

pinstripe nation

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Since both my boys are left-handed, by the age of six or seven, they each knew by heart the plot of the movie *The Pride of the Yankees* (1942), since I wanted them to see what a lefty slugger could do to a baseball (even if Lou Gehrig was portrayed by right-handed Gary Cooper). What I didn't bargain for was that my youngest would become a Yankee fan to this day, rooting against his dad's Twins every time they played. Will Bishop's *Pinstripe Nation* shows how inevitable such fan allegiance is when it comes to the most iconic baseball team in popular culture.

Beginning with Babe Ruth and the rise of the Yankee franchise in the 20s and tracing through the various iconic players to follow (Gehrig, DiMaggio, Mantle, Jackson, Jeter), Bishop's carefully researched tome explores particularly well how literary texts, auto-biographies, television, and film shaped the culture's sense of what it meant to be a Yankee. Significant space is given to how the portrayal of Gehrig in *Pride of the Yankees* represents a reshaping of the heroic model from the "legendary, semi-mythical" Ruth (34) to the "morally superior" Gehrig who was "more representative of 'American' values" (45). Bishop also suggests the participation of the Yankee franchise in the making of the Gehrig movie helped shape the franchise as an icon as well, conveying "an image of an elite organization giving special honor to one from among its storied ranks," as suggested as well by "[the Yankee franchise's] special 'days' given to the legends who would follow, notably Joe DiMaggio and Mickey Mantle" (43).

Subsequent chapters focus on DiMaggio and the Yankees of the 40s, particularly via his autobiography *Lucky to be a Yankee* (1946), and the Yankee-hating trend of the 1950s as seen through their rivalry with the Brooklyn Dodgers, as well as in the Douglas Wallop novel *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* (1954), the inspiration for the Broadway musical and movie *Damn Yankees* (1958). As Bishop suggests, post-war Dodger fans viewed the Yankees as "elitist," and the slowness of the Yankees to integrate helped create an alternative perspective on the Yankees as a cultural icon in the postwar period. This alternative side of the Yankees emphasized hypocrisy, arrogance, and abuse of power. It made the organization a symbol of the American establishment whose past glory loomed over and limited the success of marginalized others. (136)

Of course, it didn't help that the Yankees kept winning pennants and World Series championships. Bishop's discussion of *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* was quite effective in exploring the Faustian implications of selling your middle-aged soul to help the Senators win a pennant, but Bishop could analyze the film *Damn Yankees* further. He also missed an opportunity to explore race issues regarding the Yanks when he omitted discussion of August Wilson's play *Fences*, set in the 1950s, in which ex-Negro Leaguer Troy Maxson resents George Selkirk's playing right field for the Yankees when Troy had a better year.

As Bishop suggests early on, he finds some of the best evidence for the importance of the Yankees as popular icon in texts where they are "peripheral " to the main events, such as

Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Simon and Garfunkel's "Mrs. Robinson" because they are "perhaps most illustrative of the Yankee's iconic nature," revealing "how the Bronx club has essentially been used as a sort of cultural shorthand for certain ideas or values that all Americans would understand" (8). Santiago's emulating Joe DiMaggio as a hero who can endure the pain of bone spurs while continuing to perform for the Yankees, DiMaggio representing a lost cultural past in "Mrs. Robinson," both receive careful consideration from Bishop's analysis. Similarly, references regarding the Korean War and social conformity in Mark Harris's novel *The Southpaw*, for Bishop, provide "a link between the Yankees and the nation as a whole in a military context" (160). The Steinbrenner era too receives ample discussion through such lenses as Sparky Lyle's *The Bronx Zoo* (1979) but also through an interesting analysis of various *Seinfeld* episodes, including, of course, George Costanza's stint in the Yankee front office. Even *Field of Dreams* (1989) makes the cut, rightly, because young Ray Kinsella chooses to cheer for the Dodgers to spite his father, the Yankees fan. As Bishop sees it, Ray's father represents "the cultural values" of the early Yankees: "heroic masculinity, the promise of the American dream, and ... national success and greatness" whereas Ray, "the prototypical baby boomer," "sees his father's team and his father's values as flawed" (267).

I like how Bishop's reading of an 80s movie about worshipping a non-Yankee, *Shoeless Joe*, pivots on a father/son rivalry involving the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Yankees. When it comes to rebellion, what better way to buck the establishment than to root against the Yankees? Will Bishop's *Pinstripe Nation* successfully interrogates the significance of the New York Yankees to popular sports culture in the twentieth century.

Bishop, Will. *Pinstripe Nation: The New York Yankees in American Culture*. University of Tennessee Press. 2018.

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