literature in the broader sense.

All of these studies show scholars using tools familiar to them, literary analysis, as a means to see into the aesthetic experience of the athlete and the athletic spectator and what it contributes to the hermeneutic significance of the text overall. Perhaps for this reason, many of the early studies of sports in literature focus on the literary text and skimp on discussion of the historical context—the influence of real sports figures or teams on books that feature sport. This is particularly notable in early scholarship on *The Natural*, where critics have spent significant amounts of time analyzing the Arthurian allusions and frequently *mention* the influence of baseball history (including players Shoeless Joe Jackson, Babe Ruth, and Eddie Waitkus) on the novel, but are slow to actually *analyze* these historical allusions for the cultural meaning they bring to the novel (see Wasserman 438). From this earlier period of sports literature scholarship, Smith, who ventures an analysis of the significance of the appearance of Joe DiMaggio in *The Old Man and the Sea* in his 1970 publication, *The American Dream and the National Game*, is perhaps most satisfactory in accounting for the influence of baseball history in baseball fiction.

The growing influence of the cultural studies movement in the humanities, however, has led to an enhanced role of the existing world of sport and its history in the analysis of sports in literature. With regard to baseball, the aforementioned McGimpsey insists on the close relationship between baseball literature and Major League Baseball's professional game, something welcome to one attempting to analyze portrayals of a real professional team in literature and film, as I am. Unfortunately, McGimpsey's orientation towards baseball movies and books is one of an un-nuanced Marxist, as he over-generalizes that these baseball cultural texts are produced first and foremost to serve the interests and profits of the MLB organization and its ideology, an opiate for the baseball masses, if you will. But McGimpsey's call to acknowledge the close ties between the professional baseball leagues and mass media baseball cultural texts is an important and accurate assertion, even though my attitude towards the mutually beneficial economic relationship between the two is less purely Marxist than his own. Moreover, for the purposes of this project, it is the *narrative* relationship between the organization of baseball and the body of baseball books and films that is most important, rather than the economic one.

This relationship of shared narrative between baseball history and fiction is well represented in the work of Daniel Nathan. Nathan's study, *Saying It's So: A Cultural History of the Black Sox Scandal*, traces the varying cultural uses of the 1919 World Series fix through written histories, Hollywood films, and literary fiction that reference the scandal. Nathan's study is probably the closest thing to a methodological model for what I hope to undertake here. Combining methods from the fields of history, literary studies, film studies, and cultural studies, he draws from a variety of texts to investigate the different cultural meanings Americans have found in and projected on that one single historical event. Nathan argues that the nation has used

the Black Sox scandal in ways that best served the cultural needs of the time: a narrative of corruption in the 1920s (61-69), as grand, complex tragedy at mid-century (116-118), and as a site for exploring the theme reconciliation in the 1980s (154-157, 173-177).

This study will mainly differ in its focus on a sports entity that continues to exist, growing and changing *as an actual institution* over historical time as well changing and evolving as a cultural icon as in the minds of individuals through the changing times, as Nathan describes the Black Sox scandal. Nevertheless, Nathan's work illustrates an important principle: a tradition of baseball narrative exists in and is propagated by both the unfolding history of the real-life organized game and fictional baseball stories as told in a variety of media. United by the common imagery, signifiers, and structures of baseball—the equipment of bats, balls, and gloves, the green grass and brown dirt of the diamond, such unchanging rules of three strikes and nine innings—the narratives of the history of the professional game and fictional narratives in cultural texts such as novels or film, with no pun intended, all find themselves on essentially the same playing field of cultural consciousness.

This continuity between the narratives of baseball history and baseball fiction is exemplified not only by the frequency with which fictional baseball stories allude to or directly include a figure from the history of the professional leagues, but also by the degree to which baseball books and especially movies have influenced the professional game today. Not only do we see historical figures such as Babe Ruth (*The Great American Novel*, 1973; *The Sandlot*, 1993, *The Given Day*, 2008), Shoeless Joe Jackson (*Shoeless Joe*, 1982, and its film adaptation, *Field of Dreams*, 1989), Jackie Robinson (*In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*, 1984), and Roberto Clemente (*Chasing 3000*, 2008) as important figures or characters in fictional baseball narratives, but allusions to fictional ballplayers, teams, or events are increasingly

becoming part of the presentation and consumption of professional baseball. For example, the San Francisco Giants late-1980s first baseman, Will Clark, was nicknamed “The Natural” after the Hollywood version of Malamud’s fictional Roy Hobbs, a moniker later occasionally applied to players such as Ken Griffey, Jr. and Josh Hamilton, as well. Likewise, in many MLB ballparks across the country, Randy Newman’s dramatic score from that same 1984 film is played from the stadium speakers when a home run is hit. Meanwhile, on ESPN’s popular news programs SportCenter and Baseball Tonight, it is increasingly commonplace to hear references to “putting on [one’s] P.F. Fliers,” a wild pitch being “juuuust a bit outside,” or the unwritten rule that “there’s no crying in baseball!”—quotations from the films *The Sandlot*, *Major League* (1989), and *A League of Their Own* (1992), respectively. Thus, in terms of baseball narrative, it is perhaps better to think not about a binary of history versus fiction, but of a continuum, a baseball narrative tradition that includes both mutually influential fact and fiction as well as stories that land somewhere in between those poles—perhaps *especially* the stories that land somewhere in between.

This narrative tradition is far from being monolithic or homogenous, though it is sometimes viewed that way, and has been a significant vehicle for the expression of American values and ideologies. In examining these narratives we can see both how these values and ideologies have changed and how they have not.

Team-Focused Scholarship

As a study of a specific team, my project is somewhat unique, but there are already a few team-focused studies on baseball franchises including the Brooklyn Dodgers, the Chicago Cubs, and the Boston Red Sox. While there is not large number of academic studies focused on teams

or franchises, in contrast, popular publications centered on the meaning a specific team can have for its community of fans abound. A few of these texts succeed in pinpointing a unique cultural meaning beyond the standard values associated with American sports fan culture in a more general sense. National Public Radio journalist Scott Simon's memoir of his childhood of sports fandom, *Home and Away: Memoir of a Fan* (2001) stands out among these. Simon describes the notoriously unsuccessful Chicago Cubs ball club as "the devotion that defines despair" and ". . . the love that evinces the triumph of hope over experience" (58) concluding that, "to be a Cubs fan, finally, is to learn something of the vexations and disappointments, smashed promises and diminished dreams that love survives, if you want to keep it" (135-136). While perhaps more elegantly and intellectually articulated than many, Simon's discussion of the Cubs represents this body of popular fan memoirs and their perspective on the cultural meaning of the given team. That is, they seek primarily to construct or identify a particular meaning or identity for their team at least partially motivated by a sense of loyalty or local pride. Though this is certainly appropriate and acceptable for a personal memoir, it does not necessarily lend itself to significant critical analysis.

The body of more academic literature focused on sports franchises or teams, while still relatively small, has emerged in recent years with some of the more notable examples treating the aforementioned professional baseball teams. Adding cultural theory to notions of identity within the community of Cubs fans as presented by writers like Scott Simon, Jane Juffer argues for the Cubs' historic Wrigley Field as a Foucauldian "heterotopia," describing the ballpark as "a liminal zone. . . an in-between space, a space of contradiction and contestation" (289-290). "It shares something with the other ballparks—" she elaborates, "the sense of competition, the game, the desire for the pennant. Yet it differs as well, insofar as the winning is constantly

deferred, allowing pleasure in the immediacy of the game” (290). Juffer’s use of contemporary sociological theory here is welcome for the academic seriousness it imparts to the too long neglected analysis of sports fandom. The author, however, perhaps overreaches in some of her claims about the uniqueness of the Cubs’ fan culture, such as “Wrigley [calling] into question the pressure to win not only in other baseball stadiums but also in all those other sports areas where the only pleasure derived is that from victory” (290), or that raising her son a Cubs fan might make him less susceptible to masculine cultural demands for success and victory (295-296). In the end, while advancing the use of theory to study sports fandom, as well as the notion of team-focused studies within the larger body of sports-related cultural studies, Juffer’s article shares too much of the local boosterism found in many of the popular team-focused fan memoirs.

More successful in this regard is Carl E. Prince’s 1996 book, *Brooklyn’s Dodgers: The Bums, the Borough, and the Best of Baseball, 1947-1957*. Perhaps the best existing sports team-focused study, Prince’s text, along with insightful fan memoirs by journalists Thomas Oliphant, Roger Kahn, and historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, as well as Peter Golenbock’s oral history, *Bums*, presents the mid-twentieth century experience of Brooklyn Dodgers fans as a unique local culture with national significance. With the proliferation of Dodgers-related popular histories and memoirs since the 1970s, Prince hardly needs to argue his case that “the Brooklyn Dodgers live on in memory; not only in New York reminiscences but in important ways in the historic memory of the nation” (138). But Prince also provides a historian’s perspective, discussing the local and national significance of “the team’s early and important role in the struggle for integration” (138) and the way it “reflected the scrappy working-class culture of the borough” (xii) in the light of theories of race and masculinity within the broader cultural context of the postwar United States. Such analysis is a welcome supplement to the nostalgic, occasionally

sentimental memoirs. As a drawback, the place of women and anti-communism within postwar Dodger fan culture, to which he devotes a chapter each, are quite likely less unique among professional baseball clubs and their fans than the author suggests. However, Prince succeeds in his insightful discussion of the perennial bridesmaid Dodgers and their supporters relative to their more victorious local rivals within the context of competition-focused male culture. Overall, he conveys Dodger fandom as a unique cultural experience that simultaneously represents broader national trends as well.

More recently, Michael Ian Borer's 2008 book *Faithful to Fenway: Believing in Boston, Baseball, and America's Most Beloved Ballpark*, provides a sociological study of Red Sox fans, focusing on the team's home field, Fenway Park. Borer seeks to analyze the historic ballpark as an exercise in probing "the way that people construct their own relationships to a place through personal experiences and collective memories" (12), discussing the role of Fenway Park in the creation of belief and identity of Red Sox fans as individuals and as a community. While the author makes a case for Fenway as a significant cultural space in the broader landscape of the United States, the focus of the study is local: how the ballpark shapes the cultural terrain of Boston and experience of Bostonians. Thus, Borer's work perhaps best illustrates the focus on locality—on the shared culture of a relatively small fan community, rather than engaging a larger national dialogue that baseball scholarship often does—that characterizes most of the scholarship centered on teams.

While this focus on the local is certainly appropriate for an examination of the cultural meaning of a team for its community of fans, it is a point of departure for the work I set out to do here. For, rather than analyzing the significance of the New York Yankees to Yankee fans, I seek the various cultural meanings of the team to the nation at large. As such, I will not draw on

geographically-centered theories of urban culture, or of public versus private space as does Borer. Since I will largely focus on often highly-delocalized mass-media texts created for the consumption of and distribution to the entire nation, the base of my study will rest in the field of semiotics, an approach that has long been affiliated with such mass communication. In this way, I hope my work will supplement the already existing team-focused studies, providing a fresh approach that will add to dialogue concerning the potential cultural meaning of a sports team.

In some ways, the difference of my approach is suggested, perhaps made necessary by the nature of my subject of study, the Yankees. Noticeably, the three baseball teams that dominate the team-focused academic work, and to a lesser extent, the memoirs and popular histories—that is, the Cubs, Red Sox, and Brooklyn Dodgers—are all as well known for their periods of futility and near-misses as much as their successes. As losing teams, each of these three clubs has fostered a fan culture that is distinct from the broader strokes of American sports fandom in one crucial way: while the fans of the Brooklyn Dodgers, Red Sox, and Cubs certainly want or wanted to win, they did not let the fact that their team consistently failed to do so at the nation's highest stage diminish their commitment or enthusiasm. It is likely this deviance that most makes these fan cultures interesting to academics. The Yankees, meanwhile, epitomize the norm of American sports and its obsession with winning. Perhaps this is the reason for the great discrepancy between the number of popular histories and memoirs about the Yankees and the academic literature, which, outside of straight team history, is virtually non-existent. Unlike the fan cultures of the three aforementioned clubs, scholars find relatively little distinct in a close examination of the Yankees and their fans that they could not encounter in a broader study of American fan culture in general. They are the background that makes the three other teams stand out, making a study of national texts and the way the Yankees icon has been

used to represent national myths and ideologies a fitting way to examine the cultural meaning of the team.

Perhaps partially due to this local focus, academic studies about sports teams have not spent much time examining the appearances of teams in books and films. Prince gives a brief discussion of the use of the Dodgers in two novels from the early 1990s, *Brooklyn Boy* and *Pledge of Allegiance*, to emphasize his argument about the club as a conservative political force in postwar Brooklyn (43-44) and even briefer mention of William Bendix's role as a Brooklyn Dodger fan in the 1942 movie *Wake Island* (104).

Aside from these mentions on the periphery of Prince's book, the only study that expressly seeks to analyze the portrayals of a specific professional baseball team in cultural texts like films and literature is Tim Morris's recent article that probes the presentation of the Cubs in literary fiction. But even here Morris is focused, like the aforementioned scholars, on the team's fan community. When not busy pointing out the dearth of Cubs appearances in fiction, Morris seems more interested in measuring literary works' use of the Chicago club against a preexisting essence of Cubs fandom, praising W.P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe* for "[catching] a wryness in the Cubs fan experience that rings true" in his characterization of Cubs supporters as possessing a naïve but, somehow, still noble belief in and love for their club in the face of unending futility (131).

Morris is perhaps more aware and analytical of the construction of what he calls "Cubness" in his discussion of the writings of Chicago journalist Mark Royko, whose supposedly fictional Cubs fan persona is described as "personifying to the city and the nation an acid-etched facetiousness which came to be the semi-official identity of Cubdom" (131). But by

the article's end the author has returned to the idea of the literary texts "capturing" a pre-existing essence, as he calls Kinsella and Royko "the two best writers to attempt extended prose reflection of the nature of Cubs and their fandom" (132), relegating the authors to the role of *observers of*, rather than *participants in the creation of* Cubness.

What I attempt in this project will differ not only in its focus on the use and meaning of the Yankees as an icon on a broad, national level as opposed to a local one, but it will take a different approach to the cultural texts as well. Rather than focusing on a given novel or film's "accuracy" in its portrayal of the Yankees, their fans or any pre-existing "essence"—an approach perhaps related to the tendency for critics of baseball film and literature to obsess over how closely the text in question reflects the action, rhythm, and color of the "real" game as they have known it—this project will stress the role of these texts in shaping and creating meaning for the Yankees icon.

A "Baseball Ideology"

In addition to contributing to the young sub-field of sports studies focused on teams, I also hope that this study will help call into question the tendency for scholars to over-generalize when studying sport-based cultural texts. Like McGimpsey's generalizations that baseball literature as a whole is "patriotic" (1), "politically conservative," and characterized by "nostalgic idealism" (20), film scholars Marshall Most and Robert Rudd speak of an "ideology of baseball" (11) as a blanket term for those aforementioned cultural values most commonly associated with baseball, and which the game and its texts tend to address or valorize.

McGimpsey, Most, and Rudd are not alone among baseball cultural scholars in stressing this continuity among baseball related texts. More generally speaking, many scholars focus on

the similarities of plot and theme in their assessments of baseball-themed writing or film, such as baseball filmographer Hal Erickson, who, while simultaneously arguing for a vast differentiation and variety within established conventions of plot and theme, admits there is something to the accusation that “baseball movies all have the same plot” (10). For Erickson, this archetypal plot spotlighting the triumph of an underdog or outsider with the stereotypical bottom-of-the-ninth victory can be traced back to the early days of juvenile sports fiction, as filmmakers frequently borrowed from the successful pulp writers like Burt Standish (pen name of Gilbert Patton) and Arthur M. Winfield (Edward Stratemeyer’s nom de plume) (10). Similarly, Cordelia Candelaria, traces the origins of the modern baseball novel to this same pulp fiction “mostly intended for children” that is “almost interchangeable in plot, character, and theme,” that scholar of baseball literature (15).

These pulp fiction roots are also a significant influence on establishing the broader cultural meanings commonly associated with baseball-based cultural texts as a whole. Most and Rudd are perhaps most explicit in this regard, postulating an “ideology of baseball,” or “the [meaning] we as a culture now associate with[the game],” that is not only influenced by juvenile sports literature, but also rooted in the designs of baseball’s early organizers around the turn of the century that continue today (11). Concerned with the rise of the industrialization and urbanization in the United States during the latter nineteenth century, the game’s proponents—largely middle-class white men at this point, particularly businessmen—are described by sports historian Steven Reiss as “looking back to a glorious past” and promoting baseball as a tool for the cultivation of vigorous masculinity, strong moral character, and democratic collectivism: values they saw and discussed as quintessentially “American” (214-216).

In his essay, “Baseball as Civil Religion: The Genesis of an American Creation Story,” religious studies scholar Christopher H. Evans goes so far as to describe baseball as an American civil religion, engaged in creating a “collective national identity through bestowing sacred meaning on a variety of secular symbols, rituals, and institutions” (14). His study focuses particularly on the mythic, propagandistic turn-of-the-century histories of the invention and development of baseball, especially the work of Albert Spalding. Evans finds that baseball “reflected the popular sentiments of Victorian middle-class maleness” (21). As such, baseball stands in contrast to the children’s game of rounders and the “aristocratic” game of cricket (the two British games from which baseball is most-derived), football (the new game for American college boys), and the sports of working-class gamblers: boxing, billiards and horse racing. This middle-class masculinity was emphasized in thoughts that baseball “fostered intense, but healthy, competition,” required a “balance (of) both brains *and* brawn” and was supposedly guarded from the “evil vices lurking throughout America,” such as gambling and violence (19-20).

And since the white middle-class had taken upon itself the duty of the nation’s cultural leading group, and because of existing gender hierarchies, it is no wonder that during this period baseball, the game thought to embody male middle-class values, began to be described as representing the values of “America” itself. Boosted by Albert Spalding’s fabricated story of baseball’s invention by Civil War hero Abner Doubleday in the pastoral fields of rural Cooperstown, New York—a “creation myth,” if you will—baseball soon was robed in rhetoric describing not only how it “represented, in some fashion, the ‘soul’ of America,” but that as a “democratic” game was testament to and symbol of the nation’s divinely ordained position and role in world affairs (29-30).

For Most and Rudd, baseball movies have played an important role in sustaining these turn of the century ideals as, collectively, they continue to “offer a vision of the America that was meant to be” (15). Film scholar Wes D. Gerhing agrees, detecting in baseball films, which often feature a “community of individuals working together for the common good” (25), a pronounced strain of populism. He compares these baseball narratives on celluloid with the films of Frank Capra from the 1930s and ‘40s, as they, like well know titles such as *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), and *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946), “[balance] underdog second chance victories with grass-roots pastoral patriotism” (15).

While perhaps somewhat subdued compared to the sentimentality of baseball film, McGimpsey finds the same themes of nostalgic patriotism dominating baseball writing. Though there are numerous baseball novels with content not consistent with this description, McGimpsey emphasizes that baseball books, like many “popularized cultural texts” frequently “take on ideologies that connotatively outdistance their textual realities” (20). In other words, while certain baseball texts may contain plot points, characters, or themes not entirely consistent with the idealistic, pastoral aura that the game seems to give off, the “baseball ideology” of conservative patriotism and nostalgia embraced by these texts effectively trumps any content they could contain that might undercut said ideology.

Semiotics: Baseball as Mythic Signifier

This discrepancy that McGimpsey acknowledges between content and meaning is perhaps best understood with the insight provided the approach of Susan Gronbeck-Tedesco. In her dissertation on the theme of regeneration in baseball films of the 1980s, Gronbeck-Tedesco, like myself, draws on the field of semiotics, particularly Roland Barthes’s application of the signifier-signified relationship to the way mythology and ideology operate in society.

Gronbeck-Tedesco argues that in films during the 1980s, baseball *in general*, not just the New York Yankees, operates as mythic signifier, evoking nostalgia for a supposedly simpler, more stable time through its strong associations with the 1950s and the naïve, innocent childhood memories of the baby boom cohort (21, 34). I would argue this “mythic dimension” of baseball has been accessed earlier in U.S. history in moments such as World War II and its aftermath (including the Postwar 1950s of which Gronbeck-Tedesco speaks), during which, because of the way baseball had been promoted around the turn of the century, the game could be used as a symbol of the continuing fundamental goodness of the American way of life and American values in the face of the threat of foreign fascism and, later communism. In fact, this mythic use of baseball in the mid-twentieth century was crucial in enabling filmmakers to evoke a nostalgia for a Postwar era cloaked in those same values during the 1980s.

This semiotics-based perspective on the mythic dimension of baseball as signifier is helpful, because it explains why, as a whole, baseball texts are described by scholars as nostalgic, idealistic, patriotic, conservative, and so forth. As a mythic signifier, baseball means these things. Thus, baseball can be evoked in a text that is primarily not about baseball, as it is in Simon and Garfunkel’s 1968 song “Mrs. Robinson” and its line, “where have you gone Joe DiMaggio?,” as a kind of cultural shorthand for those culturally conservative ideas about America and American values.

Things become a bit more complicated, however, when baseball texts—that is, texts that feature the game baseball as an important if not primary organizing principle in their action or plot—contain plot points, characters, situations or themes that don’t exactly coincide with the ideology supposedly signified by baseball itself. This discrepancy results in a number of texts with meanings that are somewhat difficult to pin down or contradictory. For example, both the

1956 film *Fear Strikes Out* and the 1996 film *The Scout* feature a star baseball player who deals with mental illness, something certainly not consistent with the traditional image of vigorous and composed masculinity that is strongly affiliated with the mythic “baseball ideology.” And yet, both films also spend some energy, though certainly not as much as many other films, in evoking the mythic dimension of baseball and its traditional ideology. This results in very mixed overall cultural meanings for both films.

For McGimpsey, baseball’s mythic dimension speaks louder than such complications of character and plot (20). In the cases of these two films, he may be right in seeing baseball’s culturally conservative connotations as overshadowing the detail of dealing with an issue like mental illness, but I would like to argue that there are texts that cut against the grain of the “baseball ideology” to such an extent that they overpower it, and ultimately have a cultural meaning that contradicts baseball’s mythic meaning.

Writing about the history of baseball-based written fiction, Candelaria asserts that, as a subgenre of American literature, baseball fiction has continually progressed to increasingly complex levels of literary abstraction, a progression that itself mirrors baseball’s metamorphosis from the primitive fact of ritual to the stylized realm of (meta)fiction, where symbols are beheld at the highest level of refinement of their cultural origins. (2)

For Candelaria, baseball literature’s “movement from the allegory and romanticism of its earliest forms to the realism and solipsism of its contemporary renderings” (2) represents an increased self-awareness on the part of authors and an acknowledgement of mythic dimension in American culture. As such, modern authors often either *consciously* seek to challenge or nuance the “baseball ideology,” or to *consciously* refresh and reinforce it. In fact, most of the baseball

fiction considered to be of highest literary value has *always* operated in this realm of self-awareness, dating back to Ring Lardner's *You Know Me Al* (1916), and continuing in *The Natural* (1952), *The Southpaw* (1953), and Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel* (1973), to name just a few examples. The same case for a trend towards self-awareness can be argued for some filmmakers operating in the baseball genre, with films such as *The Bad News Bears* (1976), *Field of Dreams*, *Cobb* (1994), and *Sugar* (2008).

This trend overall has resulted in a body of contemporary baseball narrative that is decidedly mixed in its approach to the topics of the American nation, gender, and cultural tradition in general. While some cultural producers will continue to use baseball's mythic connotations to make culturally conservative statements, others will use this same icon as a way to attack or question the ideologies affiliated with the game.

As mentioned, such a departure from the traditional "baseball ideology" is far from the exclusive privilege of texts from the past thirty years. While perhaps not always as plentiful or as overt in their departure from the expected norms of baseball narrative, there are numerous texts throughout the twentieth century that present a picture of the game and those associated with it that differ significantly from the mythic baseball story. When dealing with such texts where the variation from the norm is more subtle—and thus, perhaps thought of as of little consequence for some scholars—it is important to consider the argument made by David McGimpsey, himself: that baseball texts are made by individuals who are themselves fans of the game. In other words, the narratives are almost always created by people *within* the subculture of baseball, not outside of it.

This is important because, due to acknowledged culturally conservative atmosphere of baseball culture, defiance of that culture—a subtle questioning of the American dream ideology

or of the value of staid and steady masculinity, for instance—may not appear like defiance to those *outside* the culture. Just as popular music scholar Beverly Keel's assertions that we should not measure country music's forays into feminism by the standards of the much more culturally liberal tradition of rock music (28), it is equally important to look at baseball texts and their cultural politics and meanings in the context of the broader subculture of baseball, not the cultural norms of academics living fifty years after the text was produced. With this in mind, the portrayal of a baseball star struggling with mental illness in 1956's *Fear Strikes Out*, is actually quite a significant development within the world of baseball cultural products.

As such, I submit that, despite the continued viability of baseball's traditional meanings as a mythic signifier, we can no longer characterize baseball narrative as a whole as idealistic, nostalgic, and politically conservative. Rather, it exhibits its own internal disagreements, dialogues, and separate strains of discourse that have approached and will likely continue to approach this traditional "baseball ideology" in differing ways.

In this project, I will argue that the baseball cultural icon of the New York Yankees has played an important role in facilitating the dialogue about the traditional "baseball ideology" within baseball narratives. As one may have already noted, I describe the Yankees as a semiotic icon that represents mythic cultural ideologies, namely, the American dream, heroic masculinity, and national success that Gronbeck-Tedesco affiliates with the entire sport. In making my more specific claim, I do not wish to refute her argument. My hope is to be able to add nuances to it.

Specifically, in light of Gronbeck-Tedesco's discussion of baseball's mythic dimension and the "baseball ideology" of which Most and Rudd speak, it seems apparent that, as the most successful club and the self-conscious public "face" of the game during some of baseball's peak years of popularity, the 1920s through the mid-1960s, the Yankees can be seen as the epitome of

these traditional baseball values. As the apparently clean-cut winners featuring masculine team leaders of humble backgrounds, the Yankees embodied the American myths that baseball represented better than any other team or single player could. They were essentially the Platonic ideal of the “baseball ideology” and are frequently accessed in baseball narratives as such, with examples from both culturally conservative (*The Pride of the Yankees*) and iconoclastic (*Ball Four*, 1970) viewpoints abounding.

By localizing baseball’s mythic associations within one corner of the tapestry of baseball narrative—the Yankees, the ones who fulfilled the myth the best—rather than in the entirety of the sport, writers and artists have been able to create nuanced baseball narratives that are not necessarily “patriotic” (McGimpsey 1), “politically conservative,” and characterized by “nostalgic idealism” (20) just by virtue of being about baseball. Instead, by either celebrating the Yankees or condemning them, these cultural producers can actively make widely divergent socio-cultural statements within the broad umbrella of baseball narrative that is too often characterized as homogenous.

Chapter Two

“Let Me Tell You about Heroes”: *The Pride of the Yankees* and the Crystalization of the Yankees Cultural Icon

Introduction

After finding success for the first time in the 1920s with Ruth and other players purchased through Jacob Ruppert’s substantial monetary investment in the club, the Yankees entered a period in the late 1930s that could be described as sustained dominance. Beginning two years after Ruth’s retirement from 1936 through 1939, the Yankees won what was then a record four World Series titles in a row led by Lou Gehrig and Joe DiMaggio. Early in this period, Gehrig was the more established presence on the team, having been a valuable and successful member of the Yankees during the years of Ruth’s dominance. In fact, Gehrig even won the league’s MVP award the year of Ruth’s famous single-season home run record in 1927. But just as the shy, reclusive Gehrig was significantly overshadowed by Ruth’s larger-than-life persona in the 1920s, during the Yankees triumphs in the later ‘30s, the dependable and soft-spoken slugger was largely eclipsed by the new rookie sensation Joe DiMaggio, who joined the team in 1936.

Gehrig’s status as overlooked and underappreciated, however, changed dramatically in 1939 when the first baseman’s dependable play rapidly and mysteriously deteriorated. In May of that year, Gehrig took himself out of the line-up ending his streak of 2,130 consecutive games played. That summer he was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), a rare

degenerative neuromuscular disease that meant not only that he would never play baseball again, but that he did not have long to live. The Yankees organization and community of baseball fans responded by arranging a “Lou Gehrig Appreciation Day” on the Fourth of July at Yankee Stadium, the first of its kind for the Yankees (but certainly not their last), complete with a ceremony between the games of the day’s doubleheader. The emotional moment struck a chord with the fans in Yankee Stadium, who gave a two-minute standing ovation for Gehrig, and with America at large. Within two years, Gehrig was dead, but he would never be overlooked as a ballplayer or a Yankee again.

His standing in America’s collective cultural memory achieved iconic status with the release of an MGM-produced film based on Gehrig’s biography, penned by sports journalist Paul Gallico. Unlike many previous baseball-related movies, the Gehrig biopic, *The Pride of the Yankees*, was a rousing critical and financial success, profiting \$3 million, more than any of producer Samuel Goldwyn’s previous movies (Erikson 374). The movie shattered baseball film precedent, perhaps bolstered by the American public’s sentimental feelings towards Gehrig, who had been dead a little over a year when the movie was released in July of 1942. As baseball film critic Wes D. Gehring notes, *The Pride of the Yankees* was the first sound-era baseball biography that “broke the movie norm of associating baseball with comedy,” and more importantly, it “helped put to rest the mistaken belief that baseball movies could not score at the box office” (49). Today, *The Pride of the Yankees* stands as an important touchstone in baseball film history, with baseball filmographer Hal Erikson stating that as it was “the most financially successful film of its kind made up to 1942” (368). It remains “the mold from which virtually all future baseball biopics would be shaped” (368). *The Pride of the Yankees* is likewise an important text in the formation of the New York Yankees cultural meaning, fusing the team’s on-field success

with Gehrig's populist heroism and a celebration of the American dream to render the Yankees a true American cultural icon of the mid-twentieth century.

The Pride of the Yankees dramatically boosted Gehrig and the Yankees' profile in the broader world of popular culture beyond the sports page. Many film historians have noted how MGM executive Sam Goldwyn and director, Sam Wood, intentionally sought a broad audience for a baseball film, which stereotypically have limited appeal. There is strong evidence that MGM was thinking of a mixed-gendered audience, not just a predominantly male one that might be anticipated for a sports movie. Erickson suggests attempts to entice female viewers were common in the first half of the twentieth century when “‘popular elements’ referred to those qualities which would entice women moviegoers who—as all males told themselves back then—just hated baseball” (12).

In *The Pride of the Yankees*, this effort to cater to women is visible in the prominent role given Gehrig's wife Eleanor (played by Teresa Wright, who earned a “best actress” Academy Award nomination for her portrayal) in both the movie itself, as well as its advertising (see fig. 1).

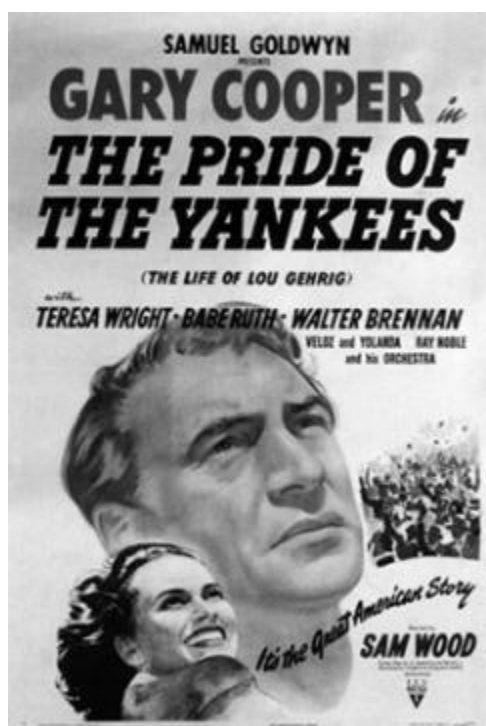


Fig. 1

The film devotes much screen time to the romantic relationship between Lou and Eleanor, the “love story subplot” that Erickson implies was all but requisite for a baseball film in this era (12). In fact, the female-oriented love story could hardly be called a “subplot” in *The Pride of the Yankees* as the movie's middle section is essentially crafted around the courtship of Lou and Eleanor, complete with the typical Hollywood touches of soft focus close ups of the two leads exchanging

romantic looks and a sentimental score.

Of further note in this regard are the full-length performance of the Irving Berlin love song “Always” and the performance of a tango by dance team Veloz and Yolanda, moments that seem especially tailored for potential women in the audience. Additionally, the inclusion of a Walt Disney comedic cartoon featurette, “How to Play Baseball,” starring the hapless Goofy character¹ in the movie’s first theatrical run further points towards MGM’s effort to make the film appealing to a very broad audience, including young children.

Unlike most of the baseball films that preceded and immediately followed it, MGM’s attempts to cast a wide net with *The Pride of the Yankees* were at least somewhat successful. The film set a new precedent for box office returns among baseball films and was nominated for eleven academy awards² including best picture and best editing, the latter of which it won.³ While Oscar nominations are only one measure of cultural impact, it could still be said that *The Pride of the Yankees* is one of a select few baseball films to gain significant mainstream success and cultural influence. As such, it plays a key role in establishing the Yankees cultural icon in the broader culture and shaping the meaning of that icon.

The Significance of “Yankees” in the Film Title

Many have commented upon the reputation baseball films have had as “box office poison,” with Erickson even documenting a handful of instances over the years wherein movie

¹ Bosley Crowther’s contemporary *New York Times* review of the film suggests that this cartoon was made at the special request of Sam Goldwyn himself.

² The nominations included best picture, Gary Cooper for best actor, Teresa Wright for best actress, art direction, cinematography, special effects, score, sound recording, screenplay, and story (an awards category that no longer exists).

³ Only seven other baseball-themed films have ever been nominated for an Academy Award, including *The Stratton Story* (1949—screenplay), *Damn Yankees!* (1958—score), *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1973—Vincent Gardenia for supporting actor), *The Natural* (1985—cinematography, Glen Close for best supporting actress, score, art design), and *Bull Durham* (1988—screenplay). Like *The Pride of the Yankees*, *Field of Dreams* (1989—best picture, screenplay, score) and *Moneyball* (2011—best picture, Brad Pitt for best actor, Jonah Hill for best supporting actor, editing, sound mixing, screenplay) were also nominated for best picture, among other things, but both films went home empty-handed. In fact, *The Stratton Story* is the only other baseball film to win an Oscar.

studios have attempted to sell their baseball films in a way that hides the fact that they are about baseball (18-19, 202-203). Erickson's point notwithstanding, it remains true that throughout the twentieth century many baseball films have actually sought to use their baseball content as a *selling point*. Within the genre of baseball cinema it is common for production companies to include verbal cues—signifiers, if you will—to communicate to potential ticket buyers the movie's baseball content. Terms like “ball”, “league”, “game”, “diamond”, “rookie”, or “home” have frequently been included in baseball movie titles for this reason. While many of the baseball films made before *The Pride of the Yankees* have been lost to the cultural consciousness of most Americans, films like *The Busher* (1919), the Babe Ruth vehicle *Heading Home* (1920), *Casey at the Bat* (1927), *Slide, Kelly, Slide!* (1927), and *Death on the Diamond* (1934) illustrate that filmmakers' tendency to include baseball signifiers in movie titles was firmly in place at the time the film was made, perhaps even more so than it is now. Significantly, *The Pride of the Yankees* not only uses baseball terminology to announce its content, but it is the first major film to refer to a specific team of the professional Major Leagues, rather than a more general signifier of baseball on any level.

Even most films that are particularly focused on existing or historical Major League Baseball teams refrain from specifically referencing the team in the film's title. A good example of this is 1989's *Major League*, which, while not historical, is especially dependent on the struggles of the real Cleveland Indians and the downtrodden state of the city of Cleveland during much of the 1970s and '80s, but still uses more generic baseball signifiers in its title. *The Pride of St. Louis* (1952), about the life of St. Louis Cardinals pitcher and broadcaster Jerome “Dizzy” Dean, is similarly titled to MGM's 1942 Gehrig biopic, likely an intentional parallel for marketing purposes. But notice that even in this case, the studio avoids using the “Cardinals”

name in the film's title, instead depending on the greater cultural clout of the city of St. Louis, perhaps hoping to build off of the positive cultural associations with Charles Lindberg's famous plane, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, and the more recent, hugely successful movie musical *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944).⁴

This prominent use of the Yankees signifier indicates how high the team's cultural profile was among the general populace by the late 1930s and early '40s. The word "Yankee" has had a long and interesting history of usage since the eighteenth century when it was used most specifically to refer, often pejoratively, to New Englanders, particularly those of English, puritan ancestry. This meaning persisted well into the late-nineteenth century, as evidenced by Mark Twain's novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) and continues to some degree today, as in *Yankee* magazine (founded 1935, Dublin, New Hampshire), a regional lifestyle and culture magazine focused on New England.⁵ It is believed the term "Yankee" came from the colonial South, where during the Civil War and Reconstruction, it could mean a member of the Union army or Northerner in general.⁶ In Britain or other English-speaking former British colonies, meanwhile, since the eighteenth century, it has been used to mean any American (Oxford English Dictionary). The regional mutability of the term is illustrated by an aphorism widely attributed to E.B. White, who humorously put it:

To foreigners, a Yankee is an American.

⁴ In fact, the only other baseball feature film to include a Major League team's name in the title is the 1994's *Angels in the Outfield*, about fictional version of the California Angels (now "Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim"). But even in this case it should be noted that this film is a remake of the identically titled 1950 film that was about a fictional version of the Pittsburgh Pirates who were aided by heavenly beings, to whom the title referred. (The Angels nickname still only belonged to Los Angeles's Pacific Coast League franchise at the time.) Thus, even in the 1994 film, the more general use of the word "angel" has greater importance than its more specific meaning as a proper noun in Major League Baseball.

⁵ The persistence of the New Englander denotation for the word Yankee is, of course, a great irony to the modern baseball fan, as the New York Yankees have long been fierce rivals of the Boston Red Sox, the team that draws fan support throughout New England.

⁶ This likely derives from the fact that the New England was still largely America's Northern center of culture leading up to and during the Civil War, and, perhaps more importantly, because the abolitionist movement was largely centered in New England.

To Americans, a Yankee is a Northerner.

To Northerners, a Yankee is an Easterner.

To Easterners, a Yankee is a New Englander.

To New Englanders, a Yankee is a Vermonter.

And in Vermont, a Yankee is somebody who eats pie for breakfast. (qtd. in National Geographic)

With the advent of American involvement in European wars in the twentieth century, however, the association of the term “Yankee” with the entire nation of America would have become increasingly common around the time *The Pride of the Yankees* was released and in the years following. In fact, it is through this meaning of Yankee that the team likely acquired the name itself. In the early days of the twentieth century, newspapers in cities with a team in both the National and the American League, would often refer to these franchises as the “Nationals” and the “Americans.” As an extension of this practice, New York sportswriters would occasionally substitute “Yankees” for “Americans,” both in the pursuit of variation in diction to avoid repetition and because “Yanks” could be used to make shorter headlines. Eventually the name stuck (Sports Encyclopedia).

This European-derived, nationalistic meaning of “Yankee” correlates with some nationalistic themes of the film that portrays Gehrig as the essence of American values, as will be discussed further in this chapter. To MGM executives in 1942, however, a Yankee was clearly a baseball player, and they correctly counted on this newest of meanings for the term to eclipse two hundred years of regional definitions for the general American public. The title *The Pride of the Yankees*, presumes audiences to expect a baseball film rather than a Civil War film, or a film about Vermont, for that matter. This presumption of MGM marketers that the average

American, including the female viewers they hoped to court, knew “Yankees” meant baseball indicates the substantial cultural profile the team had acquired through its on-field success and heroes Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio by 1942.

But the title *The Pride of the Yankees* and a simple superficial knowledge of the film’s subject matter—information one could get from a movie poster or “trailer” advertisement—also imply that the Yankees are *more* than just a baseball team. The title implies the Yankees are an entity that ostensibly stands for something, that can take “pride” in one from amongst its midst that could somehow represent its greater whole. For those familiar with baseball, the phrase “pride of the Yankees” might conjure ideas about a standard of on-field excellence, as well as images of the heroes Ruth, DiMaggio, and, of course, Gehrig. For those less familiar, the sight of movie cowboy Gary Cooper on advertisements might suggest steady, dependable manliness. But it would seemingly be safe to say that all viewers would go into the film with an unspoken expectation to be instructed, or perhaps *further* instructed, on what it is the Yankees organization stands for and why Gehrig qualifies to represent it. In this regard, *The Pride of the Yankees* does not disappoint.

The Yankee Presence on Screen

The film itself provides ample opportunity for viewers to connect the New York Yankees with cultural ideals, particularly the desire for success and excellence. While the film’s real subject is the “pride of the Yankees,” Gehrig, rather than the entire team, the prominent place the team name gets in the title and the attention devoted to the team’s championship legacy in the film constitute a significant motif as well. This emphasis on the Yankee legacy is clear in the film’s latter half in a time passage montage mediated through newspaper clippings Gehrig’s

wife, Eleanor, puts in her husband's scrapbook. In addition to personal achievements related to Gehrig's career communicated by fabricated, though factual headlines such as "Lou Gehrig Named Captain of Yanks," viewers also see a review of the team's history in the 1920s and '30s including headlines such as "Joe McCarthy Signs to Manage Yankees," or "Babe Ruth Leaving Yankees." The inclusion of the headlines about other Yankee players and managers is perhaps a bit curious, as the information seems somewhat tangential to the film's central plot. While coaching changes and the achievements of teammates are certainly somewhat relevant to Gehrig's biography, the motivation behind evoking these now legendary baseball names in a somewhat celebratory tone seems to be an attempt to present Gehrig as an integral and long-standing part of a legendary organization that excelled at what they did. For the baseball fan, the names and achievements of Babe Ruth, Miller Huggins, Joe McCarthy, and the history of those Yankee teams additionally serve as reminders of just how successful those teams were.

The idea of the Yankees as the epitome of success and excellence is brought to its full in the movie's conclusion, however. The film reaches its dramatic climax with a recreation of Gehrig's now legendary speech at a special ceremony at Yankee Stadium wherein the hero describes his tragic diagnosis as "a bad break" and still calls himself "the luckiest man on the face of the earth" for the opportunity he had to play with his Yankee teammates and coaches and for the support he received from fans, his parents, and his wife. Film critics, historians, and amateur movie buffs alike often cite this emotional scene for its impact on viewers and its tear-jerking potential, as evidenced by the American Film Institute's inclusion of *Pride of the Yankees* as number twenty-two on its list of "America's Most Inspiring Movies" and Cooper's "luckiest man" speech as number thirty-eight on its list of most quotable movie lines.⁷ Yet this

⁷ The film version of this speech largely holds true to what Gehrig actually said, with a few variations. In addition to summarizing some passages, including statements about past and present members of the Yankee organization,

hagiographic scene designed to lionize Gehrig with heroic status noticeably takes time to celebrate the Yankees as a team as well. As in real life, in the film, Gehrig's 1939 Yankee teammates were joined by the members of the 1927 "Murderer's Row" team that was already legendary by 1942. The scene visually compares the Yankees of the recent past (or "Murderer's Row, our championship team of 1927" in the words of Cooper's cinematic Gehrig) with Gehrig's then-current teammates ("the Bronx Bombers, the Yankees of today") by lining them up symmetrically, flanking the centrally-positioned Cooper's left and right. The praise Gehrig gives both groups of men, calling it a "great honor" to play with the 1920s Yankees and a "further honor" to play with the then-current team, suggests to viewers that the two versions of the Yankees are roughly equal in excellence. These visuals and verbal praise of the two generations of Yankee teams suggest the idea of the New York ball club as a proud legacy of success, a tradition of institutional excellence, with Gehrig, the "pride of the Yankees" himself, as a crucial link between the two generations of champions.

The conspicuous presence of many individuals and icons of the real-life New York Yankees ball club furthers the heroic presentation of the Yankees in Sam Wood's film. First and foremost, the film featured the American living legend, Babe Ruth, who played himself in a small but much-advertised role, as indicated by the Babe's billing status of third after Cooper and Teresa Wright. While not a skilled actor (despite his own experience as a star in his own cinematic vehicles in 1920 and '27) Ruth took his role quite seriously and managed to steal many of the scenes in which he appears with his natural charisma. Ruth's large presence was supplemented by cameos from Bob Meusel and Mark Koenig, two more members of the

for the purpose of brevity, the movie version places the famous "luckiest man" sentence at the end of the speech, rather than at the beginning, where Gehrig actually pronounced it. This was likely done to enhance the drama, making the "luckiest man" quote the last spoken words in the film. See Appendix for a side by side comparison of the historic and Hollywood versions of the speech.

dominant Yankees teams of the late 1920s. Bill Dickey, who in 1942 was winding down his career as an all-star Yankees catcher, also plays a small but significant role as Gehrig's loyal teammate in the post-Ruth era. These famous Yankees and the numerous shots of the actual Yankee Stadium, particularly in the film's emotional closing scene, increase the team's presence in the film's narrative, linking Gehrig's eventual success and heroism with the team's legacy of success. The presence of real-life stars Meusel, Koenig, and especially Ruth early in the film impress to viewers, particularly knowledgeable fans, the high standard of baseball excellence the protagonist Gehrig must live up to in order to join their storied ranks. Director Wood emphasizes this in a scene depicting the rookie Gehrig's arrival with the team, with a panning shot of the empty Yankee clubhouse allowing viewers to read the names printed on the lockers: Babe Ruth, Mark Koenig, Bob Meusel, and Tony Lazzeri.⁸ A wide-eyed Cooper examines each one before finding his locker, indicated by a less-official and less-permanent, hand-scrawled name card, signaling the need to prove himself among these established titans of Yankee baseball.

The presence of the then-still-active Dickey, meanwhile, implies Gehrig's success in not only filling the shoes of the great Yankees who came before him, but also passing that legacy down to the next generation of Yankee excellence. The fact that these men played themselves in the film makes an especially strong connection between the heroic drama of the film and the real-life American League team, conveying the idea of the team as baseball's celebrated elite to the uninitiated (and perhaps christening a few new Yankee-supporters from among their

⁸ Lazzeri did not actually debut with the Yankees until 1926, and Koenig, not until '25, thus, they would not have been part of the team during Gehrig's rookie season in 1923. Having these two players present, however, not only allowed the filmmakers to condense and simplify history for a popular audience, but emphasizes the pressure Lou felt to "measure up" to the established standard of Yankee greatness.

numbers) and fleshing out, humanizing, and ultimately heroizing the Yankees known success for those who were already baseball fans.

The involvement of the Yankee organization itself in *The Pride of the Yankees* is actually addressed in a film credit reading, “the cooperation of Ed Barrow and the New York Yankees arranged by Christy Walsh.” This participation by the baseball club in MGM’s tribute to Gehrig, including current and past players, and Yankee Stadium, conveys the image of an elite organization giving special honor to one from among its storied ranks. This seems to be the attitude and tone the organization seeks in its many celebrations of itself over the years including the special “days” given to the legends that would follow, notably Joe DiMaggio and Mickey Mantle.

But their ever-expanding “Monument Park” provides the clearest example of the Yankee organization’s tendency to celebrate and reverence its own history. Monument Park began with a free-standing block of red granite in deep centerfield to honor the sudden passing of 1920s manager Miller Huggins in 1929 and grew with the deaths of Gehrig in ’41 and Ruth in ’48 (Fromer 53, 78). Thus, until Yankee Stadium was remodeled in 1974, which changed the dimensions of the outfield fence and enclosed these memorials in a walled-off “park,” the Yankees had monuments to their storied past *on their field of play*.⁹ While all Major League Baseball teams seek to celebrate and remember their past, no team does it with such prominence, solemnity and grandiosity.¹⁰ With the close involvement of the Yankees organization in the making of *The Pride of the Yankees*, the film becomes an important part of this tradition and, in

⁹ Commenting in Ken Burn’s documentary *Baseball*, both television sports broadcaster Bob Cotas, and comedian Billy Crystal claimed that when attending games at Yankee Stadium as young boys in the early 1960s, they thought that Ruth, Gehrig, and Huggins were actually buried there beneath the solemn monuments.

¹⁰ Monument Park has continued to grow, with the erection of plaques and large representations of retired numbers to honor the most successful Yankees. In 1996 and 1999, respectively, granite monuments to Mickey Mantle and Joe DiMaggio were added to the original three and in 2009 all of this was moved to a location just beyond the centerfield wall in the team’s new home, *New Yankee Stadium* (Fromer 187, 199).

effect, essentially becomes the cultural property of the organization, a perspective with which many current baseball fans still think of and view the movie.

Gehrig Contrasted with Ruth

While the presence of Babe Ruth in *The Pride of the Yankees* emphasizes continuity and the tradition of Yankee excellence of which Gehrig was the latest iteration, in another sense, Ruth is used in the film to provide significant contrast to draw attention to certain traits that Gehrig possessed. Generally, Ruth's colorful, larger-than-life persona is contrasted with a portrayal of Gehrig as a consistent and hard-working everyman. The contrast eventually becomes more than just about individuals, however, as the progression of the film shows once Ruth retires and Gehrig becomes the Yankee's team leader and dominant presence. *The Pride of the Yankees* depicts a narrative of the brash, colorful Yankees of the Ruth-dominated Roaring Twenties transforming into a more disciplined, hard-working group of ballplayers in the 1930s under Gehrig's influence. In an interesting development, considering the fact that Ruth enthusiastically agreed to play himself in the film and received third billing in advertising, the film seems to imply that Gehrig's presence was more important than The Babe's himself in bringing the Yankees into their "true" form as the paragon of baseball excellence and as an American symbol.

A few scenes in *The Pride of the Yankees* seem designed particularly to show the contrast between Ruth and Gehrig's demeanor. The most obvious of these occurs as a competition of sorts between the two Yankee legends, and is based on a semi-mythic-tale about Ruth promising a homerun to a sick boy during the 1926 World Series and ostensibly "curing" him, as he made good on the promise and the boy's health dramatically improved. While this tale was wildly exaggerated in newspapers at the time and has only grown more elaborate in retellings like the

one featured in *The Babe Ruth Story* (1949), none of these mythic interpretations have ever included Gehrig in the action. And yet, in *The Pride of the Yankees*, Gehrig is given a role. The scene opens with Ruth, something of a strutting peacock, posing with the sickly young Billy¹¹ before an entourage of teammates, sportswriters and photographers. Grinning widely and constantly checking back on the photographers and reporters to ensure they're listening, he offers an autograph and a homerun in that day's game. Obviously more interested in making a show for his hangers-on than making an impression on the boy, the Babe then further hams it up by asking which field Johnny would prefer his homerun to end up in, right, center, or left. Without even pausing for a response, Ruth pretends the boy gives an answer and reports for his crowd, "What's that? Center it is!" and saunters off with his company, presumably off to his next adventure.

After the crowd clears out, Gehrig approaches the young man and, unlike Ruth, engages in a conversation with the sick boy, offering some folksy words of encouragement. "You'll play [baseball] again," he assures him, "Billy, you know, there isn't anything you can't do if you try hard enough." Billy then turns this platitude back on Gehrig and asks if he will hit not one, but *two* homeruns for him in the coming game.

Given this exchange, viewers are prompted to see Gehrig's agreement to fulfill the boy's request—a promise he makes good on the next day, of course—as coming from an unselfish desire to model the value of earnest effort and optimism for the downhearted child, a sharp contrast from the seemingly egotistical and indifferent Ruth. It would seem that for the filmmakers it was not enough for Gehrig to appear as morally superior to Ruth, but it was also necessary for him to better Ruth on the baseball diamond as well, hitting two homeruns for Billy

¹¹ The actual sick boy involved in this legendary tale was named Johnny Sylvester. During the 1926 World Series his father had obtained some baseballs autographed by the Yankees and their opponents the Cardinals, as well as a promise that Ruth would hit a home run to cheer up his sick son (Creamer 327).

over the Babe's measly one. The motivation for this sequence seems to be an effort on the part of filmmakers to show that, while Ruth certainly was more famous and celebrated in American culture, in many ways Gehrig was a *truer* "hero," a cause in which they ironically involve the real Babe Ruth. In addition to the fact that the events related to Gehrig and the sick boy presented in *The Pride of the Yankees* are a complete fabrication, this sequence also misrepresents Ruth as a man. Despite what would be perceived as his many flaws—notably his insatiable physical appetites for food and sex which Gehrig did not share—many historians point out that the boisterous Ruth was often quite generous and had a particular soft spot for children, with whom he had great rapport and often savored spending time (Creamer, *Babe* 332-334).

Gehrig compares favorably to Ruth in *The Pride of the Yankees* in another somewhat comical scene where Gehrig's wife Eleanor falsely insinuates to his sportswriter friend Sam Blake that Lou has been cheating on her. The gag is played out to some length with Eleanor continually expressing she is tired of her husband not coming home after games at Yankee Stadium, saying she "caught him" and is going to confront him, while Blake, unbelieving, swears to her that Gehrig is "true blue." The sequence climaxes, however, with the reassuring revelation that it was all a prank and that Gehrig has only been "cheating" on his wife with the local sandlot boys, whose games he jubilantly umpires. In a film that struggles to find drama in the interim between Gehrig's courtship of Eleanor and his fatal diagnosis, this sequence is effective as filler. It temporarily grabs viewer's attention and causes them, like Sam Blake—who grumbles he is on the verge of losing "faith in human nature"—to hope it all is not true before restoring the faith of the audience by revealing just that.

But there are other things going on here as well. Director Sam Wood seemed especially interested in threatening his viewers with the idea of infidelity on the part of the idealized

baseball heroes in his film narratives; he used a very similar episode in 1949's *The Stratton Story*, an inspired-by-real-events film with Jimmy Stewart as a ballplayer who loses his right leg in an accident only to make a heroic comeback as a minor-league pitcher. In *The Stratton Story*, the reassuring revelation is that the protagonist was secretly taking dancing lessons after ballgames as a special gift to his wife. Thus, it would seem that, for Wood at least, there was a perceived public understanding that ballplayers often cheated on their wives, an "ugly truth" the MGM director wanted to explicitly point out did not apply to *real* baseball heroes like the ones in his films. Yet, in *The Pride of the Yankees*, with the presence of Ruth playing himself, it is hard not to compare the "true blue" Gehrig with his fellow Yankee, the Babe, a notorious philanderer, during this comedic but moralizing sequence. Again, the filmmakers invite comparison between Gehrig and Ruth, leading viewers to see Gehrig as morally superior and, thus, as more representative of "American" values.

This favorable comparison of Gehrig to Ruth carries over into the way the Yankee teams they led are portrayed in *The Pride of the Yankees*. In the film, Ruth's intimidating Murderer's Row Yankees of the "Jazz Age" 1920s stand in stark contrast to the post-Ruth Yankees that Gehrig captained to four-straight World Series wins in the late-1930s. When Gehrig first joins the Yankees, his shyness makes him appear a bit out of place among the players, who, with the screen presence of real retired Major Leaguers Ruth, Mark Koenig, and Bob Meusel, not only exude real baseball credibility for audiences, but also possess a brash but jubilant confidence exhibited through their locker-room joking and needling of each other. These Yankees seem to have an excess of energy and spend plenty of it off the field with elaborate practical jokes and card playing, most prominently in a scene where some of the Yankees steal Babe Ruth's new

straw hat and each take a bit out of.¹² Gehrig, then a shy rookie, is encouraged to take *two* bites—“if you’re one of us, you’ll take a bite”—and is reluctantly holding the hat when Ruth catches on. Thus, this scene establishes a brash, swashbuckling character and emphasizes that the humble and sensitive Gehrig does not fit in.

Later on, after a passage of time marked in terms of Yankee history by Eleanor’s scrapbook montage, the Yankees at the end of Gehrig’s career are portrayed quite differently, with the staid Bill Dickey replacing Ruth, Koenig and Meusel as the screen icon of baseball authenticity. These Yankees, under Gehrig’s leadership as captain since Ruth’s departure in the 1935 season, are portrayed as more grounded and committed to success than the free-swinging Yankees of Gehrig’s rookie year in 1923. A revealing scene depicts the Yankees in the locker room after a tough loss in which Gehrig, by this time unwittingly losing coordination and strength to ALS, played poorly. While most of the Yankees wear the faces of solemn disappointment, one begins complaining loudly about Gehrig’s lackluster play as the reason for the loss. Upon hearing this Bill Dickey delivers a single punch to the complainer’s mouth. The player falls to the ground, but no further scuffle ensues. Soon Gehrig enters the locker room, visibly distraught over his poor performance, but summons the composure to play the role of captain and remind his teammates to “save the fight for the field, boys” in an authoritative baritone.

In this brief scene we learn all we need to about these Gehrig-led Yankees. They seem to embody what could be described as the popular ideals of twentieth century athletics: a commitment to maximum effort and winning, loyalty among teammates, and sportsmanship.

¹² This is ironic because, according to the Yankees 1920s third baseman, Joe Dugan, it was Ruth who once took a bite out of a straw hat. Creamer quotes Dugan, “He was an animal. He ate a hat once. He did. A straw hat. Took a bite out of it and ate it” (*Babe* 330).

When the one vocal player violated this ethic, Dickey¹³ swiftly acted as enforcer, with his relatively level-headed aggression apparently coming more out of loyalty to the Yankee captain, Gehrig, than from anger towards the offending teammate.

Baseball history suggests that this change depicted in the film is not just a narrative fabrication of Hollywood. For one thing, Gehrig's style of play, independent of the film, likewise built an image of work ethic, consistency, and honor in the pursuit of victory when compared to Ruth's style. Ruth was best known for his herculean homeruns (as well as his frequent herculean whiffs) that were scarcely thought possible before and dramatically changed the game of baseball forever. Meanwhile, Gehrig's defining career achievement was for playing in 2,130 consecutive games, a feat of humble, workaday consistency. This image of greatness built on consistency that the Yankees of the later 1930s took on represents a significant change from the free-wheeling teams from Ruth's era, but it is this more buttoned-down image, reasserted through the dependable Joe DiMaggio, who outwardly seemed to embody "calm, cool, and collected" throughout the 1940s, would be the one to persist in the popular memory.¹⁴

DiMaggio biographer Richard Ben Cramer endorses this view, writing of the Jazz Age Yankees, "Ruth's Yankee's were all about high-hat and high times, three-run homers and 12-5 wins. . . . Of course, they swaggered: those Yankees were playing (they had invented) a different game than any other team could play" (92). And while he sees the managing style of Yankee

¹³ Bill Dickey would go on to play himself and serve as embodiment of the tradition of Yankee excellence in a cameo in Sam Wood's *The Stratton Story*.

¹⁴ DiMaggio's presence is notably missing from the late '30s Yankees in *The Pride of the Yankees*. Film and baseball historians have not reported on whether he was approached to appear in the film, but it is possible that he was left out of the movie entirely (His name is not even mentioned a single time.) out of fear that the presence of "The Yankee Clipper," who had recently enraptured the nation with his fifty-six game hitting streak in 1941, would eclipse the Hollywood Gehrig as much as he did the real one. In any case, aside from the negative public reaction to DiMaggio's contract battle against the parsimonious general manager Ed Barrow in 1938, the public perception of DiMaggio, as well as his actual club house demeanor, would have fit right in with the focused, no-nonsense portrayal of the late-'30s Yankees in Wood's film (*Baseball in '41* 12-13, Cramer 117-9, 123-127). DiMaggio and his contribution to the Yankee cultural icon will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

skipper Joe McCarthy, not Gehrig, as *The Pride of the Yankees* leaves us to surmise, as the key to the shift in character and tone in the 1930s Yankees, Cramer corroborates the film's portrayal of the 1939 Yankee locker room. He writes, “[the late 1930s and ‘40s] Yankees were a cooler edition of the Pinstripes. When hard times hit in the 1930s and the Bambino’s Bombers had played out their string, the ethic of the day became ‘Buckle Down.’ Swagger [McCarthy] simply wouldn’t permit. He wanted players who did all the little things right, who took every advantage, who stuck to business at all times” (92). Two such players who did “the little things” right and “stuck to business” were Lou Gehrig and Joe DiMaggio.

Baseball film historian Gary E. Dickerson has suggested that this shift in the persona of the Yankees was part of a broader cultural shift in the first half of the twentieth century, arguing that Ruth’s “flash, flair, and energy” fit the Jazz Age 1920s. In contrast, “Gehrig is [both] the blue-collar worker of the Depression . . . [and] the man in the trenches in the front lines during World War II” (54), an ideal combination for the hero of a film released in 1942, as the Depression has just given way to the War, but lingered in public memory. This cultural timing may have played into the public’s embrace of the film and of Gehrig as a hero and exemplar of what were deemed to be “American values.” These broader cultural shifts may have also played into the fact that the “flashy and new” image of Ruth’s Yankees was largely eclipsed by the Gehrig-era’s “success through honor and work-ethic” tradition that continued into the 1940s while DiMaggio was the face of the team. As will be shown in the chapters that follow, this by and large, became the dominant image for the Yankee icon throughout the twentieth century.

Gehrig as Icon of the American Dream: Ethnic Assimilation

The significant presence of Ruth as a contrast is just one part of the film’s overall heroic portrayal of Gehrig, which naturally factors significantly in how *The Pride of the Yankees*

presents and shapes the Yankees icon. As suggested by its title, the film presents Gehrig as the best the Yankees organization has to offer, the essence, if you will, of “Yankee-ness.” Through the life of Gehrig as portrayed in Sam Wood’s film, this essence includes a realization of the American dream, specifically the social and economic upward mobility of white ethnics. Added to this up-by-the bootstraps narrative is a strain of folksy populism, a celebration of the common man through Gehrig’s consistent humility and work ethic. Finally, Gehrig also embodies many of the core traits of the mainstream ideals of masculinity. With this powerful combination of traits, the Gehrig of *The Pride of the Yankees* defines what it means to be a Yankee hero.

The “American dream” is a concept that has received much attention over the history of the United States, often making appearances in the rhetoric of politicians, a tendency that has not waned even as the twentieth century became the twenty-first. Despite this fact, or perhaps because of it, the term is actually quite slippery, supporting a range of meanings. Cultural historian Jim Cullen suggests a number of variations of the American dream, but posits a vital link that unites them: “an abstract belief in possibility” (7). One particular and prominent incarnation that this “possibility” has taken on is what Cullen and others call “the dream of upward mobility” (59). Essentially, this phrase refers to the idea that all individuals can improve themselves and their social and economic position through persistence, patience, and a healthy dose of the Protestant work ethic. To a significant extent, this ideology is rooted in the Puritans beliefs that earthly prosperity was a sign of God’s approval of their personal righteousness and hard work. Also contributing to the cultural prevalence of “dream of upward mobility” were the American colonies’ many indentured servants, who left Europe with little material possessions but, through a period of contracted labor, were able to improve upon their economic position. This notion of upward mobility was further popularized in the writings and lives of early

American heroes such as Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, Abraham Lincoln, and Andrew Carnegie (60-81).

Carnegie is perhaps noteworthy to call out here because he was an immigrant, albeit of Northern European ethnic stock, and this dream of upward mobility had particular allure to immigrants throughout the nineteenth century, some of whom came to the U.S. with little else but a hope for a better life and excitement over the rumored promises of land and jobs. Once in the United States, however, many immigrants found their cultural, linguistic, religious, and physical differences from native-born Americans rendered them second-class citizens. Thus, their dream for “upward mobility” was in their own and succeeding generations often viewed not only as economic improvement, but as a journey of improvement in social status as well. Many scholars have written about the role baseball, with its rhetorical cloak of “Americanness,” played in this assimilation. Lawrence Baldassario, for example, writes:

. . . there is no question that baseball, more than any other sport and more than most American social institutions, has mirrored the gradual and often difficult process of assimilation experienced by a succession of ethnic and racial groups over the course of the twentieth century. For much of the first half of the century, baseball provided a window on the American Dream, creating in second-generation youth, especially those of European heritage, an awareness of those ideals that the arbiters identified as “American” and serving as a bridge between the customs of their immigrant parents and the world they found outside the home. (Baldassaro 4)

Peter Levine, meanwhile, offers a similar assessment regarding baseball’s role in the assimilation of a particular ethnic group, in this case Jews:

Loaded with symbolic value by those who promoted it as America's National Game, [baseball] appeared as a sport that underlined competition, fair play, and American opportunity. For Jewish boys who played it on the sandlots and in the streets and who followed the exploits of major leaguers, at times with their fathers, it became a special way of connection to a larger American community (Levine 9).

While Levine focuses on Jewish Americans, studies by other scholars reports similar experiences for other Euro-ethnic groups, including Italians (Baldassaro 93), Slavs (Pease 144-147), and particularly relevant to Gehrig and *The Pride of the Yankees*, Germans, about whom Larry R. Gerlach writes:

Besides the primary attraction of pleasure, participation in the uniquely American sport was an easy means of assimilation and gaining recognition for one's ethnic group. And with its transformation from amateur recreation to commercial entertainment after the Civil War, baseball also afforded economic opportunity for the talented few. (28)

For some, baseball not only contributed social uplift, but economic uplift as well, as many of the heroes of professional baseball's first several decades were second or third generation European immigrants including Mike "King" Kelley, John McGraw, Honus Wagner, Hank Greenberg, Stan Musial, as well as Yankee heroes Ruth, Gehrig, DiMaggio, Tony Lazzeri, Yogi Berra, and Phil Rizzuto. Arguably, baseball was one realm where the American dream of upward mobility was actually fulfilled, albeit in an obviously limited number of cases. Thus, the presence of this dream of upward mobility in a baseball film is something of a natural fit. Specifically, in *The Pride of the Yankees*, this upward mobility narrative provides a framework

for Gehrig's personal biography, and through him, becomes a central tenet to the Yankees' heroic national icon.

The national narrative of upward mobility shapes *The Pride of the Yankees* starting in its earliest scenes. Director Wood begins his film with a brief but memorable glimpse of Gehrig's childhood in working-class New York City. Almost immediately, the strong ethnic flavor of this neighborhood impresses itself upon viewers. While the young, undersized Gehrig struggles to gain the respect of the local boys at a pick up baseball game, a mother shouts a message to her son from a nearby tenement balcony in a pronounced Euro-ethnic accent. The precocious Gehrig surprises his peers by hitting the ball so well he breaks a shop window, and the subsequent meeting between Gehrig's parents, a police officer, and the shopkeeper solidifies this European immigrant motif. Not only do Mr. and Mrs. Gehrig (Ludwig Stössel and Elsa Janssen), who remain important side-characters throughout the film, speak in the strong German accents that one might expect from the first generation immigrants they were ("I can't do anything without my wife," Mr. Gehrig intones.), but the shop owner speaks in an excessively musical Italian accent ("I'm a-sorry.") and the policeman, stereotypically, in a prominent Irish brogue. Furthermore, this scene introduces the idea of the Gehrig family as poor, with Mrs. Gehrig asking the shopkeeper for leniency and patience in paying for the damage.

Overall, the filmmaker's intended effect seems quite clear: Gehrig comes from a working-class, German immigrant family living in a mixed Euro-ethnic neighborhood. The use of clichéd cues to indicate the mixed ethnic flavor of the neighborhood (the stereotypically Irish cop, the hammy Italian accent, the laundry on clotheslines between apartment buildings) remind us that this type of social landscape already existed in the popular American mind. Such a

concept of the scruffy, urban mixed-white-ethnic neighborhood was most clearly and consistently pushed to the American cultural consciousness in comedy texts and performances.

This is perhaps most notable in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Vaudeville comedy theatre circuit where broad ethnic humor was the order of the day. In such Vaudeville acts, “the core of the humor is the construction of caricature based on familiar ethnic stereotypes and linguistic humor—puns, malapropisms, double entendres, and accent-play, including broad exaggeration and misunderstandings which result from faulty pronunciation” (Mintz 20). This ethnic humor depended on ethnic stereotypes. Germans like the Gehrigs, for example, were typed as “lazy, stodgily conservative, and of course, also dumb” (21), where “dumb” meant “stupid or unintelligent, but also meant culturally naïve, ‘green’ or bewildered, ‘unhip’ as well”(20). However, it would be a mistake to read this humor as categorically viscous and xenophobic. Enacted by performers who often belonged to the groups being stereotyped for audiences that had a similar ancestral make up, within the world of Vaudeville, such ethnic jokes were generally perceived as “harmless fun, light amusement, harmless banter, enjoyed by all” (25). And though ethnic jokes can sometimes be intended or be seen as denigrating towards immigrant groups, scholars have argued that this tendency is “subordinate to their cognitive value, that is, to the ways in which they contribute to cultural awareness, to the process of acculturation” for both the subgroups and the culture at large (25).

Vaudeville’s tradition of ethnic humor had many mass-media descendants and heirs: the Marx Brothers’ films (Lieberfeld and Sanders 105) and comic strips like *The Yellow Kid* (Meyer) and, later, *Katzenjammer Kids* (Conolly-Smith 55-56) and *Bringing Up Father* (Soper 269-271), which focused more particularly on recent German and Irish immigrants, respectively, in stereotypical but empathetic ways. It is such texts from the turn of the century through the 1930s

that *The Pride of the Yankees* draws on in its formulation of Gehrig's parents and neighborhood. Rather than paint a new and unique local background for Gehrig's childhood, the filmmakers quickly call up this pre-existing social setting from America's collective pop cultural archives and apply it broadly to Gehrig.

The tone of gentle mockery common in most Vaudeville and Vaudeville-derivative acts is carried over in *The Pride of the Yankees*, particularly in the way the filmmakers use Gehrig's parents. In a memorable and often revisited scene depicting Lou's debut with the Yankees, Mr. Gehrig, with his thick German accent, attempts to explain the game of baseball to his wife, who goes as far as asking "Vot do zey do viz de pillows?" as she gestures towards the bases. The comedy in this scene derives from a presumed familiarity with baseball among the viewership and Mrs. Gehrig's colorfully portrayed naïveté, but the issue of nationality—always present when Gehrig's parents are on screen—complicates the scene some, giving it additional cultural meaning. Here, a presumed basic knowledge of baseball in viewers, and the lack thereof in the ethnic Mrs. Gehrig, are signifiers for "Americanness" and assimilation or the lack thereof. In sharp contrast to his parents, the Gary Cooper-portrayed Gehrig speaks with no trace of a German accent (nor the somewhat nasal New York accent with which the real Gehrig spoke), and is obviously well-schooled in baseball knowledge, presumably just like the typical American audience in 1942.¹⁵ That the young Gehrig has a collection of baseball cards, can throw the ball, and shows unexpected talent at the plate in the film's opening scene all prove the "Americanness" of this immigrants' son.

¹⁵ Lou Gehrig's higher degree of assimilation relative to his parents is far from a Hollywood fabrication. In fact, Eig suggests that Mrs. Gehrig had designs on the Americanization of her son while he was still in infancy. His birth certificate indicates that in the moment of filling it out, Mrs. Gehrig changed her mind and opted to give her son the very American name "Henry" rather than "Heinrich" (7).

This contrast between Gehrig and his parents implies a narrative of assimilation, the cultural dimension of the social uplift central to the American dream. While never expressly putting down Gehrig's parents or the other white ethnic characters in Gehrig's neighborhood, the film continually portrays them as quaint and frequently uses them as comic relief, in contrast to the somewhat idealized, heroic and thoroughly "American" Gehrig and his wife Eleanor. Baseball plays a key part in Gehrig's ability to transcend his own marginal ethnic background in the film, not only because it provides the monetary means of social improvement, but, with the long-standing rhetoric of baseball as the quintessential American pastime, it provides the cultural means of social ladder-climbing as well.

The Pride of the Yankees is by no means unique in presenting the game of baseball in these ways. The theme of baseball as a tool of assimilation, or more properly, of "Americanization" for cultural outsiders has received ample attention in baseball-related texts ranging from academic to popular. Again, the early-to-mid-twentieth-century Yankees were as rife with the sons of European immigrants as any Major League team. But it is interesting to note that the film's emphasis on the contrast between Cooper's all-American Gehrig and his conspicuously-ethnic parents, that is, on Gehrig's Americanization and lack of stereotypical, perhaps negatively-perceived ethnic traits, are paralleled in the popular portrayal of the Yankee hero who succeeded Gehrig, Joe DiMaggio. For example, in a 1939 *Life* magazine article about DiMaggio, who at that point was the being celebrated as the next Yankee hero, addresses his Italian heritage somewhat ambivalently. Author Noel F. Busch is happy to mock Italian Americans generally even as he praises DiMaggio individually. This is evident as assures readers that DiMaggio speaks with no accent and somewhat condescendingly comments "Instead of olive oil or smelly bear grease, [DiMaggio] keeps his hair slick with water. He never reeks of

garlic and prefers chicken chow mein to spaghetti” (69). The author’s interest in promoting the ballplayer as “well adapted to most U.S. mores” is clear here. His ethnic heritage is valuable, but only as an obstacle for him to overcome.

This story in *Life*, like *The Pride of the Yankees*, wants to have its cake and eat it too, emphasizing the Euro-ethnic heritage of the baseball hero, likely for the “upward mobility” narrative it conjures in American minds, while simultaneously assuring audiences that the boy is thoroughly “all-American.” In so doing, both texts channel two opposing views on immigrants: that they are noble individuals struggling to live the American dream, or that they are lazy, shiftless, suspect and culturally, if not genetically, inferior to old stock Americans. Both texts seem to take something of a middle path. Gehrig and DiMaggio are the “good kind” of immigrant, the kind that prove the validity of the American dream and become “American.” In this way, the biographical narrative of these two Yankee heroes articulates the oft-celebrated American dream of upward mobility, without making their hero too “un-American.” In the case of Gehrig, a son of *German* immigrants, being portrayed as thoroughly “American” would have been particularly important in the context of World War II.

While this ambivalent, somewhat schizophrenic attitude towards ethnicity is not unique to the way Yankees players were portrayed in mass media texts, the fact that Gehrig and DiMaggio followed the legacy of Ruth, another former-poor-boy Yankee hero with Euro-ethnic heritage, created in the popular imagination the notion of a *legacy* of Yankee heroes who stood as a testament to the narrative of European immigrants and the American dream while simultaneously staying firmly in the “all-American” traditional mainstream.

Gehrig as Icon of the American Dream: Economic Improvement

Filmmakers supplement Gehrig's ethnic upward mobility narrative with numerous references to his changing financial state as well. While the Gehrig family's social improvement through the cultural assimilation of son Lou is told in a more subtle manner, filmmakers spell out the purely economic side of their upward mobility quite clearly. If the working-class signifiers in the film's opening scene of the boy's pick-up game in the sandlot outside their tenement house are not obvious enough, filmmakers actively impress the Gehrig's humble economic circumstances upon viewers with Mrs. Gerhig's apology that she will have to pay the rest later when reimbursing the shopkeeper for the window Lou broke. Their lowly socioeconomic status and ambition to rise above it is later conveyed more explicitly when Mrs. Gehrig lectures her son about studying hard and taking advantage of the fabled opportunities of their new homeland. "Look at your papa, look at me. We didn't go to school and what are we? A janitor. A cook," she observes, "I want you to be somebody. . . . In this country you can be anything you want to be." Later, the film even attempts to convey the class-related social stigmas Gehrig would have been subject to at Columbia University with a scene that portrays some obviously arrogant fraternity members scoffing at their brother's suggestion that they invite the financially-disadvantaged Lou to join their organization. "This fraternity has standards. You just can't ignore his family," one member opines, "Go ahead. Hang a pledge pin on him. Don't expect me to call him brother." Gehrig eventually is allowed into the fraternity, but is subjected to a humiliating prank.

Later on, when his mother takes ill and they do not have the money to cover medical treatment, Lou finally opts to go against Mrs. Gehrig's wishes and drop out of his Columbia engineering program to play baseball and take the needed money offered by the Yankees. This

detail closely links Lou's baseball career with economic improvement, but is careful to do so in a way that highlights Gehrig as noble and self-sacrificing (even if viewers know that Gehrig really preferred baseball all along), and thus, all the more heroic, rather than merely greedy. Once his baseball career has begun, director Sam Wood continues to focus on Gehrig's family, offering plenty of scenes that show Gehrig as bread-winner, first supporting his parents, then courting and providing for his wife Eleanor.

In brief, Goldwyn and Wood's film shows Gehrig progressing from a humble working-class childhood to an adult role as a stable provider. There is no glitz, glamour, or excess here. Scenes featuring Gehrig and his wife on a date in eveningwear at a local carnival followed by dinner of "hot dogs and champagne" during their courtship, or their honeymoon at the ballpark emphasize Gehrig's humility and distancing him from any kind of elitism or Jazz Age excess.¹⁶ But Wood seems clearly interested in showing audiences that despite his humble childhood, Gehrig has turned himself into a successful man who ably fulfills the expected role of family provider. Like the issue of ethnicity, this economic uplift is also something that filmmakers wish to portray with some nuance. Gehrig is clearly aligned with the American dream narrative, but this is no rags to *riches* tale, which might give him too much of an air of elitism. This grounding of Gehrig in healthy but relatively modest economic success in the film makes an important impact on Gehrig's status as a hero and, through him, on the Yankees icon itself. Like the ethnic-yet-Americanized treatment of Gehrig's cultural otherness, the moderation projected on his economic uplift give Gehrig an everyman quality, making him seem not so different or distant from viewers.

¹⁶ This could be read as another contrast to Ruth, who spent his money freely and often ostentatiously (Creamer 273, 379).

This “common man” quality that Gehrig attains through the *modest* portrayal of his upward mobility helped give the Yankees a bit more of a populist aura. When the film was released, the Yankees had just recently won their four World Series in a row at the end of the 1930s and then recaptured the title that fall of ’41. This dominance contributed to some accusing the organization of elitism or plutocracy. Creamer even suggests that the cry “Break up the Yankees!” could be occasionally heard among baseball fans during the 1941 season (*Baseball in ’41* 23). Similarly, Creamer recalls Yankee owner Jacob Ruppert, “urbane, sophisticated, impeccably dressed . . . [personifying] the superior quality of the Yankees” (62), as contributing to an aura of wealth and elitism surrounding his club. The portrayal of Gehrig in *The Pride of the Yankees* counters this perception, presenting the Yankees as less the elitists that some may have accused them of being, and more as an organization that, like Gehrig, earned success through hard work and commitment.

***The Pride of the Yankees* and Populism**

This democratic coloring of the Yankees icon is highlighted by the very personality and demeanor of Gehrig as portrayed by Gary Cooper. Wes D. Gehring argues that the actor’s portrayal is rooted in the American populist tradition that celebrates its belief in “the common man.” Populism draws on a deep American heritage including Jefferson and Jackson, but in early-twentieth-century popular culture, as Gehring suggests, American populism was promoted by the folksy, “cracker-barrel” humorist Will Rogers and the film director Frank Capra, known for such tear-jerking celebrations of the Everyman as *It’s a Wonderful Life* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Gehring views the populist narrative as a genre that typically features “a community of individuals working together for the common good” and is defined by an “optimistic belief in a world still seen as rational” (15) as well as a faith in “families, second

chances, . . . traditional American icons like small town pastoral life and baseball,” and above all, “*the people*” (20).

The very casting of Gary Cooper in the role of Gehrig helps establish a populist foundation for *The Pride of the Yankees*. Best known for playing the quintessential American male populist hero, the cowboy, Cooper established his rustic everyman charm in *The Virginian* (1929), one of Hollywood’s first sound Westerns, and confirmed his status with his roles in *The Spoilers* (1930), *The Plainsman* (1936), *The Cowboy and the Lady* (1938), *The Westerner* (1940), and *North West Mounted Police* (1940). These cowboy roles continued after Cooper’s 1942 turn in *The Pride of the Yankees* with *Along Came Jones* (1945), *Dallas* (1950), *Garden of Evil* (1954), *Vera Cruz* (1954), *Man of the West* (1958), and his memorable Academy Award-winning performance in *High Noon* (1952). Supplementing these performances as a rural American icon were starring roles in two populist films directed by Frank Capra himself, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) and *Meet John Doe* (1941) that helped make Cooper “synonymous with the mythic cinematic image of the inherently good ‘aw shucks’ American” (Gehring 57).

Though Cooper’s baseball skills were limited, many observers commented that his well-established Hollywood persona as the American everyman made him the perfect person to play Gehrig, as “both epitomized what used to be called ‘the strong silent American’” (65). As Cooper biographer Larry Swindell writes, “Gehrig . . . had been sort of a Gary Cooper of baseball, a quiet hero much admired for his character” (238). In addition to his quiet, workman-like demeanor, Gehrig had acquired a populist public image through his streak of 2,130 consecutive games played.

With the casting of Cooper, this everyman quality of Gehrig’s biography was certainly highlighted in *The Pride of the Yankees*, but it doesn’t stop there. The celebration of the

common man seems to be the particular focus in several scenes of the film, with Cooper's Gehrig consistently epitomizing the populist theme. The key populist scene does not actually involve Gehrig, however. Relatively early in the first baseman's career with the Yankees, two sports writers sit on a train debating the value of Gehrig, who, at this point, was only beginning to prove himself. One reporter, Hank Hanneman, played by Dan Duryea, criticizes Gehrig's already apparent "common man" persona, complaining,

A guy like that is a detriment to any sport. He's a boob with a batting eye. He wakes up, brushes his teeth, hikes out to the ballpark, hits the ball, hikes back to the hotel room, reads the funny papers, gargles, and goes to bed. That's personality, hm?

The other reporter, Sam Blake¹⁷ disagrees, however. Blake calls Gehrig "a real hero" and proceeds to give an impassioned speech that captures the essence of *The Pride of the Yankees'* populist theme:

Let me tell you about heroes, Hank. I've covered a lot of 'em, and I'm saying Gehrig is the best of 'em. No front-page scandals, no daffy excitements, no horn-piping in the spotlight . . . but a guy who does his job and nothing else. He lives for his job. He gets a lot of fun out of it. And fifty million other people get a lot of fun out of him, watching him do something better than anybody else ever did it before.

Here Blake not only emphasizes Gehrig's "Average Joe," workingman qualities, but lauds them as virtues, despite his colleague's insistence that they make Gehrig bland. Blake then even more overtly asserts Gehrig's status as an everyman when he responds to the other writer's comeback. When Hanneman jokes that Blake might have a point "if all baseball fans were as big boobs as Gehrig," Blake again turns the insult into a virtue, asserting, "They are. The same kind of boobs

¹⁷ Blake is portrayed by celebrated character actor Walter Brennan who had shared the screen with Cooper in *The Cowboy and the Lady* (1938), *The Westerner* (1940), *Meet John Doe* (1941), and *Sergeant York* (1941).

as Gehrig.” This comment forges an important link between Gehrig and the common man. In this scene and others that follow it, filmmakers present Gehrig as merely an average American male who has been put in the spotlight and portray him as all the better for it.

Sam Blake’s thesis statement about Gehrig the everyman is supported in a variety of ways, including the wide array of humble working-class Americans who are shown celebrating while listening to his triumphs on the radio, and the natural rapport Gehrig is shown to have with kids. Gehrig’s folksy manner of speech serves as another signifier of his everyman quality. When explaining his decision to cut the “apron strings” and deemphasize the role of his sometimes domineering mother in his life in favor of his then-fiancée, he intones “You can’t run a baseball team with two captains or a household with two bosses. There’s only going to be one boss in this house.” This sort of corny baseball metaphor is similarly employed later when asking the doctor to be forthright with him about his potentially fatal diagnosis. “Go ahead, Doc; I’m a man who likes to know his batting average,” he implores, “Give it to me straight . . . is it three strikes, Doc?” While more baseball-centric in *The Pride of the Yankees*, Gehrig’s diction in the film recalls Cooper’s earlier turns in “common man” roles in Westerns and Capra-directed films, as well as the tradition of folk wisdom found in the likes of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (such rustic, common sense truths like, “I don’t take no stock in dead people” or “You can’t pray a lie”), and typified in the early twentieth century by Will Rogers. In sum, filmmakers present Cooper’s Gehrig as not just the “pride of the Yankees,” but the pride of “the people,” as well.

Gehrig’s populist image is particularly important for the impact it has on the perception of the Yankees as a whole through the film. As mentioned, the Yankees’ success elicited resentment in baseball fans who perceived them as elitist. When the film was released in the

summer of '42, in the wake of five Yankee World Series titles in six years, such resentment would have been in ample supply. The film's touting of Gehrig the everyman as "the pride of the Yankees," however, provides a significant counterpoint to this tendency to see elitism in the club. While in reality the Yankees' deep coffers contributed significantly to the team's success by providing funds for scouting and signing players, no such factors are addressed in *The Pride of the Yankees*. On the contrary, the 1942 film implies that the Yankees only achieved their success through the hard work, dedication, and sportsmanship of "Average Joes" like Gehrig. This paradox of populist success replicates the "upward mobility" narrative of the American dream and allows the Yankee icon to somehow encompass both elite excellence and the humble everyman.

***The Pride of the Yankees* and American Masculinity**

The issue of masculinity is also related to Gehrig's embodiment of the American dream narrative and his status as a populist icon. The way Cooper's Gehrig fills both of these roles coincides significantly with the most prevalent form of twentieth-century American masculinity, making the film's portrayal of the Yankee hero also an icon of mainstream manhood in some respects. Unlike his embodiment of the American dream and populism, which are more or less complete, however, Gehrig's masculinity as portrayed in *The Pride of the Yankees* deviates in a few significant ways from the mid-twentieth century norms. These deviations—his shyness, maternal devotion, and emotional sensitivity—are largely rooted in the facts of Gehrig's biography and serve to temper, but not eclipse the film's portrayal of the slugger as a "self-made man," a man of courage, a successful team leader, and a capable breadwinner and head of family, making him a "model" male in many regards.

In the academy, the field of gender studies has grown enough in influence over the past thirty to forty years that it should come as a surprise to very few when American masculinity scholar Michael Kimmel asserts that “manhood is neither static nor timeless; it is historical. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed” (81). Nevertheless, this understanding that gender—in this case, masculinity—is something that one performs and attempts (or not) to live up to, is important as we begin to analyze how well Gary Cooper’s Lou Gehrig fulfills the cultural expectations of him as a male. Kimmel argues that those expectations are largely derived from “participation in the market place, from interaction with other men in that marketplace—in short . . . based on homosocial competition” (82).

The concept of the marketplace is twofold in its importance. First, it is the most fundamental *proving ground* of American society. Perhaps due to the nation’s relatively recent agrarian or frontier past, there exists a need for American men to prove themselves, show that they can be self-sustaining and independent, like a homesteader living on the edge of the wilderness, apart from any supportive community. It is from this tradition that Kentucky Senator Henry Clay coined the laudatory informal title of “self-made man” in 1832 (82) that gestures towards the “up-by-his-bootstraps” narrative of the American dream that has already been discussed, but it also describes the gendered social expectations of every American man: he must “make” himself by himself. As Clay asserted, “We are a nation of self-made men” (82).

In this regard, Gehrig as he appears in *The Pride of the Yankees* passes the test of American masculinity with flying colors. The film validates Gehrig’s masculinity with Cooper portraying the ballplayer as an unequivocal self-made man. Not only is he able to take care of himself with his baseball paycheck, but his parents as well, including his sick mother’s medical

bills. In this way he succeeds as a specimen of masculinity where his father failed.¹⁸ Later, he takes on the more traditional form of American breadwinner after marrying Eleanor. Gehrig's role as provider is emphasized in one particular sequence of scenes that depicts him leaving home, kissing his wife goodbye and heading off to the ballpark, to return home later and be asked how his day went. This enactment of the script of a typical day in twentieth-century American domesticity in a baseball setting not only emphasizes Gehrig's competency as a breadwinning husband, but also emphasizes the workman-like mentality he had towards his job.

This quality of dependability and consistency was further emphasized in the popular perception of the real Gehrig prior to the film, with his nickname "The Iron Horse" and his renown for setting the record for consecutive games played, something not lost on the filmmakers who devote screen time to both. Again, the financial success Gehrig achieves through his "up-by-his-bootstraps" journey to becoming a self-made man is relatively modest. He proves a dependable provider, and even achieves fame, but nothing resembling glamorous wealth. In fact, such things are eschewed, for, while not inconsistent with the social measure of self-made manhood, such trappings of elitism would compromise Gehrig's position as a populist hero. On the baseball field, however, Gehrig's victories, free from any uncomfortable class connotations, can be unrestrained, and as both an individual player and leader of the Yankees, Gehrig proves even more successful than he did in baseball's marketplace, a fact filmmakers emphasize with anecdotes of dramatic homeruns as well as a time-lapse scene depicting the accumulation of trophies on the Gehrigs' mantle, polished and added to, appropriately, by a female hand.

¹⁸ The film makes a single suggestion that the elder Gehrig was employed as a janitor—a generous gesture towards a man whose employment was irregular and infrequent due to poor health, drinking, and an alleged aversion to work (Eig 4-5, 8-9, 21).

Unlike the modern capitalist marketplace, the realm of sport also has the additional bonus of being a *physical* proving ground, thus aligning Gehrig and his compatriots with the frontiersman and cowboys of America's past who also showed themselves to be "self-made men" in more physical ways. Thus, as a self-made man Gehrig could hardly be portrayed as more successful in *The Pride of the Yankees*. As such, this representation renders him a "true man" by twentieth-century cultural standards and lends a masculine air to the success synonymous with the Yankee icon.

While Gehrig is certainly presented as adequate as a self-made man, Kimmel's homosocial marketplace environment is more than about proving one can be self-sustaining and provide for a family, it also includes successful competition with other men. With regard to the "proving ground" of American manhood, Kimmel writes, ". . . no sooner is masculinity proved that it is again questioned and must be proved again—constant, relentless, unachievable" (82). This constant need to prove oneself makes competition among men—not merely achieving something but achieving more, faster than other men—a key quality in American male culture. As such, another man's success is frequently felt as a threat to one's own manhood. One of the outgrowths of this culture of "homosocial competition" is what Kimmel describes as "the flight from the feminine"—the rejection of the supposedly "feminine" traits of "nurturance, compassion, and tenderness" as a sign of weakness (85). Kimmel cites "the drive to repudiate the mother" as especially important for a young man to declare his masculine autonomy (85).

On baseball's playing field, both Gehrig and the Yankees are an unqualified success with regard to "homosocial competition." With his two Most Valuable Player awards, seven selections to the All-Star Team, and the six World Series championships with the Yankees, both Gehrig and his team were no strangers to being considered "the best" in the world of baseball.

This fact is certainly not omitted in Sam Wood's film, as it features moments designed to show Gehrig's supremacy as a ballplayer, including the memorable scenario with the sick boy where he beats teammate Babe Ruth at his own homerun game, hitting *two* of them while the Babe could only muster one. Likewise, the accumulating trophy scene, the newspaper headline montage, and the film's closing scenes at Yankee Stadium implicitly celebrate the New York Club as professional baseball's unequivocal best. With Kimmel's framework in mind, this success over other players and teams certainly has its "manly" connotations, perhaps particularly in the case of the Yankees and the team's then-recent dominance from 1936-1939. This success lends an "alpha male" connotation to the Yankee icon itself and anyone that associates themselves with the organization, including fans.

Other aspects of Gehrig's life and personality as portrayed in *The Pride of the Yankees*, however, challenge his fulfillment of this aggressive and competitive facet of American masculinity. This is especially apparent in scenes taking place off the baseball field, where twice Gehrig is the target of pranks by a group of his male peers, effectively making him the butt of a joke in front of a broader male social group. In addition to the straw hat hazing episode with the Yankees in his rookie year, in college his fraternity brothers conspire with a co-ed to lead on the wallflower Gehrig so they can later mock his awkwardness in romance by parroting and parodying his conversation with her. "You're the one that's wonderful . . .," they ham with Lou in earshot the morning after, "Well, I'd like to be a great big fireman but the mater won't let me. She wants me to be a motorman . . . will you remember me?" While such scenes may enhance Gehrig's underdog quality for viewers, they certainly do not make him appear manlier by most cultural standards in mid-twentieth century America.

Perhaps even more damning in this regard is the portrayal of Gehrig's relationship with his somewhat controlling mother. The close connection between the real Gehrig and his mother is well-established. Eig summed things up succinctly by writing that "if there were a Hall of Fame for mama's boys, Gehrig would have been a shoo-in" (12). Filmmakers showed real nerve for portraying this in the movie, especially in scenes depicting Gehrig as obviously bending his own will to his mother's wishes in seeking a career as a college-educated engineer instead of pursuing his true love, baseball. Likewise, as late as college, Mrs. Gehrig remains Lou's "best girl." This "momma's boy" quality is completely abandoned only when Gehrig's then-fiancée becomes the new woman in his life.

But even after marriage, the film is still somewhat ambivalent about Gehrig's desire and ability to keep power over the women in his life, an impulse Kimmel's discussion of masculinity suggests he should feel. In many ways, Eleanor is portrayed to be Gehrig's equal, especially during their courtship, when she engages in playful and flirtatious verbal banter in the style of "screwball" romantic comedies that were Hollywood staples of the period, such as *It Happened One Night* (1934), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), and *The Philadelphia Story* (1940). For instance, when a romantically confused Gehrig sheepishly asks Eleanor, "Aren't you my girl?" she teases him coyly, "Why Lou, I don't know what you mean by your girl. Your best girl? Is that what you mean? Why, whatever gave you that idea?" Later in that conversation, she extends his misery, wondering aloud, "I wonder if I'm going to miss you (after Gehrig leaves on a road trip)." When the thoroughly-in-love and defenseless Gehrig responds, "Can't you find out before I go?" she dryly responds, "Nope. Isn't that too bad? Why is it like that?" Without a witty retort, Gehrig can't play Spencer Tracy or Cary Grant to Eleanor's Hepburn-like barbs. As

evidenced in this dialogue, in many ways, Eleanor is actually in the driver's seat in their relationship, far from the alpha male standard of which Kimmel speaks.

After their marriage, however, while her verbal bantering continues to some extent, the former socialite Eleanor, conspicuously becomes a devoted housewife, whose main occupation is to emotionally support her husband—to be “the greatest fan a man ever had,” as Gehrig puts it. After marrying, the former Miss Eleanor Twitichell, it seems, clearly lives for her husband, a fact that is symbolized by the care she takes as curator of the scrapbook that memorializes Gehrig and the Yankees' achievements, and by Gehrig's anniversary gift to her: a bracelet made out of award pins he won as a ballplayer. Thus, while Gehrig may have been something of a momma's boy and exudes a sensitive shyness, the film nonetheless shows him as quite capably upholding the gendered domestic role of “head of household” in nearly every sense of the term.

This progression from the stereotypical momma's boy to patriarchal head of family is significant. Paralleling his climb from his impoverished, ethnic origins to financial success and baseball glory, Gehrig's assumption of normative masculine domestic roles after his years deferring to the wishes of his mother can be read as an emphasis on Gehrig's growth as a man. The film depicts similar progress in his experience with the all-male social sphere. Just as Gehrig eventually takes on a more empowered role in his relationship with women, this man who was once shown to be the butt of jokes from his male peers is portrayed as gaining the considerable respect of his Yankee teammates and becoming the team captain to whom the other players defer in the clubhouse. While Gehrig may come off as overly sensitive and lacking in confidence in many areas for the tastes of some mid-twentieth-century viewers, particularly the men, *The Pride of the Yankees* portrays him as growing into a full-fledged man by film's end, and he perhaps even gains additional audience respect for the progress he makes.

Furthermore, it should be noted that many of the hallmarks of American male culture that Kimmell identifies, while not inaccurate, are still widely considered as immoral, and unethical human behavior. While many men's lives may have indeed been shaped by the cultural pressures to succeed, prove one's superiority to other men, eschew "feminine" characteristics, and dominate actual women, the fact remains that all these tendencies have never been universally praised in every sphere of American culture. This is particularly true of mid-twentieth-century Hollywood films intended for a broad, mixed-gender audience. And because *The Pride of the Yankees* is not merely a sports film, but doubles as a romantic comedy, Cooper's portrayal of Gehrig must not only fill the role of model male specimen, but make him a convincing romantic lead as well. As such, Gehrig's "soft heart" was likely viewed by many as a positive quality, and his shyness as an endearing trait that he must overcome to "get the girl." His eventual assumption of the patriarchal role of head of family reassures audiences of the stability of mid-century-gender norms (regardless of the stability of such gender roles in reality), but many of the sensitive "feminine" qualities remain part of Gehrig's character throughout the film, keeping him a sympathetic romantic lead and perhaps promoting a model of moral behavior. While not necessarily consistent with the competitive ethos of the male realm of homosocial competition, Gehrig's sensitivity and lack of aggression uphold the Judeo-Christian ethical ideals and the broader American public discourse of which these ideals were a significant part at the time.

Finally, the film's true-to-life tragic conclusion provides a unique opportunity for Cooper's Gehrig to reassert his masculinity. Death represents the ultimate challenger for a male individual's life, as it is the one obstacle or foe that cannot be "beaten." With this in mind, it certainly poses an apparently overwhelming threat to the competitive, win-at-all-costs cultural

pressure the American male faces. The world of sports itself provides a good example of perhaps the only script for how to deal with unavoidable defeat in a manly way: to face it honestly with no complaining or “effeminate” whining, while keeping any emotions of grief or sadness from being expressed outwardly. The final act of *The Pride of the Yankees* depicts Gehrig as facing his fatal diagnosis in precisely this manner. When Lou and Eleanor meet after his diagnosis, Eleanor is the only one to shed tears. And in the film’s signature scene, Gehrig’s Yankee Stadium speech, while others lose their composure, Lou fights back his tears and remains ever the image of strength and bravery. Even the text of his famous speech asserts a manly attitude towards death. He refutes the impulse to complain or ask “why me?” through his famous rebuttal towards those who “say [he’s] had a bad break,” claiming that he “considers [himself] the luckiest man on the face of the Earth.” His courage is then visually symbolized by his resolute walk into the shadows in the Yankee clubhouse.

The courage with which Gehrig faces his tragic death are even compared to that of a quintessential symbol of American manhood, the soldier, in an opening crawl text that sets the stage for the entire film. It reads, “He faced death with that same valor and fortitude that has been displayed by thousands of young Americans on far-flung fields of battle. He left behind him a memory of courage and devotion that will ever be an inspiration to all men.” This reference to courage in battle naturally would have held substantial emotional significance for audiences in the summer of 1942 when U.S. involvement in the Second World War was only around seven months old. Positioned at the very beginning of the film, the comparison of Gehrig with soldiers that fought in American wars provides audiences with the take-home message they should be looking for even before the story starts. Thus, as per the film’s own decree, even given the substantial screen time devoted to Gehrig’s journey of upward mobility to baseball

success, and the elements of screwball romantic comedy that color the film, it is Gehrig's steady courage in death that viewers focus on and remember the most, leaving no doubt about the baseball hero's status as a "real man."

The Pride of the Yankees and Nationalism

This direct comparison of Gehrig to American soldiers does more than just bolster his masculine credentials, however. It also metaphorically wraps the Yankee hero in the American flag, nationalizing his life narrative. It also puts a distinct "American" stamp on the Yankees cultural icon that the film Gehrig shows as epitomizing. While Gehrig's narrative of upward mobility, his populist everyman qualities, and even his ultimately triumphant masculinity all have ties to traditional American institutions and values—namely democracy and the capitalist economic system—this connection made to the military provides a more tangible, material evocation of the nation state that the mass audience would recognize.

Thus, this opening crawl text makes the vital tie between the "American way of life" that Gehrig embodies and more overt signifiers of the nation and its government. Gehrig as portrayed by Gary Cooper becomes not just a baseball hero, but a national hero. The film transforms him into something of a martyr for what was then still a young world war. Against totalitarian foes, Gehrig, cut down tragically in the prime of life like so many soldiers, embodies the "American way of life" that those soldiers were celebrated as defending and spreading to other parts of the world. And as Gehrig, the so-called "pride of the Yankees," is shown to be the quintessential American hero, or the "pride of America," the Yankees, with their traditions of rags-to-riches heroes and sustained excellence on the field, become synonymous with American greatness. In *The Pride of the Yankees*, the team whose name always gestured towards nationalism officially takes on that role in earnest.

Chapter Three

“Think of the Great DiMaggio”: Joe DiMaggio and the Mythic Dimension of the Yankees Icon in the Postwar Era

Introduction

In the brief period surrounding his ballyhooed 1939 retirement, and the release of *The Pride of the Yankees* in 1942, Lou Gehrig enjoyed—largely posthumously—a prominent cultural status that he never had during his more unsung days as a player. But prior to and following this surprise attention the American public gave to Gehrig and his memory, another Yankee hero was the toast of the Bronx. In his 1936 rookie year, he was hailed as the man to replace the void left by Ruth. In the year in which Gehrig died, 1941, this player’s exploits would inspire a hit pop song. And in the years following World War II, after the public’s memory of Gary Cooper’s saintly Hollywood Lou Gehrig had at last faded some, American sportswriters would transform him into a virtual demigod. This Yankee was centerfielder Joe DiMaggio, the man who would carry the mantle of Yankee heroism into the postwar era and bring it to new mythic heights.

DiMaggio, nicknamed “The Yankee Clipper” for his graceful style of play, first joined the Yankees in 1936 and made an immediate impact, eclipsing the taciturn Gehrig in terms of fan popularity. As biographer Richard Ben Cramer explained, while Gehrig lacked “color” in the public imagination, DiMaggio, by contrast,

. . . was aware from the first moment, aware at every moment, of the hero game. He was alive to the power of the camera: he made himself available, he could smile, and he

knew when to smile. With writers he was as alert, as poised as pent as he was in center field. . . .

Joe didn't have to say much. Any words from him were like a confidence that he bestowed, not to be misused. . . . He could bring them in—just enough—so they could play the big game together. (110-111)

While the established elder statesman Gehrig and the newcomer DiMaggio both played vital roles in the Yankees' unprecedented string of four World Series victories in a row from 1936-'39¹⁹, prior to Gehrig's diagnosis, death, and Hollywood hagiography, it was DiMaggio's quiet magnetism that truly excited sports writers and the public. As Cramer puts it, in 1941, the year Gehrig died and Cooper, Sam Goldwyn, and Sam Wood were creating *The Pride of the Yankees*, "at that time, in the real world, the Pride of the Yanks was Joe" (169).

Popularly portrayed in a manner that encompassed both the familiar populist heroism of Gehrig and a new mythic heroism, Joe DiMaggio eventually became a national icon that served to remind America of its own greatness in the wake of World War II. This unique everyman/superman duality of character is evident in the journalistic reporting of his hitting streak in 1941 and his dramatic comeback from injury in 1949. The centerfielder's double-faceted public image is even more apparent, however, in two very different books published in the early postwar period, DiMaggio's youth-oriented autobiography *Lucky to Be a Yankee* (first edition, 1946) and Ernest Hemingway's novella *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). Through all these texts DiMaggio's public heroism helped transform the Yankees into an icon of America's national success story, particularly in the postwar period of prosperity and world power. The

¹⁹ Gehrig was an All-Star every year from 1933-'38 (and was even voted to the '39 team in the year he was finally sidelined by illness) and won the MVP award in 1936. Nevertheless, some Yankee players agreed with the public in favoring DiMaggio's contributions over Gehrig's on these late-'30s teams. Though his statistics from 1936-'38 are impressive, George Selkirk summed up the opinion of some in saying "We needed a leader after Ruth left. Gehrig wasn't a leader. He was just a good old plowhorse" (qtd. in Allen 17).

mythic element of DiMaggio's public persona characterized Yankee success as decreed by destiny, emblematic of the more broadly-prevailing cultural notions about American prosperity and power as divinely-ordained.

DiMaggio as All-American Populist Hero

Even as it took a tragic diagnosis with a mysterious terminal illness and an extremely popular film eulogy to prevent Gehrig from being eclipsed by Joe DiMaggio, as baseball fans in the year of the film's release, 1942, surveyed the current Yankees for the values lauded in Gehrig by the film, it would have been this very same DiMaggio that would have stood out as most representative of the Yankee standard of personal excellence. In many respects DiMaggio bore a resemblance to Gehrig. His background as the son of a poor Sicilian fisherman paralleled Gehrig's as an iconic embodiment of the American dream of upward mobility for European immigrants. Like Gehrig, DiMaggio was a quiet individual who preferred to let his performance on the field speak for itself. Similarly, DiMaggio's no-nonsense attitude, willingness to play through injury, and ability to stay out of the scandal sheet²⁰ were consistent with the work-a-day populist values praised in *The Pride of the Yankees*.

Furthermore, like Gehrig's famous feat of playing in 2,130 consecutive games, DiMaggio's signature claim to baseball fame also bolsters his status as a populist hero. In 1941 DiMaggio scored at least one base hit in a streak of fifty-six consecutive games, besting the previous record by twelve games. Like Gehrig's feat, this record testifies of DiMaggio's consistency, his insistence on putting forth his maximum effort day in and day out, rather than a Ruthian eruption of superhuman strength affiliated with homerun hitters. With this consistency, DiMaggio seemed to exhibit a workman-like quality that effectively complimented Gehrig's

²⁰ Biographer Richard Ben Cramer suggests that DiMaggio had something of a taste for showgirls (including his first wife, Dorothy, but it did not stop with her), and occasionally associated with bookies and gangsters, but the press largely prevented this from becoming public knowledge (127-131, 177-178, 242-243).

legacy and gave further evidence to the notion promoted in *The Pride of the Yankees* that the ball club found success through their work ethic.²¹ Thus, DiMaggio helped cement the club's status as a symbol of the American dream of upward mobility through hard work and patience. Just as Gehrig and DiMaggio seemed to prove that the protestant work ethic could bring the sons of immigrants socioeconomic uplift, the Yankees teams they led seemed to prove it could bring unmatched baseball glory.

DiMaggio as Mythic Hero

In addition to this populist image, however, DiMaggio's on-field exploits were also viewed as possessing a certain element of the superhuman. In the words of biographer Jerome Charyn, "Babe Ruth was loved; Ty Cobb was reviled. Joe DiMaggio was revered, looked upon with an almost religious awe. He was the first saint of baseball when baseball itself was a religion" (1). His fifty-six game hitting streak serves as an illustrative example. The streak essentially consisted of having one minor success every day, a contrast to more grandiose and frequently more recognized contributions such as Ruth's trademark epic homeruns.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that finding the minor success of a base hit *every* day is a very difficult thing to do. A popular saying about baseball goes something to the effect that baseball is the only game where someone is thought of as doing very well when they fail seven out of ten times, a reference to the long-held standard of excellence, the .300 batting average, or three hits for every ten batting opportunities. Thus, given about four chances to hit every game, to find success every day for fifty-six games in a row is no small feat. Famed evolutionary biologist,

²¹ Detracting from DiMaggio's populist, workman image was a tendency to hold out for a higher salary earlier in his career, particularly in 1938. This earned DiMaggio frequent boos, in that '38 season, and to a lesser degree, for couple seasons thereafter from fans "who often grew annoyed when players held out for big raises in those Depression years." But the 1941 hitting streak, and his later postwar exploits, "gallantly overcoming injuries" to lead the Yankees in key victories helped sway public opinion and minimized those earlier holdouts in public memory (Creamer 12-13).

Yankee fan, and baseball “statistical maven,” Stephen Jay Gould describes the streak as “the greatest accomplishment in the history of baseball, if not all modern sport” (175). This element of defying the odds, combined with the workmanlike, day-by-day nature of the record, causes DiMaggio’s streak to carry both populist *and* superhuman connotations.

This everyman/superman tension is a common theme in the public’s perception of DiMaggio. He was consistently described as seemingly “born to play baseball” as if he had a divine gift. The terms “grace,” “beauty,” and “perfection” were frequently employed to describe DiMaggio’s play. As journalist David Halberstam puts it,

DiMaggio complemented his natural athletic ability with astonishing physical grace. He played the outfield, he ran the bases, and he batted not just effectively but with rare style. He would glide rather than run, it seemed, always smooth, always ending up where he wanted to be just when he wanted to be there. (*Summer of '49* 46)

DiMaggio supplemented this seemingly “natural,” yet otherworldly “grace”²² with a desire to “play through” injuries, which resulted in a large number of “miraculous comebacks” and narratives of self sacrifice surrounding his career.

This mythical dimension to DiMaggio’s public persona recalls the work of a scholar who was roughly the Yankee centerfielder’s contemporary: Joseph Campbell. Campbell (1908-1987), an American mythologist who studied legendary and mythic narratives of disparate world cultures, argued for a common narrative structure in these myths. He described this “same shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story” he perceived as the *monomyth* (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 3). Heavily influenced by Jung, Campbell saw this monomyth in pseudo-religious terms, believing it to be “the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of

²² Ted Williams once said that “DiMaggio even looks good striking out” (qtd. in Halberstam, *Summer of '49* 47).

the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestation” (3). In its most basic terms, Campbell described the narrative pattern that he believed to be timeless and universal thusly:

A Hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (30)

Many recent scholars have been critical of Campbell’s “tendency to think in generic terms” and oversimplify the differences between cultural traditions as well as his willingness to allow his own personal spiritualism to influence writing presented as academic (Ellwood x-xii). The fact remains, however, that Campbell identifies a basic narrative pattern—centered on a single heroic figure who delivers or saves his or her (but usually *his*) people—that has been prevalent and influential throughout much of Western culture. Such narratives include stories foundational to the Western tradition like those of Gilgamesh, Beowulf, Moses, Hercules, Jesus, and King Arthur. Even the popular narratives about historical American figures like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln follow Campbell’s pattern, as do more contemporary mass media texts including the cowboy western and superhero narrative genres, as well as the Harry Potter books, and the Star Wars film series, which creator George Lucas partially based on Campbell’s work and Campbell himself held up as a quintessential example of his monomyth (*The Power of Myth* 177-179). If nothing else, Campbell’s work and the continuity it posits between these ancient and contemporary narratives at least helps explain the profound popularity of these latter stories. Whether or not such stories provide a “secret opening” to the “energies of the cosmos,” they do represent a narrative pattern that Americans have certainly grown accustomed to consuming.

These more recent, popular narratives that share structural qualities with the pattern Campbell believed to be universal are particularly relevant as they gesture towards the possibility of including the heroes of modern sport in this tradition of Western heroes. Though Campbell himself never wrote about sports figures, he firmly believed in the importance of finding modern examples of such heroic figures to help “[render] the modern world spiritually significant” (388). With his proven ability to “bestow boons” (including nine World Series championships) on his fellow Yankees, and in a broader sense, on baseball fans in general with his impressive clutch performances, and with the American public’s tendency to view these heroics through a superhuman or supernatural lens, Joe DiMaggio easily fits into Campbell’s monomyth tradition of heroism. And perhaps more importantly, the line Campbell traces between such modern iterations of heroism and the ancient heroic narratives help illuminate the nature of Americans’ fascination with DiMaggio and the influence his career had on the Yankees cultural icon.

In his history-cum-memoir about the last Major League Baseball season before World War II, *Baseball in '41*, sportswriter Robert W. Creamer asserts that DiMaggio’s popular persona did not always have this mythic, superhuman dimension, even as far into his career as the beginning of the memorable 1941 season. His comments are revealing about the evolution of DiMaggio’s mythic heroism. For Creamer, “the dignity and grace of [DiMaggio] over the forty years since he quit baseball, combined with story after story about his accomplishments on the diamond, have created an indelible image of perfection” (12) that did not exist earlier in his career. He continues, arguing that DiMaggio as we see him now, or even as he was seen in the 1950s is:

. . .the man with the (1941) hitting streak behind him, the postwar DiMaggio gallantly overcoming injuries, the DiMaggio of 1949 coming back to the Yankees late in June after

missing spring training and the first half of the season to destroy the Boston Red Sox single-handedly and propel the Yankees toward the first of Casey Stengel's ten pennants.

(12)

Here Creamer mentions two events of particular importance to the forming of DiMaggio's superhuman persona in the American public eye: the 1941 hitting streak and his dramatic comeback from injury in the middle of the 1949 season.

Considering the difficulty of the task of hitting safely in fifty-six games in a row, the fascination and outright awe with which Americans closely followed DiMaggio's streak is somewhat understandable. Indicative of this adulation are the tributes paid to the Yankee Clipper in commemoration of his feat. In the year of the streak (a year when DiMaggio also won the league's Most Valuable Player award and the Yankees another World Series title), Alan Courtney and Ben Horner composed pop song lyrics about the Clipper and his streak that bandleader Les Brown and his orchestra brought to life as "Joltin' Joe DiMaggio" (*Baseball Almanac*). While obviously subject to the hyperbole typical of pop songs, "Joltin' Joe" is revealing for the praise it heaps upon the Yankee hero and for the way it describes Americans' fascination with the streak, intoning "He started baseball's famous streak / That's got us all aglow . . . Joe, Joe DiMaggio / We want you on our side . . . From coast to coast that's all you'll hear / Of Joe the one-man show / He's glorified the horsehide sphere / Joltin' Joe DiMaggio." It then prophesies, "He'll live in baseball's Hall of Fame / He got there blow by blow / Our kids will tell their kids his name / Joltin' Joe DiMaggio." One line particularly speaks to the everyman/superhuman paradox DiMaggio embodies. "He's just a man and not a freak," the song insists, asserting the hero's mere humanity while simultaneously acknowledging that it is scarcely believable he is just a man.

Similarly, the September 29, 1941 issue of *Life* magazine featured a color reproduction of an original painting by Edward Laning (see fig. 2) depicting what the magazine called “the greatest moment in big-league baseball in 1941,” DiMaggio tying the previous hit-streak record of forty-four. Laning’s painting shows DiMaggio in a follow through motion of the famous hit, with his characteristic wide stance.



Fig. 2

DiMaggio is depicted from the point of view of the grandstand, distant, but at the painting’s focal point. The wild enthusiasm of the earthy, backlit crowd dominates the canvas’s foreground but their collective gaze directs our eyes to DiMaggio, so small he could be anonymous, but exuding his fabled godlike confidence and grace with his manly frame and fluid stride. Overhead, Yankee Stadium’s iconic decorative bronze frieze compliments the crowd in the foreground to complete a visual frame around the conquering hero, fusing the man, the Yankee tradition, and the awe-struck masses in a moment of triumph.

While the contents of this jazzy pop song and Norman Rockwell-esque painting are telling about how the public viewed and utilized DiMaggio’s heroism, perhaps even more telling

is the very fact that they exist. In these two works, DiMaggio becomes both subject and muse for the inspiration of American artists. With Goldwyn and Wood's populist *The Pride of the Yankees* still one year away, such tokens of adulation had not been offered to a baseball player since Babe Ruth. Furthermore, these DiMaggio-inspired works more firmly establish his credentials as a mythic hero. Like Hercules, Arthur, and Jesus before him, DiMaggio was now the subject of "poetry" and "art," or at least their mass-culture equivalents.

Mythic Heroism and DiMaggio's 1949 Comeback

While the 1941 hitting streak is perhaps most instrumental in awakening the American public to the idea that DiMaggio was somehow more than just a baseball player, his dramatic comeback from injury in 1949 secured his status as a modern American mythic hero in the Joseph Campbell vein. During much of the 1948 season, DiMaggio, who had been susceptible to injury throughout his career, struggled with a painful bone spur in his heel, a problem he hoped to clear up in the off season. After an operation and attention from the best medical experts the United States had to offer²³, DiMaggio was still in great pain, leading many, including the Clipper himself, to wonder if his baseball career might be over. But in late June, with the season half over and the DiMaggio-less Yankees in a pennant race with their surging arch-rivals, the Boston Red Sox, the acute pain in his heel was suddenly all but gone. DiMaggio unexpectedly flew up to Boston's Fenway Park for the Yankees' three-game stand with the Red Sox and proceeded to defeat their rival seemingly single-handedly with four decisive home runs in three games, including one that cleared Fenway's famed thirty-foot high "Green Monster" leftfield wall and dramatically clanged off the steel post holding the massive stadium light fixture as if it were some kind of omen (Cramer 266-269, Halberstam, *Summer of '49* 162-164).

²³ The seriousness of DiMaggio's condition became clear during spring training in Texas, where he was "subjected to four hours of tests" before being flown "through a series of storms" to Baltimore's prestigious Johns Hopkins Hospital for emergency surgery (Halberstam, *Summer of '49* 42-43).

The sportswriters of the country struggled for words adequate to describe DiMaggio's dramatic comeback. The headline from the *New York World-Telegram* on the third successive day of DiMaggio's comeback shows both enthusiasm and awe, reading, "Once more Joe's flaming spirit, his flair for coming through against odds, his penchant for the dramatic achievement and consummate showmanship were stressed as he drove the ball for three runs, and won for the Yankees by 6 to 3." Perhaps even more revealing in this regard is the August 1, 1949 issue of *Life* magazine, which featured a close-up of DiMaggio on its cover with the accompanying headline "My Greatest Comeback."²⁴ The article inside, titled "It's Great to Be Back" provides a first-hand account of the drama by DiMaggio himself with, biographer Cramer assures us, the assistance of a ghostwriter (270). DiMaggio's account was preceded by a brief introduction that illustrates the impact of this episode on his public profile. It reads:

During the week of June 26th a \$100,000-a-year baseball player named Joe DiMaggio—a shy and retiring young man who up to then had been noted chiefly for his easy grace in the outfield and his mechanical efficiency at punching out base hits—suddenly became a national hero. After being out for nearly half the season with a bad heel that threatened at times to end his career, he got back into uniform and—in perfect fairy-tale fashion—began breaking up game after game by hitting the ball out of the park.

It was one of the most heartwarming comebacks in all sports history and from one end of the country to the other it became the summer's prime topic of conversation, even among people who never saw a game in their lives. DiMaggio had always been a great player, and now he took his place in that select circle of athletes, like Babe Ruth and Jack

Dempsey, who are not only admired but also beloved. (66)

²⁴ According to Cramer, *Life* paid DiMaggio six thousand dollars for this cover story, "more than a working man made in a year" (270).

Life's coronation-like tone here is all the more significant considering the magazine's general interest focus and its comments about the event registering outside the confines of the world of sports fandom and emotionally influencing Americans in a broader way.

It is important to note the role the Yankees play in this improbable comeback drama. As the entity that DiMaggio saves from defeat and leads to miraculous victory²⁵, the Yankees play the most obvious role of the “fellow man” in Campbell's structural framework, the community upon which the returning hero “bestows (his) boon.” But just as DiMaggio literally brings victory to the Yankees on the baseball diamond, he also brings emotional, psychological, or spiritual victory to not just Yankee fans, but potentially all baseball fans²⁶ and all Americans, by providing them with a hero figure through his seemingly superhuman achievements that become a “boon” of inspiration and hope in an otherwise hum-drum world. As Cramer puts it,

This wasn't New York news, but world news. It wasn't about what pitch the Clipper hit . . . nor even three games. . . . This wasn't about Boston eight games back—it wasn't about the pennant race. This wasn't just baseball! It was the greatest comeback in the history of sport! This was—this was . . . divine. (269-270)

This mythic and religious language used to describe the DiMaggio-led Yankees' victories that season makes it seem like the Yankees were *destined* to win the pennant that year.²⁷ In this

²⁵ Yankee victories in 1949 not only included the three game sweep of the rival Red Sox, but an eventual victory over this same Boston team in a close American League pennant race that came down to the last two games of the season. Though sick with the flu, DiMaggio played and hit a key double in the first game to cut into a 4-0 Red Sox lead and inspire his teammates, who went on to win both games in the series and the pennant (Cramer 270-272). The Yankees then cruised to beat a talented Brooklyn Dodgers club four games to one in the World Series, a welcome win after the previous year's disappointment.

²⁶ Obviously, Red Sox supporters would not have shared in the public's enthrallment with DiMaggio's performance. It is likely that many fans of New York rivals the Dodgers and Giants might not have been as enthusiastic about his heroism as well. That being said, in some ways, the public's reception of DiMaggio's comeback performance in that Yankees-Red Sox series at the end of June in 1949, as suggested by the flowery language of the *Life* cover story, transcended the lines of traditional baseball rivalries.

²⁷ In a wry commentary on the mythic language used in reporting and discussing DiMaggio's comeback in late June of 1949, Cramer deadpans, “Now that God had a hand in the pennant race it came down to the final two games. . .” (270).

regard, the New York club paralleled the nation itself in 1949, still fresh from victory in World War II, and combating communism in their role as a new world power. To many Americans the United States' destiny of success, like that of DiMaggio and the Yankees, seemed divinely appointed. This parallel contributed to an increasing tendency to view the Yankees as the embodiment of the triumphant American nation itself, as earlier hinted at in *The Pride of the Yankees*'s comparison of Gehrig with American soldiers.

The narrative pattern of overcoming trials and seemingly insurmountable setbacks featured in this saga of DiMaggio and "his" Yankees is common to the Western tradition of hero stories. Campbell includes this road of trials as a hallmark of his monomyth hero narrative, writing, ". . . the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. This is a favorite phase of the myth-adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals" (97).

More particularly, Campbell focuses on a single culminating trial that enables the hero to truly realize his or her superhuman potential or divine calling. Sometimes this takes the form of a symbolic or literal death followed by an empowered rebirth, with the New Testament narrative of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as the most obvious example. From the biblical story of Jonah, Campbell refers to this transformative period of trial as "the belly of the whale" (90).

The narrative account DiMaggio and his ghostwriter provide of his experience with injury and return to the Yankees takes on this "belly of the whale" structure of symbolic death and rebirth. DiMaggio's period of injury is recounted thusly:

Sitting in my room I sometimes thought, 'Why try to be an athlete at all?' I've had a lot of trouble—spurs on both heels, bad knees, an operation that left two scars on my

throwing arm, a Charley horse that made my left thigh knot up big as a cantaloupe, even stomach ulcers. . . . When it piles up like that you begin to wonder.

At night I had trouble going to sleep. If my playing career was over, what was I going to do? Lying awake in bed at night, sometimes until 4 or 5 in the morning, I figured out at least a half dozen careers. (68-69)

Here DiMaggio's sleepless nights fearing the end of his baseball career easily constitute a metaphoric death, which is played for dramatic contrast with his triumphant return. First, the centerfielder's improvement in health is described in miraculous terms reading, "One morning I stepped out of bed, expecting the pain to shoot through my heel as usual. Nothing Happened. I felt the heel with my hand; it was no longer hot. . . . It was cool" (69). While the humble, everyman tone of the piece prevents DiMaggio from reveling too much in his surprise triumph against the Red Sox, he does give a significant account of the public's adoring reaction to the return of this baseball messiah, back from the dead. He writes:

Back at Yankee Stadium it was almost embarrassing. The home town fans seemed to want me to get a hit even more than I did myself—and when I flied out they seemed to be more disappointed than I was. The kids started running out on the field for my autograph. I didn't exactly know what to do. . . . One night at least 30 of them ran out, scooting from the left, right and middle trying to get past the guards. . . . In a way fans have been much too generous. . . . Next Day everyone was saying that I was a hero for risking my heel on a play like that. . . . Well, that sort of thing makes you feel funny, and sometimes you wonder how you can ever live up to it—but it's nice.

Robert Ruark, the columnist, wrote an article about me that made me very grateful and at the same time frightened me a little. He said I was the ‘first real sports colossus since the Dempsey-Jones-Ruth era.’ (72)

This public outpouring of adulation is counterbalanced by the tone of overwhelmed humility that DiMaggio’s narrative takes, striking an equilibrium between the superhuman hero’s status he has just earned and his everyman roots.

This humble origin by no means diminishes his mythic heroism. In fact, Campbell describes an utterly average or even a below-average social background as common to heroes of Western narratives, writing that mythic heroes often begin life as, or spend part of it disguised as “the despised one, or the handicapped: the abused youngest son or daughter, the orphan, stepchild, ugly duckling, or squire of low degree” (325-326). This humble origin strengthens the hero’s connections with the people he will lead, protect, and/or save with prominent examples being Jesus, the stable-born carpenter’s son, Malory’s King Arthur, an unassuming foster son unaware of his royal blood until he removes the enchanted sword from the stone, or even Superman’s alter ego, the clumsy and dull Clark Kent. With this in mind, DiMaggio’s humble origins as a poor immigrant fisherman’s son and his populist qualities—which seem to persist even as the case for his superhuman heroism mounts—do not detract from his mythic heroism, but add to it. Thus, the paradox of DiMaggio’s tendencies towards both the superhuman and the everyman find ultimate resolution wherein one strengthens the other. DiMaggio can be both a godlike mythic hero and the humble exemplar of the American dream. In fact, for many Americans, the more these two narrative strands intertwine, the more appealing DiMaggio becomes.

A Dialectic of Baseball Heroes

DiMaggio's public image as a populist-superhuman hybrid of a hero can be viewed as something of the culmination of a Hegalian dialectic in the realm of popular baseball (or more specifically, Yankee) heroes. If Ruth, the first Yankee hero and baseball's first truly mass-media-catalyzed popular idol, can be thought of as the larger-than-life, demigod *thesis* of baseball heroism, working-class origins notwithstanding, then the workaday, strong-silent-type Gehrig would be its *antithesis*. DiMaggio's public figure becomes something of a perfect *synthesis* of the two previous heroic models as public demand combined with DiMaggio's background, personality, and style of play to yield a popular persona that captured what were deemed the best qualities of both Ruth and Gehrig. Whether conscious or unconscious, the public celebration of the mixture of Ruth and Gehrig's qualities they saw in DiMaggio, the face of the Yankees throughout the 1940s until his retirement in 1951, also had a refining or redefining effect on the Yankees cultural icon, adding some mythic resonance to the "all-American" heroic ideals of *The Pride of the Yankees*.

And in another context, the figure of DiMaggio added yet another member to the succession of Yankee heroes—or with the concept of DiMaggio as a culminating dialectical synthesis in mind, perhaps one could even say *progression* of Yankee heroes. Roughly between 1920 and baseball's integration in 1947, a period when Major League Baseball enjoyed significant popularity, with Ruth, Gehrig and DiMaggio the Yankees had three stars who were easily among baseball's most popular and well-regarded. In fact, one could argue they were the three biggest baseball names of that era.²⁸ The effect of these stars all playing for the same franchise had a mutual magnifying effect for both the players and the team. Being a Yankee

²⁸ Though arguments could certainly be made for Hank Greenberg, Ted Williams, and Stan Musial, among others as rivaling Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio in terms of popularity during this period, the fact that three of the players that would be prominent in such a conversation all played on the same team is significant.

added something to the legacy of the players and the unbroken succession of such high-profile baseball heroes nearly made the Yankees synonymous with baseball heroism itself. The monuments to Gehrig (erected 1941) and Ruth (erected 1949) in Yankee Stadium's centerfield²⁹ during this period were tangible reminders of this Yankee legacy. The fact that DiMaggio was seen to possess a synthesis of both Gehrig-like and Ruthian qualities further underscores the Yankees heroic legacy.

DiMaggio as Populist Hero in *Lucky to Be a Yankee*

DiMaggio's dual status as both populist everyman and larger-than-life mythic hero is clearly demonstrated in the different presentations of the centerfielder in two books from the postwar era that were both quite popular, but very different: DiMaggio's autobiography, *Lucky to be a Yankee*, and Nobel Laureate, Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. *Lucky to Be a Yankee*, an "autobiography" directed at an audience of adolescent boys, was ghostwritten by Tom Meany (Cramer 216) in 1946, the year of Major League Baseball's celebrated first season after World War II. This popular juvenile book went through a number of editions and does much to bolster the All-American populist facet of DiMaggio's public figure.

DiMaggio as populist icon emerges immediately and clearly in *Lucky to Be a Yankee's* first chapter, wherein Meany and DiMaggio present a narrative quite consistent with populist ideals in both content and tone. When recounting a crucial game in the 1948 pennant race with the Boston Red Sox in this first chapter of the updated 1949 edition titled "Almost But Not Quite," DiMaggio, who characteristically played much of the season hampered by injury, talks about "[hobbling] off the field on [his] bum gam," and laments, "It's ancient history, now. We did the best we could and we didn't win" (2). Here the DiMaggio voice, as presented by Meany,

²⁹ It is perhaps fitting that DiMaggio, who would later get his own monument, played centerfield, as did Mickey Mantle, the only other player to have such a monument.

carves out a “common man” space with his use of contemporary slang (“bum gam”), short, direct sentences, and an endorsement of the populist values of work ethic and modesty. In fact, the narrative voice so reminds Cramer of *The Pride of the Yankees*, he described the book as “just Joe doing his Gary Cooper thing. (Aw, shucks)” (33).

As a tale of populist heroism, *Lucky to be a Yankee* is not unique among baseball biographies for young boys, nor was it novel when first released. *New York Times* contributor Andrew Santella described the book thusly:

DiMaggio's book followed in a tradition that went back at least to Christy Mathewson's "Pitching in a Pinch," published in 1912. The general idea was to provide a good example and tell an inspiring story - a true story, if possible, but inspiring in any case. It would be a long time before any baseball memoirist or his ghostwriter would dare to deviate from that tradition.

While the format and content of the book was nothing new³⁰, the fact remains that it was DiMaggio's book, and as the most prominent and popular baseball player in an era when the United States was baseball-mad, DiMaggio was arguably the most beloved sports figure of his time. Many even saw the star as embodying the nation itself in the years following World War II.

For instance, in a new introduction for the 1948 edition (and all subsequent printings) of *Lucky to Be a Yankee*, former U.S. Postmaster General James A. Farley wraps DiMaggio in the cloak of patriotism and the American dream. He writes:

³⁰ The youth-oriented baseball biography of the *Pitching in a Pinch* and *Lucky to Be a Yankee* tradition also owes much to the Frank Merriwell novels by Gilbert Patten (pen name Burt L. Standish). The Merriwell books (1896-1930) tell of the titular character's boarding school athletic success that results from his dedication and upstanding character, bearing the influence of Horatio Alger's tales of upwardly mobile young men (1868-1913) as well as Englishman Thomas Hughes's boarding school book, *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857).

(It) is a story that could have happened only in America, the story of Joe, the son of immigrant parents, of a boyhood which was far from luxurious, and his rise to national eminence on the strength of his baseball ability.

I believe Joe's story . . . the story of a boy's life. I hope it will prove of interest to many other American boys, for it is really a story of our times. (7-8)

Here, DiMaggio is not only held up as a shining example of the national cultural myth of upward mobility for European immigrant families, but his personal history is celebrated as “the story of our times.” This timeliness that Farley observes in DiMaggio's story is particularly revealing of how many Americans saw themselves and their country. For Farley, DiMaggio's “rise” from his humble boyhood to “eminence” captures the zeitgeist of postwar America, a triumphal America that had emerged from the global conflict, not to mention the national trial that was the Great Depression, with new economic and political clout in the world. In the celebratory mood of the postwar United States, many like Farley saw the country as whole as living out the fabled American dream of upward mobility: through the sacrifice and perseverance of its citizens, the country was able to pull itself up by its bootstraps and, after the trials and conflicts of history, found itself living something of the “good life” in the postwar economic prosperity. And for Farley, and possibly many other Americans, perhaps especially the boys who read his introduction to *Lucky to Be a Yankee*, Joe DiMaggio symbolizes the rise of this triumphal America.

Portrayal of the Yankees in *Lucky to Be a Yankee*

The Yankees as a team and organization naturally share to some degree in this association with victorious postwar America, but *Lucky to Be a Yankee* offers passages that advance this connection between the Bronx Bombers and the nation as a whole. Specifically, the

autobiography frequently describes a loyalty to and a respect, admiration and even reverence for the New York Yankees baseball club that evidently needs no explanation or justification. This parallels patriotic usage of the signifier “America” or “American.” The book’s title itself, *Lucky to Be a Yankee*, of course most obviously exemplifies this tendency. But DiMaggio and Meany further pepper the book with comments like “The Yankees were my ideal. . . the team I wanted to be with most of all” (23-24) from his years in a minor league,³¹ which was eventually fulfilled with a contract marked by the celebratory statement, “I was with the Yankees at last” (27). His first trip to the gargantuan Yankee Stadium prompts further reverence, with the remark “I had never seen anything like it and it was a little frightening to know that this was to be my stamping grounds” (32). And much later, while reflecting on the significant personnel changes between the World Series champion Yankees team of 1941 and the ‘47 champs, the book’s narrator reassures himself and readers, “They were still Yankees, however, and I was lucky to be with them” (91). Perhaps most revealing of such reverential language, however, is a statement DiMaggio and Meany attribute to manager Joe McCarthy. When clubhouse horseplay would get a little too rough, *Lucky to Be a Yankee* tells us that the disciplinarian McCarthy would settle his players by quietly intoning something like, “You fellows are Yankees, act like Yankees” (28).

Such ambiguous statements seem to imply an understood explanation or justification for the respect and reverence of the Yankees but never quite supply one.³² The Yankee signifier is

³¹ DiMaggio played for his hometown San Francisco Seals of the Pacific Coast League from October of 1932 through the 1935 season. While not considered one of the two “Major Leagues” that could gain a birth to the World Series, the Pacific Coast League operated completely independently from the American and National Leagues and their teams. The PCL clubs were not “farm” teams. Many, including Dennis Snelling, have argued that the PCL was really not a “minor” league at all, rivaling the American and National in quality of play and fan support (2-5). With teams in California, Oregon, and Washington (and briefly, Salt Lake City, UT from 1915-’25), the PCL served a region far from the cities of the “Major Leagues” until the Dodgers and Giants moved west in 1958. Incidentally, while playing for the PCL’s Seals, DiMaggio hit safely in sixty-one consecutive games in 1935, five games more than his Major League record.

³² DiMaggio supplemented this type of language featured in *Lucky to Be a Yankee* with his own statement to the public on “Joe DiMaggio Day” at Yankee Stadium, the penultimate day of the 1949 regular season. (This was the

presumed to have enough cultural power to justify and explain itself, not dissimilar from the word “America,” that is also often expected, in and of itself, to elicit similar respect and reverence without any further argument or elaboration, perhaps particularly during this postwar period of high celebratory patriotism. James A. Farley’s use of the phrase “only in America” in the introduction to *Lucky to Be a Yankee* itself is a typical example of this type of usage.

Eventually *Lucky to Be a Yankee* does address the reasons readers should understand its reverence for the club. The DiMaggio-Meany narrator writes:

I did a lot of thinking about what it means to be a Yankee. . . . It is only natural that I should regard the Yankees as a great organization. Any minor leaguer would think the same of his first big league club but when that club turned out to be a winner, and a winner by so decisive a margin, it was difficult to be moderate in your opinion and praise of the team. (41-42)

Here the autobiography lays out fairly clearly the major reason for admiring and respecting the Yankees organization precisely as many readers would have assumed: success. As winning is the main organizing principle and value in modern team sports, this should come as no surprise. But it is significant that Americans in this postwar period tended to use this same reason, success, to explain the greatness of their country. Not only had the nation’s military been instrumental in ending World War I and, especially, the recent Second World War, but it could pride itself on surviving the Great Depression and becoming the great economic and political power of the world, with perhaps only one rival.

This rival, the communist Soviet Union, as it turns out actually provided more motivation for using success—particularly the material abundance of economic success—as reason for

day before the Yankees clinched their comeback pennant bid over the Red Sox.) DiMaggio stepped up to the microphone and spoke a single sentence: “I’d like to thank the Good Lord for making me a Yankee” (Cramer 272).

American superiority. For example, in his discussion of the infamous 1959 “kitchen debate” between then-vice president Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, Benjamin Rader points out that Nixon did not use traditional and, perhaps, expected arguments about the American principles of “freedom, democracy, and philanthropy” as being more ethical than the communist political and economic system. Instead, he continually pointed to “the vast array of wonderful consumer goods that he claimed were available to the typical American family” as indicative of the United States’ economic success and prosperity and, thus, the superiority of the American way of life (314).

Though many Americans during this time period, like many before them and since, would have mentioned the democratic system and individual liberty as reasons for supposed American greatness, this victory-and-abundance-based form of postwar American patriotism that Nixon typified was not uncommon, and still holds cultural currency. In this train of thought, citizens of the United States could consider themselves “lucky to be Americans” for the same reason DiMaggio’s book advertised the slugger as “lucky to be a Yankee.” Both could say they contributed to and enjoyed the spoils of superlative success over their rivals. In this way, DiMaggio and the Yankees became emblematic of the triumphant postwar America. For many, the Yankees were the greatest baseball team for the same reason America was the greatest country, and like DiMaggio in his autobiography, they could describe their admiration and respect for both using similar terms and phraseology.

In a subsequent passage in *Lucky to Be a Yankee*, DiMaggio and Meany elaborate further on the meaning of the Yankees organization beyond its on-field success. On the occasion of the disease-related retirement of Gehrig and the death of owner Jacob Ruppert, both occurring in 1939, they write:

Somehow these two men were symbolic of the Yankee legend. Gehrig, the immovable, brawny slugger who went along day after day for a decade and a half without missing a ballgame, and Ruppert the millionaire owner. Only a fraction of the Colonel's wealth was in baseball but the Yankees meant more to him than all his other interests. He wanted to win every day and he wanted to win in Yankee fashion—clean sweeps and one-sided scores. (52-53)

Here Yankee baseball success and American economic might are further aligned in the person of Colonel Ruppert. Any potential negative elitist or plutocratic connotations associated with Ruppert's status as a millionaire are offset by Gehrig, whose work ethic and dedication, not to mention his well-known past as the son of poor immigrants (thanks to *The Pride of the Yankees*), represent for the authors of the book a crucial facet of this success. In fact, as it is the figures of Ruppert and Gehrig *together* that are “symbolic of the Yankee legend,” the link between success and work ethic is presented as the crux of Yankee-ness. They win, but they come by it honestly, through the *American* way of prosperity as dictated by the American dream itself: hard work, not through any kind of aristocratic privilege. This is as vital an amendment to the celebration of Yankee success as it is to the American triumphalism of the postwar period. Such success is not just earned with work and sacrifice but, as per the long shadows of Puritan notions of prosperity coming to the righteous, success is itself proof that one is deserving of it.

DiMaggio as Mythic Hero in *Lucky to Be a Yankee*

While patriotic populism is *Lucky to Be a Yankee's* most salient feature, DiMaggio's status as a superhuman mythic hero also comes out in the autobiography. This is nowhere more apparent than in the “Foreword” written by seasoned sportswriter Grantland Rice. No stranger to hyperbole, Rice writes:

No matter how many years you look at sporting events, and in my case, it has been more years than I care to admit, you never grow blasé or apathetic to the thrill of perfection. . . . Joe DiMaggio possesses that magic gift of perfection in his swing at the plate. If ever an athlete was meant for a sport, Joe DiMaggio was meant for baseball. (vi)

Here, Rice's awestruck use of the terms "gift," "magic," and above all, "perfection" distance the "everyman" DiMaggio not only from the common American, but from the typical Major League Baseball star. For Rice, DiMaggio is not only the embodiment of perfection, but he was either born that way or destined to become that way, like some sort of baseball demigod. Rice's hyperbole is corroborated with a story told by sportswriter Joe Williams that serves as the book's final chapter. When talking in 1935 with Tommy Laird, an eccentric fellow sportswriter from San Francisco, Williams asks about DiMaggio, who at that point had been making a name for himself with the Pacific Coast League's San Francisco Seals. Laird responded by saying he would not claim DiMaggio to be a "second Babe Ruth," a "second Ty Cobb" or a "second Tris Speaker," but that "he's better than all three put together!" (152). While obviously intended to be humorous, Laird's comments that assert DiMaggio as surpassing the talents of three men who were then acknowledged to be the best power hitter, best hitter for average, and best outfielder in the game's history to that point betray the occasional messianic lens through which fans observed DiMaggio. As a player he was seen and described as so complete, so lacking in faults that only terms of perfection and divinity could capture their awe.

Though bookended with accounts from others that paint DiMaggio as superhuman, DiMaggio and Meany's own "aw, shucks" narrating voice in *Lucky to Be a Yankee* certainly would not permit any claims to perfection or anything that would be perceived as braggadocio. There are, however, a few moments where the hero does actually claim something like a divine

gift, writing, “It always has been a theory of mine that hitting is a God-given gift. . . I know that I’m a professional ball player today because at the age of 18 I had a natural gift for hitting and for no other reason whatsoever” (15). With this statement, DiMaggio and Meany are able to maintain the centerfielder’s everyman appeal by using a tone of humility and gratitude while claiming a “God-given gift.” While this passage does not necessarily assert such gifts are exclusive to DiMaggio, this notion of being born with special gifts represents a softened version of the superhuman baseball demigod featured in the guest-written foreword and conclusion and, as such, this passage actually lends these hyperbolic statements some credence. Though most readers probably would not actually believe that a single DiMaggio is more valuable than three baseball legends combined, the slugger’s own comments about his “natural gift” may well encourage them to wonder if he *really did* leave the womb with a perfect set of baseball skills. So while the bulk of *Lucky to Be a Yankee* features a DiMaggio narrator doing, as Cramer suggests, his best Gary Cooper, all-American populist impression, the book also hints at and fosters the cult of Saint DiMaggio, God’s divine gift to baseball.

Heroism in *The Old Man and the Sea*

DiMaggio the mythic hero looms even larger in what perhaps might seem to many an unlikely place: Ernest Hemingway’s 1952 novella, *The Old Man and the Sea*. A Nobel Prize winning author (1954), Hemingway is often remembered for his concise, pithy prose and for writing lucidly about stoic and scarred men engaging the violent worlds of war, bullfighting, and big-game hunting. The popular and *populist* world of Major League Baseball might seem to some as beneath such a serious writer. Hemingway’s place as a canonical American modernist is potentially deceiving in this regard, however, as both the popular world of professional baseball

and the traditional narrative patterns of Western mythic heroes play important roles in the structure and drama of *The Old Man and the Sea*.

In Leverett T. Smith, Jr.'s description of central themes in Hemingway's work, a continuity of interest and purpose between the work of the Nobel-Prize-winning author, the pseudo-religious ideas of Joseph Campbell, and the celebrated career of Joe DiMaggio is evident. Smith writes:

[Hemingway's] work, in general, seems a long search for a setting within which human action might seem meaningful. The most important manifestation of this impulse is Hemingway's frequent use of the sporting world in the settings of his novels and stories. . . . In sports, or in activities which have some of the same basic qualities as sport, Hemingway's characters create their own meaningful world within a world essentially meaningless. (51)

For Hemingway, as for Campbell, the modern world offers little in the way of meaning and the individual must find for him or herself (but, again, usually *himself*) a space within existence that walls off much of the clutter and clatter of (post)industrialized, rationalized society and allows the individual to act independently and, in so doing, find emotional, psychological, and/or spiritual oneness. Scholars commonly call individuals engaged in this work in Hemingway's writing "code heroes," after their individual code of action. For Campbell, this sought-after, meaningful space is the collective mythic hero narrative, "the secret opening" to the "inexhaustible energies of the cosmos" (3) that "[renders] the modern world spiritually significant" (388).

For Hemingway, this space is an active rather than a narrative one (but, incidentally, he made a career out of narrating this action), usually a realm of vaguely premodern activity such as

hunting, fishing, or bullfighting, that has its own traditional body of skills and wisdom passed down from person to person. Armed with a knowledge of such skills, Hemingway's protagonists negotiate these sub-worlds as independent agents and live an existence that makes its own meaning. Smith argues that Hemingway's characters find such a space in a variety of activities, including camping and cooking in the short story "Big Two-Hearted River" (57), but it is the world of sport that Hemingway favors the most. Usually, the author champions individual, solitary sporting activities in his writing such as bullfighting, hunting, fishing, or boxing, pastimes of which he himself was an *aficionado*. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, however, he makes the popular world of professional baseball, and the career of DiMaggio, in particular, the setting for his code hero ideal. *The Old Man and the Sea* also happens to be the work where Hemingway's code hero world clearly intersects with the traditional mythic hero in the figures of both the Cuban fisherman Santiago and his idol Joe DiMaggio.

While DiMaggio and United States' Major League Baseball are featured somewhat prominently in *The Old Man and the Sea*,³³ the book's main focus is the experience of Santiago, an aging deep sea fisherman of Cuba's Gulf Stream, who over his long career has achieved some renown among the other local fishermen. Santiago has befriended the young Manolin, with whom he has been fishing and sharing his knowledge of the craft, but a recent personal lack of success has made the boy's parents think Santiago is past his prime and Manolin has reluctantly taken up with another boat. Under this pretext, the story begins with the downtrodden Santiago setting off in his boat in hopes of breaking his recent eighty-four day streak of futility. He hooks not only the biggest marlin of his career, but the biggest marlin he has ever seen. The drama of the novella then centers on his effort to keep the great fish on the line, bring him in, and fend off the predatory sharks trying to scavenge his catch.

³³ DiMaggio, specifically is brought up in five separate occasions in this novella of little over 120 pages.

As previously mentioned, this novella comes as close to the structure of mythic hero narratives that Joseph Campbell proposed as anything Hemingway ever did. The core plot of *The Old Man and the Sea*—a tale of the aging fisherman suddenly unable to catch fish, and then just as suddenly thrust into the greatest struggle of his life in effort to bring in the biggest fish he has known—is a classic “belly of the whale” story. And while he loses virtually all the saleable meat from the fish to the mobs of scavenging sharks, Santiago nevertheless returns to the fishing village with “boons” for his people: the marlins head to use in fish traps, the fish’s nose spear—the biggest anyone had ever seen—as a souvenir for Manolin, and especially the gifts of awe and inspiration to all the fishermen and Santiago’s young friend and apparent successor, in particular. As reward for persevering and returning with these largely psychological boons, Santiago, regains the devotion of Manolin.

While Hemingway’s hero tale ends with a victory that is more personal and internal than many mythic hero tales identified by Campbell, *The Old Man and the Sea* does the same type of work as the ancient narratives of the Western world. Readers are often reminded of this through Hemingway’s persistent usage of primeval, elemental imagery: sea, land, sun, moon, cloud, wind, “the old man” and “the boy.” Hemingway also includes occasional biblical references that invite comparison to ancient mythic narrative. This is particularly true of the crucifixion imagery of Santiago uttering a cry described as “a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hand and into the wood” (107), shouldering the mast in weakness on the way home (121), and sleeping “with his arms out straight and the palms of his hands up” (122).

DiMaggio as Mythic Hero in *The Old Man and the Sea*

In this narrative that successfully registers as both an example of a Hemingway code hero in action, and as Campbellian mythic hero tale, Hemingway adds numerous allusions to the professional baseball career of Joe DiMaggio. Had the substantial connections between the public's perceptions of DiMaggio and the tradition of mythic heroes not already been established here, this might seem a strange combination. Indeed, in his *New York Times Book Review* from the year of the novel's publication, Robert Gorham Davis deemed the baseball references an aesthetically poor choice. Scholar Sheldon Norman Grebstein, meanwhile, interpreted the author's baseball references as "interludes of comic relief," labeling the allusions to baseball in Santiago's "struggle with insuperable natural forces" an "incongruous juxtaposition" (193). The evidence, however, suggests Hemingway was quite sincere in his laudatory references to DiMaggio.³⁴ Hemingway was, in fact, an admirer of DiMaggio and often sought his company in New York. An oft recited anecdote describes them at a boxing match together. After a fan had finished heaping praise on DiMaggio, he noticed Hemingway and asked him, "You're somebody, too—aren't you?" to which the author deadpanned, "Yeah, I'm his doctor" (Cramer 241).

In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway translates his admiration of DiMaggio into a near-idolization of the Yankee slugger by protagonist Santiago. The day before leaving on his fishing journey, Santiago and Manolin, both fans of America's Major Leagues, discuss the pennant races in both American and National Leagues. C. Harold Hurley has pinpointed the events of the novella as taking place between September 12th and 16th of 1950 when the Yankees were battling the Tigers for first place in the American league pennant race (78-79). The

³⁴ DiMaggio himself certainly took the mention as sincere praise, as Cramer reports that later in life DiMaggio would keep in his car an audio cassette tape of actor Spencer Tracy (who played Santiago in a 1958 film adaptation) reading the novella (427).

conversation between the old man and his friend confirm this and when asked his opinion, Santiago exudes confidence in the Yankees as eventual pennant winners stating, “The Yankees cannot lose” (17). When Manolin expresses doubt regarding Santiago’s prediction, saying he “[fears] both the Tigers of Detroit and the Indians of Cleveland,” the old fisherman’s confidence is unflagging. He gives two responses to this doubt. One is a joke. He tells Manolin, “Be careful or you will fear the Reds of Cincinnati and the White Sox of Chicago” (17), which Hurley shows would be laughable in September of the 1950 season as the Reds and White Sox were in a lowly sixth place in their respective leagues at the time (85).

Santiago’s other response is even more revealing. “Have faith in the Yankees my son,” he reassures Manolin, “Think of the great DiMaggio” (17). Here the semi-religious language used in relation to the Yankees clearly distinguishes them from the other clubs. The term “faith” implies not only a confidence in the Yankees ability to win, but also an implied goodness or connection with the divine. One does not “have faith” that anticipated harmful or unpleasant events will take place or that nefarious individuals will indeed be able to accomplish their aims. Thus, as the team one should exercise faith in, the Yankees become the protagonists of the Major Leagues and, in effect, extensions of the self for Santiago and Manolin, and through them, for readers as well. While American readers who are baseball fans might feel conflicted if they have other rooting interests and have learned to resent the Yankees and their frequent success over any number of other possible favorite teams, the “faith” the humble Santiago professes in the Yankees has encourages readers to “suspend disbelief,” if nothing else, and be willing to see the Yankees as protagonists in the context of the novella.

The real substance motivating Santiago’s “faith” is, of course, “the great DiMaggio.” At this point in the novella no elaboration is provided as to why Santiago feels DiMaggio’s presence

is enough to convince Manolin to have faith in the Yankees, but perhaps many readers, thinking of the events of 1941, and especially 1949, will be able to fill in the blanks. For others, the reverential title “the great” that precedes Santiago’s use of his name provides some clues. Further baseball conversation adds some to the Yankees and DiMaggio’s image in Hemingway’s book. He writes:

“Tell me about the baseball,” the boy asked (Santiago).

“In the American League, it is the Yankees as I said,” the old man said happily.

“They lost today,” the boy told him.

“That means nothing. The great DiMaggio is himself again.”

“They have other men on the team.”

“Naturally. But he makes the difference. . . .” (21)

Here “the great DiMaggio” is clearly placed in the hero’s role as the one who “makes the difference” for the Yankees. Santiago’s comment about him “being himself again” more explicitly evokes the idea, previously expressed in other texts, of DiMaggio as superhuman. For DiMaggio, “born” with natural baseball gifts, merely being “himself” is enough to defeat the other teams. In this passage Santiago’s view of the relationship between DiMaggio and the Yankees is refined. While he earlier suggested Manolin have faith in the Yankees, here it becomes clear that the Yankees themselves must have faith in the difference-making DiMaggio to lead them to victory.³⁵ Again, as in the sports journalism surrounding DiMaggio’s ’49 comeback, the Yankees are presented as occupying the metaphoric role that we, as readers would

³⁵ The reality, of course, is that the Yankees of the late 1940s and early ‘50s depended on the contributions of many individuals including, but not limited to, shortstop Phil Rizzuto, catcher Yogi Berra, outfielders Tommy Henrich and Charlie Keller, pitchers Allie Reynolds, Vic Raschi, Joe Page, and perhaps especially manager Casey Stengel (see Golenbock, *Dyanasty* 1-79; Halberstam, *Summer of ‘49*).

put ourselves in, the mythic hero's community that depends on his gifts, example, and inspiration.

For Santiago, this relationship is played up by his subsequent comment that he “would like to take the great DiMaggio fishing. . . They say his father was a fisherman. Maybe he was poor as we are and would understand” (22). Here, Santiago attributes to DiMaggio the empowered mythic hero's empathy for the community he protects or saves. With his comments about being poor, he simultaneously places himself in the position of needing this metaphoric protection or salvation, just as the Yankees depend on him to bring them literal victory on the field.

Much more is revealed about Santiago's devotion to DiMaggio as the novella progresses and he ventures out fishing. Out at sea, the lonely Santiago has a nearly unceasing conversation with himself in his head. His thoughts return on several occasions to DiMaggio, particularly as Santiago encounters hardship or must tolerate pain in his effort to keep the mighty marlin on the line. At one point he tells himself,

I must have confidence and I must be worthy of the great DiMaggio who does all things perfectly even with the pain of the bone spur in his heel. . . . Do you believe the great DiMaggio would stay with a fish as long as I will stay with this one? he thought. I am sure he would and more since he is young and strong. Also his father was a fisherman.
(68)

Here Santiago invokes the name of “the great DiMaggio who does all things perfectly” as one might pray to a catholic saint. As if DiMaggio were the patron saint of “grace under pressure”—perhaps the key quality of the Hemingway hero in the words of the author himself (qtd. in Parker 29)—Santiago uses thoughts of the Yankee Clipper's perseverance through injury to inspire

himself to do the same. He turns to DiMaggio not just for inspiration, but as an example of how to react in his situation. This implies that Santiago is beginning to compare his own situation to that of DiMaggio, and thus, while the old fisherman may not have thought this himself, invites readers to consider him in the same heroic role as the Yankee slugger.

This is also the first time that Santiago mentions DiMaggio's bone spurs, the symbols of his perseverance through pain that plagued him later in his career. More specifically, the bone spurs evoke the end of the 1948 season and the first half of the 1949 season, the "belly of the whale" period that prefigured DiMaggio's "miraculous" 1949 comeback. This is particularly fitting, as at this point in the novella, it is becoming clearer that such a life-defining "belly of the whale" trial has thrust itself upon Santiago as well, further contributing to the theme of Santiago as a mythic hero in his own right.

Later on, Santiago's thoughts turn to DiMaggio again in his moment of triumph. After spearing and at last killing the giant marlin, Santiago thinks to himself, "My head is not that clear. But I think the great DiMaggio would be proud of me today. I had no bone spurs but the hands and the back hurt truly" (97). And still later, after successfully defending his catch against a scavenging shark, he thinks, "I wonder how the great DiMaggio would have liked the way I hit [the shark] in the brain? It was no great thing, he thought. Any man could do it. But do you think my hands were as great a handicap as the bone spurs? I cannot know" (103-104). Santiago's thought that DiMaggio would be proud of his actions in both of these passages advances Santiago's case as mythic hero.³⁶ While he would probably not go as far to suggest he has achieved DiMaggio's lofty status, it is clear that Santiago takes pride in his actions as a worthy, DiMaggio-like effort. This is further evident in his comparison of his ailments with

³⁶ In swinging at and hitting the shark with his oar, Santiago also comes closest to emulating the physical action of DiMaggio.

DiMaggio's bone spurs. For Hemingway, however, the implications of these passages seem to be that the two are roughly equals in heroism, two individuals living out a meaningful existence through their tenacious demonstration of will power and adherence to their personal code of conduct under difficult circumstances.

Santiago's thoughts turn to DiMaggio one last time in his triumph. "You were born to be a fisherman as the fish was born to be a fish," he tells himself, "San Pedro was a fisherman, as was the father of the great DiMaggio" (105). Here, Santiago once again invokes his connection to DiMaggio through the fact that his father was a fisherman. But this time, considering Santiago's comment to himself that he was "born to be a fisherman"—an interesting echo of the common sports writer's comment that DiMaggio was "born to play baseball"—they are linked in a relationship closer to equal. Santiago no longer seeks a model to emulate in the heroic DiMaggio, but surmises he has earned his admiration. Furthermore, this time the connection between the two is further sanctified by the inclusion of Saint Peter, who connotes divine approval for them both.

By enduring the pain in his back and hands, and by holding the fish on the line for nearly two days, Santiago shows the same heroic form that the novella suggests DiMaggio did in enduring his bone spurs. As each eventually triumphed, passing through the "belly of the whale" while displaying excellence in their craft, grace under pressure, and adherence to a personal code of action, they both not only become successful Hemingway code heroes and Campbellian mythic heroes, but a fusion of the two.

By using DiMaggio as superhuman heroic exemplar to a character that achieves heroic status himself, *The Old Man and the Sea* is perhaps the ultimate tribute to the Yankee centerfielder's public persona as a mythic hero. Written during DiMaggio's final 1951 season

and published the following year, Hemingway's novella is as much an apotheosis of "the great DiMaggio" as *The Pride of the Yankees* was Lou Gehrig's hagiography. However, while *The Old Man in the Sea* certainly presents unprecedented levels of poetic expression and thematic depth in characterizing DiMaggio as a mythic hero, it would be a mistake to say that Hemingway transformed him into one. In writing about him the way he did, the author was merely giving more eloquent expression to the way many Americans had been thinking of DiMaggio since his celebrated 1949 comeback at the latest. But Hemingway's novel, cited specifically in his award for the Nobel Prize two years later and still frequently taught in American high school and college literature classes, has preserved this mythic DiMaggio in literary form. DiMaggio's name remains closely linked with baseball heroism today, even for those who know relatively little about the history of Major League Baseball.

Masculinity in *The Old Man and the Sea*

While the central theme offered to readers of *The Old Man and the Sea* is the fusion of Hemingway's code hero with the type of mythic heroic narrative highlighted by Campbell, the novella, like *The Pride of the Yankees* before it, also offers its audience a model of masculinity. As hinted at previously, the tradition of Western hero narratives favors men. Thus, female monomyth heroes like Esther, Joan d'Arc and the growing number of more contemporary pop culture iterations like *Alien's* Ellen Ripley, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or *The Hunger Games's* Katniss Everdeen aside, with the overwhelming number of mythic hero stories centered on boys or men, the heroic narrative has also long doubled as male life script. The same could be said for Hemingway's literary code hero. For instance, in Leverett Smith's astute analysis of said figures already utilized here, every example of an individual seeking "a setting within which human action might seem meaningful" from Hemingway's literary oeuvre is male. These observations

should be read as less an indictment of a sexist society and more as evidence that both these versions of heroism, which merge in *The Old Man and the Sea*, are particularly relevant to a study of societal expectations of men.

As it draws on the Hemingway and the Campbellian versions of heroic narrative, both heavily male, *The Old Man and the Sea* and Joe DiMaggio's place in it are certainly worth examining as masculine models, particularly concerning how they might shape the cultural meaning of DiMaggio and the Yankees. The novella does not disappoint in this regard, as Santiago's comments continually frame his actions in the context of manhood. And the "manly" quality that seems to be especially emphasized in Santiago's comments is the very thing that is so strongly connected with his memories of DiMaggio: endurance, particularly endurance of pain. At various points in the book when facing sacrifice or pain, he tells Manolin, or more often himself, "It is what a man must do" (26), "I wish I could show [the fish] what kind of man I am" (64), "It is not bad. . . and pain does not matter to a man" (84), and, in what could be an encapsulation of one of the novella's main themes, "I will show [the fish] what a man can do and what a man endures" (66). This final comment offers a grand gesture towards the supposed essentials of male experience and true manhood. Positioned in this way, *The Old Man and the Sea* presents Santiago as embodying the "true essence" of manhood, proven through his physical and psychological perseverance through his trials with the marlin. DiMaggio, the old fisherman's inspiration and model, shares in this masculine embodiment as well. For Santiago, DiMaggio represents something of a patron saint of persevering through pain, and as evidenced

in journalistic writing already cited here, this was something for which DiMaggio had a reputation.³⁷

Self-Sacrifice and Mid-Twentieth Century American Culture

Masculinity scholar David Savran argues that this glorification of male suffering and endurance of physical pain, which he frames as masochism, is a prevalent theme throughout twentieth century conceptions of masculinity (3-5), but Jacqueline Foertsch has also described this focus on self-sacrifice for a greater good as part of the cultural legacy of World War II, citing not only the sacrifice of the lives of soldiers, but the patriotic attitude with which many American women took up factory jobs and the country participated in rationing and collected scrap iron (169-179). With this in mind, perhaps the quality of enduring pain and sacrificing oneself for a greater good would have been particularly important for men in the World War II generation.

Always willing to play hurt to help achieve the greater good of a Yankee victory, DiMaggio's public persona was associated with this concept in popular journalism prior to the publication of Hemingway's novella, but again, his presence in *The Old Man and the Sea*, solidifies this notion in poetic fashion. While Gehrig was compared to brave American soldiers in *The Pride of the Yankees*, DiMaggio actually served in the Army during World War II, like many other prominent Major League ballplayers. Though DiMaggio never saw anything close to combat,³⁸ the fact that he and his fellow ballplayers did leave the game to join the military may well have helped give baseball more national legitimacy and encouraged Americans to see sacrifice on the ball field and on the battlefield as part of a the same seamless whole of American

³⁷ As a regular at Toots Shor's Restaurant that was also a well-known haunt for DiMaggio and several New York City sports writers, Hemingway was familiar with both The Yankee Clipper's exploits and the reporting of them (Cramer 193).

³⁸ DiMaggio spent the war playing baseball for the U.S. Army Air Force baseball team and in an Army hospital with stomach ulcers (Cramer 208, 211-215).

manliness. Frequently playing with pain and yet still somehow able to lead the Yankees to so many victories, DiMaggio was unparalleled in this kind of manliness in the mind of the public in the years following the war, as indicated by the newspaper coverage of his '49 comeback.

And yet, even as *The Old Man and the Sea* seems to endorse certain national cultural trends like the “culture of sacrifice,” it should be noted that in other ways, the novel eschews several other American cultural narratives, most specifically, the American dream. Not only does the main story have an international setting and characters,³⁹ putting it outside the context of an exclusive national discourse, but it presents a story that denies the American dream of upward mobility. The impoverished Santiago works hard and sacrifices, and for that he gains an important personal victory, but his rewards are the respect of his peers, the admiration of his apprentice and self-satisfaction. In fact, the novella even evokes the idea of economic reward (97) and then makes a point of taking it away in tragic fashion through the predatory sharks.

As such, Michael Kimmel’s concept of “marketplace masculinity”—manhood proven through success as a capitalist and breadwinner is rejected in Hemingway’s book for a more intrinsic masculinity proven through adherence to a personal code of action including endurance through pain and grace under pressure. Even DiMaggio’s background as a poor immigrant fisherman’s son, which was seen in texts like *Lucky to Be a Yankee* in the context of his upward mobility from that humble starting point, is evoked to bolster his qualities as a mythic hero and connect him more intimately to Santiago. This of course makes sense, considering Hemingway’s aim in *The Old Man and the Sea*, with its Christ imagery and a discussion of “what a man can do and what a man endures,” was not to comment on American society or tell an “American” story, but a grand, mythic, even a universal one.

³⁹ While most of Hemingway’s major works are not set in the United States, only *The Old Man and the Sea* does not have an American protagonist.

Success and Mid-Twentieth-Century American Culture

Hemingway's downplaying of DiMaggio's economic upward mobility and material success in favor of his intrinsic heroic strength does not change the fact that The Clipper was celebrated for those more tangible successes by others. Just as he was lauded for embodying "the American story" in James Farley's introduction to *Lucky to Be a Yankee*, so could DiMaggio have been celebrated as the essence of American manhood, with his self-made, rags-to-riches story, his drive to endure physical pain as he led the Yankees to nine World Series championships, and even his ability to woo and marry the ultimate Hollywood starlet, Marilyn Monroe in his post-retirement life.

As already suggested in the earlier discussion of *Lucky to Be a Yankee*, the triumphs and spoils that DiMaggio won were consistent with certain American cultural trends in the postwar era. Even as Foertsch cited a culture of sacrifice as influencing the World War II era, she argues equally for the rise of a nearly opposite culture in the postwar period. While not completely forgetting the sacrifices of the Depression and the War, as Americans entered the 1950s, they quickly adopted a culture of consumption. As evidence, Foertsch describes not only the economic upswing, the education and housing booms, but also the increasing number of commercial products, time-saving devices and technologies available to supplement and adorn the home, yard, or car garage (183-199). Television, not the least of these new products, offered a new forum for advertisements for these material goods as well.

It is also important to consider how the Cold War political climate, which set the capitalist United States against the communist Soviet Union, served to promote and justify the purchasing of goods, and enjoying "the good life" as it demonstrated the freedom implicit in consumer choice and prosperity were synonymous with "the American way of life," not the

practices of a communist economy. Just as Americans saw it as their patriotic duty to sacrifice during World War II, so also was it perceived as their patriotic duty to buy in the postwar era.

With his career stretching from 1936-1951, from the Depression to the Baby Boom, DiMaggio's public persona was perhaps uniquely positioned to absorb some of both the culture of sacrifice and the succeeding culture of plenty and consumption from these periods. As both all-American populist who pulled himself up by his bootstraps, and mythic hero whose ultimate sacrifice yielded ultimate victory, DiMaggio is paradoxically able to capture both cultural trends. This may have been particularly important for any individuals in the postwar period who might have felt a sensation of vertigo or even guilt at the country's, and his or her personal, sudden shift from austerity to plenty, from sacrifice to indulgence. For in DiMaggio, the man who endures the pain of bone spurs as he leads the Yankees to the pennant, this sacrificial past was ever before them, even in bounteous victory.

DiMaggio's Impact on the Yankees as Cultural Icon

DiMaggio's impact on the Yankee cultural icon is likewise significant. Before DiMaggio's postwar rise to mythic heroism, the Yankees certainly embodied unparalleled excellence and success. Through Lou Gehrig and *The Pride of the Yankees*, they grew as emblems of national narratives: the American dream of upward mobility, populist work ethic, and traditional masculinity. But in the postwar era, watching or reading about a DiMaggio-led Yankee victory took on, more than ever before, the tone of religious devotion, not just for Yankee fans, and— if the 1949 *Life* magazine cover story is any indication—perhaps not even just baseball fans, but for the nation as a whole.

Building on baseball's longstanding rhetorical connections to a concept of American identity and patriotism, and Gehrig and DiMaggio's status as emblems and exemplars of the

American dream, the pseudo-religious connotations that DiMaggio brought to the Yankees transformed the Bronx Bombers in this postwar period to something of an icon of America's civil religion. Religious studies scholar Christopher H. Evans describes the concept of civil religion as the creation of a "collective national identity through bestowing sacred meaning on a variety of secular symbols, rituals, and institutions" (14). Evans argues that the game of baseball as a whole, and particularly the institution of Major League Baseball, functions as civil religion, keying in on the rhetoric from baseball's promoters in the late-nineteenth century as laying the foundations for baseball's status as a revered symbol of the United States (19-21).

The annual ritual of the president throwing out the first pitch of the season alone is sufficient evidence for Evans's case. Nevertheless, I submit that the DiMaggio-led Yankees in the postwar period constitute a special case where baseball's role as civil religion was magnified. Robert Bellah, the originator of the term "civil religion," described American civil religion as being especially "concerned that America be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it, and a light to all the nations" (40-41). With his popular status as an American mythic hero whose victories often seemed predestined, DiMaggio was able to provide the nation reassurance in this regard.⁴⁰

DiMaggio's popular persona of mythic heroism deepened the reverence and connection with the divine felt by the fans, the "practitioners" of this civil religion. With his "miraculous" 1949 comeback as his crowning achievement, DiMaggio was recipient to more suggestions of godhood than any player since Ruth. But unlike Ruth, who would mystify crowds with his individual feats of herculean power, DiMaggio's power over the public was more tied to his

⁴⁰ This, of course, is despite the man's many personal flaws that were largely kept from the public eye, including womanizing (Cramer 127-131, 177-178, 242-243), and connections to mafia figures (140-144), which were certainly inconsistent with most mid-century Americans' concept of being "in accord with the will of God" on an *individual* level.

ability to lead the Yankees to dramatic victory. And while many fans of other baseball clubs certainly could bemoan the Yankee's dominance and complain about the organization's deep pockets, DiMaggio's presence helped *sanctify* the Yankees, in a manner of speaking. Even fans who did not root for the Yankees would have had a hard time escaping the religious-like language used to describe them as a team of destiny—to “have faith in,” to use Santiago's words—particularly with the media's attention to DiMaggio's long suffering through injury and proclamations of miraculous comebacks. As such, the Yankee team and their narrative of victories became entwined in religious-like feelings and experience for many Americans. DiMaggio's superhuman goodness both brought to pass and justified Yankee success.

The Yankees were not the only ones enjoying success in the 1940s and 1950s, however. As a nation, the United States had, like DiMaggio, suffered and sacrificed but ultimately emerged as triumphant as the Yankees in both the Second World War and in economic recovery. DiMaggio's combination of self-sacrifice and destiny not only justified the Yankee's dominance of the Major Leagues, but made it seem right and destined. Americans could draw parallel conclusions about the recent triumphs of their country, and quite possibly, their own personal economic improvement. Through the dramatic lens of DiMaggio's mythic self-sacrifice and triumph, the Yankees in this postwar cultural moment, in a sense, became America and America became the Yankees.

DiMaggio's role in baseball's civil religion in the late '40s and early '50s can be read as part of a broader cultural trend regarding nationalism and faith. Rader emphasizes the degree to which “faith and patriotism frequently blended” in the postwar period (313). This is corroborated by Cold War historian Dianne Kirby, who emphasizes how during the Truman administration (1945-1952) the United States' new world role as the anti-communist leader of

the West “was presented as part of America’s ‘manifest destiny’ and sustained by the conviction that the American cause was morally right” (77). Cold War cultural historian Tony Shaw further suggests that in the period “religion became discursively associated in Western popular culture with ‘liberty’, ‘democracy’ and ‘Western civilisation’” (214). In this vein, the popular understanding of recent history attributed a divine destiny to the nation as a whole. The United States won the war and emerged destined to continue to free the world of communism because God’s will worked through our collective efforts in the same way that DiMaggio’s miraculous feats manifested the Yankee’s destiny to win. Thus, the success of the DiMaggio-led Yankees in the national moment following World War II could be described as an especially potent icon of American civil religion, dramatizing and reassuring Americans of the divine rightness of their recent military and economic success and the role the country was assuming on the world stage.

The Yankees’ parallels of national success in the postwar period were further strengthened with the introduction of a new logo in 1947. Up to that point the Bronx Bombers could be represented by their interlocking NY cap logo, their navy blue and white team colors, and particularly their famous pinstriped home uniforms. The new official team logo (see fig. 3) introduced after the War, however, emphasized the nationalistic connotations of the word “Yankee,” and featured an Uncle Sam top hat with the stars and stripes of the American flag hanging from the barrel of a baseball bat.



Fig. 3

This logo, with only very minor alterations is still in use today (Fromer 70, Stout). In it the signifiers of the Yankees ball club are melded with national signifiers,⁴¹ making Yankee excellence one with American excellence. Through it, the Bronx Bombers' prosperity both evidences and exemplifies American prosperity.

Conclusion

The top hat logo visually represents the nationalistic connotations DiMaggio helped bring to Yankees icon in the postwar period. Through his populist work ethic and American dream life story, DiMaggio, like Gehrig before him, embodied many mid-century American values, and during his tenure as the public face of the team, the Yankees continued their cultural association with these values. But with his mythic public persona projected in texts like *Lucky to Be a Yankee*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, and journalistic profiles, DiMaggio brought new facets to the Yankees icon. In a post-World War II period when the mythologizing of America's economic prosperity, and military and political success was increasingly common, DiMaggio's mythic presence helped strengthen the Yankees nationalistic connections. Through his dualistic everyman/superman public persona, Joe DiMaggio justified and sanctified Yankee success, and by the same right, the triumphant postwar United States.

⁴¹ Among all American professional sport franchises, only the teams based in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C. (The Washington Senators' logos during this period featured the dome of the national capitol building.) and Philadelphia (The Philadelphia Phillies of the postwar era wore uniforms with the name Phillies in red script with blue stars dotting the "i's." Later in the 1990s they would adopt the Liberty Bell as part of their logo.) come close to rivaling the Yankees in terms of nationalistic imagery on team logos.

Chapter Four

“Wall Street Brokers and Haughty Businessmen”: The Yankees and Brooklyn Dodger Fan Identity

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, the Yankees have been analyzed as a cultural icon from what could be described as a mainstream national perspective. I have focused on national voices of public discourse, particularly those emanating from institutions with established cultural clout that focus attention on sport and baseball only occasionally, such magazines as *Time* and *Life*, as well as the institutions of Hollywood and the world of high-brow literature. This focus is intended to show how a broadly-conceived, general American public (which would include, but not be limited to those who consider themselves active baseball fans) perceived and used the New York Yankees as a cultural icon in the 1940s and ‘50s. No attempt has been made to probe the meaning the Bronx Bombers had for their community of fans in New York City, nor the archipelago of Yankee devotees across the nation or globe.

There were likely some Americans in the middle decades of the twentieth century who chose to root for the Yankees for ideological reasons—for the way the team embodied an idealized notion of the American dream or American masculinity. And there were likely more who claimed the Yankees as their favorite team exclusively based on their success and the status it brought them through association. It would be a mistake, however, to apply such a characterization to the entire community of Yankee fans. The majority of Yankee fans, then as

well as now, likely became fans for the same reasons supporters of other teams did: geographic proximity or familial precedent. As such, I would suggest that the experience of a Yankee fan in the 1940s, or '50s, aside from the significant detail of the Yankees' consistent winning, was not that different from any other baseball fans. Childhood Brooklyn Dodger fan and American historian Doris Kearns Goodwin learned as much in her early years wherein she associated with many fans of the rival Yankees in her neighborhood on Long Island. In her memoir of Dodger fandom, Goodwin observes that her best friend Elaine, a Yankee fan, was "as devoted to her team as I was to the Dodgers" (64). Furthermore, while Goodwin remembers a widespread perception that the Yankees were "supported by the rich and successful" (63), she often remarks that many of her acquaintances who supported the Bronx Bombers did not quite "fit the typical image of the Yankee fan" (65).

Thus, it could be said that there was often some discontinuity between the ideologies the Yankees often represented in popular culture and the sociocultural identities of their actual fans. This is clearly evidenced in Joseph Trumino's recent paper titled "The Political and Cultural Contradictions of the 'Lefty' Yankee Fan." Trumino ponders his fierce loyalty to the Bronx Bombers (which he attributes to both the place and family he was born into) despite his nearly-as-fierce disagreements with the ideologies the team—"the Bourgeoisie. . . the Chase Bank of baseball" (4)—is associated with in the contemporary popular mind. The existence of such a light-hearted, yet earnest presentation suggests such a discontinuity between team ideology and fan identity is as common today as it was in the mid-twentieth century.

These discontinuities between the experience of Yankee fans and the team's cultural meaning does not necessarily mean that an examination of the Yankees in baseball fan culture is completely useless, however. While this study will not devote any more space to investigating

and analyzing the experience of the community of Yankee fans, the Yankee cultural icon is perhaps more interesting for the role it plays in the culture of fans of other baseball teams, particularly Brooklyn Dodger supporters in the postwar era.

Dodger fans of this era used the Yankees as a successful, aristocratic counterpoint to help craft a communal identity as working-class underdogs. The Dodgers met and lost to their cross-town rivals, the storied Yankees, five times between 1941 and '53 before finally beating the Bronx Bombers for their first World Series title in 1955. The Yankees represented the powerful establishment that stood in the way of their deepest desire as fans. Thus, in the collective worldview of mid-century Brooklyn Dodgers fans, the Yankee's association with an idealized narrative of the American dream was turned on its head as the rival team became the main impediment to the Dodgers own narrative of upward mobility. This "haves" versus "have-nots" dynamic to the Yankees-Dodgers rivalry takes on additional social significance when one considers the Dodgers' role as the leaders of the racial integration of baseball with the Major League debut of Jackie Robinson in 1947, while baseball's established crown jewel, the Yankees, dragged their feet with regard to integration, remaining one of a handful of lilywhite teams until 1955. For the fans of the Brooklyn Dodgers, the Yankees came to embody both a symbolic and a literal power structure, taking on sociocultural categories of class and race as well as on-field dominance.

Fan Communities and the Creation of Meaning

Lawrence Grossberg is among the increasing number of cultural scholars devoting attention to fandom in general as a site of identity formation and cultural production. While this growing body of fandom scholarship has been generally focused on fans devoted to aspects of popular culture that are more overtly "textual"—certain genres of music or musicians, television

shows, or film series—the theories and concepts of Grossberg’s work are particularly applicable to the world of sports fans as well.

Grossberg’s concept of “mattering maps” is especially relevant to Dodger fans’ attitude towards and use of the Yankees cultural icon. He argues that fandom helps fans “map,” or bring organization and order to their existence, helping them “divide the cultural world into Us and Them” based around his or her perception of and experience with that object of fandom and what it represents, be it a rock band, comic book character, sci-fi TV show, or sports team (58). In this way, fandom becomes a powerful tool for building a concept of identity: which values, ideologies, or experiences fans identify with and claim, which they do not, and where they, as individuals, fit in the world. Along with identity, fandom creates a shared community, a sense of “Us,” as Grossberg puts it, centralized and unified around the object of fandom and the accompanying values it represents. For Dodger fans, the Yankees acted as an important landmark on their “mattering map,” an ever-present counterpoint that reinforced their self-characterization as scrappy, striving underdogs by reminding them of what they were not: empowered, established, or socially elite.

“The Sad, Crazy Saga”

Dodger fans’ self-perception as underdogs in contrast to the elitist Yankees is grounded in the two teams’ histories on the baseball field itself. Historically, it was neither the Yankees nor the Dodgers who captured hearts and headlines of New York City baseball fans, but the New York Giants of John McGraw and Christy Mathewson, who found significant success in National League play during the first two and a half decades of the twentieth century, winning ten pennants in this time period. While the Giants were less successful in the World Series, winning only three times in these years, they dominated the triangular inter-city rivalry. The Dodgers

mustered two pennants, 1916 and 1920, losing both World Series. The Yankees meanwhile, fared even worse, not winning any pennants before 1921.

All of this changed, of course, when Colonel Jacob Ruppert took over the team and began seriously investing his money in Babe Ruth and other talent, and in the cathedral-like Yankee Stadium in the early 1920s. Soon the Yankees were competing with the Giants for New York City and national baseball supremacy, and eventually became the most dominant baseball team in either league over the course of the 1920s and '30s. During this Yankee dominance, the Dodgers, who had shown some promise in their two earlier pennant-winning years, tumbled from mediocre to laughably bad. While the Yankees competed almost annually for the title of baseball's best team, and the Giants did the same on occasion, the city's third club, Brooklyn, became the league's clowns. The Dodgers of the late 1920s and '30s were notorious throughout the Major Leagues as the "Daffiness Boys," known for losing in comical fashion, such as the instance when several base-running errors saw the Dodgers end up with three men on third base (Seymour 456). Even authoritative baseball historian Harold Seymour refers to these Dodgers as "those colorful incapables" (454).

In 1938, the Dodgers hired Larry MacPhail as general manager of the club, and their fortunes quickly improved. MacPhail made many moves to improve the club and its park, culminating in the team's first pennant in twenty years in 1941. In the '41 World Series, the Dodgers met and were defeated by an imposing Yankee team. Many then and now cite the fourth game as the Series's turning point. With the Yankees leading the Series two games to one, but the Dodgers leading the game by a run in the ninth inning with two outs, Brooklyn catcher Mickey Owen inexplicably dropped what would have been the third strike to Yankee

slugger Tommy Henrich.⁴² This strike would have ended the game and evened the Series, giving the Dodgers the edge in momentum and putting them only two wins away from the club's first World Series title. But Henrich took advantage of the dropped pitch, and advanced to first base, keeping the Yankees alive. The Dodgers never recovered from this small but costly mistake, eventually losing the game to the Yanks, who went on to score four runs and win 7-4. Demoralized, Brooklyn dropped the following game and lost the Series.

Owens' dropped third strike set the tone for the narrative tradition Dodgers fans would begin to craft around their team through the 1940s and early '50s. Goodwin underscores the importance such a narrative tradition plays in uniting a sports team's fan community, observing that in the postwar New York metropolitan area, "team affiliation was passed on from father to child, with the crucial moments in a team's history repeated like the liturgy of a church service" (61). For Brooklyn Dodger fans, the dropped pitch of the '41 World Series encapsulated the substance of the Dodger narrative: their dream, a World Series victory, and with it a measure of national and local respect, was constantly just out of reach. The team as a whole had made significant strides since their days as clowns, yet with the ultimate disappointment at season's end—a motif that would become maddeningly familiar to Dodger fans—the feeling remained that they had not come far enough.

In their Dodger-centric memoirs, Goodwin and fellow childhood Brooklyn fan, journalist Thomas Oliphant both claim to be receivers of this Dodger narrative tradition, which Oliphant describes as a "sad, crazy, saga, with each year's late flop adding to the lore and legend of the previous one" (153). While Oliphant and Goodwin were both born too late to have any memories of the 1941 Series, each recall being told that specific tale as children. Even though

⁴² Many have suspected that the pitch may have broken especially sharply because it was an (illegal) spitball. (Golenbock 74-75)

Oliphant's father maintained the '41 dropped strike gained its critical place in Dodger losing lore only in retrospect, after other late-season collapses seemed to enhance the significance of the moment, the author suggests that, for most Brooklyn fans, "the Dodgers' ensuing history of bitter disappointments in high-pressure situations could be said to have begun the moment Mickey Owen's glove failed to follow [pitcher Hugh] Casey's pitch" (110). Goodwin presents the 1941 World Series narrative as a Dodger fan's rite of passage or initiation, describing the tale as "a story I was to hear many times from many different people, all ritually re-enacting the tragedy which the years had translated in to a strange delight" (42-43).

The next decade and a half would bring much of the same and the narrative tradition within the community of Dodger fans continued with a cyclical plot of renewed hope being annually swallowed up in stinging defeat. After the Major Leagues' unofficial hiatus during World War II, the Dodgers returned to prewar pennant winning form and ended the 1946 season in a tie for first place in the National League with the St. Louis Cardinals. This prompted the League's first best-two-out-of-three playoff which the Cardinals won in two straight games, denying the Dodgers a chance in the World Series. Their fortunes would improve to some degree the following year, however. With the immediate impact of the addition of Jackie Robinson, the Dodgers were even better in 1947, winning the National League but losing a dramatic, closely contested World Series that went the full seven games to the Yankees.

After a down year in 1948, the Dodgers returned to the World Series again in 1949. This Dodger team featured two new stars culled from the Negro Leagues, Hall of Fame catcher Roy Campanella and pitcher Don Newcombe, who joined future Hall of Famers Robinson, centerfielder Duke Snider, and shortstop Pee Wee Reese, as well as all-stars and fan-favorites Gil Hodges, Carl Furillo, Preacher Roe and Carl Erskine. Most of this core of players would remain

with the Dodgers through the 1955 season, enduring the many heartbreaks and near-misses along the way. The first of these for this group was the 1949 World Series itself, which the Casey-Stengel-led Yankees took in five closely-contested games.

1950 brought even more drama, with Brooklyn starting the season slowly only to rally and come within one game of tying the Philadelphia Phillies and causing a playoff for the pennant and a chance at a rematch with the Yankees. On the last day of the season, after taking what many observed to be an especially wide turn around third base, leftfielder Cal Abrams was thrown out at home plate trying to score the potential game-winning run against the Phillies, who later won the game in extra innings with a homerun by Dick Sisler.⁴³ This turn of events recalled Mickey Owen's error in the 1941 World Series and served to further the club's image as hard-luck losers among Dodger fans themselves, as well as baseball fans in general.

But this last-minute collapse would pale in comparison to the events of the 1951 season. After jumping out to a fast start, the Dodgers were the frontrunners of the National League for nearly the entire season, holding a thirteen-game lead over their fierce intercity rival the Giants as late as August 11th. In that month, however, the Dodgers began to lose momentum, while the Giants became red hot, ending the regular season in a tie with Brooklyn and prompting a three-game playoff. After splitting the first two games, the teams headed to the Giants' Polo Grounds for a winner-takes-all showdown. In a close game, Brooklyn finally began to break away, taking a three-run lead into the bottom of the ninth inning, only to have disaster strike. First, the tiring Don Newcombe, who had been dominant until then, gave up a run and put two men on base,

⁴³ Significant debate took place about who was really to blame in the incident. Phillies outfielder, Richie Ashburn, was playing shallow, anticipating a bunt, and was thus able to get to the ball extra quickly, leading some to fault Dodgers third base coach Milt Stock for signaling for Abrams to attempt to score. Manager Burt Shotton stood by Stock's decision. Soon after the season end, however, both Stock and Shotton were let go. Abrams stayed with the Dodgers as a reserve for two more seasons (Golenbock 255-260). Dick Sisler's home run, meanwhile, was retroactively "foreshadowed" by Ernest Hemingway in a conversation about the outfielder's power in *The Old Man in the Sea*, which was set during the pennant races in the fall of 1950, but written after they had taken place in 1951 and published the following year (21-22).

then, pitching in relief, Ralph Branca gave up a game-winning three-run home run to Bobby Thomson, that sent the Giants to the 1951 World Series. For the second year in a row, the Dodgers lost the pennant in the last inning of their last game of the season. Thomson's home run, dubbed "the shot heard 'round the world,"⁴⁴ remains a touchstone for baseball fans of that era—particularly those living in New York City—and would become yet another symbol of frustration for Dodger fans.

In 1952 and '53 Brooklyn broke their pennant jinx and played in two consecutive World Series. But again, these seasons ended in disappointment, as they were handed defeat in both contests by the Yankees, yet again. At one point in the 1952 Series, the Dodgers seemed to have victory in hand, leading three games to two and needing only one victory to at last claim the championship. But the Yankees bested them twice in a row in two close games to deny them once again. The Yankees 1953 World Series victory in six games represented five championships in a row, improving upon their previous Major League record of four in a row from 1936-'39. Three of these five championships came against the Dodgers, who were still seeking their first.

The Yankees as Villains in the Dodger's Narrative

While the St. Louis Cardinals, Philadelphia Phillies, and their local rival, New York Giants, all played the role of spoilers at various points for Brooklyn fans, the Yankees were clearly the true villain of their "sad, crazy saga." Every time the Dodgers managed to make the World Series, the Yankees were there waiting to defeat them and their aspirations. During this period in which world championships became almost routine for the Yankees and their fans, the

⁴⁴ The original "shot heard 'round the world," was, of course, Ralph Waldo Emerson's poetic term for the first gunshot of the American Revolution, in his "Concord Hymn." But among sports fans, it is debatable which meaning of the phrase is better known.

Dodgers, who were filled with undeniable talent and were, in the minds of their fans, certainly deserving, could never quite manage to win a single one.

This villain's role assigned to the Yankees in the minds of Dodgers fans comes through clearly in their recollections to oral historians. Brooklyn fan Bill Reddy put things this way to Peter Golenbock:

There was a feeling of frustration, and it grew worse with every World Series loss, because you would say to yourself, "When the hell are we ever going to beat (the Yankees)? They can't be invincible. . . Why can't we beat them?" . . . Every year we got beat. It was such a feeling of frustration. It was getting to be galling. (*Bums* 325)

Childhood Dodger fan Florence Rubenstein voiced similar feelings:

The Yankees were always winners and they always had this infuriating arrogance about it. I had cried every year after I would get my hopes up for the Dodgers only to see them lose again. I would get in bed, put my head under the pillow and just cry. . . Each time a World Series would start it would be like here we go again, and how unfair it all is. But I would hang in there. And after all that time and the way we kept coming back, and tried so hard, we should win already. (qtd. in Oliphant 123)

While he attempts to be a bit more analytical and objective about the issue, even Dodger pitcher Carl Erskine recalled similar feelings:

See, somehow in sports, life, somehow when you get momentum, it seems you can't turn the dumb stuff around. The Yankees appeared, and I'm not saying we were snakebit, but whenever there was a fluke break, bounce, loop, anything, the darn thing always seemed to go their way in these close Series. . . . That's just the way it was with the Yankees. Those suckers were tough. . . . But that was just the frustration of playing those guys.

Darn it, I don't know if psychologically there was a difference, or whether the Yankee tradition played a part, I don't know what it was, but there was a fine line there somehow that in five World Series against them, we only managed to win one. (qtd. in Golenbock, *Bums* 365)

In his memoir, Oliphant offers more overarching narrative themes to the Dodger fans' experience watching their team lose year after year to the mighty Yankees. "The Brooklyn Dodgers were as much a National team as the Yankees were;" he asserts, "where the Yankees personified power and success, the Dodgers symbolized struggle" (32). He suggests that for their fans, "the Dodgers were the epitome of deserving underdog-ism, just as the New York Yankees symbolized Roman Empire-like success and intimidating mastery" (4).

Dodgers as Symbols of Brooklyn

This deserving underdog/successful empire contrast that existed in the collective consciousness of Dodger fans, and, to some degree American baseball fans in general, took on a smattering of relevant sociocultural issues that were beyond its intrinsic basic "underdog" narrative. One such issue was the borough of Brooklyn's second-class social status in the context of the city of New York. As home to the nation's advertising, fashion, publishing, broadcasting, and banking industries, as well as the country's largest literary, theater, and artistic communities, the borough of Manhattan dominated local politics and became a capital of culture for both the nation and the world in the twentieth century. For many Manhattanites, the other boroughs seemed parochial and pedestrian in comparison, and because of New York City's cultural preeminence in the national scene, these attitudes were broadcast across the country.

Brooklyn's perceived cultural inferiority was magnified by history. Until 1898, Brooklyn had been an independent city, but in that year it was officially absorbed into Manhattan's New

York City, along with the three other boroughs. Historian Neil J. Sullivan argues that, amongst the boroughs, this change was particularly difficult for Brooklyn:

For all the community's economic and cultural achievements, its consolidation into New York had made it a kind of comic foil to Manhattan. The other boroughs may also have smarted as a result of their second-class status, but as the largest borough in the city, Brooklyn's diminished role required the sharpest adjustment. (15)

Sportswriter and New Yorker Robert W. Creamer remembers that Brooklyn's perceived position of cultural inferiority made it an easy target for jokes in the 1920's and '30s—the early days of radio, film and an emerging *national* popular culture. This coincided with and reflected upon the Dodgers comically bad years at the bottom of the league. Creamer writes,

The borough of Brooklyn—Manhattan's Sancho Panza—was America's joke city, a larger Peoria, a bigger Podunk. The Brooklyn accent seemed hilarious. Danny Kaye took it to boffo extremes in one of his later routines when the character he was playing declared, "I'm fwrom Bwrooklyn. My whole family's fwrom Bwrooklyn. I was bawn and bwed in Bwrooklyn." Radio comedians always got a laugh when they mentioned Brooklyn. For all of Brooklyn's hope, the Dodgers were a joke team from a joke town. (Creamer, *Baseball in '41* 7-8)

Along with the Dodgers reflection of the borough's lowly status, Sullivan further argues that, even though the Yankees technically play in the Bronx⁴⁵, the intercity rivalry between them and the Dodgers reflected and magnified the cultural tension between Manhattan and Brooklyn. He writes, "The Yankees became the image of New York glamour, while the Dodgers, along with

⁴⁵ Old Yankee Stadium (1923-2008), like the current Yankee Stadium (2009—present), sat just across the Hudson River from Upper Manhattan

Brooklyn, became a comic foil” (10). For Sullivan, the Yankees and the borough of Manhattan were made for each other. He continues:

In certain respects, the Yankees mirrored the place of Manhattan in New York City government, the first among equals. Manhattan and the Yankees both dominated their respective spheres in a manner that conveyed arrogance and inevitability. The Yankees attracted fans from the entire metropolitan area. . . (Sullivan 16)

In her memoir, Goodwin corroborates Sullivan’s insights, recalling that she always associated the Yankees with the “Wall Street brokers and haughty businessmen” of Manhattan (63).

The Brooklyn-Manhattan tensions that became a facet of the Dodgers-Yankees intercity rivalry took on new significance once the Dodgers began to improve in the early 1940s. With their dramatically improved play and their multiple pennants and World Series appearances, the Dodgers, in the words of Sullivan, became “so important to Brooklyn because they symbolized the borough’s aspiration to escape a humiliating burlesque role” (Sullivan 15). Creamer remembers Brooklyn’s enthusiasm for the newly improved Dodgers spilling over into the rest of the nation during the 1941 season. “The rags to riches story seduced America. Everyone was taken by them,” he recalled. “It became an in thing to be a fan of the Dodgers” (*Baseball in '41* 8).

Along with the Dodgers, Brooklyn’s less-than glamorous reputation began to take on new connotations for both Brooklynites and Americans in general in the 1940s. This seemed especially apparent during World War II in Hollywood’s portrayal of the American military effort. Beginning with 1942’s *Wake Island*, which featured the character Private Aloysius K. “Smaksie” Randall, portrayed by William Bendix⁴⁶, “just about every war movie had ‘a kid from Brooklyn’ in it, usually comic and dumb, though sometimes heroically comic and dumb”

⁴⁶ Bendix was nominated for a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his performance in *Wake Island*.

(Creamer, *Baseball in '41* 8). About this phenomenon, *New York Times* columnist Russell Baker somewhat cynically observed:

If you'd watched Hollywood's World War II movies you may have thought one of the main things they died for was to save baseball, or at least to save the Brooklyn Dodgers. The basic-war-movie formula of the period called for a kid from Brooklyn to chatter away about the Dodgers between bombardments and kamikaze attacks. Confronted with villainous Axis performers like Conrad Veidt and Richard Loo, Hollywood leading men were apt to declare that the Axis could never crush the spirit of a nation that rooted for the Dodgers.

While Baker presents the underdog populism that these characters embodied with a legitimate skepticism, they are significant for the shift they signaled in the popular connotations the nation associated with Brooklyn. Once something of a national laughing stock, during the Second World War, Brooklyn became an icon of American populist values. As Oliphant observes, "These characters could be foolish and buffoons . . . they could be simple-minded and stubborn, but they were also hardworking, warm, and loving people" (14).

The Dodgers played a key role in this shift in the public's cultural perception of Brooklyn. As the former clowns of baseball became the colorful 1941 pennant winners (with much more success to come after the war) they enraptured much of the country, and, by association, helped transform Brooklyn from punch line to the epitome of American populism in the mind of the public. Condescending attitudes labeling Brooklynites "parochial" or "uncultured" were countered by media portrayals emphasizing the flip-side of such adjectives. Parochial became "loyal;" uncultured became "humble." The Dodgers, meanwhile, became one of the primary signifiers of Brooklyn's scruffy underdog populism in the public consciousness,

perhaps second only to the famed Brooklyn accent. This is certainly true in the World War II films where movie-goers could tell the oft-featured “kid from Brooklyn” was the genuine article by his thick accent and his tendency to wax poetic about his hometown Dodgers.⁴⁷

The improved Dodgers’ struggles with the storied Yankees in the late 1940s and early 1950s added an interesting wrinkle to Brooklyn’s collective pursuit of cultural respectability at mid-century. Just as the success of the Dodgers that began in 1941 had a positive effect on the borough’s national profile, so also their inability to beat the Yankees had a detracting effect on the community’s social standing. Each time the bridesmaids Dodgers “choked” against the Yankees in the World Series, or even against the Giants in 1951’s “Shot Heard ‘Round the World” game, seemed to confirm suspicions that the borough was indeed a deficient or inferior part of the bustling, cosmopolitan New York City.

This certainly appears to be a paranoia of Dodgers fans themselves, as indicated by pitcher Carl Erskine’s comments after the Dodgers finally beat the Yankees in the 1955 World Series. “It had so much significance,” Erskine said about the victory’s effect on Dodger’s fans and the borough, “There was personal pride. There was a whole city that now could raise its head, look across the river to the Bronx and Manhattan and say, ‘We’re number one’” (qtd. in Golenbock, *Bums* 405). As Erskine’s observations about the local fans imply, the 1955 victory offered some much needed resolution to Brooklyn’s inferiority complex.⁴⁸ But until that monumental 1955 victory, the contested cultural status of Brooklyn within the context of New York and the nation was played out dramatically in their nearly annual clashes with the Yankees. The Dodgers’ and Brooklyn’s initial promise somehow always gave way to defeat at the hand of the baseball symbols of their cultural superiors, leaving the issue seemingly eternally unsettled.

⁴⁷ In 1946, MGM actually released a film called *The Kid from Brooklyn*, starring Danny Kaye as a humble milkman turned boxing champion.

⁴⁸ Or at least temporarily; the Yankees, after all, came back and beat the Dodgers in the ’56 World Series.

Dodgers as Working Class Icons

It is perhaps already evident that closely allied with Brooklyn's image consciousness is the issue of socioeconomic class. In their narrative played out on the baseball field in the 1940s and '50s, and particularly in their rivalry with the Yankees, the Dodgers took on a distinct working class persona. Even as Dodgers fans formulated an identity around their team that celebrated a working class status and value system, they simultaneously demonized the Yankees and their fans as privileged aristocratic snobs.

Carl E. Prince, in his academic study *Brooklyn's Dodgers: The Bums, the Borough, and the Best of Baseball 1947-1957*, talks about Brooklyn's residents as being not only predominantly of "lower-middle-class origins," (103) but predominantly "ethnic" as well. "While the fashionable Heights, in the shadow of Brooklyn Bridge, remained generally bedrock elite, native, and Protestant," Prince writes, "the rest of Brooklyn was solidly ethnic: mainly Irish, Italian, and Jewish, with smaller groups of Scandinavians, Greeks, and Poles in the mix"(103). Prince further argues for the prevalence of the conflation of class and ethnicity in "the majority native culture," stating, "inasmuch as foreign origin and lower-class assignment . . . went hand-in-hand, Brooklyn was an especially obvious example of this social judgment" (109). Presumed to be both ethnic and lower class by both the nation and the rest of New York, those two markers became integral to Brooklyn residents' identity.

It is difficult to disentangle Brooklyn's ethnic-cum-working-class leanings and the borough's cultural inferiority complex discussed earlier. Indeed, the two seem to be mutually influential. Prince argues as much: "Because of Brooklyn's cultural isolation, both within the borough itself and as a distinct part of greater New York, the sense of class inferiority common to most first and second-generation immigrants could only have been enhanced" (103).

Brooklyn's lowly cultural status and the borough's class consciousness were brought even closer in the symbol of a local identity the Dodgers provided the borough.

Just as the narrative of the team's history parallels Brooklyn's lower cultural status, this narrative of struggle and near-misses, and an unattained goal likewise resonated with the borough's class consciousness. Like many of the residents of Brooklyn's working-class, first- and second-generation immigrants that supported them, the postwar Dodgers were still in the struggle to live the baseball equivalent of the American dream. The postwar Dodgers had made great strides since their years as the clowns of the league in the '20s and '30s, but their ultimate goal remained out of reach. Similarly, many of Brooklyn's baseball fans would have also felt that their hard work had yielded some socioeconomic gains but they had yet to "make it"—yet to achieve a certain level of stability and respect, yet to feel they had attained the American dream. For such fans, rooting for the Dodgers provided some sense of solidarity and identity, perhaps allowing them to take some pride in their struggle and progress, despite their low social standing and the fact they, like their team, had yet to gain their ultimate goal.

Prince even suggests that the Dodgers acted as a unifier of Brooklyn's ethnic subgroups in this regard. He writes:

Overt class consciousness seemed to run higher in Brooklyn than elsewhere in the city, and the Dodgers' presence helped maintain an uneasy truce among ethnic groups. . . The realities of immigrant differences dominated everyday life. . . The Dodgers, in this tense setting, formed a social force for acculturation, perhaps an example of the larger role baseball has played in shaping American commonality in the twentieth century. (103)

Perhaps any baseball team might have provided some sense of unity; yet it is significant that the Dodgers' team narrative paralleled the personal narrative of so many Brooklynites. Moreover, the Dodgers offered a somewhat more abstract version of that narrative that individuals might be more likely to recognize in the lives of fellow fans from different ethnic backgrounds. The Dodgers could represent them all.

Just as Dodger fans cultivated a working-class identity for themselves and their team, they likewise used the successful Yankees as a wealthy socioeconomic foil. This is quite apparent in the memoirs of both Goodwin and Oliphant. Goodwin writes about the culture of comparative fan loyalty in her Long Island suburb, asserting, "the Yankees were the 'Bronx Bombers,' whose pinstriped uniforms signified their elite status, supported by the rich and successful, by Wall Street brokers and haughty businessmen" while the Dodgers were thought of as "unpretentious clowns, whose fans were seen as scruffy blue-collar workers who spoke with bad diction" (63). While even Goodwin herself acknowledges this depiction as an "exaggerated caricature" (63), the existence of the caricature itself reveals the importance of class identity to the ideological borders on Dodger fans' conceptual "mattering map" that Grossberg has suggested.

The association of wealth and privilege with the Yankees is even more prevalent in Oliphant's memoir. The author offers several remembered details that clearly link the Bronx Bombers with a reputation as rich, high-class elites. For instance, Oliphant recounts that the private school he attended on scholarship was "filled with kids from wealthy families who were nearly all Yankee fans" (28). He even recounts an experience of attending a country club with one such well-off classmate in 1953 and becoming acutely aware that he was "a tiny Dodger island in a sea of Yankee fans" while they watched the televised broadcast of a World Series

game in the club lounge (202). Similarly, Oliphant specifies that the baseball loyalties in the law office where his mother worked were clearly divided along class lines, with the partners generally supporting the Yankees and his mother and the other secretaries rooting for the Dodgers (24, 93). Upon this clearly drawn social world of baseball fandom from his childhood recollections, Oliphant sprinkles a number of additional class-conscious digs at the Yankees, from his description of Yankee Stadium as “a majestic palace” (11) with box seats filled with “big shots” (223), to his characterization of postwar Yankee owners Del Webb and Dan Topping as “the boss of a real estate development empire,” and “a trust fund child with movie star looks and gobs of money from the Anaconda copper fortune,” respectively (160).

This very cut-and-dry world Oliphant describes, where baseball rooting interests most often seem to be a direct result of one’s salary (or their father’s), may be a bit of an exaggeration. Writing for publication in 2005, Oliphant could be accused of magnifying fuzzy childhood memories from fifty years ago, shaping them perhaps by his own current sociopolitical biases. His memories could also be potentially recast in the light of an already existing cultural narrative that has circulated about the Dodgers-Yankees rivalry in popular texts like Ken Burns’s multi-part documentary *Baseball* (of which the fourth installment, “The Capital of Baseball,” devotes significant time to the Dodgers-Yankees rivalry and its sociocultural dimensions), sportswriter Roger Kahn’s lauded *The Boys of Summer*, which has sold nearly three million copies since its first printing in 1972, or even Goodwin’s own memoir, already extensively-cited here, which became a *New York Times* Bestseller itself in 1997. Yet, though he possibly may over-generalize or embellish in order to read his own childhood into this moderately lucrative cultural narrative, the kernel of Oliphant’s characterization of the rivalry’s class divide is corroborated by the already-cited Sullivan, Goodwin, and others, lending it some credibility.

For example, even life-long Yankees fan Peter Golenbock's nostalgia-tinged first book about the Bronx Bombers of the Stengel years backs up the essence of the Yankees' mid-century class connotations so thoroughly embraced by Oliphant's narrative. Notably, Golenbock gives his book, *Dynasty: The New York Yankees 1949-1964*, a subtitle inspired by the popular early-50s aphorism that rooting for the Yankees was like rooting for U.S. Steel.⁴⁹ The author expounds upon its decidedly corporate connotations in his memoir-like introduction where he writes,

When I was growing up in upper-middle-class suburbia, I attended private school, belonged to a country club, all my friends were white, and I rooted for the Yankees. Which only figured. I felt that the Dodgers and Giants were supported by a different kind of person—the blue-collar masses of the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn—and that somehow they were different from the Yankees and me. Later I found out that bank presidents rooted for the Dodgers and Bowery derelicts wore Yankee caps. But in many minds the powerful Yankees were seen to be the embodiment of the Establishment—a fantastically successful corporation with everyone from the owners down to the batboys working together for the good of the firm. (ix)

While the term “Establishment” had additional connotations by the time Golenbock wrote in the wake of Vietnam and the counterculture in 1975, most of the author's characterization of his own experience as a young fan is based in economic class. Building on the U.S Steel metaphor, Golenbock echoes Dodger fans in comparing the Yankees organization and its rooters to elite, upper-crust capitalists “working together for the good of the firm.” While Golenbock sides with

⁴⁹ Roger Kahn, who was then covering the Dodgers for the *New York Herald-Tribune*, described this humorous observation as “the most popular sports comment that autumn (of the 1953 World Series)” (*The Boys of Summer* 164). The saying is often attributed to comedian Joe E. Lewis (Baseball Almanac). Postwar Dodger centerfielder Duke Snider offers—possibly misremembering—a variation on the phrase in an interview for Oliphant's book, recalling, “Somebody said rooting for the Yankees was like rooting for General Motors” (224).

Goodwin over Oliphant in emphasizing that the notion that all Yankee fans were wealthy and all Dodgers fans were working-class was largely a myth, he highlights the significant role this myth played in the formation of the identities of these two clubs and especially their fans.

Willard Mullin's "Bum" Caricature and the Dodger's Working Class Persona

Perhaps the most vital evidence for the class characterization of the Dodgers-Yankees rivalry is *New York World Telegram* cartoonist Willard Mullin's personification of the Brooklyn club and her fans in a "bum" caricature and the eventual embrace of this portrayal by those fans and the organization itself. Supposedly inspired during the "Daffiness Boys" era in 1937 by a cab driver who picked up the cartoonist as he left a game at Ebbets Field and asked the cartoonist "Well, what'd dem bums do today?" Mullin began drawing a tramp, complete with patched and tattered clothing and a five o'clock shadow beard, to embody the spirit of the team and its fans (Stout 97, see fig. 4).



Fig. 4

Though originally intended to poke fun at both the team and the borough, Dodgers fans eventually embraced the image, particularly once the team improved in the 1940s, and soon "Dem Bums" became an unofficial nickname for the club.

The "Bums" theme became a common motif at Ebbets Field and in the broader network of Dodger fan culture. It was not unusual for fans to dress up like tramps themselves and this

ragamuffin style became the unofficial dress code for the fan-organized “Sym-Phony Band” that punctuated games at Ebbets Field with moments of musical humor (see fig. 5).



Fig. 5

front covers of their annual “Year Books” in the first half of the 1950s (see fig. 6), and later in 1957 hired renowned circus clown Emmet Kelly to perform before home games dressed up as a tramp, “the living personification of the Bum character” (D’Agostino and Crosby 119, see fig. 7).

But the fans were not alone in their embrace of the “Bums” image. The organization itself used illustrations of the Brooklyn Bum drawn by Mullin himself for the



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

The “Bums” nickname and image soon became well known to the national community of baseball fans at large. This fact is most clearly demonstrated by the oft-cited cartoon that appeared on the front page of the *New York Daily News* on October 5, 1955, the day after the Dodgers at long last beat the Yankees and won their first and only World Series in Brooklyn. Drawn by Leo O’ Mealia but based heavily on Mullin’s original creation, the *Daily News* cartoon showed a tramp with the tell-tale beard scruff flashing a toothless but convincingly wide grin. “Who’s a Bum!” the accompanying headline read in large letters typically reserved for declarations of war or the sinking of the Titanic (see fig. 8).

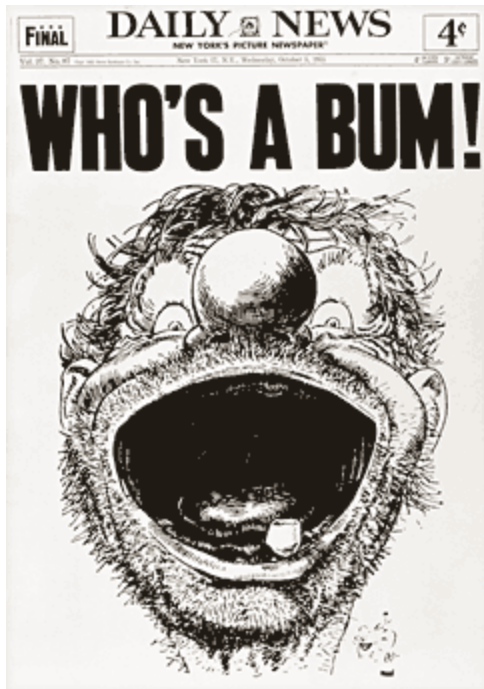


Fig. 8

The class connotations of this chosen mascot for the Brooklyn Dodgers require little in the way of explanation, yet it is important to emphasize that Dodgers fans usually wore the Bum iconography as a badge of honor. Roger Kahn maintains that the moniker “Bums” was never used as a “local term of affection” (*The Era* 16). But even if this was true and Brooklyn fans never used the *nickname* in a positive sense—and there is evidence to suggest he is wrong, such as a buttons and pennants with the Bums nickname (see fig. 9 and fig. 10)—there is ample evidence suggesting that they, along with the organization itself, embraced the Bums *image* with all of its connotations of the underclass.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

This embrace takes on additional meaning when one considers that many Brooklynites might have sensed what Dodger historian Glenn Stout argued about Mullin’s caricature, that it was not so much intended as a metaphor for the on-field fortunes of the down-and-out 1930s Dodgers—though it certainly succeeds on that level—but that Mullin’s caricature “focuses on the futility not on the field but off it, on the Depression-afflicted few who still bothered to turn out at Ebbets Field” (97). This notion of the Bum as a caricature of the Dodgers’ Brooklyn fan base is underscored by the fact that the Bum could often be seen speaking in a heavy “Brooklynese” accent/dialect. For example, a delirious Bum from a Mullin cartoon in the wake of the 1955 World Series victory exclaims, “We dood it! We beat ‘em! We beat them Yankees! We spot ‘em th’ foist two games. . . an’ we beat ‘em! That Podres! Woil’ Cham-peens! Me!” (see fig. 11).



Fig. 11

Prince offers the rationale that,

The “Bum” was never meant to denigrate the lowly. It represented at heart a lingering Depression mentality that exalted the virtue that it wasn’t what you had that mattered, but how you looked at things. In this way, it was a Dodger-focused, widely understood symbol of working-class pride; the emphasis is on class here, for one of the Bum’s roles was to mock perceived “upper class” pretensions. (105)

As Prince’s comments suggest, the self-consciously working-class aura of the Bum mascot can be thought of as a subtle form of protest aimed at the affluent, the elite, and the successful. To use Grossberg’s terminology, the Bum stood as a key signpost on the “mattering map” of cultural values for Brooklyn Dodger fans.

The cartoon implies that while the Dodgers may have at last won the championship, they remained irrevocably working class and irrevocably Brooklyn.

Why would a group of people who supposedly already had an inferiority complex related to the place they lived embrace an icon that emphasizes their economic disadvantage?

The Yankees of course, acted as an icon against which these fans protested. This is made particularly clear in some of Mullin's less famous baseball cartoons. While the cartoonist's Brooklyn Bum has achieved some level of national awareness, less well-known are his postwar illustrations of New York's two other teams, the Yankees and the Giants. Caricatures personifying all three teams are depicted together in cartoons used for the cover of a baseball season schedule distributed by The Manufacturers Trust Company throughout the New York area. In these cartoons the New York Giant is, as the nickname dictates, the tallest and largest of the three, but his largeness is portrayed as flab rather than muscle, perhaps evoking the relative decline of the franchise that was once one of the most successful in the early decades of the twentieth century. In contrast to this big but harmless oaf, and the Dodgers' short, stocky, and quintessentially scruffy Bum, the pinstriped figure representing the Yankees stands tall, neat, and muscled (fig. 12 and fig. 13).



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

The close-up facial portraits on the cover of the 1953 schedule reveals a square-jawed Yankee, perhaps bearing a slight resemblance to the All-American movie star cowboy and icon of 1950s masculinity, John Wayne (see fig. 14).



Fig. 14

Mullin does not portray the Yankees here as an extreme caricature of American wealth the same way he does the Dodgers and poverty, nor does he in the occasional cartoons for the *World-Telegram* in which the team makes an appearance. Instead, the Yankees and their success are coded as a mainstream ideal of masculinity, perhaps especially as venerated in popular military and Western narratives, whether film, pulp fiction, comics, or television.⁵⁰ By drawing on the deep connection between success and

“true” manhood as described by both Kimmel and Rotundo⁵¹, Mullin effectively portrays the mainstream postwar view of the Yankees icon as described in the previous chapter: all-American, victorious, battle-hardened, and ideal in their success. But the presence of the Dodgers Bum in these illustrations alters this perspective. To the sympathetic viewer, the masculine, idealized Yankee looks privileged and bland in comparison to the scruffy but loveable Bum.

⁵⁰ It is no coincidence that these two genres, the Western and military drama, are the two most associated with John Wayne, then and now.

⁵¹ See Chapters 2 and 3 for a more complete discussion of the ties between success and American masculinity.

It might be going too far, however, to presume it was Mullin's intention to undercut the Yankee's status or make them look elitist in his drawings. Far more likely, the cartoonist's goal was to portray the Yankees as he felt America saw them, and, in this regard, he succeeded, giving an embodied physical form to an idea that already widely existed in the popular consciousness. I would contend, however, that it *is* the aim of Brooklyn Dodger fans, if perhaps only unconsciously, to sabotage the Yankees icon, make them look elitist and privileged through their conscious adoption of the underclass "Bum" imagery. These performances challenge the Yankees' position as "all-American" or representing America in postwar era.

The Dodgers, Yankees, and the American Dream in the Postwar Era

The prominent presence of the Dodgers and their fans as a challenge to the established Yankees in postwar sporting culture suggested that America could be and was other things besides the triumphalism and near-constant success of the Bronx Bombers. And one of the more significant things that Dodgers fans implied America could be was working class. Such an assertion of a working-class identity is particularly meaningful considering the strong tendency for popular culture in the 1950s to skew increasingly middle-class and suburban in its presentation of the nation. After the crucible of economic depression and world war, many celebrated the relatively prosperous 1950s as the arrival of the long-sought "good life." It seemed to many as if the nation as a whole had "pulled itself up by its bootstraps" to achieve a life of abundance.

As cultural historian Benjamin Rader suggests, the new medium of television was particularly good at broadcasting such an image of the nation and its citizens "[bleaching] out differences" as it "[shifted] toward a world of suburban uniformity" (316). This was true

whether in domestic, suburban, and middle-class situation comedies such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966), or *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960), or in the ever-present advertisements and corporate sponsors offering an increasing variety of consumer goods and products to acquire.

In this increasingly mass-media-dominated culture focused on domestic, middle-class prosperity and the suburban “good life,” the working-class persona of the Dodgers and their fans acted as a subtle form of cultural protest. While many from the working-class *were* able to achieve middle-class status with the help of the G.I. Bill and generous home loan policies in this era, the Dodgers Bum all but declared that not all Americans had the means to buy the split-level ranch house with a white picket fence seen on television and magazine advertisements. The Dodgers served as a reminder that the triumphal postwar America the Yankees embodied was not the *only* postwar America.

Even today, the working-class identity of mid-century Dodgers fan culture can act as a powerful antidote to the popular over-generalization that the reality of America in the 1950s was reflected in the bland domesticity of *Leave It to Beaver* (1957-'63). Though the celebration of suburban abundance in such mass-media texts do accurately capture certain cultural trends and were powerful cultural influences themselves, figures like Willard Mullin’s Dodgers Bum or his fellow Brooklynite, the down-and-out bus driver Ralph Kramden from TV’s the *Honeymooners* (1951-'55), evidence that 1950s American culture was far from monolithic.

While the Dodger’s working-class connotations certainly do not challenge or overturn the American dream narrative that is so vividly embodied in the succession of rags-to-riches Yankee heroes, I would argue that they do portray it in a different context and with a different emphasis.

Though the Yankees' had an unbroken tradition of stars who lived out an Algeresque narrative beginning as young men of little means⁵², the club's long tradition of success looms over these individual stories of upward mobility. With this tradition of sustained Yankee success figuring large in the personal narrative of upward mobility for all these players, the version of the American dream conveyed by the Yankees icon places a distinct emphasis on the achieved success or "good life" at the end of the rags-to-riches journey. The disadvantaged back story of heroes like Gehrig and DiMaggio that had received some attention in popular media was always viewed through the lens of their eventual success. As such, the Yankees in the postwar era could effectively be described as an icon of the American dream *achieved*.

Though the Dodgers did not have a high-profile star with a rags-to-riches story as widely broadcast as that of Ruth, Gehrig, or DiMaggio, the collective narrative of the Brooklyn Dodgers as a team essentially dramatizes this same narrative of upward mobility, precisely in the manner that the postwar Yankees did not. Not only did the Dodgers recent history as the league's laughingstock in the 1920s and '30s make them a candidate for the all-American upward mobility saga, but the fact that they remained perennial bridesmaids from 1941 until their long-awaited World Series win in 1955 even further enhanced their cultural connotations as underdog outsiders.

As such, it could be argued that the Dodgers' variation on the mythic American dream narrative differed substantially from that of the iconic Yankees, whose version, in comparison, seemed to emphasize the good life already achieved, paralleling much of 1950s consumerist- and suburban-focused popular culture. The Brooklyn Dodgers, meanwhile, became a cultural

⁵² This includes the grand heroic lineage passed from Ruth to Gehrig to DiMaggio to their successor and son of a lowly Oklahoma zinc miner, Mickey Mantle, as well as several other immigrant's-sons-turned-Yankee-standouts such as Tony Lazzeri, Phil Rizzuto, and Yogi Berra.

symbol for and celebration of the act of *still struggling* towards the goal of upward mobility. Thus, the six World Series meetings between the Yankees and the Dodgers between '41 and '55 played out a metaphoric battle between competing perspectives on the American dream. The Dodgers acted as a reminder that, in the midst of the postwar culture of abundance and plenty, there were still many who had yet to achieve any imagined notion of the American dream.

The Yankees, Dodgers, and Race

Black Americans represented a significant number of these postwar Americans who had not achieved—nor been given the chance to achieve—any kind of mythic “good life.” Historically, this had been as true in the world of professional baseball as it was in any other American institution. As historian Jules Tygiel argues, however, with the signing of African-American Jackie Robison in 1946, Major League Baseball led the way in the nation’s long journey towards integration, preceding nearly all other key milestones in the history of American desegregation.

The whole of baseball did not embrace integration all at once and without conflict, however; individual clubs integrated one-by-one, and at their own pace. The Dodgers and the Yankees were on the opposite ends of the spectrum with regard to integration. Brooklyn president Branch Rickey put Brooklyn in the lead of desegregation. He initiated integration by signing Jackie Robinson to the Dodgers franchise and the club followed up Robison’s 1947 major-league debut with the addition of Don Newcombe and Roy Campanella in '49, Joe Black in '52, Jim Gilliam in '53, and black Cuban Sandy Amoros in '54. These acquisitions meant that in 1954 with Newcombe or Black on the pitcher’s mound and four other black players starting the game in fielding positions, the Dodgers became the first baseball club to field a team that was

a majority black. This first occurred on July 17, 1954 (Tygiel 307). Many other clubs followed suit, gradually becoming integrated to a significant degree. The Yankees were not one of them. In fact, the New York Yankees, the acknowledged kings of baseball during the era when integration took place, were among the last to integrate. When Elston Howard made his debut as the first black Yankee in 1955, only the Philadelphia Phillies, Detroit Tigers, and Boston Red Sox remained unintegrated.

A variety of contributing factors have been proposed for the cause of the Yankees' slow acceptance of integration. Certainly, the Yankees refusal to integrate was symptomatic of the American League in general, whose teams, with a few exceptions, drafted black talent less quickly and frequently when compared to the National League. Yet, David Halberstam suggests that the Yankees front office itself set the tone for this reticence (*October 1964* 54). Halberstam further argues that Yankees failure to integrate can largely be attributed to general manager George Weiss's personal views on race disseminated down through the ranks of scouts, such as Tom Greenwade, who had helped Branch Rickey in scouting Jackie Robinson, but was told by Weiss, "Now, Tom, I don't want you signing any niggers. We don't want them" (55).

Whatever the reason for the Yankee organization's hesitancy, the Yankees become the "white team" in the context of New York City baseball in the postwar era. While Brooklyn remained the league leader in integration, the Giants organization followed the Dodgers' lead, desegregating quickly and thoroughly. In 1949, Hank Thompson and Monte Irvin debuted to officially integrate the Giants. In 1951, they added Willie Mays and in that year's World Series started Major League Baseball's first all-black outfield. Thus, in the ten year period of time from 1947 through '57, an era that Roger Kahn described as "When the Yankees Dodgers and Giants

Ruled the World,” the Yankees effectively became New York’s all-white team. The success of these three New York City clubs during this period helped broadcast this

This combination of being one of the last “lily-white” teams and being the most dominant team in baseball did much to shape the Yankees’ popular image in the postwar period. This contrast was made all the clearer by the fact that they met the Dodgers so many times on baseball’s biggest national stage in such a short period. In light of the context of race and integration, these World Series battles took on aspects of sociological conflict and historical drama, anticipating and embodying the slow advance of racial integration in the United States.

In this dramatic narrative played out before the American public on the baseball diamond, the Dodgers became a symbol of integration for Americans. Oliphant captures some of this distinct role they came to fill in the national culture, writing:

The Dodgers had a unique glow because they were the team that broke the color line; not only that, they had gone way beyond this to give a still-segregated and essentially racist society one of its few glimpses of equal opportunity itself. In the African-American community Jackie Robinson was beyond hero status; and in a growing part of white America that was embarrassed by overt racism a decade after World War II, Robinson’s heroic achievement was a powerful symbol of hope that easily became affection for his integrated team. (43)

But the Dodgers were far more than just a symbol of integration. Tygiel even effectively argues that Jackie Robinson and the other black players who followed him into the majors led the way for civil rights on the ground-level, providing its advocates with “a model of peaceful transition through militant confrontation, economic pressure, and moral suasion”(9). Dodger president

Branch Rickey's signing of Robinson to a major league contract in 1946 and Robinson's major league debut the following year preceded and prefigured all of the oft-observed hallmarks of the development of the civil rights movement, including the desegregation of the military in 1948, the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision in 1954, and the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955.

The Dodgers also came to occupy an important place in the African-American community, in particular. Tygiel describes black baseball fans "[affixing] their loyalty to not only Robinson, but the Dodgers as well" (167). This loyalty in the African-American community, together with the presence of Robinson and several other black players that followed closely on his heels, effectively made Brooklyn the "black" team in the national consciousness. Though there was certainly some resistance to integration among both Dodgers players of Southern birth and white ethnic Brooklyn fans (Kahn, *The Era* 34-36, Golenbock, *Bums* 155-159), the team's association with the nation's racial outsiders generally harmonized with the cultural persona of scrappy, working-class bridesmaid underdogs it had cultivated for itself. And once again, the Yankees were there to act the perfect foil.

The Yankee-Dodger rivalry's uncanny parallel of the national struggle over integration, the main rising social conflict of the era, is perhaps its most important cultural significance. It would be both naïve and glib to presume that Dodgers fans were all integrationists and Yankees fans all holders of the line of segregation. True, Oliphant seems to imply such a neat and clean liberal/conservative split in his memoir. He characterizes Dodger fans as a coalition of the noble working class and progressive intellectuals while it seems all Yankee-supporters of the author's acquaintance are stodgy, conservative capitalists, or spoiled prep-school kids (24, 28, 93, 151). Such a representation is a reductive binary, but it does gesture towards the historic reality: the

Yankees' failure to integrate until 1955, their elitist cultural connotations among Brooklyn fans, and their literal and metaphoric role of constant spoiler of Dodger hopes and dreams on the field.

With the Yankees' all-white line-up, their continual defeat of the integrated Dodgers represented a deferral of the dream of civil rights as well. This would have been particularly and painfully true for black baseball fans, many of whom, as Tygeil suggests, had adopted the Dodgers as their team following Robinson's debut. Just as the collective hopes of African Americans for socioeconomic uplift were thwarted by the irrationality of lingering racism, so also the integrated Dodgers repeatedly, frustratingly, and sometimes inexplicably could not surmount the barrier to success the Bronx Bombers represented.

The role the Yankees played in this metaphoric racial struggle compliments Dodger fans' conceptualization of the team as the embodiment of Manhattan snobbery and upper class elitism. With these connotations of cultural, economic, and racial privilege and empowerment, for Dodger fans the Yankee icon was imagined as the essence of the established, sometimes-unjust American power structure at mid-century.

This alternate perspective on the Yankees cultural icon is a striking contrast to the heroically triumphal, patriotic postwar Yankees of Joe DiMaggio, or the Yankees that projected populist integrity through the martyred Lou Gehrig in the late 1930 and early '40s. That side of the icon, so evident in *The Pride of the Yankees* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, represented many of the most celebrated American values: democracy, hard work, a belief in the possibility of upward mobility. The perspective on the Yankees icon taken by Dodger fans and introduced to the nation at large through the media attention represents a protest of the face-value acceptance of these "mainstream" values. With ultimate success always just out of reach and with their

cultural connotations as racial and socioeconomic outsiders, the Dodgers' very existence seemed to suggest that the celebrated, bountiful postwar America represented by the Yankees had a hidden dark side. Not only was the postwar American working-class largely glossed over or ignored by a culture that increasingly celebrated itself as uniformly middle class and suburban, but, even more glaringly, racial prejudice prevented many black Americans from having any chance at entering that middle class. Notably, the government subsidies for education and housing that many lower-income white Americans took advantage of were denied to people of color (Rader 314).

The racial context of the Yankees-Dodgers rivalry adds an additional dynamic to the contrasting visions of the American dream narrative the two teams represented. As discussed earlier, the Yankees, with their strong tradition of heroes of obscure, working-class origins, are nevertheless colored by their unflagging success, making the Yankee American dream a narrative of self-made success *already achieved*. The Dodgers, meanwhile, played out a narrative of upward mobility still in the works, emphasizing struggle and effort in the face of defeat and, until their first World Series victory in 1955, an uncertain future.

These respective versions of the American dream narrative with their contrasting emphases are quite fitting of the racial profile of each club. The Yankees, with their legacy of high-profile heroes who were sons or grandsons of European immigrants—Germans, Ruth, Gehrig, and Henrich; Italians, DiMaggio, Berra, Rizzuto, and Lazzeri—roughly represent the standard popular telling of the American dream as imagined in the mid-twentieth century. The Yankees' triumphal version of this narrative, with the emphasis placed on success *achieved* is particularly fitting in the postwar era.

The crucible of World War II largely minimized the significance of the white ethnic difference of these Yankee heroes. As Hank Greenberg, the Detroit Tigers' Jewish Hall of Fame slugger during the 1930s and '40s, observed,

When you joined the army, you became an American. When I first broke into baseball, every time they wrote about me, it had something to do with my ethnic background.

When the war was over, ballplayers were no longer referred to by their religion. . . . It was an amazing change that took place. (*The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg*)

This was as true in other aspects of American society as it was in baseball. As individuals of various European backgrounds worked together in military companies and war effort assembly lines, all with the goal of defeating an enemy characterized by bigotry, those of European backgrounds that had once been held in suspicion became fully integrated into the American mainstream. Furthermore, the strong U.S. postwar economy combined with generous government policies assisting former G.I.'s and their brides with college education and buying a first home enabled many sons and grandsons of European immigrants to move from the working class into an expanding middle class. Rader describes these policies as effectively "[integrating] into the mainstream a whole chunk of society that had been living on the edge" (Rader 314).

This socioeconomic uplift of European ethnics had a racial dimension as well. As Matthew Frye Jacobson argues in his book *Whiteness of a Different Color*, the boundaries of the American concept of a mainstream white race—"its internal hierarchies, its proper boundaries, and its rightful claimants"—have changed and shifted over time "and it has been a fairly untidy affair" (5). For much of the nineteenth century many ethnic immigrant groups were not looked upon as "white," and certainly not part of the American mainstream. The early twentieth century

was then a transitional period with regard to European ethnics and whiteness. But again, by the end of World War II any lingering doubts about the “racial integrity” of European ethnics had all but disappeared. A new racial boundary had been drawn, with those appearing of European decent being considered “white” on one side of the line and people of color—those appearing to be of African, Asian, Native American or Latin American decent—on the other side (Jacobson 91-93).

Not coincidentally, these Americans of color were not only unable to enter into the privileged circle of whiteness, but racial discrimination largely prevented them from taking advantage of any of the socioeconomic opportunities of the postwar era. Thus, while the nation was collectively congratulating itself for enduring the Depression and soldiering through World War II to emerge a powerful economic dynamo, and with many able to own their own homes and think of themselves as “middle class” for the first time, such opportunity was still denied to many on the basis of racial categorization. Most prominent among such groups in the national consciousness at the time were African Americans

With Jackie Robinson and as many as four additional black Dodgers on the team’s roster, the Brooklyn club gave baseball representation to these racially and socioeconomically marginalized Americans. Their many head-to-head match-ups with the Yankees and their tradition of white ethnic heroes called into question this established mid-century conceptualization of the American dream. This most common perspective, as visibly seen in *The Pride of the Yankees*, for instance, celebrated the idea of socioeconomic upward mobility for European-descended Americans while simultaneously denying Americans of color this same right and ability. In other words, the Dodgers high profile in the postwar era all but accused a nation of hypocrisy for reveling in the rhetoric of the American dream, but still tolerating

segregation. And the Yankees were the prime example of this common perspective. The presence of the Dodgers cast the Yankee American dream as an incomplete and exclusionary American dream.

The limited cultural protest that the integrated Dodgers made was magnified by the way Jackie Robinson was placed in the heroic mold established in the mass media by Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio. A quick survey of Jackie Robinson's pop culture profile in the late 1940s and early '50s reveals a body of cultural products that closely parallels the types of popular texts that featured those Yankee heroes. Not only was Robinson's image used to sell Wheaties breakfast cereal, and plastered on the covers of both *Time* and *Life* magazines, but 1950 saw the release of a Hollywood-produced film, *The Jackie Robinson Story*, which, like nearly all of the biographical baseball movies from the period, follows the pattern of *The Pride of the Yankees* closely. Similarly, the same year also saw the publication of a six-issue series of Jackie Robinson comic books, roughly equivalent in intent and tone to DiMaggio's "autobiography" for young boys, *Lucky to be a Yankee*. Jazz legend Count Basie even wrote a song, "Did You See Jackie Robinson Hit That Ball?" that was made into a hit by singer Buddy Johnson, a development reminiscent of the time when "Joltin' Joe DiMaggio" lit up the pop charts in 1941.

Such Robinson-based cultural texts not only demonstrate the immense popularity the ballplayer achieved among black Americans as well as many white Americans, but they also evidence that Robinson was held up in the American popular consciousness in a way quite similar to and probably patterned after the great white ethnic Yankee heroes of previous decades. This is nowhere clearer than in *The Jackie Robinson Story*, where the opening narration emphasizes a young Robinson as "an *American* boy" with a "dream that is *truly American*" (emphasis added) and the closing narration similarly describes his story as "one each of us

shares.” As Robinson, easily one of the most prominent African-Americans of the postwar era, was placed firmly on the path of the popular rags-to-riches baseball hero most thoroughly and publicly trod by these white ethnic Yankee idols, the public was forced to confront the idea of the American dream in black racial context. Because Robinson filled those shoes so ably—finding success and garnering praise with his on-field exploits⁵³ as well as fully embracing the trappings of the mass media baseball hero, even playing himself in *The Jackie Robinson Story*—for many Americans, the justifications for excluding people of color from the mainstream of American society and culture likely did not hold up as well as they did during the days of the so-called “color line.” The elevation of Robinson to the same status of Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio in the popular imagination supported an argument that the old model of simultaneously celebrating a white American dream while enforcing a separate and inferior sociocultural sphere for black citizens was elitist, unjust, and outdated.

When added to Dodger fans’ conception of the Bronx-based club as elitist, the issue of race helps create an alternate perspective on the Yankees cultural icon in the postwar period. This alternative side of the Yankee icon emphasized hypocrisy, arrogance, and the abuse of power. It rendered the organization a symbol of the American establishment whose past glory loomed over and limited the success of marginalized others, but was also losing its grip on the nation’s moral conscience even as it continued to exert its power. This counter-narrative of an elitist Yankees organization that flourished in the subculture of Brooklyn Dodgers fans, would gain wider circulation in the mid-1950s and ‘60s, taking on less-localized forms and becoming more clearly an expression of a louder, rising voice of sociocultural dissent that transcended baseball.

⁵³ Robinson won Rookie of the Year in 1947, National League Most Valuable Player in 1949, and was selected as an all-star six times.

Chapter Five

“Damn Yankees”: The Popularization of Yankee Hating in the 1950s

Introduction

While Brooklyn Dodger fans watched the New York Yankees repeatedly deny their team a modest slice of victory, they were not the only ones getting fed up with the Bronx Bombers’ dominance of organized baseball. During the decade of the 1950s—particularly in response to the Yankees’ five pennants and World Series victories in a row from 1949-1953—negative portrayals of the Yankees icon became increasingly common in cultural texts on a national level. Such texts include Douglass Wallop’s novel, *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* (1954), and its Broadway adaptation, *Damn Yankees* (1955-57, film version in 1958), Mark Harris’s novel, *The Southpaw* (1953), and popular magazine articles chronicling and explaining the rising tide of Yankee-hating. While their representation of the New York ball club and cultural uses of them vary considerably, overall the negative portrayals of the Yankees in these texts are affiliated with a questioning of the vision of postwar America the Yankees icon embodied—one rooted in success and triumph in economic terms at home and military and political power abroad.

The Yankees as Antagonist in *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*

One of the most prominent examples of this groundswell of critical perspectives on the Yankees icon is Douglass Wallop’s light Faustian baseball fantasy, *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*. Not as embroiled in cultural politics as the critical portrayal of the Yankees

common in Brooklyn Dodgers fan culture, Wallop's novel nevertheless engages issues of American identity and how well the Yankees icon actually represents the nation. In contrast to the triumphal Yankees icon of Joe DiMaggio that was often celebrated as the epitome of the postwar American success story, Wallop's novel largely presents the Yankees as an oppressive antagonist in the imagination and sporting lives of sympathetic, everyday American characters. In this way, Wallop's novel—and perhaps particularly its reincarnation as the Broadway musical (1955-1957), and later, movie musical (1958)—translated some of the Dodger fans critical perspective on the Yankees icon to a popular mainstream cultural text, helping disseminate and solidify the gospel of Yankee-hating nationally.

The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant tells of middle-aged Washington, D.C. real estate salesman, Joe Boyd, a devoted fan of the Washington Senators who would love to see his hapless team win the American League pennant almost as much as he would like to see the mighty New York Yankees lose it.⁵⁴ So frustrated is Boyd, that when he is propositioned by the devil incarnate, who goes by the name of “Mr. Applegate,” he agrees to exchange his soul for a chance to be transformed into the idealized baseball hero Joe Hardy to lead his Senators to the pennant.

⁵⁵ Though largely devoid of any heavy-handed sermonizing, Wallop's light-hearted tale is largely concerned with exploring issues of wish-fulfillment versus appreciation for everyday reality. This is expressed most fully through Boyd's ever-present longing for his old life with his wife Bess, despite his strong desire to win the pennant for long-suffering Washington manager Benny van Buren, and ninety-year-old owner Adam Welch. Boyd also must override his

⁵⁴ The Senators played in the nation's capital from 1901 to 1960, when they moved to Minnesota's Twin Cities and were renamed the Twins. The Senators were not the most successful of clubs, winning the pennant only three times (1924, '25, and '33) and the World Series once (1924) during their one bright period from the mid-20s to the mid-30s. After this era, they struggled significantly and the popular aphorism about the Washington ballclub went thusly, “first in war, first in peace, and last in the American League” (Holtje).

⁵⁵ For example, Hardy pinch hits two home runs in the two games of a double header on his first day with the Senators (46). He hits for a .545 average and knocks forty-eight home runs in two months (193).

empathy for and attraction to the beautiful and kind Lola, another “lost soul” that Applegate introduces to him to distract Joe in his longing for his old domestic life.

This moral turn notwithstanding, *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* still emphasizes Boyd’s dream of the Senators at long last trumping the Yankees as not merely justifiable, but desirable, even necessary. Like Joe Boyd, readers wish they could have it both ways: we know using the escape clause in Applegate’s contract to return to Bess and home is the right thing to do, but so is beating those Yankees for van Buren, Welch, and all the long-suffering Senators fans. In the end, this is precisely the conclusion Wallop gives his readers, as with some clever counter-manipulation of Applegate by the self-sacrificing Lola, Boyd is able to help beat the Yankees in the pennant clinching game on the last day of the season as Joe Hardy *and* return home to Bess as his old self later that night.

This ending, which essentially enables Boyd and the readers to have their cake and eat it too, is testament to the negativity surrounding the novel’s portrayal of the Yankees. Rendered in a dramatically exaggerated form of reality, Wallop imagines a New York Yankees club four years in the future in 1958 that has not lost the American League pennant since 1949—nine in a row, four better than the actual Yankees’, and the Major League’s best, five in a row (1949-’53).⁵⁶ This lopsided relationship between the Bronx Bombers and the rest of the league plays such an important role in Wallop’s narrative that it is the subject of his opening sentence, which reads, “On the hot and humid night of July 21, 1958, when all signs pointed to a tenth consecutive pennant for the New York Yankees, a manhole cover rose slowly from its resting

⁵⁶ In actuality, the Yankees, fittingly, failed to win the American League the same year in which Wallop’s novel was published, 1954. Despite winning 103 games, their highest total ever under Stengel, the Bronx Bombers finished second to the Cleveland Indians, who set a new Major League record by winning 111 games, ostensibly without supernatural assistance. New York would go on, however, to win the pennant in nine out of the next ten years, faltering only in 1959.

place near the center of a certain intersection in Washington, D.C.” (7). This manhole, naturally, provides narrative entry for Applegate, the devil himself, seemingly the only being capable of ending this American League reign of terror.

This exaggerated (if at times only *slightly* exaggerated) portrayal of postwar Yankee dominance continues throughout the novel, with Boyd and other characters almost always describing the team in hyperbolic terms. For instance, when the transformed Joe Boyd first meets the Yankees on the field with his Senator teammates, Wallop writes, “It has been written that when the Yankees took the field in that decade of the 1950s, they must have appeared seven feet tall to the opposing team, and to the opposing pitcher, even taller when they strode to the plate” (82-83). And when Applegate is attempting to convince Boyd to make their Faustian bargain, he casually remarks, “Did it ever occur to you that you may even die before you see [the Senators] win the pennant again? For that matter you may die before any team other than the Yankees wins it. There’s something rather tragic about that, something very sad” (18). Later, during an intimate conversation with the love-struck Lola, she confesses that she admires his dream of defeating the Yankees, even sees it as a “worthy cause” (131), explaining,

. . . you know, it’s ridiculous in a way, but everywhere I go there’s such a real bitter antagonism against the Yankees. Even in Hong Kong. A little man asked me not long ago, ‘When will the Yankees not win the pennant?’ I said I did not know, perhaps never (131).

This exaggeration of Yankee invincibility is echoed in a sports page “letter to the editor” Boyd peruses while suffering through a televised Senators loss to the Detroit Tigers in the novel’s opening chapter. Wallop describes the letter as

. . . another in a long series of fan suggestions on how to keep the Yankees from winning another pennant. This advocated that a Yankee player hitting a home run should be compelled to circle the bases five times at top speed and thereby exhaust himself.

Yesterday somebody had suggested that the Yankees be forced to carry weights, like jockeys. It had become a game, this search, but it was a game that Joe found distasteful. To him, it was a form of cringing. (9)

This seemingly supernatural power the Yankees have over the other teams extends to include the supporters of these other clubs, namely the novel's protagonist, Joe Boyd. This is most clearly conveyed through a nightmare he has after learning of Applegate's proposal for the first time. Wallop writes,

When finally he closed his eyes he felt the turf beneath spiked shoes; it was like sponge, resilient, giving his feet wings. And he must have dozed, because he saw a monster with a bloated, insatiable face, across its swollen chest the word YANKEES. He was striking the face with a baseball bat. (27)

Boyd's animosity toward the Yankees is perhaps only matched by that of the Washington Senators' nonagenarian owner, the-white-haired Adam Welch, about whom Wallop writes, "though [Boyd] knew him only from newspaper references, he felt that he knew him intimately and for years had admired him for his spirit, his hope, his hatred of the Yankees" (63). Welch's rancor towards the Yankees is put on full display in a Senators press conference celebrating the momentous debut of the mysterious rookie Joe Hardy, where Wallop describes the scene thusly:

[Mr. Welch] sank back onto his pillow again, but was immediately up as the [New-York-based] reporter named Head sniffed and said, “You mean you think you’re going to beat the Yankees?”

“Beat the Yankees!” Mr. Welch was shaking a gnarled forefinger at Head. “You can bet your sweet life we’ll beat the Yankees. What makes you think we won’t beat the Yankees, young man?”

. . . “Why you listen to me young man,” Mr. Welch said, enraged. “If it wasn’t for just blind devil’s luck those Yankees would have dropped clear out of the League by now. They’d be down. . .

. . . down in the Three-Eye League by now, that’s where they’d be,” he managed, and then began to grope for his collar button, pulling loose his tie from the round stiff collar. Hands grasped his shoulders and pressed him gently back onto his pillow, where he sat, breathing heavily, eyes watering, but still glaring defiantly at Head. (64-66)

After Welch is calmed down, Senators manager Benny van Buren explains to the offending reporter, “Each year he thinks we’re going to lick the Yankees and he keeps on thinking it right up until the end of the season. . . . But the point is, don’t ever mention Yankees around him again. It upsets him” (67).

All of these examples gesture towards the fact that the Yankees take on a significant role in the structure and narrative design of the novel. These slightly-fictionalized Yankees act as a source of drama with the degree of intimidation and hatred they garner. And, perhaps more importantly, the dream of both Boyd and the heads of the Senators organization depends on deposing them. As such, the Yankees become one of the dual antagonists of Wallop’s novel,

with the other, of course, being the demonic Mr. Applegate. While Applegate is the more direct antagonist, the shifty, double-crossing villain that Boyd must out-manuever, the Yankees perhaps occupy a more important role. In addition to being literal opponents for Boyd and the Senators, the Yankees also act as a more abstract antagonist. As the entity that has always stood in the way of Boyd's dream of seeing the Senators win the pennant—an unrequited longing that seems to embody all of his life's frustrations (9-14)—the Yankees become the metaphoric impediment to his life's dreams and sense of fulfillment. The Bronx Bombers' role as this symbolic antagonist is affirmed by the revelation near novel's end that the demonic Applegate is a devoted Yankee supporter, and ostensibly uses his power to ensure their success. "You see, Joe, Old Man Welch was right without knowing it," the Mephistophelean figure casually remarks, "Because my first allegiance really is to the Yankees" (215-214).

Because Wallop's fantasy is rooted in recent baseball history, perhaps particularly the Yankees five consecutive World Series victories, its negative perspective on the Yankees icon has enhanced significance. A Washington, D.C. native and Senator fan, Wallop, though clearly embellishing, writes like someone who has personally known baseball hardship at the hands of the Yankees. These New York Yankees of the near future that Wallop imagines in 1954 induce such sheer intimidation in the novel's baseball fans, that the Yankees cultural icon looms large over the design of this novel. And even though it is hyperbolic fantasy, as baseball statistician and cultural pundit Bill James observes, the novel and the portrayal of the Yankees in it are still grounded in the real, the common, and even the historical (1-3). The Yankees in Wallop's novel are the same Yankees that Americans knew in 1954. They are just more so.

Like *The Pride of the Yankees* and the DiMaggio biography, *Lucky to Be a Yankee*, the title of Wallop's novel is dependent on some previous cultural knowledge about the New York

ball club.⁵⁷ All three titles are designed to depend on cultural connotations of success, but unlike the two older texts from the 1940s, *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* doesn't necessarily celebrate that success. Though by novel's end the title ends up being literal, at first encounter in the 1950s context, Wallop's chosen title seems ironic—wryly suggesting that a failure by the Bronx Bombers to win the American League would be something quite out of the ordinary. Indeed, the novel's plot, wherein a Senator fan goes to supernatural lengths to defeat the Yankees, confirms Wallop's droll commentary on the state of the American League. Crucially, the title's tone and the perspective of the novel's protagonist and other sympathetic characters make this Yankee success an annoyance (at the very least) rather than something to be celebrated. Thus, while the titles *The Pride of the Yankees* and *Lucky to Be a Yankee* depend on generally positive cultural associations, *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*, presumes negative connotations for the signifier "Yankees." It is the first major mainstream cultural text to do so, and as such can represent a turning point of sorts in the general American public's perception of the Yankees icon.

Damn Yankees and the Popularization of Yankee Hating

This is not to say that Wallop invented the concept of Yankee hating. The experience of Brooklyn Dodgers fans in the previous chapter is more than enough evidence to correct this misconception. Naturally, similar animosity towards the Bronx Bombers existed in supporters of other clubs throughout the nation.⁵⁸ But as a mainstream, mass-media text existing outside the

⁵⁷ The fact that the novel is titled *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*, and not "The Year the Senators Won the Pennant"—a scenario that in 1954 would have seemed equally as unlikely—is a testament to the continued cultural prominence of the Yankees icon. At the most basic level, as with *The Pride of the Yankees*, it was still deemed feasible to use the word "Yankees" to signify baseball to the American public.

⁵⁸ This fact is more than evident in the rash of articles about Yankee resentment in popular sports and general-interest publications during the mid-1950s. An overview of these articles will follow later on in this chapter.

confines of the subculture of Dodger fans, *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* could act as a lightning-rod of sorts for Yankee animosity as no single text had before.

This became even more evident after the book was adapted by Wallop, theater veteran George Abbott, and Broadway composers Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, into the highly successful Broadway musical *Damn Yankees*. The show opened in May of 1955, only a year after the novel's publication, and after transferring to London's West End⁵⁹ in May of 1957, ran for a transatlantic total of over a thousand performances by the time it closed in October of that year. It was nominated for nine Tony awards and won seven of them, including "Best Musical" (Internet Broadway Database).⁶⁰ The success on Broadway led to a film adaptation released in September of 1958,⁶¹ which essentially recreated the Broadway show on film, including the reprisal of lead performances by Ray Walston as Applegate and Gwen Verdon as Lola and all but three musical numbers (Erickson 142-143). The film was comparatively less successful, but nevertheless expanded the musical's—and through it, the novel's—cultural influence.

This is particularly true of *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*'s anti-Yankee sentiments, something notable considering how many of these aspects of the novel are bleached out of the musical and its film adaptation. Many of the passages bemoaning the exaggerated dominance of these slightly fictionalized Yankees do not get translated into the musical. The main exceptions are Joe Boyd's opening scene exclamation of "Those damn Yankees!" as he

⁵⁹ When the film was released in Britain, the title was changed to "What Lola Wants," ostensibly to either avoid the use of the word "damn," or to avoid the possibility that the British populace—unlike Americans, for whom "Yankees" still obviously signified baseball—might think the movie was about the American Civil war (Erickson 139).

⁶⁰ Ray Walston also won "Best Performance by a Leading Actor in a Musical" for his performance as Applegate and Gwen Verdon won in the equivalent female category for her portrayal of Lola. Choreographer Bob Fosse also won the Tony for "Best Choreography" (Internet Broadway Database).

⁶¹ Coincidentally, this was the year in which Wallop's novel was set. Unlike in the novel, the Yankees did not quite achieve the predicted nine pennants in a row, faltering in 1954. They had also lost in the World Series twice since the publication of the novel, in 1955 and 1957.

watches his team lose to the Bronx Bombers on TV (which serves as a segue to the title sequence), and a brief conversation during Boyd/Hardy's tryout about the notion of handicapping the Yankees, wherein Applegate, essentially quoting Wallop's novel, quips, "I read somewhere that they're talking about handicapping the Yankees, making them carry extra weight like racehorses." But gone is the crucial revelation of the Yankees satanic ties through Applegate's fandom, as is Adam Welch's delirious anti-Yankee tirade, and the majority of Wallop's hyperbolic asides about the Yankees' dominance.⁶²

Furthermore, while baseball remains at the center of the musical's plot and is visually prominent in the popular musical numbers "Heart" and "Shoeless Joe from Hanibal, MO," much time and attention in the musical itself, and particularly its advertising, is devoted to Gwen Verdon's character, Lola. Though, as in the novel, she is eventually revealed to be a sympathetic character, early on in the musical, Lola is portrayed as a vamping seductress, inconsistent with the character in the novel. This played-up sex appeal is particularly noticeable in Verdon's musical number, "What Lola Wants," arguably the song most popularly linked with *Damn Yankees*. A still from this number featuring Verdon with bare legs spread wide served as the dominant image for the poster for both stage (see fig. 15) and film musical (see fig. 16), neither of which feature so much as a bat, ball, glove, cap, or pinstriped uniform.⁶³

⁶² The reasons behind this muting of the critical portrayal of the Yankees are uncertain, but could possibly have something to do with Broadway's location in the heart of New York City.

⁶³ As such, *Damn Yankees* serves as an example of Erikson's comment that baseball films have occasionally been promoted in a manner deemphasizing their actual baseball content (18-19, 202-203). About the *Damn Yankees* movie poster Erikson quips it had, "No baseball to speak of, but plenty of 'selling power'" (141).

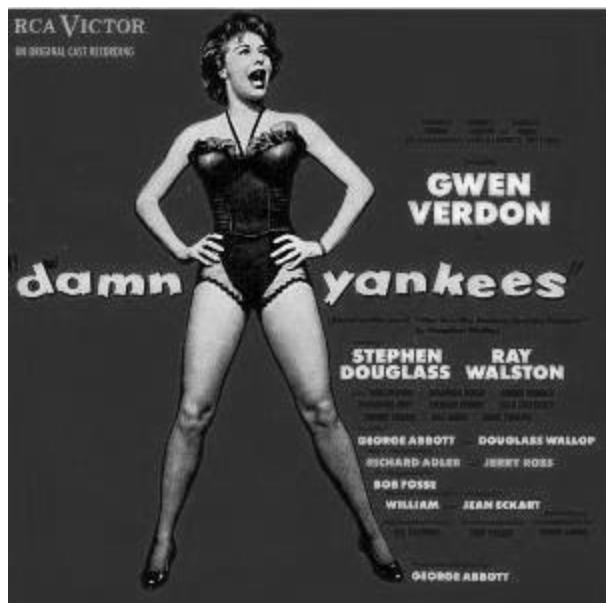


Fig. 15

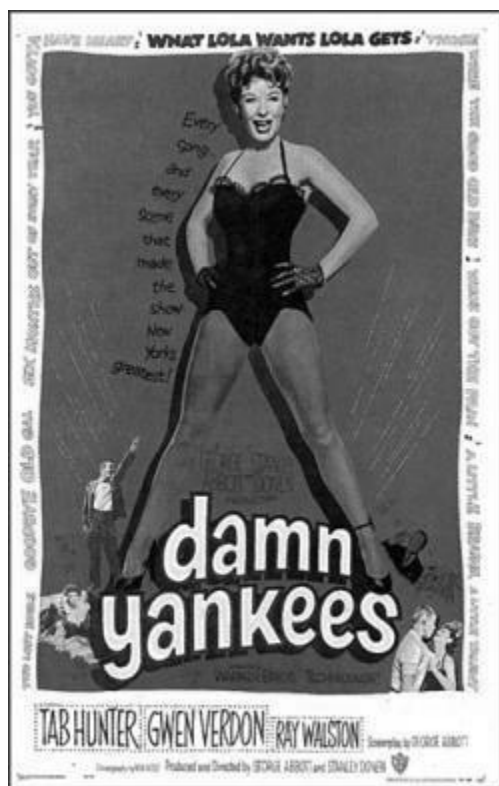


Fig. 16

This toning-down of the anti-Yankee sentiments of the novel and de-emphasis of the story's substantial baseball content, however, is somewhat countered by the change in name. As a title, "*Damn Yankees*" offers a much more critical image of the Bronx Bombers than the content of the musical does itself. As a pun on the old Southern epithet for a Northerner, *Damn Yankees*, like the title of the novel from which it was adapted, draws on the cultural prominence of the Yankees icon. Rather than wryly commenting on the ball club's dominance, however, the musical title cuts right to the chase, implying the demonic connection that its own plot denied. As the title for this Tony-award winning Broadway show and its film adaptation, "*Damn Yankees*" would be hard to overestimate in its importance in the public's overall impression of the phenomenon.

As a cultural entity, the title "*Damn Yankees*" can be seen as the answer or antidote to the "*The Pride of the Yankees*" moniker, capable of adoption as a rally cry by baseball fans wishing to speak of the Yankees using its decidedly negative connotations. This is true whether the speaker imagined the literal, biblical lineage of the word "damn" and its diabolical implications, or merely wished to link the team's name with profanity. Indeed, the number of books about the New York ball club with the phrase "damn Yankees" in the title—including *Damn Yankee: The Billy Martin Story* (1980), Muary Allen's biography of the irascible second baseman and manager, *Those Damn Yankees: the Secret Life of America's Greatest Franchise* (1999), an semi-academic critique of the late 1990s resurgence of the club, and the recent collection *Damn Yankees: Twenty-Four Major League Writers on the World's Most Loved (and Hated) Team* (2012)—testify to the impact of the musical's appropriation of the old Southern phrase on the Yankees cultural icon. It offered those who were growing weary of the Yankees' dominance of

Major League Baseball something tangible, evidence that they were far from alone in their animosity towards the club and provided a rallying cry for their cause.

Cultural Critique in *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*

In terms of sheer popular influence, the title of its musical adaptation is probably the biggest contribution *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* makes towards shaping the cultural meanings of the Yankees icon. That having been said, the novel's negative portrayal of the Yankees is not without broader implications on mid-century American culture. Though Wallop's novel does not engage the same sociocultural critique that Dodger fans' use of the Yankees icon implies, it nevertheless bears the imprint of the Dodgers/Yankees national sports drama that unfolded between 1941 and the book's publication, wherein the two talented New York City teams met in five World Series, each won by the Yankees. This is evident in the revelation near novel's end that not only is the demonic Applegate a loyal Yankees supporter, but he admits "it just so happens that I hate the Dodgers more than I love the Yankees, if you see what I mean," adding, "I couldn't stand to see those Dodgers win the World Series. Those Dodgers have never won a World Series" (246). Wallop's inclusion of the Brooklyn Dodgers—and on the opposite side of the double-crossing devil—in this fantasy that focuses primarily on the Senators and Yankees is testament to the national influence of the Dodgers, their underdog story, and fans on the increasing prevalence of negative perspectives on the Yankees icon.

Again, *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*'s negative portrayal does not contain the same social critique along lines of class, race, and regional identity contained in Dodger fans' concept of the New York Yankees. (This is despite the fact that, at the time of the novel's publication, the Yankees still had still not desegregated.) In addition to being racially white and

ostensibly devoid of any marginalizing ethnicity, Joe Boyd is also portrayed as unambiguously middle-class. Nevertheless, the Yankees antagonistic role in Wallop's novel does subtly imply some broader cultural connotations beyond jealousy at the Bronx Bombers' on-field success. Bill James's observations about the thematic role of the Yankees in the novel perhaps best communicate this significance. Drawing on some of his own personal experience as a baseball fan and as a human being, James writes,

The Yankees are the normal order of the universe. The team of my childhood was not the Washington Senators, it was the Kansas City Athletics⁶⁴. . . but six of one, half dozen of the other. . . Joe Boyd learns, in the end, that he is living the life he was meant to live, and he is most grateful to return to it. The devil and the Yankees will always be with us, but there is much to be grateful for in the lives we are meant to lead. (4-5)

James's equation of the Yankees with "the normal order of the universe" here suggests that Yankee victory—both in the American League and the World Series—is a sad, and perhaps unjust, but unavoidable fact of life. In *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*, they become a symbol of that unfairness in life we all—or presumably, at least *most* of us—experience personally. For James, Wallop's novel implies that, like Joe Boyd, who eventually rejects life as the quintessential baseball superstar to return to his humdrum life, most of us mere mortals are not destined for the celebrated glory of the monumentally successful epitomized by the mid-

⁶⁴ The Athletics' short-lived tenure in Kansas City was not a successful one. They moved from Philadelphia in 1955 and, having been purchased by the eccentric and headstrong Charles O. Finley in 1960, departed for Oakland after the 1967 season. While in Kansas City, the A's never finished higher than sixth, and finished in last place five times in those thirteen years. On top of this disappointing record, baseball historians have suggested that during the second half of the 1950s, as a result of the previously existing business relationship between Athletics owner Arnold Johnson and Yankees owners Topping and Webb, the Kansas City franchise essentially behaved as a Yankee farm club, frequently participating in lopsided trades with the New York club, giving up such valuable Yankee contributors as Roger Maris, Bobby Shantz, Hector Lopez, Clete Boyer, and Ralph Terry (Katz xiii-xv). With this in mind, Wallop's fantasy notwithstanding, perhaps it could be said that the true devil's bargain involved not the Yankees and the Senators, but the Yankees and the Kansas City Athletics.

century Yankees. But James makes the case that Wallop's novel celebrates a personal glory to be found in the unsung struggle of day-to-day existence. Perhaps our lofty dreams may go unrealized, but a truer fulfillment can be found in our relationships and dedication to career or craft.

In Wallop's novel, this concept of nobility in the everyday struggle of life is embodied not only through Joe Boyd and his wife, but in the dedication and longsuffering of owner Adam Welch, of Lola, who voluntarily returns to her old life as a homely and lonely school teacher to free Boyd from Applegate's grasp, and of Senators' manager Benny van Buren, who Wallop describes thusly,

Mr. van Buren looked . . . to Joe with eyes crinkled at the corners from many long nights of squinting at pop flies against light towers. They were they eyes of a man who had known great suffering, and Joe felt a wave of sympathy. In his playing days, Mr. van Buren had been a hell-for-leather third baseman, the best the team had ever had.

Managing a seventh-place team these five years must have been gall. (39)

Here Boyd's admiration and empathy for van Buren are tied to the manager's endurance in the face of continual defeat. It is precisely this endurance and willingness to soldier on despite their unrequited aspirations that makes these characters endearing. This is most true for the central protagonist himself, who during the course of the novel develops the empathy that puts him in the double bind of both wishing to sacrifice his dream of leading the Senators to the pennant over the Yankees to return to his wife Bess, and simultaneously wishing to sacrifice his life with Bess to help fulfill the dreams of Welch, van Buren, Lola, and all Senators fans.

Because Wallop's novel is a fantasy, we can have it both ways, with all of these longsuffering characters having their lofty dreams realized.⁶⁵ But the value the book places on everyday struggles and sacrifices of oft-defeated people suggests that this resolution is whimsical wish-fulfillment, or perhaps a metaphor for the reward everyday Americans *deserve*, but—in the real world, anyway—will never actually *have*. (For, as James suggests, in the “natural order of the universe, the Yankees will always end up on top. . .”) But these characters in *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* do have each other's empathy, support, and companionship as they struggle, sacrifice, and suffer together. If any “moral” can be culled from Wallop's light-hearted baseball fantasy, that would be it.

With this subtle celebration of the oft-unsung struggles of average Americans, Wallop not only relishes the chance to imagine an alliance between the Bronx Bombers and the devil, and fantasize about their failure, he also offers an alternate version of America to that embodied in the Yankees cultural icon. While the concepts of everyday work ethic and self-sacrifice are certainly contained within the meanings of the Yankees icon, particularly through media portrayals of Gehrig and DiMaggio, these ideas are always linked with eventual triumph. This component of success or victory to the Yankee concept of struggle and sacrifice is emblematic of the American dream, which implies that hard work inevitably leads to socioeconomic improvement. In the postwar context, this focus on success is likewise representative and reflective of a broader cultural emphasis on triumph and abundance during the period of economic prosperity and recent national military victory.

⁶⁵ Not only do the Senators finally beat the Yankees and win the pennant, but Boyd is even able to blackmail Applegate into returning to Lola the physical beauty she gave up as recompense for setting Boyd free.

But this is not the America portrayed in Wallop's novel that, as James suggests, manages to be both fantastic and simultaneously grounded in reality. In *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*, despite the dedication, hard work and sacrifice of its sympathetic characters, an other-worldly power is required in order to bring them any grand Yankee-like triumph. Like the Bum persona of the Brooklyn Dodgers and their fans, Wallop's novel celebrates struggle, not victory. Thus, without engaging directly in any discussion of politics or economics, Wallop's novel offers a subtle critique of, and counterpoint to, the postwar America of triumph and plenty embodied in the Yankees icon at mid-century.

Yankee Hating in Popular Journalism

The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant and its musical adaptation constitute the most significant text of the 1950s to represent the Yankees icon in a negative way, but they are hardly a lone voice crying in the wilderness. Rather, they represent a groundswell of anti-Yankee sentiment nationally that surfaces in American journalism as well. To a degree unmatched in previous eras, the decade of the 1950s spawned articles in both sports and common interest magazines that express serious animosity towards the New York Yankees. As one of these authors, Milton Gross asserted in his 1953 article for *Sport*, "Yet never in the history of sports has such intense feeling of animosity arisen so spontaneously among so many people in so wide an area" (Gross 10).

However, while certainly clear enough in their chronicle of growing dislike for the Yankees nationally, as a whole, this rash of anti-Yankee articles is ambivalent in its portrayal of the Yankees as a cultural icon. While some authors denounce the Bronx Bombers as haughty aristocrats, or even label them as anti-American, many others cannot help but admit jealousy and

admire the Yankees organization as the ultimate expression of the triumphal postwar, pro-capitalist American way.⁶⁶

Through the sheer number of articles published with titles like Jim Murray's "I Hate the Yankees" (*Life* 1950), this national trend of Yankee-hating seems to have been on the increase in the 1950s, particularly during and in the wake of the club's five consecutive World Series victories. But it was not the first manifestation of anti-Yankee sentiment expressed in print journalism on a national level. In February of 1939, with the Yankees having already set a new major league record by winning three World Series in a row and poised to win a fourth, *Collier's* published an article by Cleveland sports writer Gordon Cobbledick titled "Break Up the Yankees!" The connotations of trust-busting suggested by the title are echoed in the sub-headline teaser, which speaks of their "World Series monopoly" as "getting pretty monotonous" (19) and then continues throughout the piece, which cites recently-deceased owner Jacob Ruppert's "moneybags" (62) as the primary reason for the "mounting power" of the Yankees "machine" (19). Whether Cobbledick invented the phrase or merely appropriated it, "Break up the Yankees!" became something of a rallying cry among baseball fans tired of their "World Series monopoly" in the late-'30s and early-'40s (Creamer, *Baseball in '41* 23). The accusations of plutocracy that Cobbledick gives voice to here, couched, as they are, in somewhat anachronistic language from the turn-of-the-century anti-trust era, would continue to the present as part of the Yankees icon, a dark flipside to their celebrated all-American aura as portrayed in texts like *The Pride of the Yankees*.

⁶⁶ Curiously, none of these focus their criticism of the Yankees on, or even mention, their failure to integrate until eight years after the debut of Jackie Robinson, making them the thirteenth team to integrate out of sixteen Major League clubs.

But just as the cry of “Break up the Yankees!” among certain baseball fans and insiders would be drowned out by 1942’s *The Pride of the Yankees* and its big-budget, Hollywood-produced celebration of Yankee-ness as the essence of all that makes the nation great, so also was Cobbledick’s article answered with an opposing perspective on the Yankees icon. The following month, the magazine followed up Cobbledick’s article with Rud Rennie’s interview of the late Col. Ruppert, wherein he defends his club, predictably using the rhetoric of American free-market capitalism. Bluntly titled, “Stop Squawking!,” Rennie’s account of Ruppert’s defense celebrates the Yankees as a successful business, quoting the Colonel, “It is true that money is necessary to operate a baseball club. It is necessary to any business. But money alone does not bring success. You must also have brains, organization and enterprise. Then you’ve got something” (61). The article further suggests, in the spirit of capitalist competition, that “enterprise and initiative would die” if attempts were made to even the playing field by instituting an amateur/minor league draft, as Cobbledick suggests (63).⁶⁷ Instead, Rennie quotes Ruppert as insisting “the Yankee organization is showing the way to better baseball” and suggesting that other organizations “stop squawking and start hustling” (61).

This somewhat heated *Collier’s* dialogue is rich not only with discussion about the Yankees, their role in baseball and cultural significance, but also with discussion on the relative merits of free-market capitalism. However, after Rudd’s article, the debate over the merits of the Yankees in national magazines comes to an abrupt halt. During the decade of the 1940s, nary a single anti-Yankees article or Yankees defense was published in a major national periodical. Perhaps the feeling was that everything that needed to be said had already been captured in Cobbledick’s article and Ruppert’s response to his critics. Perhaps the onset of the World War

⁶⁷ Indeed, in 1965, this is exactly what happened, and as Jack Mann suggests, likely contributed to the Yankees’ decline (18, 22-26).

and baseball's direct participation in that military conflict diverted attention to other matters. Or perhaps the fact that other teams, notably the St. Louis Cardinals,⁶⁸ brought an end to the Yankees late-'30s "monopoly" led baseball fans to dismiss theories of Yankee dominance such as Cobbledick's.

Whatever the reason, this public manifestation of Yankee animosity was not reignited until after the Bronx Bomber's return to American League pennant and World Series glory in 1947, and after their dramatic DiMaggio-led comeback to capture the 1949 pennant from the Red Sox followed by another Series victory. When the tide of Yankee-hating did return and swelled to new heights, it was generally received as something new and different from the protest of the late 1930s. As Charles Einstein, of one the authors of this influx of articles chronicling the national increase in Yankee-hating in the 1950s argued:

True, Yankee dominance of the American League is an old story, but the anti-Yankee feeling among fans is new. When Joe McCarthy was earning his reputation as a "push-button manager" with his pennant winners of the late Thirties and early Forties, the cry of "Break up the Yankees" was heard in the land, but in those days it meant what it said and nothing more. (96-98)

The first sign in the national mass-media of this marked increase in animosity towards the Yankees came in the form of Jim Murray's economically titled article "I Hate the Yankees" in the April 17, 1950 edition of *Life* magazine. In this first of many such articles, the Los Angeles-based sportswriter Murray essentially follows the model established by Cobbledick a decade before. He chalks up Yankee success to the organization's wealth, focusing particularly on the

⁶⁸ The Cardinals won the National League pennant and the World series in 1942, '44, and '46, even beating the Yankees in a head to head match up in the '42 World Series, the first time the Yanks had dropped a Series since 1926 (also to the Cardinals).

ticket receipts from their high attendance figures, asserting, “. . . the Yankees were and are superchampions for the same reason General Motors or U.S. Steel or Standard Oil are superbusinesses. They have more fans paying more money than any other club in the history of the game” (28).

In some ways Murray’s comparison of the Yankees to these “superbusinesses”—particularly U.S. Steel and Standard Oil and their respective association with the prototypical robber barons, Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller—seems even more anachronistic than Cobblestick’s trust-busting language in his 1939 article. While in 1939, with the nation still feeling the effects of the Great Depression, Cobblestick’s turn-of-the-century anti-trust language certainly may have had political and cultural relevance for many readers, in 1950, Murray is writing for a very different America. The twin influences of the postwar economic boom and anticommunism generally made the United States of 1950 decidedly more pro-business than when Cobblestick was writing (Rader 308-310, 313-318).

While Murray’s somewhat anachronistic choice of “big business” icons certainly doesn’t damage his argument against the Yankees beyond repair, or lessen the impact his article may have had on the Yankees cultural icon—particularly with that frank title “I Hate the Yankees”—it does perhaps predict the mixed messages that would characterize many of the anti-Yankee articles that would follow. Of the six articles in major national publications over approximately the next decade that either critique the Yankees or chronicle Yankee antipathy, only two adopt Murray’s stance in accusing the Bronx Bombers of plutocracy.

In the first of these, Milton Gross’s “Why They Hate the Yankees” published in the September, 1953 issue of *Sport*, goes beyond Murray’s accusations of the Yankees having an

unfair financial advantage,⁶⁹ and borrows from the Brooklyn Dodger fan's characterization of the Yankees, condemning them as snobbish aristocrats. Gross writes, ". . . instead of displaying the manners and grace of a champion, there have been too many times when [the Yankees] have exhibited the stuffy haughtiness of the self-styled aristocrat" (80). But Gross goes one step further, suggesting that, supposedly unlike in previous eras of Yankee success in the 1920s, '30s and early '40s, the postwar Yankees abuse their power, eliciting "strong resentment over the suspicion that [they] also dominate the league headquarters and umpires, the feeling that they are prissy, petty, boastful, and arrogant, and, at the same time, fearful that everyone is acting in concert against them" (80).

Four years later, Charles Einstein similarly associates the Yankees with abuse of power in his September, 1957 piece for *New York Times Magazine*, "The Yankees: There Oughta Be a Law." Einstein starts his article in a manner that echoes Jim Murray, light-heartedly suggesting that a congressional investigation evaluating Major League Baseball for "monopolistic characteristics," will inevitably result in a "law against the New York Yankees" (96).⁷⁰ Einstein, however, does not continue along Murray's wealth-begets-success argument. Nor does he accuse the Yankees of exercising undue influence in organized baseball like Gross. In fact, Einstein largely leaves the economics and business of baseball alone, instead focusing more than any other anti-Yankee article from this era, on the Yankees' cultural meaning. And in doing so, he, like Gross, continues in the vein of Dodger fans, writing,

⁶⁹ The gravity of this advantage is actually disputed by several writers of these anti-Yankee articles from this period, including Dexter (30), Cohane (60), and Wallop (76-78).

⁷⁰ Einstein also references *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* and *Damn Yankees* as evidence of the degree to which Yankee hatred has captured the nation, a testament to the cultural influence of Wallop's novel and its musical adaptation.

There is here an element of the blueblood against the serf, and Yankee fans as a breed often do what they can to encourage it. More Cadillacs roll up to the gates of Yankee Stadium than any other park, and within the stadium itself, yet away from the primeval unrest of the field, is a swank, pastel-hued Stadium Club where noble members may wine while the players and bleacherites sweat. (96)

Einstein is less interested in whether or not the Yankees are “good for baseball” and more interested in why they had recently garnered such hatred. As indicated in the above passage, he concludes that issues of success and class are at the heart of the 1950s boom in Yankee hating. Like the use of the Yankees icon by Brooklyn Dodger fans, Einstein’s portrayal of the Yankees and their fans is particularly interesting in the context of triumphal and consumptionist-minded postwar United States. Both constitute a subtle critique of the American tendency to portray their postwar society as a paradise won, abundant with luxurious consumer goods to be enjoyed by all. For both the Yankee-hating Dodger fan and Einstein, the Yankees act as a reminder that class lines still exist in this supposed paradise, that the wealthy still separate themselves from and look down on their socioeconomic inferiors.

Einstein takes this elitist characterization of the Yankees further, ascribing to the club a “philosophy of triumph” that has created a disconnect between them and many Americans. He writes,

Perhaps the philosophy of triumph has something to do with the anti-Yankee feeling that predominates today. When you win the jackpot on a slot machine at Vegas it is considered only right to put one more coin back into the machine. This is known as “taking the winner off.”

The New York Yankees never take the winner off if they can possibly help it. They just collect. A trifle bitterly, we might say more power to them. Trouble is, they've already got more power. (68)

Here, Einstein characterizes the Yankees relentless pursuit of victory as alienating to many Americans, who, ostensibly, value some things over—or at least in addition to—winning, even when it comes to sports. He cites the growing national hatred of the Bronx Bombers as exhibit A for this facet of the American psyche, arguing, “. . . if it is true that the world loves a winner, then the U.S. must be functioning in another world, because the most common breed of homo fan to be found is the Yankee hater” (96). Though apparently lost on its author, Einstein's semi-tongue-in-cheek remark that people in the U.S. must be different than the rest of the world in not loving a winner is heavy with irony considering that, during the 1950s, in many ways the United States was the world's ultimate winner.

Thus, though the author may not have made this connection between the Yankees and the nation as a whole himself, Einstein's portrayal of the Yankees icon, and indeed the apparently growing practice of Yankee hating itself can be read as cutting against the grain of the consensus celebration of American triumph and abundance in the postwar period. While Yankee-hating baseball fans, like Einstein, may not have seen similarities between the successful New York ball club and their nation as a world power, their rejection of the Yankees still constitutes a rejection of “the philosophy of triumph,” which only a decade later would be applied with zeal to American businesses, government, military, and the nation as a whole. And, as will be shown in the next chapter, many would, not coincidentally, see the Yankees as the embodiment of this America that was abusing its power.

This tendency for Americans not to see their nation as a whole in their critique of Yankee triumphalism—despite the fact that texts like *The Pride of the Yankees* had long established the practice of using the Yankees icon as a positive symbol for the nation—is borne out in the ambivalence of the remaining anti-Yankee articles. In these pieces of popular journalism, the authors all either intend to chronicle the growing animosity towards the Yanks among baseball fans, or state their own case against the club, but each ends up praising the Bronx Bombers at least in part, because they remain committed to the postwar ideals of American greatness that also make up the foundation of Yankee success.

The most one-sided in this regard is Charles Dexter's 1954 article for *Sport*, "New Reign of Terror," whose title suggests a sympathetic perspective toward other baseball teams and their Yankee-hating fans. But the reality is that Dexter only acknowledges the rise of animosity toward the Yanks so he can dismiss it as sour grapes, and celebrate the Yankees hard-earned success. To detractors he asserts,

The fact is, of course, that the Yankees are just another squad of skilled professional athletes organized in much the same manner as any other major-league club. They do not use magic. They spend no more than some of their well-heeled rivals. . .

It does happen, however, that the Yankees benefit from certain intangibles, such as a long tradition of victory and the confidence which results from it. Youngsters who plan a career in baseball are naturally attracted to a team which has won 20 pennants in 33 seasons. Yankee players naturally aspire to emulate the feats of their famous predecessors. A rookie gains aggressiveness as he realizes he wears the uniform of a champion. (30).

Here, Dexter's glowing discussion of "emulating the feats" of "predecessors," and the "intangible" effect the "uniform of a champion" has on a young player captures the essence of the traditional view of the Yankees icon, with obvious parallels to the ambiguous, patriotic rhetoric that often accompanies exceptionalist celebrations of the American nation. Certain symbols and signifiers need only be exchanged—the Yankees pin-striped "uniform of a champion" for the flag, or perhaps the image of the flag on a soldier's uniform—and much of Dexter's language would be instantly transferable to the national cause.

Dexter even seeks to further the Yankees status as a national emblem, by attributing populism and an everyman quality to their fan base. Writing contrary to the characterization of mid-century Yankee fans by Goodwin (63), Oliphant (24, 28, 202, 223), and Einstein (96), Dexter describes Yankee fans thusly, "The Yankee fan is faceless and nameless. He comes from all levels of society, from all parts of the nation, and even from foreign lands. He is a relative newcomer to the game whose Yankee interests may not go back any further than 1947" (89). Here Dexter puts a positive spin on the type of fan that most self-respecting Dodger or Giant fans (and indeed, likely many loyal Yankee fans as well) in 1954 would describe as a "frontrunner" or a "bandwagon fan," by emphasizing the democratic aspect of this mass appeal. With this gesture, Dexter counters the accusation of elitism and emphasizes the nationalistic connotations of the Yankees cultural icon, in the face of growing antagonism.⁷¹

Like Dexter, New York sports writer veteran Roscoe McGowen writes an article that, in chronicling the trend of Yankee-hating, ends up primarily rebutting the phenomenon.

McGowen's "Baseball Yes! Yankees No!," published in the 1961 edition of *Street and Smith's*

⁷¹ Dexter characterizes Dodger fans as "a guy called Gus, raucous and bellicose, ready to fight for his Bums all the way from Red Hook to Coney Island," while his prototypical Giant fan is "an old New Yorker, disdainful of modern ways, steeped in the victory tradition of John McGraw and partly disillusioned today" (89).

Baseball Yearbook, constitutes the last major publication of this group of articles describing animosity toward the Bronx team. Less romantic about the mythology surrounding the Yankees cultural icon than Dexter, McGowen nevertheless characterizes Yankee-hating baseball fans like Montana cattle baron Albert Kochivar, “who, at the opening of the 1959 season, offered a hunting trip at his ranch to any American League team ‘doing the most’ to beat the Yankees out of the pennant,” (49) as “unreasoning. . . fanatic(s)” (46).⁷² McGowen dismisses animosity among baseball fans for the Yankees as jealousy, possibly influenced by a “colossal inferiority complex about New York City” (48) and offers this rebuttal intended to end all arguments,

Any man who knocks another’s success and denies that the other’s ability was responsible for his achieving it inevitably lays himself open to the i.c. charge. He is like Aesop’s fox, which couldn’t reach the grapes. And as that sage slave said, “It is easy to despise what you cannot get.” (49)

McGowen makes no direct reference to the capitalist free market system or the individualism implied in the American dream, but considering the anti-communist postwar context in which he writes, this broader cultural milieu is certainly relevant. Thus, with these comments of defense, McGowen, like Dexter, entrenches the Yankees more fully as a national icon of the mid-century American values and success.

Though not quite as one-sided, Tim Cohane’s publication in the general interest magazine, *Look*, in June of 1953, titled “You Can’t Beat the Yanks with Pop Bottles,” also sets out chronicling the rising tide of Yankee animosity, but like Dexter, in the end heaps more admiration in the direction of the New York club. On one hand, after describing signs of the

⁷² The 1959 American League pennant was won by the Chicago White Sox, only the second team to beat the Yankees (who surprisingly finished a distant third) in the A.L. race during the decade, and the first to do so since 1954. McGowen makes no comment as to whether Kochivar made good on his promise.

increasing prevalence of Yankee-hating nationally—including fans aiming pop bottles at Yankee outfielders in St. Louis and bitter editorials in local New England papers (57)—Cohane offers a stinging characterization of Yankee “fans” reminiscent of Bill James’s reading of *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*. Cohane writes,

There aren’t many Yankee fans. There a millions of Yankee followers. A fan and a follower aren’t the same. A fan’s attachment to his team is strengthened and purified in the crucible of disappointment that makes an occasional sip of the pennant potion all the more delectable. A follower follows the Yankees—Notre Dame’s football teams also have more followers than fans—because they almost always win.

Nourished on steady victory, a Yankee follower risks the danger of developing a spurious sense of values. He begins thinking that life is all nuts and whey. He may even get to thinking that nature itself has conspired to keep him happy. (59-60)

In these comments Cohane echoes Wallop’s novel in finding nobility in an existence defined more by struggle and defeat than by victory, granting some cultural superiority to supporters of other clubs over Yankee “followers.” Again, though he makes no attempt to compare this world of success in baseball fandom to broader issues of the global role of the United States, Cohane’s comments on “steady victory” cut against the cultural grain of triumphalist postwar America and its economic plenty, even if neither he nor most baseball fans would consciously make such a connection.

Nevertheless, Cohane is ultimately swayed by the lure of the Yankees icon and their embodiment of this same version of America. After refuting accusations of favoritism by umpires (60), Cohane not only dismisses suggestions that the Yankees’ wealth gives them an

unfair advantage, but lauds the organization for skillfully utilizing resources to their own advantage, writing, “Money alone didn’t make the Yankees. Detroit and Boston haven’t lacked money. The Yankees put theirs to better use. They secure the best front-office direction, the top players, and the most astute field managers” (60). Later, Cohane’s mounting admiration for the Yankees organization reaches its pinnacle with his description of outfielder Hank Bauer, whose qualities of being “obsessed with finishing first” and “willing to make all the sacrifices it demands” (67) are identified by the author as typifying the Yankee and the reasons for their success. Cohane writes,

Bauer represents a level of player found in all championship units: not quite up to top-billing, but providing much of the cement or glue indispensable to the structure. . . .

The kind of man Bauer is can be appreciated from his war record. He was a sergeant in the 4th Raider Battalion of the Marines, and twice decorated for valor. . . . During his war service, he had 23 attacks of malaria and suffered from battle fatigue and shrapnel wounds.

His face is tan, his nose is dented, his eyes a cold hazel. His short brown hair is brushed back and parted on the side. His belly is flat and his muscles are hard. In a battle or a ball game, a good man to have on your side. (67)

Cohane’s admiration for the Yankees organization here reveals an investment in postwar America for which the team is emblematic. He first admires their efficiency and success as a well-run business and then celebrates their heroic, self-sacrificing masculinity and populist team play that he believes make such success possible. In short, Cohane, despite leveling a serious critique of the mentality fostered by the “steady victory” to be found in Yankee fandom, cannot

bring himself to join the Yankee-haters because he believes too firmly in the mid-century values for which the Yankees had become a totem.

Most conflicted and perhaps most telling of the ambivalence the American populace as a whole felt toward the success of the Yankees in the 1950s, is a Yankee-hating article penned by none other than the author of *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*, himself, Douglass Wallop. In “How the Yankees Got that Way” (1956), written for *New York Times Magazine* during the middle of *Damn Yankees*’ successful run on Broadway, Wallop begins echoing the hyperbolic anti-Yankee venom found on the pages of his novel.⁷³ He describes the Yankees as “a dynasty beginning to take rank with the Bourbon, the Hapsburg, the Carolingian, the Ming, and the Egyptian eighteenth,” and asserts that, “Any historian worth the name will record that the New York Yankees are exasperating, irritating and, if not downright un-American, certainly disruptive of American institutions” (26).

Wallop’s humorous accusation that the Yankees are “un-American” is ironic, considering how closely aligned the Yankees cultural icon was with the prevailing values of the mid-postwar American populace, as shown by the previous three authors here analyzed. And tellingly, Wallop offers no elaboration or explanation for his comment, simply allowing the article to trail off on that topic, rendering it an example of humorous overstatement.⁷⁴ But as Wallop continues attempting to explain why these hated Yankees have achieved the position they have, the author reveals just how quintessentially American they are.

⁷³ He also makes allusion to his own novel referring to “one desperate fan” willing to “barter his soul to devil for the talent needed to snap a Yankee pennant streak” and engages in “paraphrasing a Broadway musical” (which he co-wrote) to suggest “forcing the Yankees to carry extra weight, like jockeys” (26).

⁷⁴ As will be argued in the following chapter, in the late-1960s some might take such an “un-American” accusation seriously, using the Yankees as the embodiment of everything wrong with a country they believed to have betrayed its true heritage.

In delineating Yankee success, Wallop joins many of his colleagues in dismissing the argument that the Yankee's power springs from the club wealth (76-78), but instead points towards the quality of their business organization, from the club's general manager at the top to the scouts and farm teams at its base (78). With this somewhat jealous admiration for the Yankees as a well-run business, Wallop echoes Cohane, and reveals his own investment in the postwar American culture and its anti-communist influences that highly valued success in business and held that an individual's or company's triumphs were wholly the result of their own honest efforts. Along these same lines, even though he remains insistent that the prolonged Yankee dominance is *not* good for baseball (78), Wallop does not, as Cobbledick did in 1939, suggest that the structure and rules governing Major League Baseball as a business should be altered to be more egalitarian. Instead, he maintains his unspoken—and perhaps unconscious—commitment to the American free market in stating that the only way to “bring the Yankees down to size” is for other teams to “get better ball players than the Yankees have got” (78).

Perhaps an even bigger surprise, however, is Wallop's admission that he is “NOT a Yankee fan” but is “a Yankee admirer” (78). From the man responsible for the most prominent Yankee-hating text of the decade, this comes as quite the confession. His ambivalence is indicative of the strength of the Yankees icon's ties to the cultural values of the postwar period. For many Americans like Wallop, something felt fundamentally wrong about one team dominating organized baseball the way the Yankees did in the 1950s. Nevertheless, their beliefs in the rhetoric of an America triumphant in world military conflict and free-market economic plenty made joining the Brooklyn Dodger fans and others in actually *hating* the Yankees, who remained a vibrant cultural icon for this successful postwar America, somewhat difficult.

The Yankees Icon in *The Southpaw*

While the popular journalism chronicling the rising tide of Yankee hating only occasionally made conscious reference to broader cultural connotations that the team had acquired, in 1953, the year the Bronx Bombers won their fifth consecutive pennant and World Series, a novel was published that purposefully utilized the Yankees icon to embody the postwar nation. In stark contrast to *The Pride of the Yankees*, this novel, *The Southpaw* by Mark Harris, employs the Yankees as a metaphor for everything its author thought was *wrong* with postwar America. Through Harris's use of the Yankees icon, the book portrays postwar America as tainted and compromised by a prevailing conformism, an over-emphasis on success, and an obsession with romanticized notions of its own past.

Mark Harris's *The Southpaw* is the first of four novels featuring the protagonist Henry Wiggen, who Norman Lavers describes as a plain-spoken wise-fool that follows "an established literary tradition which dates at least to Huck Finn, of the naïve and semiliterate narrator telling his story in his own language" (37). In this first novel, Wiggen leaves his father's small-town farm in upstate New York, where he pitched in high school, to join the fictional New York Mammoths, a wealthy, successful, tradition-rich, and talent-laden club that acts as a thin disguise for none other than the New York Yankees.

While Harris's Mammoths aren't necessarily the real-life Yankees lifted directly from Major league Baseball's history and given a different name,⁷⁵ this fictional club occupies the same role of a storied, traditional powerhouse in their fictional professional league that the Yankees filled in the real-life Major Leagues at the time. For instance, early in the novel, Wiggen reminisces about the dominance of the Mammoths of his childhood, ostensibly in the late 1930s or '40s when there were "several years running when the Mammoths was in the

⁷⁵ In fact, the nickname "Mammoths" evokes the New York *Giants* more than it does the Yankees.

Series” (30), a streak that evokes the Yankees then-unmatched string of four World Series championships in a row from 1936-’39.

While this position of a storied New York franchise that seems to be the league’s most dominant stands as the biggest reason the Mammoths would be remind readers of the Yankees, there are a host of other details that confirm this strong comparison. Like the Yankees, the Mammoths have strong rivalries with both the Brooklyn and Boston franchises of their fictional world (Harris 209).⁷⁶ Like the Yankees, the Mammoths play in an “elegant” (189) stadium that on the occasion of big games can accommodate “80,000 [spectators] if need be” (Harris 50, Fromer 34, 43, 55). Like the Yankees, who were famously owned by Beer Baron Jacob Ruppert whose deep pockets lifted the club from obscurity to greatness (Creamer, *Baseball in ‘41* 61-62), the Mammoths are owned by an equally wealthy president of Moors Motor Company, Lester T. Moors, Jr. (Harris 66, 99). Despite this wealth, the Mammoth’s upper management, like the Yankees general managers Ed Barrow (1920-1945) and George Weiss (1947-1960), has a reputation for tightfistedness (Harris 101, Cramer 68-69, 73, 105, Kahn, *The Era* 209). Finally, Harris describes the Mammoths as frequenting a bar and grill owned by real-life Manhattan restaurateur Toots Shor (285), whose establishment was a legendary hang-out for Yankees players in the 1940s and ‘50s, particularly stars Joe DiMaggio and Mickey Mantle (Cramer 112-113, Leavy 77).⁷⁷

⁷⁶ The professional league that Harris’s fictional Mammoths play in appears to be an interesting amalgam of the American and National Leagues, with teams in Brooklyn and Pittsburgh (National League cities), Cleveland, and Washington (American League cities), as well as New York, Boston, St. Louis, and Chicago (who at the time the novel was published, all had a team in both leagues). The Mammoths play Philadelphia (another city then having a team in each league) in the World Series. Excepting the Mammoths, none of the other major league clubs is ever referred to by a nickname, either fictional or historical. As a child, Wigger’s fascination with baseball leads him to unsuccessfully look for books in his local library with the words “Giants,” “Yankee,” “Reds,” and “Senators’ and such” (31), so it would seem these teams exist in some form in Harris’s baseball universe, just as real life figures Carl Hubbell (14), John McGraw, Ty Cobb, Shoeless Joe Jackson, Babe Ruth, and Walter Johnson (169).

⁷⁷ One significant way in which the Mammoths differ from the 1953 Yankees is that they are integrated, beating the real-life Yankees by two years.

Additionally, while not a precise roman-a-clef, Harris endows the Mammoths with two characters who seem modeled after two of the most famous Yankees. When Wiggen joins the Mammoths he becomes acquainted with their most famous player, the aging “Sad” Sam Yale, who bears a strong resemblance to Yankee figurehead Babe Ruth with struggles to keep his weight down (Harris 85-86) and a tendency to run himself ragged with his drinking and womanizing (118-119) that are kept out of his bowdlerized image in the press, particularly in his moralistic biography for boys (238). Even the name of the book, *Sam Yale—Mammoth*, though not directly connected to Ruth, nevertheless evokes the Yankees with its dependence on the signifier “Mammoth” to communicate something about its subject—ostensibly heroism and excellence—just like Joe DiMaggio’s famous sanitized biography *Lucky to Be a Yankee*.

Similarly, when Wiggen joins the club he meets the Mammoth’s famous manager Dutch Schnell, who alternately exhibits a resolute sternness and a whimsical, folksy, yet wry sense of humor, much like the legendary Yankee manager at the time of writing, Casey Stengel, who was also nicknamed “Dutch” (Kahn, *The Era* 163). Schnell’s Stengel-like drollness is evident in narrator Wiggen’s descriptions of numerous of the Mammoth manager’s pronouncements as “real sarcastic” (171, 244), and his penchant for telling “funny stories” (169). In one instance, when Schnell is informed in the clubhouse that the team will be paid a visit by Patricia Moors, Mammoth’s executive and daughter of team Owner Lester Moors, he deadpans, “She will have to wait until I am done pissing” (177). Later, when Wiggen is preparing to visit a teammate in the hospital to deliver the \$150 prize of a clubhouse pool, he mentions that, “Dutch . . . told me go straight to the hospital and not get tangled up with any young ladies along the way. This brung another terrific laugh” (333). Such utterances, balancing sarcasm, a certain home-spun folksiness, and an occasional modicum of vulgarity, would be right at home with some of

Stengel's famous quotes, including what Jack Mann describes as the "Stengel standard" often delivered to sports writers, "You're full of ——, and I'll tell you why" (101), or his observation that "most people my age are dead" (99).

Again, while Harris's novel is not intended as a roman-a-clef, the allusion to these two legendary figures, Ruth and Stengel, then so intertwined with the public's notion of the Yankees past and present, respectively solidify the likelihood of readers linking the Mammoths with the real-life Yankees organization. The connection between Harris's fictional club and the Major League's Yankees is important because it implies a more direct interaction between the novel and its themes and the existing reality of contemporary professional baseball in America, particularly the Yankees as an institution and American cultural icon.

Challenging the Yankee Heroic Legacy

With the Mammoths' strong Yankee parallels in mind, it is significant that as Wigger acclimatizes to life with the club, he becomes disenchanted with the reality of the team he idolized as a boy. This is perhaps most readily embodied in the person of the Ruth-like "Sad" Sam Yale, the Mammoth's left-handed hurler whose picture hung above the young Henry's bed. As mentioned, Henry's fascination with Yale is fed by a sanitized biography, a fictional parallel of such biographies of real Major Leaguers, perhaps especially the popular *Lucky to Be a Yankee* and early biographies of Ruth. Harris mimics the highly idealized and moralistic content and style of such books, writing,

My name is Samuel (Sad Sam) Yale. I was born in Houston, Texas, on March 13, 1918.

I had the good fortune of becoming a member of the world-famed New York Mammoths five years ago. . . .

This book is written in the hope that every American boy now playing the great game of baseball in his home town, wherever that may be, will take inspiration from my straightforward story. . . . His success or failure . . . depends on him and him alone.

I have three simple rules which I live by:

1. Take the game seriously. . .
2. Live a clean life, shunning tobacco and liquor in all forms.
3. Follow the instruction of you high-school coach. . .

Most important, have faith in yourself, for the road lies before you, and success will be yours. By the grace of God you will succeed. (33)

The young Wiggen's naïve, wholesale acceptance of this platitudinous prose feeds his goals of becoming a Mammoth himself one day and his heroic, idealized concept of baseball life. He narrates, "I studied the words over and over again, and the picture, and I knowed that moment and ever more that some day I would be a Mammoth and all my dreams come true" (33).

While Ruth is the most obvious historical reference point for the character of Sam Yale, Harris's chosen title for his youth-oriented biography, *Sam Yale—Mammoth*, and its evocation of the famous DiMaggio biography, added to the fact that the novel was written and published contemporary to his retirement, make the revered "Yankee Clipper" an relevant figure as well. Both cases evoke the Yankees organization. While the Yankees hardly had a monopoly on the sanitized baseball hero, their concept of a legacy of such heroes, which the organization itself promoted through practices like the aforementioned monuments to Ruth, Gehrig, and Manager Miller Huggins, was unique within Major League Baseball. This would have been particularly true at the time of *The Southpaw*'s publication in 1953, when discussions of Mickey Mantle as a potential heir to the Yankee legacy of Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio enhanced the public profile

of this legacy of heroism.⁷⁸ Harris parallels this concept of what we might call a “heroic brand” today, with the announcement near season’s end by Sam Yale’s ghostwriter Krazy Kress that “Dutch Schnell will work on a book this winter. Look for it in April. Title: ‘Dutch Schnell—Mammoth’” (343).

Considering Harris’s evocation of this publicly prominent legacy of the Yankee Hero and the manner in which the Mammoths parallel the Bronx Bombers in baseball success and other smaller ways, when his protagonist learns the truth about Sam Yale, it is not just a refutation of the naïve acceptance of romanticized baseball heroes, but a specific critique of the Yankee Hero at the heart of the Bronx Bomber’s iconic cultural meaning.

This debunking of the (Yankee) baseball hero through the eyes of the narrator is thorough and somewhat embittered. After learning that Sam Yale’s heroic persona is a fiction crafted by sports journalists who ignored the wild nightlife of drinking and womanizing of the nation’s chosen star, Wiggen comments, “Such corny crap as that is all behind me now. I ain’t even interested in Sad Sam Yale no more. You spend a long period with a fellow and he stops being a hero all of a sudden. Sam ain’t all he is cracked up to be. But I didn’t know it then. I wasn’t but a kid” (35).

Wiggen’s comment about “a fellow” ceasing to be heroic once one has spent enough time with him is perhaps a more philosophical critique of the concept of heroes in general, but the ramifications of the baseball context and the propagation of deliberate falsehoods in the name of crafting idealized baseball idols for public consumption are presented as particularly worthy of condemnation by Harris. This is further emphasized in a somewhat comedic and nearly postmodern gesture later in the novel where Wiggen gives Sad Sam Yale a copy of the book the older Mammoth supposedly wrote to read for the first time. Yale roundly mocks it as “all a pack

⁷⁸ Mantle and his inheritance of the legacy of the Yankee hero will be discussed further in the chapter that follows.

of horseshit” (238). With the Yankees organization as the most prominent name in baseball heroism, this critique is particularly damaging to their status as embodiment of all that is great about the American nation. For Harris, the Mammoths/Yankees are emblematic of both baseball and the nation as a whole with their blind devotion to their own sanitized and mythologized past.

Conformism, Korea, and the Existential Hero

Harris continues his critique of postwar America through the New York Mammoths and their parallels with the Yankees icon with an attack on a national tendency towards conformism. With the context of anti-communism and the ever-growing influence of mass-produced consumer goods and media sources (particularly television) the topic of conformism was much discussed on many levels of American society during the 1950s. Representative of this discourse of “crisis” is David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), a sociologically-based text that gained a large popular audience. In it, Riesman spoke of an intrinsically-motivated or “inner-directed” character that dominated nineteenth century America and contrasted that with an increasingly externally-motivated or “outer-directed” national character in the middle of the twentieth century. While Riesman “stated on many occasions that he did not favor the dynamic ‘inner-direction’ associated with nineteenth-century capitalism” over outer-direction with its associations of postwar mass culture and corporatism, most Americans nevertheless received *The Lonely Crowd* as “a critique of present-day conformity” and a longing for the “self-made, inner-directed man, the entrepreneur, the frontier farmer and the small businessman” of the previous century (Gilbert 35).

While Harris likely would not add his name to the list of Americans pining for the “self-made” entrepreneur, *The Southpaw* nevertheless shares some of this anxiety over conformism.

Again, Harris uses the Yankee-like Mammoths organization to reveal the problems with what he sees as an overly-conformist United States of America in the postwar era.

Harris conveys American conformity through the thoroughly corporate portrayal of the Mammoths organization, and the pressure put on the players to burnish the image of the Mammoths tradition both through the demand for victory and avoiding behavior that would cause a “crisis for the organization” (343). Wiggen’s teammates typically seem more than happy to comply as long as they receive their deserved financial rewards.⁷⁹ The novel’s narrator and protagonist eventually begins to adopt some of these habits and attitudes himself, a change most conspicuously marked by his decision to go against his previously held standard of play and throw an illegal spit ball to get a much needed out (297-298). Wiggen, however, receives his ethical wake-up call in the form of a reprimand from his girlfriend and future wife, Holly Webster, who accuses him of focusing too much on his paycheck, making his father cry by throwing the spit ball, and surrendering his independence and personal values to the point of becoming “the property of the New York Mammoths . . . a little island in the Moors empire” (305). Holly’s accusation of surrendering individual freedom to the “Moors empire” is echoed in her final plea to her boyfriend, “You are a lefthander, Henry. You always was. And the world needs all the lefthanders it can get, for it is a righthanded world. You are a southpaw in a starboarded atmosphere. Do you understand?” (307). Holly’s use of left-handedness as a symbol for non-conformity lends additional significance to the novel’s title and suggests the theme of throwing off conformism is central to Harris’s text.

Holly’s encouragement leads Wiggen to reevaluate the direction of his career in baseball and commit to an individualist concept of himself. This becomes manifest in his final rejection

⁷⁹ The World Series bonus is of particular note, here, for, as mentioned, the Mammoths are portrayed as just as tight-fisted with salaries as the real Yankees organization was.

of sportswriter and *Sam Yale*—*Mammoth* ghostwriter, Krazy Kress’s repeated invitations to join him and Yale on a tour of military bases in Korea to entertain American troops engaged in the war there. Wiggen’s pacifist leanings had previously led him to shrug off Kress’s insisting invitations, telling him, “I am behind the boys but I am against the war” (240). But Holly’s anti-conformist pep talk motivates him to use the situation as opportunity for a personal declaration of independence as he resolutely tells Kress, “Leave us forget Korea. . . I bust my ass for no man. I get my head shot off for no man. . .” (335-337).⁸⁰

In the conformist Mammoths organization, Wiggen’s actions lead to some serious fall out. First, Kress writes a vindictive editorial labeling Wiggen “Henry the Whiner” (339) and, “on behalf of (himself) and thousands of indignant Americans,” demands an apology (342). Hoping to minimize damage to the public perception of the organization, the Mammoths management reprimands Wiggen and presses him for an apology. This sets up a scene that is perhaps the novel’s climax, a confrontation between Patricia Moors and Wiggen. Harris writes:

“I have wrote out an apology” (Moors) said, and she gave me a paper with a big long apology typewrote out on it. Half of it said that everything Krazy said was true, and the other half was practically an invitation for a squad of marines to drag me off by dawn and shoot me.

“I will not apologize,” said I.

“Then perhaps you will deny it,” she said and she hauled out another paper typewrote like the first, saying that everything Krazy said was lies from beginning to end. “This is the kind of a rhubarb that brings on a crisis for the organization,” she said.

⁸⁰ Wiggen’s partially self-imposed pressure to uphold the good name of the Mammoth organization and add to its tradition of victory is also symbolized in back pain that increases during the course of the pennant race toward the end of the season. Wiggen’s pain is possibly psychosomatic, as it disappears as soon as the pennant is clinched and he tells off Kress (338).

“I am not too worried about crises,” I said. “I am through with them. . . No, I will not sign them, neither of them, neither apologizing nor denying.”

“. . . It is the organization that must be kept pure and free from scandal. You are a part of the organization.”

“I am a part of nothing,” I said.

“You owe something to the organization,” she said.

“And does it not owe something to the other fellow?” I said. “What does it owe to Bub Castetter that give it 10 years and then was cut adrift? . . .” (343)

Wiggen’s rejection of conformism in this passage is strong, particularly in his pithy statement, “I am part of nothing.” It is echoed in the approval his soon-to-be fiancé, Holly, gives him at the season’s end. Harris writes,

What (the statistics) do not show is that you grew to manhood over the summer. You will throw no more spitballs for the sake of something so stupid as a ball game. You will worship the feet of no more gods name of Sad Sam Yale nor ever be a true follower of Dutch Schnell. And you will know the Krazy Kresses of this world for the liar they are. You will never be an island in the empire of Moors, Henry, and that is the great victory that hardly anybody wins any more. (348)

Here the Mammoths organization or “empire” comes to represent all conformity-demanding institutions, an idea that might have been particularly applicable to the 1950s Yankees as their unrelenting string of success under the tutelage of Casey Stengel and his platoon system always subsumed the needs of the individual to the success of the firm (Mann 100-106). Furthermore, the continual desire by both the press and the Yankees organization to cast Mickey Mantle as the

heir to the heroic Yankee legacy of Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio can be read along conformist terms for Mantle as an individual.⁸¹

With its strong condemnation of conformism, Harris's novel shares thematic elements with some prominent contemporaries including J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (published in 1961, but begun in 1953⁸²) and, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953). Henry Wiggen is seemingly cut from the same cloth as nonconformist heroes Holden Caulfield and John Yossarian, and though those three are ostensibly much less serious in temperament than Miller's dour John Proctor, they significantly share with him a refusal to surrender their name and integrity by conforming to the pressure of empowered institutions. This common thread is particularly relevant when one considers that both *Catch-22* and *The Crucible*, like *The Southpaw*, feature a scene where the protagonist is pressured to surrender his ideals and individuality by making a skin-saving, but morally-compromising deal with one of these empowered institutions (Heller 434-439, 451-452, Miller 142-145).

Like these other literary works, Harris has not just the specific institutions of the Yankees, organized baseball, corporations in general, or even the cold-war United States government and military in mind when critiques conformism. Harris intends Wiggen's struggle to maintain his personal independence while with the Mammoth's organization as a metaphor for human existence itself. As Harris scholar Norman Lavers asserts,

(Harris's) symbolism is akin to Frost's, which is to say closer to synecdoche than symbol.

Frost used a fork in the road to symbolize A Fork in the Road. Harris uses a man's life to

⁸¹ Biographers suggest, in fact, that this was how the switch-hitting slugger received this trend, which brought him discomfort the length of his career, particularly early on (Leavy 21-25, 297-298).

⁸² A chapter of *Catch-22* was actually published in a writing journal *New World Writing* in the year 1955 (Heller 12).

symbolize A Man's Life. The terms do not change . . . rather, they extend—any man to Everyman. (37)

With this broad, philosophic goal, *The Southpaw* can be viewed as a work of literature—like many in mid-century American letters, including the aforementioned works by Salinger, Heller, and Miller—influenced by existentialism, a philosophy quite relevant to the topic of conformism. As literary critic Michael Rockler explains,

For existentialists . . . an individual must define his or her own reality. Because the universe does not provide meaning, only existence, the existential task of a human being is create his or her own meaning, and the central requirement for living a meaningful life is a continual process of self-definition. A person is not defined by what he or she claims to be, but rather by his or her actions. . . .

Existentialists further believe that the defining process encompasses solitude, choice and freedom. In order to create one's self, freedom of action is required. Hence, one must not become so entangled with the lives of others that one's autonomy is diminished.

With the novel's central conflict becoming not so much an issue of whether the Mammoths will win the pennant and World Series, but whether Wiggen will become “an island in the empire of Moors,” existentialism and its premium on individual autonomy is at the heart of *The Southpaw*. And as he successfully refuses to let his surroundings define himself Henry Wiggen becomes, like Holden Caulfield, Yossarian, and John Proctor, an existential hero.

This broad, philosophical reading, however, does not preclude *The Southpaw* from having particular cultural, even political relevance in the context of postwar America. This is most powerfully signaled through the specific mention of the contemporary Cold War conflict in Korea (1951-1953). By making the key issue of Wiggen's struggle with conformity the Korean

War rather than just an issue related to only the Mammoths organization, Harris gives his existentialist-influenced critique of conformity a particular postwar American context. *The Southpaw* implies a nation held back by its conformity to the patriotic popular consensus that demanded approval of such military action and demonstrations of world power. The threat of McCarthyism in this early-1950s time period is particularly relevant and likely influenced Harris's writing. This critique of nationalist conformism is further supplemented by free-thinking catcher and Mammoths malcontent Red Traphagen's assessment of fans in the stadium at the conclusion of the ritual playing of the national anthem, where he proclaims, "Land of the free and home of the brave. There ain't a 1 of them free, and there ain't 200 of them brave. 25,000 sheep" (203).

The fact that this critique of American conformism is made through a fictional baseball club modeled on the New York Yankees says a great deal about changing perceptions of the Yankees icon. When Harris has his narrator declare at his novel's conclusion that "it is the whole history of the Mammoths that they are short dependable southpaws" (350), it seems clear (based on Holly's earlier use of "southpaw" as a metaphor for non-conformism) the author is using the Mammoths—and through them, the iconic Yankees on which they are modeled—as a synecdoche for the entire nation itself. This link between the Yankees and the nation as a whole in a military context echoes *The Pride of the Yankees* from a decade earlier, where the text of the opening crawl linked the heroism of arch-Yankee Lou Gehrig with the heroism of soldiers fighting in World War II. But this time the American-Yankees military link is not celebrated along lines of populist values and heroic self sacrifice, but is portrayed critically, for its demand of blind conformity.

Questioning Success

The Southpaw also offers a critique of what Charles Einstein described as the “philosophy of triumph” central to the Yankees icon and the postwar America they represent. Though Wiggen helps lead the Yankee-stand-in Mammoths to both the pennant and the World Series, their success is represented as hollow in several passages. One such passage is a description of Manager Dutch Schnell. Wiggen narrates:

Everybody always asks me, “What kind of man is Dutch Schnell?” I never know exactly what to say. I think he is a great manager, and the statistics back me up in this. His first and only aim in life is winning ball games, and more often he wins them than not, sometimes doing it with worse material than the next club has got. He brings out the best in a fellow if the fellow is his type of a ballplayer. He is always in a fight, right or wrong standing by his guns. . . . There is nothing Dutch will not do for the sake of the ball game. If he thinks it will help win a ball game by eating you out he will eat you out. If sugar and honey will do the trick out come the sugar and honey bottle. If it is money you need he will give you money. And if he has not further need for you he will sell you or trade you or simply cut you loose and forget you. (330)

Here Wiggen describes Schnell’s commitment to winning as if he feels like he should admire it, but his tone and allusions to sacrificing individuals in the pursuit of winning reveal his intuition that something is not quite right with this, namely the devaluation of the well-being and worth of individuals. This is complimented by Wiggen’s description of the scene in the clubhouse after the Mammoths clinched the pennant. Harris writes:

Oh, winning heals many a wound in the flesh! And I could not help thinking, “what if we lost? What if 6 games between April and September had went the other way? What then? Would Perry and Swanee be drinking together? Would Red and Sam Yale? And

Suppose I only won 13 games instead of 26? Would I then be the little golden apple in the eye of Lester T. Moors, Jr.?" (335)

Here Wiggen continues his second-guessing of "the philosophy of triumph," wondering what winning the pennant has actually won them, implying that the pursuit of the pennant promoted false camaraderie, possibly at the expense of more authentic human interaction and friendship.⁸³

This questioning of the ethic of success and victory obviously implies a critique of the Yankees icon, and by extension the triumphal and prosperous postwar America as well, though the connection here is less explicit than with the issue of conformity. Still, the two themes are perhaps best viewed together. The Yankees/Mammoths organization and the mainstream political and cultural climate in the postwar United States seemed to operate on the assumption that success on the baseball diamond, in business, or in maintaining American world influence and preventing the spread of communism all depended on everyone towing the party line, so to speak. If Harris's novel encourages readers to ponder the costs of the pursuit of many types of success, intolerance towards non-conformity would certainly be one of those costs.

Conclusion

While never achieving the type of public influence that *Damn Yankees* or perhaps even some anti-Yankees articles in popular publications like *Life* magazine, Mark Harris's *The Southpaw* offers the deepest and most culturally engaged of all the critiques of the Yankees icon in the boom of Yankee-hating texts in the 1950s. He consciously utilizes the team and their accumulated cultural meaning to offer a critique of the facets of postwar American culture they

⁸³ Harris further explores this theme of human friendship and camaraderie in his follow-up to *The Southpaw*, titled *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1956), where Wiggen returns to the Mammoths the following year, but is focused not on winning the pennant but on helping a dying teammate enjoy and feel appreciated in his remaining days of life. The Mammoths win the pennant anyhow, but with much greater joy and sense of community than exhibited in *The Southpaw*.

had come to embody. In so doing, Harris paved the way for future uses of the Yankees icon in the late-1960s, when all of the author's indictments of postwar America—the naïve romanticization of its past, conformism, and an obsession with success and victory at the expense of other values—would be taken up in greater numbers.

As such, Harris's novel, like the existentialist-influenced works by Salinger, Heller, and Miller, stand as evidence for W.T. Lhamon's argument that the cultural iconoclasm that is so often primarily associated with the 1960s had its origins in the 1950s, a decade too often thought of as one of uniform conformity and cultural conservatism (xxxviii). In *The Southpaw*, Harris himself critiques the prevalence to these stereotypical '50s tendencies in the United States, as suggested by Holly Webster's comment that taking a personal stand against conformism is "the great victory that hardly anybody wins any more" (348). However, the very fact that his book exists proves that there existed some cultural pushback against the forces of consensus in the 1950s. As such, Harris's novel joins cultural texts as diverse as Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, or even the early rock and roll of Little Richard and Elvis Presley as rebellious, iconoclastic texts that challenged the sociocultural mainstream during that decade. In a small way, the trend of Yankee-hating in general, particularly in manifestations that attack the "philosophy of triumph," can be read as part of this cultural pushback. For in as much as baseball fans questioned the value of the Yankees' success on the field, they were likewise questioning general concepts that formed a vital part the postwar vision of the American nation with its greatness rooted in military and economic triumph.

Chapter Six

“Where Have You Gone Joe DiMaggio?”: Decline, Cultural Change, and the 1960s

Introduction

After an era of frequent and often consecutive Yankee triumph that began in the 1920s, the mid-1960s saw dramatic change. During this decade of cultural change and transition, the Yankees quit winning, and almost simultaneously, popular perspectives on the club shifted significantly. While the Yankees icon was once associated with the most celebrated aspects of the nation and its values, texts in the late 1960s continued and expanded on the trend of *The Southpaw* and *Damn Yankees*, utilizing the Yankees as an embodiment of the American values that were being rejected by the emerging generation. In particular, former Yankee pitcher Jim Bouton's controversial memoir, *Ball Four* (1970), presenting its author as a friend of the growing youth countercultural movement, portrays the Yankees as the essence of the unjust and empowered “Establishment” these young rebels sought to overthrow. This perspective is complimented by texts by sportswriter Jack Mann and folk-rock duo Simon and Garfunkel that likewise present the Yankees icon as embodying values now fading into America's past.

On-Field Decline of the Yankees

After four and a half decades of remarkable, sometimes unparalleled success, in the mid-1960s the New York Yankees finally fell from grace. Their dominant string of five World Series in a row from '49-'53 was followed by a period that was only slightly less-dominant. Between

1954 and 1964, the Yankees failed to win the American League Pennant only twice. But uncharacteristically, they began losing in the World Series as often as they won, losing the title to their National League opponent in 1955, '57, '60, '63 and '64. But then in 1965, with the team coming off two World Series losses in a row—something no Yankee team had done since the 1921-22 seasons—things began to unravel on the field for the Bronx Bombers. They finished in sixth place with a losing record that year, their worst finish since 1925. In the following four years they finished tenth (last), ninth, fifth, and sixth. After having been the most dominant presence in baseball for around four decades, the New York Yankees were suddenly a second-rate ballclub.

A number of factors have been suggested as reasons for this sudden decline. Most prominently, after the 1964 season, long-time owners Del Webb and Dan Topping sold the Yankees to CBS. Many cite this new ownership's inexperienced and clumsy handling of the club as instrumental to the Yankees' decline (Golenbock, *Dynasty* 380-383). Some even suggest that prior to selling the club Webb and Topping ceased to earnestly invest in the future, leaving CBS with few prospects (Bouton qtd. in Golenbock, *Dyansty* 375). It is also notable that the CBS ownership lacked the experienced influence of longtime executive George Weiss, director of the farm system during the successful years of the late-'30s as general manager during the equally successful Stengel era, had been dismissed along with Casey at the end of the 1960 season.

As early as 1967, sportswriter Jack Mann offered a thorough explanation and theory about the collapse of the Bronx Bombers in his book *The Decline and Fall of the New York Yankees*, whose titular reference to the Roman Empire was made only partially tongue in cheek. Mann cites as a major turning point Major League Baseball's rule change to create a draft of new

amateur talent—requiring all the teams in the league to take turns in signing new prospects. This effectively eliminated the advantage the Yankees had enjoyed due to their financial means and core of tenured talent scouts, which in combination had enabled the Yankees to sign more and better players (18, 22-26).

But even before the arrival of this new rule, which Mann calls “a system of controlled mediocrity” (12), the Yankees’ pipeline of new prospects had been drying up. Their policy of selling young prospects on the idea of playing for the Yankees was becoming less-effective, as other clubs began offering larger and larger signing bonuses, a game Yankee ownership thought beneath them (Mann 12-13, 186-188, Halberstam, *October 1964* 230). To use Mann’s colorful phrase, the Yankees “disdained the vulgar rat race” (13). Finally, though the Yankees had officially integrated with the addition of catcher/outfielder Elston Howard during the 1955 season, general manager George Weiss’s racist policies cast a long shadow on the Yankees organization during the second half of the 1950s and into the early 1960s. While many other clubs loaded team rosters with black talent, the Yankees organization continued to by and large close off that outlet to itself (Mann 180-183, Halberstam, *October 1964* 231-233).⁸⁴ Mann sums things up best with the concise observation that “times had changed, and the Yankees hadn’t” (188).

Baseball in the Context of the Cultural Changes of the 1960s

But the fortunes of the Yankees and the business of baseball were not the only things changing during the 1960s. Much has been made of the sociocultural upheaval of this period, but not without some reason. In particular, the convergence of the civil rights movement, the

⁸⁴ This was perhaps illustrated in 1963 and '64 when the Yankees were beaten by the thoroughly integrated Los Angeles Dodgers and St. Louis Cardinals, respectively.

protest of the Vietnam War, and the growing youth culture centered in the still-new rock and roll music and experimentation with consciousness-altering drugs made for a decade of dramatic cultural conflict and transition. This cultural rupture was most keenly felt along generational lines. Many Baby Boomers, the large cohort of the sons and daughters of the generation that grew up during the Great Depression and fought in World War II, adopted an iconoclastic stance towards the society their parents and grandparents had built, particularly ideas about race, gender roles, drugs, big business, the role of the military, and the role of the United States in the world in general.⁸⁵

The shift in taste and values that took place during the decade had no small effect on the popular perception of organized baseball. Baseball's popularity during the first half of the twentieth century and its close cultural association with many of the values of the World War II generation led to many associating the sport with a conservative resistance to change in this age of iconoclasm. The values celebrated in many baseball cultural texts from the 1940s and '50s, and values for which the New York Yankees were often presented as epitomizing—self-sacrificing and military-oriented patriotism, heroic masculinity, faith in the capitalist economic system, and in the American dream of upward mobility through hard work—were being challenged in the 1960s. And by association, baseball may have begun to appear obsolete. The narrative introduction to the chapter of Ken Burns's documentary television mini-series *Baseball* that deals with the 1960's captures this sentiment well:

During the 1960s, the Cold War almost became nuclear war over missiles in Cuba. Israel defeated its Arab neighbors in a six day war. And The Beatles invaded the United States.

⁸⁵ Much has been published about the 1960s counterculture. American cultural historian Benjamin Rader provides one useful and fairly concise summary of the phenomenon (339).

Americans made it to Woodstock and to the moon. Americans lost a president and a prophet. Americans fought in Vietnam and then went into the streets to stop that fighting. New civil rights were won, but the country seemed to be coming apart. American cities were set ablaze, campuses erupted, generations clashed. . . . [In baseball] the players would begin to challenge the authority of the owners and one of the worst teams in baseball history would be transformed for a moment into the best. For the first time baseball would move inside and almost all of the old ballparks would be demolished. For the first time football would seriously challenge baseball as the national pastime.⁸⁶ And some began to wonder if the game mattered at all.

This voice-over narration attempts to capture the nation in the throes of violent change with baseball as an aging institution struggling to keep up, a notion echoed later with the concise statement that, “The opening day of the 1968 season was postponed after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. Baseball seemed irrelevant.”

In the 1960s, baseball was especially beginning to feel irrelevant to the young, the Baby Boomers, whose 1950s childhood coincided with one of baseball’s golden ages. The Baby Boom generation was growing up during a period when baseball had a considerable cultural profile. Before professional football and basketball had gained the popularity they now enjoy with mainstream sports fans, baseball dominated the culture of sports spectatorship and consumption. And it was arguably a great time to follow baseball, as the Major Leagues were freshly energized by the influx of black talent from the Negro Leagues after the fall of the color

⁸⁶ This is an allusion to the eclipse in popularity of baseball by professional football during the late 1960s, a trend punctuated in 1967 when the National and American Football Leagues held their first Super Bowl game. About the sporting year 1967, *Baseball* comments, “It was a great World Series, but that year, more people had watched professional football’s first Super Bowl than any Series game. Baseball was now said to be too leisurely, too serene, too dull to be the national pastime. It was football that was America’s true game.”

line, World Series games were first broadcast on television, and the near-annual meetings between the proven and intimidating Yankees and the underdog, faltering Dodgers captivated the nation. It was a period when Robert Frost's suggestion that "some baseball is the fate of us all" was fairly accurate.

But while young Americans were indeed caught up in Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris's attempt to break Babe Ruth's single-season home run record in 1961, as the decade wore on, many young people found interests that took them away from baseball. *Baseball* interviewees Doris Kearns Goodwin and Gerald Early both recount such experiences. Says Goodwin:

In the '60s I was in college and in graduate school and baseball didn't have the vitality for me that the civil rights movement did . . . and somehow the events of the world became so important that I didn't feel I had the time to indulge in the luxury of my childhood. . . I was so busy in marches that there wasn't time to sit in baseball games.

Early recounts a similar experience with his childhood love of baseball during the 1960s:

At this time in the late-'60s I was fourteen-fifteen-sixteen years old and I felt that baseball lost some of its resonance for me because these players did not seem to be in touch with what was going on. Everything had become very politicized. And this is particularly true with black players. They saw if you were to stand up and become political that you were going to be made to suffer. But as a youngster myself, becoming politicized, that was the very point. . . .

The comments of childhood baseball fans Goodwin and Early share the common theme of abandoning baseball for what they perceived as more important things, namely social and

political activism.⁸⁷ Goodwin use of the term “the luxury of my childhood” to refer to baseball suggests the image of a generation of naïve, molly-coddled Baby Boomers who came to enlightenment later as college students in the mid-to-late 1960s and “became politicized,” to use Early’s phrase, putting away perceived childish things like baseball.

It seems to be mostly a poetic quirk of history that the collapse of the Yankees dynasty would coincide so neatly with the cultural moment when the American values for which the Yanks had served as icons were being challenged so pervasively. If Mann’s theories are to be accepted, however, the cultural changes of the 1960s did actually play a small role in the Bronx Bombers’ decline. The Yankees failure to embrace integration significantly diminished the pool of up and coming players and, once they did desegregate, they continued to have a “lilywhite” reputation among many black prospects that might prefer to sign with another team (Mann 70, 180). Furthermore, the movement towards “evening the playing field” among Major League Clubs with rule changes like the amateur draft can be read as part of a broader cultural trend towards more socialistic ideas and government policies that would include Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society domestic programs, as well as the iconoclastic youth’s critique of the American capitalist ethic. Whatever the case, the decline of the New York Yankees, icons of American success, certainly seemed to parallel the passing away of many of the values that had been held up through the nation’s military victory during World War II and the economic prosperity that followed.

A Former-Yankee’s Grudge in *Ball Four*

⁸⁷ Later on in their adulthood, both Kearns Goodwin and Early eventually returned to baseball fandom.

With the change in the Yankees on-field success and the broader changes of the '60s, came new developments in the way the Yankees icon was utilized in American culture.

Foremost in this regard is former Yankee pitcher Jim Bouton's controversial memoir of his 1969 season, *Ball Four*, which utilizes the Yankees as an embodiment of the supposedly unjust and crumbling traditional American power structure.

Published in June of 1970, *Ball Four* was written from former fastball pitcher Bouton's experiences attempting to make a comeback from debilitating arm injury as a knuckleball pitcher with the short-lived Major League expansion franchise, the Seattle Pilots.⁸⁸ *Ball Four* is likely most remembered for the scandal it caused. It exposed the vulgarities of the clubhouse to many for the first time, and portrayed ballplayers in a most-decidedly unheroic manner. But the memoir, edited by sports writer Leonard Shecter, also stands as a revealing document of cultural history, showing the conflict and tension of the cultural transition that was taking place in the late 1960s. Bouton paints this tension in dramatic terms, envisioning himself as a forward-thinking friend of the counterculture and consigning his former team, the New York Yankees, to the role of a symbol of what he sees as the out-of-date values of the World War II generation.

Bouton begins building these themes from the very beginning, establishing two key ideas in the memoir's introduction: that he is on the side of the iconoclastic youth in the late-'60s cultural debate, and that he loathes his former team the New York Yankees. Bouton wastes no time in establishing his bitterness towards his former team, as the memoir's first paragraph

⁸⁸ A knuckleball, as described by Bouton himself, is a pitch "thrown with the fingertips, and the principle is to release the ball so that it leaves all the fingertips at the same time without any spin on the ball. The air currents and humidity take over and cause the ball to turn erratically and thus move erratically" (20). Unlike most baseball pitches, the knuckleball is actually more effective if not thrown with maximum force, thus, unlike Bouton's old specialty, the fastball, the knuckleball, to use his words again, "doesn't take anything out of your arm. It's like having a catch with your sister" (20).

begins, “I dream my knuckleball is bouncing around like a ping-pong ball and I’m pitching a two-hit shutout against my old team, the New York Yankees” (xv).

This disdain of, and desire for revenge on the once-mighty team that he helped to win pennants in the twilight years of their dynasty becomes a running theme in *Ball Four*. Often Bouton will be discussing a seemingly unrelated topic and his narrative suddenly returns to his dream of avenging himself on the Yankees. Examples abound. In one, he writes:

We were sitting around the clubhouse and I asked [Seattle pitching coach] Sal the Barber [Maglie] about the days when he pitched for the Giants against the Dodgers. He said yeah, he’d never forget those days. ‘You know, it’s a funny thing,’ he said, ‘when I pitched against the Dodgers I didn’t care if it was the last game I ever pitched. I really hated that club. . . .’ I’ll have that feeling at least a couple of times this year. When I pitch against the Yankees.” (34)

And later:

Still, I was feeling so good that I began to think about pitching against the Yankees, and what it would be like going back to Yankee Stadium and facing them. . . I thought how much fun it’s going to be to get back to the Stadium and toy, really Toy with them. They haven’t even seen my knuckleball. It should really be a picnic. (75)

And still later, when Bouton is suspicious he might get traded, he writes,

Washington lost 6-0, and I wonder if they can use some pitching help. I sure would like to be with a club in the East, because if there’s anything I want to do before I’m through

it's win a few games in Yankee Stadium, and being with Washington would give me some extra shots at them. If this sounds like a grudge, it's only because it is. (123)

Bouton's tendency to follow one topical thread only to suddenly veer back toward his revenge fantasies against his former team might cause him to appear pathological if not for his wry sense of humor about the subject. But these passages establish the Bronx Bombers as the primary antagonist in Bouton's mental universe.

At times he does flesh out his history with the Yankees organization and the unfairness he perceived in their treatment of him, giving some reason to his wrath. He explains,

You can make a lousy pitcher out of anybody by not pitching him. I'll always believe that's what [Yankee manager Ralph] Houk did to me. Besides, there's no way the Yankees can justify getting rid of a twenty-nine-year-old body [Bouton] for \$12, 000 [the amount he was sold for], and before the season is over I'm going to remind a lot of people that they did (32).

These comments about unfair treatment by the Yankees organization are echoed as Bouton considers the prospect of not making the Pilot's Major League roster in spring training. He writes, "I know that if I don't make it, or if I don't get to pitch, it'll be because I wasn't good enough. It won't be on my mind that someone is trying to sabotage me the way I felt when I was with the Yankees" (93). In a moment of paranoia, Bouton even wonders if the Yankees organization is somehow trying to ruin his career with the Pilots:

It occurs to me that the Yankees may have prevailed upon [Seattle Pilots general manager Marvin] Milkes, or the Pilot organization, to soft-pedal me so that I won't embarrass them. These two clubs have made quite a few trades and I know it embarrasses the

Yankees to have Hegan doing so well here. So maybe they said, “Do us a favor, don’t let Bouton look good.” (186)

Bouton’s hatred for his former team is not confined to desire for personal revenge on them, however. He makes it clear that he also wishes them ill generally speaking. For instance, during a brief demotion to the Pilot’s minor league affiliate in Vancouver, Bouton contrasts his feelings for the Seattle organization with those for his old team:

I listened to the Pilots game over the radio and wouldn’t you know it, I found myself rooting for them. When the Yankees sent me down all I wanted was for them to get mashed. Even now I hope they finish lower in their division than the Pilots do in theirs. I can’t explain it but that’s what I feel. (119)

Later on, Bouton informs us, “The Yankees have lost thirteen out of fourteen now and I feel so bad about it I walk around laughing,” but does admit to “beginning to feel sorry” for some of his former teammates (157). These passages combined with revenge fantasies and bitter memories easily make Bouton the biggest Yankee-hater in print since the fictitious Washington Senators fan Joe Boyd from *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*. While the fictional Boyd and Bouton look at the Yankees from two different perspectives—Boyd seeing a tyrant whose dethroning is well-overdue, and Bouton a fallen giant that needs to be killed off completely—their disdainful comments complement each other to cast the Yankee icon as a powerful entity that has abused its power.

Bouton and the Counterculture

Just as Bouton establishes his disdain for the Yankees in *Ball Four*'s opening pages, he likewise begins building an image of himself as a counterculture sympathizer in the introduction to his memoir. A reflective Bouton writes,

I've heard all the arguments against (professional baseball). That there are better, more important things for a man to do than spend his life trying to throw a ball past other men who are trying to hit it with a stick. There are things like being a doctor or a teacher or working in the Peace Corps. More likely I should be devoting myself full-time to finding a way to end the war. I admit that sometimes I'm troubled by the way I make my living. I would like to change the world

Okay, so I'll save the world when I get a little older. I believe a man is entitled to devote a certain number of years to plain enjoyment and driving for some sort of financial security. You can always be a teacher or social worker when you've reached thirty-five (xvi-xvii).

Here the foundation of his self-image as “progressive” is clearly laid. In addition to giving mention to specific icons of the New Left—the Peace Corps, opposition to the war in Vietnam—Bouton creates an impression of global awareness, of a desire to help the underprivileged, and a conscience about contributing to society rather than just holding down a job and winning bread. Bouton's stated rejection of the capitalist-oriented ethic of keeping one's head down and enjoying the bounty American society enabled, as well as his expressed pacifism seem tailor-made to endear him to rebellious youth of the era.

While the pitcher makes no claims of being personally involved with the political and cultural movements associated with the so-called “hippie” counterculture of the later 1960s—marching in an antiwar or civil rights protest, experimenting with psychedelics, or attending an acid rock concert—he clearly expresses his sympathy for their political views and values. In fact, in reporting a visit he made to the notoriously radical University of California Berkeley campus, Bouton states as much directly, writing,

That afternoon Gary Bell and I hired a car and drove up to the Berkeley campus and walked around and listened to speeches—Arab kids arguing about the Arab-Israeli war, Black Panthers talking about Huey Newton and the usual little old ladies in tennis shoes talking about God. Compared with the way everybody was dressed Gary and I must have looked like a couple of narcs.

So some of these people look odd, but you have to think that anybody who goes through life thinking only of himself with the kinds of things that are going on in this country and Vietnam, well, he’s the odd one. Gary and I are really the crazy ones. I mean, we’re concerned about getting the Oakland Athletics out. . . . These kids, though, are genuinely concerned about what’s going on around them. They’re concerned about Vietnam, poor people, black people . . . about the way things are and they’re trying to change them. So they wear long hair and sandals and have dirty feet. I can understand why. It’s a badge, a sign they are different from people who don’t care.

So I wanted to tell everybody, “Look, I’m with you, baby. I understand. Underneath my haircut I really understand that you’re doing the right thing.” (145-6)

In addition to the ideological sympathy that Bouton expresses here, in this passage he further casts himself as a friend of the counterculture by associating the pitcher with the iconic Berkeley campus.

Bouton's mention of his trip to San Francisco's famous hippie district, the Haight-Ashbury has a similar effect. He writes, "In San Francisco, [former teammate] Fritz [Peterson] and I made an inspection trip to Haight-Ashbury where the hippies offered to turn us on with LSD. We were too chicken to try" (29). Here Bouton bolsters his countercultural credentials through a brush with two more icons—The Haight and LSD—making it clear that while he does not become an initiate, neither does he turn up his nose. If anything, he ascribes a greater courage to the "hippies." Bouton similarly utilizes the iconic status of the 1968 Democratic National Convention protest when writing about teammate Jimmy O'Toole who had just been demoted during spring training. Bouton writes,

I've had some big discussions with O'Toole. His father is a cop in Chicago and was in on the Democratic Convention troubles. I'd been popping off, as usual, about what a dum-dum Mayor Daley was and O'Toole said hell, none of those kids take baths and they threw bags of shit at the cops, and that's how I found out his father was a cop. Even so, I feel sort of sorry for him. . . (75)

Again, here Bouton makes it clear where his sympathies lie with regard to this controversial '60s icon.

He supplements these stories with a liberal sprinkling of passing references to a few other countercultural icons throughout *Ball Four*. These include bringing a copy of Bay-Area radical underground newspaper, *The Berkeley Barb* into the clubhouse (147), remarks about the irony of

the ease with which ballplayers acquire amphetamines (or “greenies”) compared to the harsh punishment for marijuana possession (171), a seemingly earnest use of the word “groovy” (172), the mention of plans to see *Midnight Cowboy* (288), a record of numerous clubhouse complaints about the length of friend and teammate Steve Hovely’s hair (319), and a stated preference for The Beatles over the typically ballplayer-favored country music (379).

His prominent reference to these “hippie” icons notwithstanding, Bouton also impresses to readers that he does not want to be dismissed a name-dropper or a dabbler in his countercultural sympathies, continually asserting and reasserting his left-leaning position on the two major political issues of the day, Vietnam and civil rights. In doing so, he frequently contrasts his own views with the much more conservative position he implies is common in baseball.

Bouton first makes hints toward his views on race and civil rights through a his socio-cultural interpretation of an experience he had as a child:

When I was a kid I loved to go to Giants games in the Polo Grounds. And a little thing that happened there when I was about ten years old popped into my mind today. There was a ball hit into the stands and a whole bunch of kids ran after it. I spotted it first, under a seat, and grabbed for it. Just as I did, a Negro kid also snatched at it. My hand reached it a split second before his, though, and I got a pretty good grip on it. But he grabbed the ball real hard and pulled it right out of my hand. No complaint, he took it fair and square. I thought about it afterward, about what made him able to grab that ball out of my hand. I decided it had to do with the way we were brought up—me in a

comfortable suburb, him probably in a ghetto. I decided that while I *wanted* the baseball, he *had to have it*. (25)

To this personal story, Bouton later more directly expresses the political application of his view on race while writing about his former teammate, catcher Elston Howard, the first black Yankee. He writes,

The best way I can explain Howard is to recall the day Jimmy Cannon, the elderly columnist, Howard, his wife Arlene and I got involved in an argument about civil rights; Arlene and I on one side, Cannon and Howard on the other. Arlene and I were the militants. (88)

Bouton further buttresses his status as a racial progressive through several asides during the course of the narrative that casually but frankly report the subtle—and sometimes not so subtle—racism that remained part of Major League Baseball over twenty years after integration (146, 285, 368, 371-372). For example, he observes that while there was “no trouble” between black and white players in Seattle, there was “a certain distance” between them (334).

Bouton takes a similar approach in portraying his views on Vietnam, recounting a personal connection to the issue and reiterating his views every so often in an aside. He finds occasion to make his feelings about Vietnam known when recalling his fan club that formed in the early 1960s, writing, “. . . I heard that one of the fan-club members was in Vietnam. It just doesn’t seem right that a member of my fan club should be fighting in Vietnam. Or that anybody should be” (119). While perhaps not as personally significant as his story about struggling over the fly ball with the young African-American boy, Bouton’s comments about his fan-club

member-turned-soldier still personalize his views and make him seem genuine in his political stance to readers.

In addition to asserting his opposition to the war in Vietnam, Bouton also bemoans the climate of the baseball clubhouse that discourages any political nonconformity. He writes,

. . . you could talk about the war in Vietnam, only you had to say, “Look at those crazy kids marching in the street. Why don’t they take a bath?” . . . If you said these things, no one would accuse you of talking politics, because you were *right*. . . . On the other hand, if you said things like, “We’ve got no right to be in Vietnam,” . . . then you shouldn’t be talking about things like that, because you were *wrong*.” (84)

By portraying himself as a relative nonconformist in the often culturally conservative world of baseball, Bouton parallels his own experience with that of more radical countercultural youths in society at large. In essence, Bouton paints himself as baseball’s version of a hippie.

Bouton’s self-portrayal as a nonconformist in baseball is echoed in his numerous jokes about being branded as “flaky” (341) by his more traditional teammates and coaches. *Ball Four* is liberally sprinkled with anecdotes about the suspicion with which most of the team regards Bouton and his two semi-intellectual, counterculture-sympathizing teammates, Mike Marshall, nicknamed “Moon Man” (127), and Steve Hovley, christened “Orbit” (127).⁸⁹ In perhaps the most telling incident of conflict between the players who thought of themselves as “one of the boys” (303) and Bouton’s small, informal network of “kooks” (223) or “weirdos” (303) is the

⁸⁹ Though the practice is largely lost to the changing times and somewhat forgotten, at the time when *Ball Four* was written, ostensibly due to the pervasive cultural influence of the U.S.-Soviet space race, the labels “spacey,” “space case,” “space cadet,” and such related terms were often applied to individuals perceived as frequently lost in their own thoughts and lacking in “common sense” (233). The connotations of lampooning the counterculture and the “cosmic” worldview they sought should not be neglected here.

author's account of Hovely getting teased in the clubhouse for possessing intellectual, literary reading material. Bouton writes:

Another Hovely story. He was standing by the clubhouse man's tobacco shelf opening up a can of snuff. (Just wanted to try it, he said later.) [Pilots manager] Joe Shultz walked by wearing nothing but a towel around his waist and hollered out, "Hey, men, look who's dipping into the snuff." Then he grabbed a paperback book out of Hovely's pocket. It was Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed*. Schultz held the book up in the air and said, "Hey, men, look at this! What kind of name is this?"

By this time there was a group of guys around him looking at the book like a group of monkeys might inspect a bright red rubber ball. Schultz read off the back cover—a sentence anyway—until he got to the word "nihilism." Hey, Hy," Schultz said to Hy Zimmerman, "what the hell does 'nihilism' mean?"

"That's when you don't believe in nothing," Zimmerman said.

Whereupon Schultz, shaking his head and laughing, flung the book back at Hovely, hitched up his towel and strode off, amid much laughter. (242)

Here, Bouton narrates with heavy irony, as confounded as his readers at the way the grown men belittle one of their peers who dares to deviate from the jock-culture norm through intellectual pursuit. A similar anecdote essentially conveys the same idea more succinctly: manager Schultz teasingly refers to the chess-playing Marshall as "Brains" as he warms up on the mound (238).

With these stories, Bouton paints the image of the world of baseball as a place where those with the power rule irrationally and persecute those who dare to have any actual insight or

a novel thought. The parallels with the rebellious '60s youth and their protest of the American government's policies of racial injustice and the war in Vietnam are clear and intentional here. In one of his more clever and humorous moments, the author describes his perception of this baseball world thusly, "Sometimes I think that if people in this little world of baseball don't think you a little odd, a bit weird, you're in trouble. It would be rather like being considered normal in an insane asylum" (234). By using this insane asylum comparison, Bouton draws on the same metaphor at the heart of both Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), and Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), two iconoclastic novels from earlier in the decade where protagonists with supposedly questionable sanity are proven much more sane than the institution in which they are trapped. Whether consciously chosen or not, it is no accident that Bouton utilizes a metaphor that is central to two works so embraced by the countercultural youth of the 1960s.⁹⁰ All three share the rebellious Baby Boomers iconoclastic spirit.

The Yankees as Symbols of "The Establishment"

Bouton also views his grudge with the Yankees through the lens of his left-leaning cultural and political views. The Yankees become the dramatic foil to his self portrayal as a counterculture sympathizer, essentially taking up the role described by the catch-all term "The Establishment" in the rhetoric of the counterculture.

Often, Bouton will voice a complaint about one of the so-called "Neadrathal" (xvii) tendencies in baseball and will hold up the Yankees as the prime example of those tendencies.

⁹⁰ Both novels were made into films by filmmakers with countercultural ties —*Catch-22* (1970), directed by Mike Nichols of *The Graduate* (1967) fame, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), directed by Czech New Wave director Milos Forman who would later make the film adaptation of *Hair* (1979) and starring *Easy Rider's* (1969) Jack Nicholson. Also, *Cuckoo's Nest* author Ken Kesey became a leader in the American psychedelic movement, leading his band of "Merry Pranksters" on a LSD-fueled cross-county road trip and then introducing LSD to young people in so-called "Acid Test" event parties up and down the California coast (Torgoff 94-99, 113-130)

For instance, after discussing the Pilots' frosty reception to some of Steve Hovely's nonconformities, Bouton turns back to memories of his time with the Yankees, writing, "When I first came up with the Yankees there was intolerance of anybody who didn't conform right down the line—including haircut and cut of suit" (59). This pattern is repeated when Bouton complains about unwritten clubhouse rule demanding solemnity after a loss. He writes,

After a loss the club house has to be completely quiet, as though losing strikes a baseball player dumb. . . . The rule is that you're not supposed to say anything even if it's a meaningless spring training loss. . . .

The important thing is to let the manager and coaches know you feel bad about losing. . . . So you go along with the little game. *And they played this game real hard with the Yankees.* . . . (64, emphasis added)

Thus, while the conformism that Bouton decries here actually occurs with the Pilots and it is implied to be common throughout the Major Leagues, he makes a point of claiming things were even worse with the Yankees. In fact, one might get the impression that it is memories of days with the Yankees that Bouton rebels against as more than his current situation with the Pilots.

This pattern of using the Yankees as the ultimate model of baseball "Neodrathalism" continues when Bouton discusses issues that are more specifically political. While Bouton often discusses how his left-leaning political views and countercultural sympathies sometimes alienate him from his more traditionally-minded teammates, the picture he paints of the Yankee clubhouse is an archconservative bastion. For instance, a road trip to New York City gives him occasion to write,

There is always a flood of memories when I come back to New York. Like all the trouble I used to get into with the Yankees. One time nobody in the bullpen would talk to me for three days because I said I thought Billy Graham was a dangerous character. This was after he had said that Communists were behind the riots in the black ghettos. . . .

My heavens, you'd think I had insulted Ronald Reagan. (214)

Similarly, while labeled a “kook” and a “flake” with the Pilots, Bouton relates that with the Yankees he was occasionally referred to as “that Communist” (33), a label which resurfaces when a former Yankee teammate is traded to the Pilots and finds opportunity to revisit it (257, 310). While Bouton characterizes the whole of the Major Leagues as politically conservative, he reserves these accusations of McCarthyism for his former team in The Bronx.

Bouton makes similar comments about the Yankees concerning the issue of integration and race relations among players. He utilizes music in the clubhouse as a springboard to discuss the issue of race,

Well, (first baseman Don) Mincher was talking about going to see Johnny Cash and I imagine when he talks about Johnny Cash it's like the Negro players talking about James Brown. Lots of times in the clubhouse you'll have a radio on and every once in a while it gets switched back and forth between a soul-music station and a country-western station. If you're going good you get to hear your kind of music. In the Yankee clubhouse western music dominated (54).

This subtle suggestion that the Yankee clubhouse was dominated by white players—either because there weren't enough black players, or because they wielded less power—is more

damning than it may seem, as it re-aggravates the already existing public knowledge that the Yankees were late and resistant to integration.

All told, Bouton's political jabs at the Yankees clearly align them with the side of the cultural divide associated with the World War II generation, with Bouton and his Baby Boomer allies on the opposing side. But for Bouton to turn the Yankees into a symbol of "The Establishment" in the structure of his memoir, as I argue he does, he needs to do more than just characterize them as politically right-wing. He also must create the idea that they hold substantial power and that they abuse said power.

Bouton does this through a few different ploys. As already mentioned, part of the former-Yankee's grudge against his old employer is his theory about the front office conspiring against him. Bouton can't help but imagine the Yankee owners and management as out to ruin his career and possibly even limiting his success in his comeback with the Pilots to prevent being left with the potential embarrassment of releasing him prematurely (32, 93, 186). While one might expect this kind of institutional manipulation of an individual's autonomy in a Kafka novel, or perhaps more proximately and appropriately, Heller's *Catch-22*, Bouton's theories strain credibility just a bit. Nevertheless, it is revealing that the Yankee organization is so powerful, both in Bouton's mind and many of his readers', that the author might suspect that they might be able to control his career with another team. It reminds one of a more extreme version of Mark Harris's portrayal of the overly-corporate Yankee stand-ins, the New York Mammoths, and does much to set up the idea of the Yankees as a big, bad, human-crushing institution.

Also reminiscent of the Mammoths-Yankees from *The Southpaw* is Bouton's account of his struggle with the Yankee front office to obtain what he considered a fair contract. In the later-1960s famous director of baseball's Players Association, Marvin Miller was beginning to shift the balance of power from the owners to the players, negotiating the leagues' first collective bargaining agreement in 1968 to get the player minimum salary raised from \$7,000 to \$10,000, and much more was on the horizon. Contracts and the power struggle between players and the front office were on the minds of many in baseball, and Bouton was no exception. Following a familiar pattern, he bemoans what he sees as the manipulative, underhanded, and unjust practices by baseball owners in general, but saves his most venomous language for the Yankees.

In the memoir's opening section, Bouton spends about a page and a half describing the negotiation of his contract with the Pilots organization over the past two years which included some minor disagreement and haggling—much less than the author anticipated.⁹¹ He then devotes six and a half pages to describe in excruciating detail, his history of contract negotiations with the Yankees, a Kafkaesque nightmare of institutional deception, doublespeak, subterfuge and outright lying (4-10). Bouton's experience could perhaps best be summed up with his understatement, "The bastards really fight you" (5). But a more important statement might be his observations about the ball clubs' unofficial policy of telling players to keep their salaries secret. He writes, "You know, players are always told that they're not to discuss salaries with each other. They want to keep us dumb. . . . they want to keep us ignorant, and it works" (7). Here the Yankees—all major league clubs to one degree or another, but *especially* the Yankees—are not merely portrayed as an institutional bully, but as a hegemonic organization that attempts to control the information and beliefs of its underlings. Not coincidentally, this

⁹¹ In 1968 Bouton pitched for the AAA Seattle Angels Pacific Coast League, then affiliated with the California Angeles, before becoming the Major League's expansion Seattle Pilots.

control of information and ideology is the very thing countercultural rebels accused of the militaristic, anti-communist U.S. Government and “military-industrial complex.”

To round out his portrayal of the Yankees as a corrupt power structure, Bouton paints the club as simultaneously elitist and miserly. Some of Bouton’s passing comments suggest an image of success going to the head of the Yankee organization. Yankee haughtiness can be discerned in passages such as his observation that “The clubhouse here [in Seattle] is kind of cramped and the Yankees would probably sneer at it. . .” (15), or his memories that Yankee executive Dan Topping, Jr. (son of co-owner Dan Topping) “had a boarding-school accent that always made you feel like your fly was open or something” (4), or Topping’s presumptuous reminder during contract negotiations, “Don’t forget your World Series share; you can always count on that” (4). *Ball Four* would certainly not be the first time the Yankees were accused of elitism, but combined with Bouton’s imagery of a manipulative organization, this haughtiness becomes more sinister.

It is also complimented with accusations of tight-fistedness. In addition to Bouton’s suggestion that the Yankee’s organization fought for every cent in contract negotiations, his description of some Yankee clubhouse policies leaves the impression of an organization flush with its own success that somehow still insists on pinching pennies. He writes,

. . . there’s a soda fountain [in the Seattle spring training clubhouse]—Coca-Cola, root beer, 7-Up, cold, on tap, freebie. If Pete Previte saw this he’d go crazy. Little Pete’s the No. 2 clubhouse man and he had this mark-up sheet. Every time you took a soft drink you were supposed to make a mark next to your name so he’d know how much to charge

you. He spent the whole day going around saying, “Hey mark ‘em up. Don’t forget to mark ‘em up. Hey, Bouton, you’re not marking ‘em up.” (15)

The notion that the fledgling Seattle Pilots organization (which folded after only one year in the league) would treat the players to free soft drinks and the successful and notoriously wealthy Yankees would make them pay, makes the Yankees organization seem overly parsimonious.⁹² Viewed together with wealth and Bouton’s accusations of manipulating individuals, the Yankees frugality casts them as a tyrannical organization that is indifferent to the needs and well-being of its underlings, seeking only to take advantage of them. In light of Bouton’s linkage of the Yankees with the conservative politics and values of the World War II generation, this collective image of an oppressive hegemonic institution create strong parallels with the American power structure the rebels of the counterculture fought against. In essence, *Ball Four* casts the Yankees as baseball’s version of that catch-all amalgam of the U.S. government, big business, the “military-industrial complex,” and anyone over thirty: “The Establishment.”

While Bouton sees so-called “Neanderthal aspects,” political conservatism, and abuse of power throughout the culture of Major League Baseball, the Yankees are consistently portrayed as the nadir of these tendencies. Generally speaking, Bouton writes about the Yankees the way we might expect any self-respecting Baby Boomer “flower child” to talk about his or her stereotypical clock-punching, gray-flannel-suit-wearing, whiskey-drinking father: as standing in the way of change through his narrow-minded, dogmatic adherence to a value system that he or she sees as unjust and out of date.

⁹² This issue is represented in a more typical way in the relatively recent baseball movie *Moneyball* (2011), where players recently traded to the cash-strapped Oakland Athletics are surprised to find they must pay for their own soda.

The Yankees and the New York Mets in *Ball Four*

Bouton's characterization of the Yankees an icon of the "The Establishment" and the teams late-'60s decline coalesce in a simple observation about the 1969 baseball season that at first reading may seem as only an attempt at humor. In his entry for June 10th, Bouton reports, "I'm pleased to note today that the New York Mets are 28-23 and in second place in their division and that the New York Yankees are 28-29 and in fifth place in their division. Perhaps justice is about to triumph" (210). The comment about the triumph of justice here may seem like merely humorous hyperbole, which it certainly is. But considering the context of baseball history, the contemporary cultural milieu, and Bouton's characterization of the Yankees, this wry observation about justice and the relative fates of the Yankees and the Mets speaks volumes about the mindset of the iconoclasts of the late-'60s and about what the Yankee cultural icon had come to stand for in this period.

The New York Mets were created as an expansion club in the National League in 1962, partially as an effort to replace the vacated Dodgers and Giants, who had moved to California after the 1957 season. Playing first in the Giants' old Polo Grounds and then in the newly erected Shea Stadium in the borough of Queens, the Mets were initially horrible, but nevertheless won the hearts of New Yorkers, selling as many tickets as—and sometimes outdrawing—the Yankees through much of the 1960s (Mann 191-192).⁹³

⁹³ The Mets, along with their fellow '62 expansion team the Houston Colt .45s (later Astros), were founded for a number of reasons. In addition to capitalizing on the market of former Dodger and Giant fans in New York City, there was the threat of the proposed formation of a third Major League, the Continental League, which was going to include a club in the New York area. The National League offered the New York City group an expansion franchise as part of the effort to quash this proposed new league (Tygiel, *Past Time* 186-189). The Mets' Shea Stadium was built on the very plot of land in Flushing Meadows, Queens that powerful city planner Robert Moses had offered Brooklyn Dodger owner Walter O'Malley when he was looking to replace Ebbets Field. O'Malley refused to accept the land, pointing out that it was in Queens, not Brooklyn, and eventually moved his team to Los Angeles. As

Thus, when Bouton speaks of the inversion of the fortunes of the lowly Mets and the once-mighty and immovable Yankees as being a long-denied fulfillment of “justice,” the parallels with the decade’s broader struggle of the disempowered to bring down the traditional power structure are clear, be it the iconoclastic efforts of segregated African-Americans, feminists, the working-class, or those endless battalions of the young, armed with their “new” ideas about peace and love.

The underdog Mets—as if reincarnated Brooklyn Dodgers—would go on to win the pennant and beat the favored Baltimore Orioles in the 1969 World Series (though, writing on July 10th, Bouton likely would have only guessed this in his wildest dreams). The Yankees, meanwhile, languished for the fifth consecutive season in the second division. This reversal of fortunes for the two New York clubs made for a fitting end to the upheaval of the decade of the 1960s. Along these same lines, the left-leaning Bouton’s recognition of this symbolism with his reference to the pending triumph of justice may be the most telling passage in *Ball Four* related to the reinterpretation of the Yankees cultural icon in the tumultuous 1960s. Embodiment of the triumphal World War II and Postwar America, the Yankees were now the tyrannical, but corroding “Establishment,” whose comeuppance many believed to be at hand.

***Ball Four’s* Aftermath and the Yankees**

As scathing as Bouton’s portrayal of the Yankees in *Ball Four* was, the material within the covers of the memoir constitute only a starting point for the way it shaped popular perspectives on the Yankees cultural icon. Controversial for its frank—some might say sensationalized—treatment of clubhouse culture, *Ball Four* became a best-seller upon

ultimate testament to their early futility, the 1962 Mets, with a record of 40-120, lost more games than any team in the twentieth century.

publication. It won Bouton few friends within Major League Baseball, however. As Peter Golenbock colorfully puts it,

When Bouton's book was published, exposing some of his teammates as human beings who liked to have fun in human ways, some of those teammates regarded Bouton as Judas reincarnate. Part of the athlete's code has always been, "in this clubhouse what you hear here and see here, stays here." Bouton broke the code. He has suffered for it ever since. He has never been invited to a Yankee Old-Timers' Day game. Mickey Mantle and Ellie Howard, men who were close to him when they were teammates, refuse to have anything to do with him, and the baseball establishment has branded him a traitor. (*Dynasty* 372)

Ball Four invoked the wrath of both baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn, who tried to get Bouton to sign a statement declaring the memoir to be a fictional fabrication (Bouton 408), and the Yankees, who shunned him completely until finally relenting and inviting him back for their traditional Old-Timers' Day in 1998 (Fromer 194-195).⁹⁴ All of this, of course, played right into Bouton's hands. Or rather, it further bolstered his credentials as an iconoclast and friend of the counterculture, an enterprise in which he seems heavily invested in the pages of *Ball Four*. Abiding Newton's third law of motion, this fallout had an equal but opposite effect on the Yankees organization, seemingly confirming to the general public all of Bouton's accusations about them as reactionary and tyrannically controlling.

⁹⁴ The bad blood between Bouton and the Yankees continued until their reconciliation in the late-1990s and at least once was made comically public while Bouton worked as a maverick sports journalist for a New York television station. Writing in 1975, Golenbock recounts the story that reads like a passage from *Catch-22*, "Last Year Bouton put on a disguise, a beard and moustache, to try out incognito as a 20-year-old-kid pitcher with the Yankees. After his first few pitches, the Yankee scouts recognized his familiar overhand motion. They kept him at the tryout to have the satisfaction of telling him that he had flunked out" (372).

***Ball Four* and Mickey Mantle**

Ball Four's publication likewise had a dramatic effect on the public perception of then-recently retired Yankee centerfielder Mickey Mantle. More than just an All-Star, Mantle was the face of the Yankees organization since at least the mid-1950s, and in light of the club's rapid late '60s decline, was still arguably the name most connected with the Yankees in the public consciousness at the time of the book's publication. As a teammate through much of the 1960s, Mantle makes several appearances in Bouton's recollections of his days with the Yankees.

Though his portrayal of the popular Yankee hero is in many ways positive,⁹⁵ and it seems clear that Bouton liked Mantle personally, *Ball Four* frankly discussed aspects of the superstar Mantle's life that were not common public knowledge: his heavy drinking (30), his participation with teammates in peeping-tom voyeurism at hotels and ballparks (38), and his reluctance to sign autographs, which occasionally resulted in cruelty or rudeness towards young fans (30). Mantle biographer Tony Castro describes Bouton's portrayal of the Hall of Fame centerfielder as, "in retrospect . . . fair" (238-9), but at the time of the book's release many reviews and articles about the scandalous book focused disproportionately on these details about Mantle (Castro 240). In the words of Castro, this constituted a "devastating blow" to Mickey's public image in these early days after his retirement (238). David Falkner, another Mantle biographer, assesses the damage thusly,

⁹⁵ Bouton, for his part, certainly claims that was his intent, telling Golenbock,

This is the thing that I have felt worse about than anything—Mickey's reaction to the book. Because in many ways I always felt the same way that the other guys felt about Mantle. I loved him. . . He was winning games for me. He was great around the clubhouse, telling great stories. He was just fun to be around. When I was a rookie he was nice to me. There were so many reasons to love that guy. (380)

It was the age of the antihero and Bouton's irreverence fit the time perfectly. . . [A]s far as Mantle was concerned, the uncritically adoring view the public had of him began to fade. In the years following, the public's image of Mantle was as someone who surfaced for a few weeks each spring to stand around for several hours in his old uniform and then to carouse at night. (Falkner 214)

In many respects, this shift in Mantle's public image and its timeliness considering the iconoclasm of the era that Falkner describes has become a significant part of the Yankee slugger's legacy. One need look no further than the titles of his numerous biographies for confirmation, including Castro's *Mickey Mantle: America's Prodigal Son*, Jane Leavy's *The Last Boy: Mickey Mantle and the End of America's Childhood*, and Falkner's own *The Last Hero: The Life of Mickey Mantle*.

Ball Four's impact on Mantle public persona had perhaps as much of an influence on the popular perspective on the Yankees as a cultural icon as Bouton's own complaints about his old club within the text. Mickey Mantle was more than just a Yankee hero in the public consciousness, he was heir to the legacy of *the* Yankee Hero, the tradition of Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio that personified the Yankees icon and its affiliated values of heroic masculinity and the American dream.

This heroic mantle was thrust upon Mickey, the son of a poor Oklahoma zinc miner, from the very beginning of his career with the Yankees. As the ballplayer himself remembers, "When I came up, [manager] Casey [Stengel] told the writers that I was going to be the next Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig and Joe DiMaggio all rolled up in one" (qtd. in Castro 50). Stengel's thoughts about

the new Yankee Messiah were echoed in sports magazine cover stories (Leavy 22-24) and quickly spread through sportswriters to baseball fans and the national public at large.⁹⁶

But Mantle's biographers seem to agree that the real confirmation that Mantle was heir to the tradition of Yankee Heroism came from clubhouse worker, Pete Sheehy. Leavy explains,

Pete Sheehy, the clubhouse man and guardian of Yankee succession, assigned the lockers and the uniform numbers—the Yankees were the first team to do that. . . He was the institutional memory of the club. . . He fetched hot dogs and bicarb for The Babe and joe for Joe D.; he informed a historically challenged rookie that George Herman Ruth's number 3 was not available, nor was Henry Louis Gehrig's 4. As for 5 [DiMaggio's number], everyone knew 5 was still working on immortality. Sheehy gave Mantle 6. "The Law of Mathematical progression," the Yankees' public relations man Red Patterson called it. (11-12)

Regarding the symbolism of this numerical assignment,⁹⁷ Castro concurs,

Sheehy recognized an obvious continuity in the Yankees line of succession: Lou Gehrig had assumed the superstar role after Babe Ruth; DiMaggio's debut had come at the end of Gehrig's career; and now Mantle appeared headed to join the Yankees in DiMaggio's last season. (49)

With this link between Mantle and the storied Yankee past established in both the public's mind and the Yankee organization's, *Ball Four's* revelations, such as they were, made

⁹⁶ To further foster the notion that Mantle was successor to the great Yankee Hero tradition, general manger George Weiss informed him that the official public relations line was to be that Joe DiMaggio, who Mantle would replace in centerfield, was his childhood hero, not Stan Musial, Mantle's true preference (Leavy 21).

⁹⁷ Perhaps all this pressure got to Mantle initially, as he played poor early in that first season and was sent down to the minors for polishing. When he reemerged with the Yankees later that season, Sheehy gave him number 7 instead.

quite an impact on the team's cultural meaning at the end of the tumultuous 1960s. As the bearer of the torch of Yankee heroism, Mantle, like Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio before him, "was proof of America's promise: [that] anyone could grow up to be president or Mickey Mantle—even Mickey Mantle" (Leavy xv). Even Mantle himself sensed something of what the American public saw in him, admitting, "I guess you could say I'm what this country is all about" (qtd. in Leavy xv).

Though Ruth's wild off-field antics were far too extreme for the American public not to have some intimation of them, Gehrig and DiMaggio were, by and large, still seen as flawless, canonized baseball saints of the Great American Success Story. Thus, public scandal surrounding Mantle's imperfections revealed in *Ball Four* was received as something of a betrayal of the Yankee legacy. Some may have seen Mantle as an unworthy successor. Others would have presumed that if these relatively salacious details about Mantle were true, the same must be true of all baseball heroes, even the great Yankees heroes. In either case, in 1970, the great American icon, the Yankee Hero, was taken down a peg or two in the public's estimation, and with it, those accompanying ideas about the promise and goodness of the American nation itself.

This disillusionment may have been particularly resonant with that generational cohort that worshiped Mantle growing up, the Baby Boomers. Though not technically a Baby Boomer himself, Joe Pepitone, a teammate and friend from late in Mantle's career, confirms this in his interview with Golenbock, reflecting, "Mantle had been an idol for so many years to people my age [Pepitone was born in 1940] and your age [Golenbock was born in 1946], and they grow up idolizing him" (*Dynasty* 361). Leavy goes even farther in hypothesizing such a generational connection, writing simply that, "Mantle was the face of postwar America" (Leavy 120). As

such a generational icon, Mantle's public fall from grace would have had a particular effect on Baby Boomers who remembered Mantle from their youth. Pepitone says as much, claiming, "Kids grew up with a lot of good images about Mickey Mantle. They felt good just thinking about him and the next thing you know they're depressed because of what Jim [Bouton] wrote" (qtd. in Golenbock, *Dynasty* 361). One thing that Pepitone seems to overlook in his comments is the fact that many of these kids that idolized Mantle as youngsters, were no longer quite so young when *Ball Four* came out. In fact, many of them had lost faith in many icons of American greatness and were disillusioned with many American institutions they had been encouraged to respect and revere as children, including Major League Baseball. Thus, the disillusionment of Baby Boomers with Mantle has resonances of both personal loss of innocence and of a broader generational disenchantment with the values of their parents.

As illustrating example, the most immediate and obvious parallel here would be that of Henry Wiggen in Harris's *The Southpaw*, as his learning the truth about mythologized Ruth-Gehrig-DiMaggio-style baseball hero and childhood idol, Sam Yale, represents a loss of innocence and passing into a more mature and enlightened state of being. But in the cultural context of the late-1960s, another parallel to consider would be the journey of a young American like Ron Kovic, author of the memoir *Born on the Fourth of July* (1976), which tells the story of his transition from a naïve and patriotic enlistee during the Vietnam conflict to a disillusioned paraplegic veteran protesting the same war.⁹⁸ Though his version of the story might be more dramatic and extreme than the norm, Kovic's transition is essentially a microcosm for the entire generation of countercultural Baby Boomers, who were taught to believe in America and its

⁹⁸ Kovic, incidentally, was a big Yankee fan as a young boy and discusses this in interesting ways in his memoir, but since his text was produced during years outside the historical parameters of this study, I will not attempt any discussion or analysis of his use of the Yankees icon here.

institutions but during young adulthood lost faith and came to embrace what they saw as higher truths.⁹⁹

Just as Baby Boomers may have felt betrayed by the hero of their youth when learning less-than-heroic personal details from *Ball Four*, many Americans began to feel betrayed by America as they began to learn more about Vietnam, racial policies, or later, Watergate. This parallel is fitting, of course, because the Yankees cultural icon is closely tied to so many of the values of World War II generation. Thus the changing perspective on the Yankees icon in the second half of the '60s can be read as part and parcel of this broader disenchantment with the values of the nation's recent past. Leavy certainly reads Mantle in this way, asserting, "The transformation of The Mick over the course of eighteen years in the majors and forty-four years in the public eye parallels the transformation of American culture from willful innocence to knowing cynicism. To tell his story is to tell ours" (Leavy xxiii).

The Decline and Fall of the New York Yankees

While I argue that *Ball Four* both contributed to and reflected the changing public attitudes towards the Yankees cultural icon, it was not a lone voice in the wilderness. Though it mostly concerns itself with baseball business, organizational strategy, and how it had changed in recent history, Jack Mann's book length piece of sports journalism, *The Decline and Fall of the New York Yankees* does contain some discussion of the Yankees' cultural meaning. Most significant is Mann's implication that the Yankee way of doing things is on the way out, not just in baseball, but in American culture generally. While not developed into a full discussion, Mann's comments about a broader "system of controlled mediocrity" being the Yankees'

⁹⁹ In fact, in an interesting study, Landon Jones proposes that all the cultural tumult of the 1960s is best read as the confusion inherent to the coming-of-age process magnified by the size of the Baby Boomer generational cohort, who went through their teenage years and young adulthood during the 1960s (79).

downfall seem directed not just at Major League Baseball, but at other American institutions as well, possibly as a criticism of Johnson's Great Society social welfare programs.

In any case, in reading Mann one gets the sense that the author feels the version of American culture that produced the New York Yankees and made the team into its own iconic embodiment, is, like the Yankees, on its last legs. This is rarely stated outright, if at all, but can be clearly detected as he quotes Jim Turner, a former Yankee pitcher-turned-pitching-coach whom Mann describes as the "high priest of that fundamental precept of the Yankee Era"—winning (79). He quotes Turner's response to the suggestion that Yankee Stadium attendance is not dependant on the on-field success of the Yankees,

People want to see the Yankees because they're the best. That's what this country is built on. You make more money than the other people because you make the best product. Yes, if the Yankees won every game, even more people would want to see them, because they're the best. That's what American people want. . . . If you think people come out to see the Yankees lose, well, all I can tell you is that that's Communist thinking. (80)

Turner's comments here link the Yankees with a political and economic ideology particular to the postwar period of American history. For Turner, the Yankees on-field success is a symbol of American economic success and political victory, perhaps particularly where the two combine in Cold War anti-communism.

This depiction is wholly consistent with Bouton's portrayal of the Bronx Bombers, except with perhaps more of an emphasis on winning. Unlike Bouton, Mann himself has no leftist or countercultural political agenda and his book really makes only occasional gestures towards a broader cultural and historical context. But even without any explication from Mann

himself, the cultural implications in his quotation of Turner are undeniable. In Turner's statement, the subtext is that the Yankees domination of the Major Leagues in the postwar period is a parallel of the way the United States exerted its power over the world during World War II's finale and its Cold War aftermath. But for Turner, both have a right to exert this power—and are even destined to do so—by virtue of a belief in American exceptionalism, or perhaps only a faith in the free market survival-of-the-fittest ethic. For the United States, as well as the Yankees, this power and success is justified by their claim on populist values of hard work and self-sacrifice. In this way, Mann's representation of Turner gives voice to the old-guard, American "Establishment" facet of the Yankees against which Bouton rails. In fact, Turner proclaims his position in such a ham-fisted manner, he may as well be Bouton's straw man.

But as the very title of Mann's book, implies, this "Yankee Era" is over. Just as public opinion about the nation's right to exert its power in such a militant way and actual victory in Vietnam seemed unsure, Yankee dominance crumbled. And for many, like Bouton, this came not a minute too soon. Thus, as Mann's titular allusion to the Roman Empire suggests, in the late-1960s, these "fallen" Yankees have become emblems of the American Republic collapsing under its own weighty ideals.

"Mrs. Robinson" and the Yankee Icon

Far less political, but perhaps furthest reaching of all the cultural representations of the Yankees from the late 1960s is folk-rock duo Simon and Garfunkel's use of the Yankees icon in their 1968 number-one hit "Mrs. Robinson." Though somewhat opaque in terms of narrative and meaning, the famous line "Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio? / A nation turns its lonely eyes

to you” gained immediate cultural currency¹⁰⁰ and continues to be seen as a touchstone from that era and as a pithy comment on DiMaggio’s cultural legacy.¹⁰¹ This Yankee allusion in “Mrs. Robinson” compliments the depiction of the Yankees as symbols of the American values of the older generation that were “rapidly fading,” to borrow a phrase from one of the new generation’s spokesmen, Bob Dylan.

Ostensibly about a woman—the eponymous Mrs. Robinson—who is being admitted to some kind of retirement or nursing home, and recorded for an album whose major theme is the passage of time, both personal and historical (Fornatale 85, 93), Simon and Garfunkel’s song has thematic overtones of generational change (100).¹⁰² This is magnified by its association with the film *The Graduate*, featuring a young Baby Boomer protagonist and his complicated, to say the least, relationship with his parents’ generation (77).¹⁰³ Similarly, as a duo initially involved in the Greenwich Village folk scene and then making music roughly in the “folk rock” genre since the middle of the decade, Simon and Garfunkel certainly had ties to the counterculture, as evidenced by their performance at the watershed psychedelic music event, The Monterey Pop Festival, as well as the anti-war themes in their 1969 television special, “Songs of America.” With this context in mind, the character of Mrs. Robinson is perhaps best read as a representative for the entire World War II generation. Her sudden cry out for DiMaggio in the song’s last verse—first with the aforementioned famous lyric and then echoed with the response “What’s

¹⁰⁰ For example, a cartoon from the summer of 1968 by famed New York Daily News sports cartoonist Bill Gallo shows then Yankee manager, Ralph Houk sobbing “Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio?” with a chart comparing DiMaggio’s yearly batting averages from 1936-’51 with the ’68 Yankees relatively meager averages (Gallo 304).

¹⁰¹ Biographers continue to refer to the lyric. In fact, Maury Allen’s 1975 biography takes the line as its title. Similarly, after DiMaggio’s death in 1999, Paul Simon made a special appearance at Yankee Stadium’s Joe DiMaggio Day to play the song with the famous lyric (Frommer 199).

¹⁰² Songs such as “Bookends Theme,” “Old Friends,” and “Voices of Old People” (literally just voices of old people Art Garfunkel recorded in retirement homes) speak of personal aging and change, while “America” juxtaposes the past and the present by combining optimistic, turn-of-the-century notions of about the American dream, with contemporary imagery and angst (Fornatale 88-89).

¹⁰³ An early version of “Mrs. Robinson” was recorded for the 1967 Mike Nichols film, but it did not yet feature the lyric about DiMaggio.

that you say, Mrs. Robinson?/ Joltin' Joe has left and gone away"—then becomes a symbol of the shift in values and culture taking place nationally at the time.

Like the old fisherman, Santiago in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, Mrs. Robinson cries out not for DiMaggio the man, but for DiMaggio the icon, for what he represents: self-sacrificing heroism, and grace under pressure. But because we presume Mrs. Robinson is American, and because she is an older woman in a pop song in 1968, her DiMaggio would also include not just the personal values he represents, but all the cultural values associated with the great Yankee Hero tradition and with the team itself: a belief in the American dream and American prosperity, and in the goodness and rightness of the nation's position and power in the world.

Unlike Bouton, however, Simon and Garfunkel do not seem to have political motives with their use of the Yankees cultural icon. Though certainly not without their countercultural affiliations, in their music the duo typically veered toward the literary¹⁰⁴ rather than the political. This certainly seems to be the case with "Mrs. Robinson," and particularly in the famous line about DiMaggio, which the duo seems to enunciate with earnestness as if they too longed for the certainty, abundance, and relative simplicity of the triumphant America the DiMaggio-led Yankees represented. Furthermore, the use of the term "the nation" suggests that Mrs. Robinson is not a lone reactionary, but part of a national chorus, keenly feeling the loss of the values in which it once invested.

When Paul Simon, the song's author and an admitted Mickey Mantle fan, was once asked by television personality Dick Cavett why he chose to use DiMaggio's name instead of his

¹⁰⁴ For instance, they recorded a song, "Richard Cory" (1966) that is a retelling of an E.A. Robinson poem. While songs from their album *Parsely, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme* (1966) reference Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, and Dylan Thomas.

boyhood hero, Mantle, Simon made the excuse that the syllables of Mantle's name did not fit as well as DiMaggio's (Leavy xx). The obvious truth, however, was that Mantle, who retired the same year the song came out, was too entwined with the present, and perhaps, particularly the less-than-illustrious Yankee present, to work as a symbol of the longed-for American past. In fact, after his fall from public grace emphasized by *Ball Four* a few years after "Mrs. Robinson's" release, the line could be read a commentary on Mantle and the collapse of heroism he represented. Faced with a less-than-ideal image of Mantle, Americans feel nostalgia for the image of the Yankee Hero from the days when sports journalism helped build a hero's saintly status, rather than tear it down.

Less caustic than *Ball Four*, and less political in its portrayal of the Yankee cultural icon, Simon and Garfunkel's "Mrs. Robinson," nevertheless, stands as a companion piece to both Bouton's memoir and Jack Mann's book.¹⁰⁵ Like those texts, it strongly associates the iconic Yankees—who, by this point perhaps could be said to be leading a cultural existence separate and apart from the baseball team actually being fielded in the Bronx—with an American past that was recent and yet suddenly felt quite distant to many considering the substantial changes to American society taking place in the 1960s. In a period where baseball in general began to lose its cultural hold on Americans, the Yankees, as a heightened, more concentrated symbol of the populist, masculine values generally associated with baseball, and one that emphasized success in a way so harmonious with the triumphal America of the late '40s and '50s, suddenly became icons of yesterday.

¹⁰⁵ The common threads in their respective portrayals of the Yankee cultural icon notwithstanding, the producers of these texts each worked independently. However, Bouton did read and write a review for Mann's book that *The New York Post* "refused" to run (Bouton 294), which may have influenced some of this thoughts about and attitudes towards the Yankees.

Conclusion—Towards the New Millennium

The decade following the Yankees' sharp decline in the late 1960s brought even bigger changes to the club. One of these changes occurred throughout baseball, when the 1974 decision of a legal arbitrator struck down the Major League's long-standing "reserve clause," which enabled players to become free agents once their contracts were up, able to play for the team of their choice, often the highest bidder. Around the same time, in 1973, the Yankees were purchased by Cleveland ship-building magnate, George Steinbrenner. Steinbrenner almost immediately became a notorious figure in baseball with his outspokenness, active (some might say over-active) involvement in trades and acquisitions of players, and willingness to pay unprecedented sums of money to attract top talent in the new era of free agency. His frequent hiring and firing of his managers, including former Yankee Billy Martin (second base, 1950-'57) five times helped solidify his headstrong and tempestuous reputation. Steinbrenner arguably became the face and most dominant personality of the club the length of his ownership from 1973 until in death in 2010, though players such as Thurman Munson, Reggie Jackson, Don Mattingly, Derek Jeter, Mariano Rivera, and Alex Rodriguez have also had prominent public profiles, particularly during periods of renewed Yankee success, including 1976-1981 and 1996-2003.

But it is Steinbrenner who has had the most influence in reshaping the Yankees cultural icon since the end of the 1960s, bringing an aura of plutocratic egotism to the Bronx Bombers. Accusations of plutocracy had been lobbied at the Yanks since the days of Babe Ruth, and the

elitist label had always been a part of the mid-twentieth-century critique of the club, whether by fans of the Brooklyn Dodgers or disgruntled ex-Yankees like Jim Bouton. Under Steinbrenner, however, things became slightly different as the changing business of baseball and Steinbrenner's outspokenness combined to reshape the Yankees into an icon of *egocentric* capitalism. As such, Steinbrenner's purchase of the team and the advent of free agency effectively closed an era for the Yankees cultural meaning and began a new one that will always be marked by Steinbrenner's imprint.

These new dimensions to the Yankee icon notwithstanding, the legacy of the key texts of the 1940s, '50s and '60s and the way they represented the club will always be a part of the Yankees' cultural meaning. This was clear when displays of local civic pride and patriotism coalesced around the team in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York City, evoking their earlier All-American nationalist associations in texts like *The Pride of the Yankees* or *Lucky to Be a Yankee*. The legacy of the mid-century Yankees icon can also be seen in the conversations taking place surrounding the retirement of contemporary Yankee stars Mario Rivera (relief pitcher, 1995-2013) and Derek Jeter (shortstop, 1995-2014), weighing the question of whether they are worthy of the Cannon of Yankee heroes, Ruth, Gehrig, DiMaggio, and Mantle. And, finally, the critical perspectives on the mid-century Yankees icon were echoed relatively recently in 2003 and 2004, when fans of longtime Yankee rivals, the Boston Red Sox, took a page from both Brooklyn Dodger fans and Douglass Wallop in rechristening the Yankees "The Evil Empire" and associating them with the villains from the mythic Star Wars movie franchise (see fig.17).

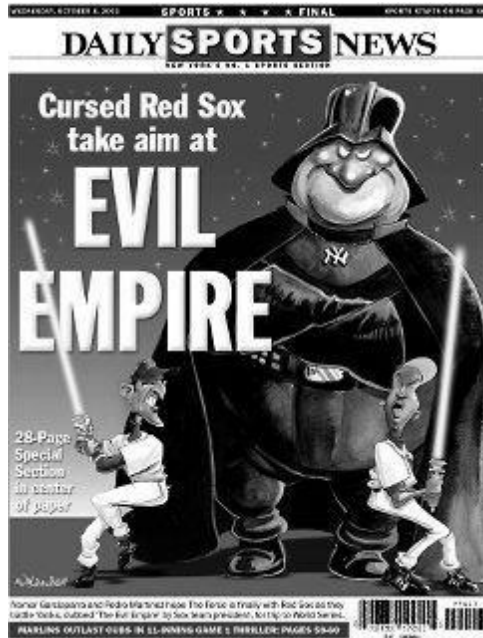


Fig. 17

Though sometimes overshadowed by the figure of Steinbrenner, or slightly reshaped by cultural changes both within baseball and the nation at large, the mid-century development of the Yankees icon remains a foundational part of the Yankees' ever-shifting and growing cultural meaning. To a certain degree, the Yankees will always be the embodiment of those prominent American values from the World War II and postwar era—the American dream, heroic masculinity, and a narrative of national success. Likewise the critical,

oppositional perspective on the icon that developed alongside it in the mid-twentieth century will always be a part of the team's cultural meaning as well, with all its implications that America was and could be other things than what that Yankees icon represented.

In this way, the impact of the cultural change and conflict between World War II and the end of the 1960s on the Yankees icon parallels the important role it plays in recent American history. Just as this important era of cultural history—its changes and conflicts in values—continue to loom large in the lives of contemporary Americans, so also do the conflicting and shifting perspectives on the Yankees icon that formed part of that historic period continue to be foundational to contemporary understandings, opinions, connotations and meanings of the club. In this sense, the Yankees icon is particularly emblematic of that crucial period in mid-twentieth century American culture. Conflicting perspectives on the club in our contemporary culture serve as a continual reminder that the struggle over and shift in values that occurred in the middle of the twentieth century are still very much with us.

Though baseball may have lost some of its cultural clout to professional and collegiate football and basketball, the New York Yankees remain as controversial as they were in the mid-1950s. And, in an increasingly globalized world with an increasingly globalized game of baseball, the controversy over the Yankees and what they represent is no longer confined to the United States of America. As tenured sports writer George Vecsey observed after noticing a proliferation of Yankee ball caps while traveling abroad in the wake of the Yanks' 1996 World Series win, the team from the Bronx is still "fulfilling the great polar needs of sport. Quite like America itself, the Yankees (are) either classic champions, envied and admired all over the world, or else they (are) haughty oppressors, resented by the downtrodden masses" (151).

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Appendix: Timeline of Key Moments in Yankees History through Steinbrenner Purchase

- 1903: Baltimore Orioles move to New York, begin play in Hilltop Park in north Manhattan and referred to as the Highlanders.
- 1904: The Highlanders threat to win the pennant causes John McGraw to withdraw his Giants from the planned World Series (McGraw felt it beneath the Giants to play their cross-town “junior circuit” counterpart.) but New York lost the pennant to Boston.
- 1913: The Highlanders move into the Giant’s Polo Grounds. No longer on top of a hill, the name Highlanders is dropped and unofficial nickname “Yankees” becomes official team name.
- 1915: In financial straits, Yankees owners Frank Ferrell and William Devery sell the ballclub to Tillinghast Huston and wealthy brewery heir Jacob Rupert.
- 1918: Miller Huggins becomes manager.
- 1920: Babe Ruth purchased from Boston in the off season. Many other trades and deals for Boston players would follow. Also, former Red Sox manager Ed Borrow hired as Yankees general manager, where he would serve for over two decades. In his first season, Ruth hits record 59 home runs. Yankees finish third to Cleveland and Chicago White Sox.
- 1921: Yankees win first AL pennant, lose World Series to Giants. Yankees told they must move out of Polo grounds after 1922 season.
- 1922: Second AL pennant, lose to Giants in World Series again.
- 1923: Yankee Stadium opens, Yankees finally beat cross-town rivals the Giants for first World Series championship.
- 1924: Finish second to Washington.
- 1925: Ruth’s “bellyache heard round the world” keeps him out for much of the season. Yanks finish seventh. Midseason Lou Gehrig becomes new starting first baseman.
- 1926: Ruth “heals” a sick boy with his World Series home run. Yanks lose Series to Cardinals.
- 1927: Yankees have most dominant season ever. Christened “Murderer’s Row,” sweep Pittsburgh in Series.
- 1928: Yankees sweep Cardinals to repeat as World Series Champs.
- 1929: Yanks finish second to Connie Mack’s Philadelphia Athletics. Manager Miller Huggins dies suddenly in September.
- 1930: Bob Shawkey becomes manager. Yanks finish third behind Philadelphia and Washington. Bob Shawkey let go as manager.
- 1931: Joe McCarthy becomes manager. Yankees finish second behind Philadelphia.
- 1932: Yankees defeat Cubs in World Series. Ruth “calls his shot” in game three.
- 1933: Yankees finish second to Washington.
- 1934: Finish second to Detroit. Ruth leaves the Yankees after season, goes to the Boston Braves and retires after two months.
- 1935: Finish second to Detroit.
- 1936: Joe DiMaggio debuts with Yankees and makes immediate impact. Yanks defeat Giants in World Series.
- 1937: Yankees defeat Giants in World Series for the second year in a row.

- 1938: Yanks sweep Cubs in World Series for third Championship in a row. Gehrig plays in his 2,000th consecutive game.
- 1939: Owner Jacob Ruppert dies, his estate takes over team ownership. Gehrig diagnosed with terminal amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and is honored with an appreciation day on July 4th. Yankees sweep Cincinnati in World Series for an unprecedented four in a row.
- 1940: Yankees finish third behind Detroit and Cleveland.
- 1941: Yankees defeat Brooklyn in World Series. DiMaggio gets a hit in still record 56 consecutive games.
- 1942: Yankees lose World Series to Cardinals.
- 1943: Yankees beat Cardinals in World Series in war-depleted leagues.
- 1944: War-weakened Yankees finish third behind St. Louis Browns and Detroit.
- 1945: Del Webb, Dan Topping and Larry McPhail buy Yankees from Ruppert estate. War-weakened Yankees finish fourth behind Detroit.
- 1946: Stars return from war, but Yankees finish third behind Boston and Detroit. Joe McCarthy, frustrated with the brash, new part-owner Larry McPhail, resigns as manager. Yogi Berra debuts with Yankees.
- 1947: Bucky Harris becomes new manager. George Weiss becomes general Manager. Yankees defeat a Brooklyn team that features first black player Jackie Robinson in a dramatic seven game World Series. Webb and Topping buy out McPhail's shares of the club at the end of the season.
- 1948: Yankees finish third behind Cleveland and Boston. Bucky Harris let go as manager.
- 1949: Casey Stengel becomes new manager. Yankees defeat Brooklyn in World Series.
- 1950: Yankees sweep Phillies in World Series for second in a row.
- 1951: Mickey Mantle debuts with Yankees. Yanks defeat Giants for third World Series championship in a row. DiMaggio retires at the end of season.
- 1952: Yankees defeat Brooklyn for four World Series in a row.
- 1953: Yankees beat Brooklyn for a new record five World Series championships in a row.
- 1954: Yanks finish second to Cleveland, despite winning 103 games.
- 1955: Yankees lose World Series to perennial bridesmaid and cross-town rival Brooklyn in seven games.
- 1956: Yanks beat Brooklyn in World Series.
- 1957: Yankees lose World Series to Milwaukee Braves.
- 1958: Yankees defeat Milwaukee in World Series.
- 1959: Yankees finish third behind Chicago White Sox and Cleveland.
- 1960: Yankees lose to Pittsburgh in dramatic seven-game World Series. Casey Stengel let go as manager. George Weiss let go as general manager.
- 1961: Ralph Houk becomes manager. Yankees Mickey Mantle and Roger Marris compete to break Babe Ruth's 60 home run mark, with Marris eventually setting a new record of 61*. Yanks defeat Cincinnati in the World Series.
- 1962: Yankees defeat old cross-town rival Giants (now based in San Francisco) in World Series. The New York Mets, an expansion NL franchise featuring former Yankees Casey Stengel and George Weiss as manager and general manager, respectively, enter MLB.
- 1963: Yankees are swept in World Series for the first time since '22 by old cross-town rivals, the Dodgers (now playing in Los Angeles). Ralph Houk moves to general manager. Yogi Berra retires as a player and becomes new manager the following year.
- 1964: Yankees lose a seven-game World Series to the Cardinals. Berra let go as manager. CBS

- buys team after season's end.
- 1965: Johnny Keane becomes manager. Yankees finish sixth—lowest since '25—with a losing record.
- 1966: Yankees finish tenth. Johnny Keane let go after winning 4 of first 20 games; Ralph Houk takes over as manager.
- 1967: Yankees finish ninth.
- 1968: Yankees finish with a winning record for first time since '64, take fifth.
- 1969: Yankees finish fifth out of six in the new American League East Division. Once-lowly cross-town rivals, the Mets win World Series.
- 1970: Yankees finish a distant second to Baltimore.
- 1971: Yankees finish fourth to Baltimore, Detroit and Boston.
- 1972: Yankees finish fourth to Detroit, Boston and Baltimore.
- 1973: Yankees bought by George Steinbrenner. They finish fourth to Baltimore, Boston and Detroit.