

MONDAY

FROM FRATERNITY TO NATIONAL LEAGUE: The Public and the Civic in Early Baseball

Thesis: The game of baseball emerged in the midst of a market revolution that reshaped American culture and society in the mid-nineteenth century. As Americans feverishly embraced calculating behavior in a competitive market, the civic and public ambitions and obligations they had inherited from the Revolution seemed less important. Instead, Americans celebrated individual economic ambition in the private market and a compensating haven of emotional support in the privacy of the domestic realm. In this context, baseball upheld an alternative set of values. Ball players celebrated fraternity and sociability, civic pride and public glory. In a period that might be described as “the great incarceration” (when more and more of life was lived indoors - in shops, factories, and respectable “homes”), ball players celebrated the joys of a life lived in public, out of doors. But baseball also straddled a cultural boundary between the boisterous public culture of the sporting crowd and a Victorian, market-oriented concern with self-discipline and self-restraint that “respectable” clerks and artisans brought to the game. Although this tension has never completely disappeared from the game, the growing commercialization of the game forced at least a partial accommodation to the values of the market.

MARKET REVOLUTION AND CIVIC LIFE: The Historical Context of Baseball's Emergence

the quest for excitement, the spirit of play and displacement of civic/cultural energy: A couple of European thinkers, sociologist Norbert Elias and historian Johann Huizinga, have connected to rise of sports (non-violent pastimes with a considerable degree of organization and a growing spectator base) to the state-building process (Elias) and the rationalization of human activity in modern society (Huizinga). Sports operated as a sort of compensation, absorbing energies and passions once found in politics (Elias) and providing an outlet for playful instincts in a rationalized and routinized society (Huizinga - who defines play as deadly serious, but non-instrumental activity, the creative spirit that gives rise to culture). Elias and Huizinga suggest that sport has a history connected to other social developments. I try to use their insights to understand why baseball emerged in the United States in the 1840s and 1850s.

public festivals and civic rituals in a privatizing society; the all-star games of 1858; fire laddies' widows and orphans (and their shirts) - the crucial connection to volunteer fire brigades

clerks and artisans in an industrializing republic: these two groups dominated the baseball fraternity. Both were experiencing tremendous changes in their work lives and their social status. Once apprentice businessmen or aspiring proprietors, clerks and artisans were becoming permanent wage-earners. Baseball provided a means of finding satisfactions, expressing ambitions, and earning respect that were missing from their work lives. It also provided a means

for these groups to assert their civic responsibilities.

the fraternal clubs; Tocqueville on voluntary associations as the great school of American democracy, the thing that brought Americans out of selfishness into civic cooperation; Hobsbawm on the world of the clubs: "the boundaries of the most politically powerful and socially cohesive elements of the 'respectable' working classes 'pretty well coincided with...the world of clubs.'")

THE BALL-PLAYING FRATERNITY: Baseball and Cultural Boundaries

the sporting and ball-playing fraternities:

A. The dives of the sporting crowd, like Kit Burns's Sportsman Hall which featured Jack the Rat who for a dime bit off mouse heads (rats were a quarter) horrified the genteel. While the sporting crowd thrived ("start with a dog fight as a curtain raiser," one old New Yorker recalled, "continue with a cock fight, then rat baiting, next a prize fight, then a battle of billy goats, and then a boxing match between two ladies, with nothing but trunks on...I think you have a night's entertainment that has enough spice...to fill the most rapacious needs"), the recreational needs of the genteel went unsatisfied. Before the creation of Central Park, one genteel observer recalled, there "was no place within the city limits in which it was pleasant to walk, or ride, or drive, or stroll...no pleasant garden where one could sit and chat with a friend, or watch his children play...."

B. The ball player, Porter's Spirit of the Times explained in 1857, "must be sober and temperate. Patience, fortitude, self-denial, order, obedience, and good-humor, with an unruffled temper, are indispensable....Such a game...teaches a love of order, discipline, and fair play." Baseball kept young men "out of a great deal of mischief," the Brooklyn Eagle editorialized in the 1860s, preventing "them from hanging around [fire] houses, stables, and taverns." The game should be endorsed by every clergyman, Henry Chadwick argued, as "a remedy for the many evils resulting from the immoral associations [that] boys and young men of our cities are apt to become connected with."

Manliness and Boyishness in early baseball; baseball at the boundaries, street culture or Victorian respectability; sociability or competition?

A. the fly rule (adopted mid-sixties): "What is more annoying to an admirer of good fielding than to see a splendid hit to the center field, such as would merit a home run, entirely nullified by the puny effort of waiting until the force of the ball is spent on the ground, and then taking it on the bound." (Porter's Spirit of the Times, 1859);

B. "Ambitious Rivalries and Selfish Victories"; tension in playing for fun or playing for keeps; championship play and boyish loss of control in competition, yet this is what newspapers

headline even as they lament the behavior of the players, “boyish in the extreme, to say the least.”

BASEBALL’S ENCLOSURE MOVEMENT: First (Civic) Steps Toward the Commercial Game

the New York game: This is what the Knickerbockers 1845 rules evolved into. Three outs and nine innings allowed enough offense and yet a game of three hours or less. Foul lines, crucially, allowed spectators to get close to the action. As the nation’s leading metropolis and home to the national sports weeklies, New York spread this game nationwide. The great struggle over defining American nationalism in the Civil War era also helped to popularized baseball as “our game.” Know-Nothings, cricketers, and Turnvereins: The Turnverein (the gymnastic clubs of immigrant Germans) emphasized "the duty of each and every association to instruct its members in...the various political questions" and to promote "earnest political agitation." They became centers of political discussion.

William H. Cammeyer and baseball’s “enclosure movement” (1862 and A.T. Stewart) - commercialization, professionalization, and the fans’ annual lament

eroding fraternity: passion, chicanery, gambling, fixes, “revolving,” and patronage jobs; Victorians and political machines (the New York “Mutuals,” one time firefighters - from civic virtue to municipal governance)

corner saloons or Standard Oil? brewers, realtors, traction interests, retired ballplayers - the old wooden parks

FROM NATIONAL ASSOCIATION TO NATIONAL LEAGUE: Evolution or Coup?

from the NABBP (1858) to the NAPBBP (1870): from amateurs to professionals

the “representative nines”: from civic virtue to civic pride and boosterism; the 1869 Cincinnati Reds and Medill and Palmer’s White Stockings (still not simply profits)

William Hulbert and the National League of Baseball Clubs (1876): WH and Mrs. O’Leary; premier clubs, Victorian propriety, and management control (the Harry Wright plan, Bostons, 1872-75 as model - Wright was the first to place his team on a business basis and related to the players as employer to employee); beginnings of territorial rule (only playing league teams in each city, the truly “representative” nine; entry restricted vs. NA’s old \$10 entry fee) and reserve clause (no tampering during the season - and Hulbert’s coup and last raid)

What else was happening in 1876? Centennial, the best men, compromise and RR strikes, Custer

EARLY BASEBALL AND POLITICS

The revolutionary generation believed their experiment with a republican form of government hinged on the character of the people. The question - especially as the market revolution gained force - was whether a commercial society could create the sort of character conducive to politics. Republican theory since Aristotle had assumed that those too single-mindedly focused on commercial activities or relegated to manual labor and a hand-to-mouth existence lacked the necessary political character to be virtuous citizens. Nineteenth-century artisans vigorously challenged that view, insisting that those who worked with their hands were the best, the most virtuous citizens, the backbone of the republic. In providing a prominent and distinctive public role for artisans, rooted in civic responsibility and electoral politics (many teams originated in volunteer fire and militia companies and political organizations), baseball supported the artisans' drive for political power. "It is not my intention here to argue the political potential of baseball club members," baseball historian Warren Goldstein writes, but he certainly gives plenty of ammunition to those who would. He suggests "tentatively" that players were "the most self-conscious and 'self-improving' of skilled workers" whose "skill on the ballfield was linked not only to the way they viewed their work but also to their sense of social position in the world outside the shop." Goldstein quotes Eric Hobsbawm to the effect that "the boundaries of the most politically powerful and socially cohesive elements of the 'respectable' working classes 'pretty well coincided with...the world of clubs.'" Baseball players staked a claim to an artisan role in politics and public life. The game they played dramatized their opposition to the assault on craftsmanship and the self-regulating workshop and embodied their vision of a cooperative organization of the economy. Baseball players were, after all, craftsmen and many of the early teams were cooperative organized.

The commercialization of the game eroded the independence of those craftsmen and substituted joint-stock companies for cooperative organization. The struggle over proper behavior within the sport, part of commercializing the sport, also undercut the artisan claim for political prominence. Artisans shared with clerks, Goldstein writes, "a history of original 'respectability'" that was slipping away at mid-century. Middle-class assumptions about proper public behavior (a code of manners that was essentially a strategy of avoiding public encounters) and new sorts of exclusive public spaces (theaters and shopping districts) hardened cultural boundaries and placed boisterous working-class culture beyond the pale. Consider the political implications of an Athletics-Excelsiors game of 1860. Goldstein's account of that game illustrates what another historian (John Kasson in *Rudeness and Civility*) calls "the disciplining of spectatorship." Taking on the voice of what Goldstein calls "an ascendant evangelical bourgeois culture," the *New York Clipper* lambasted the Athletics and "their very questionable friends" (their working-class fans) for being unruly. The "riotous proceedings," the *Clipper* continued, was the product of "the spirit of faction that characterizes a large portion of the community, and in which the foreign element of our immense metropolitan population, and their native offspring especially, delights to indulge." It was precisely this spirit that was poisoning

national politics, the Clipper concluded, “giving rise to almost all the bitterness of party spirit and sectional strife.” The same public culture that artisans had used to defend their role in political life was now being used to discipline if not eliminate their participation. Such arguments told working people to adapt to middle-class standards or stay away. In a larger context, they were used to restrict popular participation in politics and insure the dominance of politics by “the best men.”