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MEMORY AND MYTH IN CONTEMPORARY
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SPLENDID SPLINTERS:
MEMORY AND MYTH IN CONTEMPORARY BASEBALL FICTION

By

Christopher York

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

SPLENDID SPLINTERS: MEMORY AND MYTH IN CONTEMPORARY BASEBALL FICTION

By

Christopher York

It has been widely articulated over the past few decades, particularly in the extensive amount of published material regarding history and memory, that societies construct their pasts to explain and accommodate contemporary conditions. Within what we have come to know as postmodern society, the general population's understanding of history has become increasingly simplistic, fragmented, and nostalgic. Unfortunately, a striking result of nostalgia is the development of a historical amnesia, a removal of conflict and hardship from the narratives of the past.

Baseball is a game that is rich with nostalgia. This is, in part, because baseball has become a symbol for American culture that has taken on mythic dimensions. But myth is constantly evolving in order to adapt to the changing needs of a culture, and clearly the simplified, nostalgia-laced myths of baseball no longer parallel American culture as it enters the twenty-first century. One

site where this negotiation between existing myth and its changing society takes place is the fictional narrative. Many contemporary authors use the nostalgic metaphor of baseball as a starting point for addressing the complicated dynamics within American culture.

The contemporary novels I have chosen to discuss, Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, Richard Ford's *Independence Day*, Mark Winegardner's *The Veracruz Blues*, Harry Stein's *Hoopla*, Brendan Boyd's *Blue Ruin*, and W. P. Kinsella's two novels, *Shoeless Joe* and *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*, all use baseball imagery as a means of complicating the superficial, postmodern view of our collective past. Through events like the 1919 Black Sox scandal and the 1951 Dodgers/Giants play-off game, figures like Shoeless Joe Jackson and Babe Ruth, and mythic sites like Cooperstown and the pastoral ballpark of a small Iowa community, these authors explore the nature of history and memory. They look beyond figures, places, and events in the popular imagination and reconceive them as part of a more complex framing of the past, which, in turn, helps to redefine contemporary America.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	
SPLENDID MYTHS AND SPLINTERED DISCOURSES.....	1
CHAPTER 1	
"HBP. RUNNERS ADVANCE": POSTMODERNISM AND BASEBALL IN RICHARD FORD'S <i>INDEPENDENCE DAY</i>	14
"We're All Free Agents".....	16
Cooperstown: Getting Behind the Façade.....	23
Exiting the (Batting) Cage.....	29
CHAPTER 2	
"LOCAL AFFILIATIONS": IDENTITY AND PLACE IN DELILLO'S <i>UNDERWORLD</i>	34
History, Memory, and Place.....	35
The Triumph of History.....	38
Identity, Place and the Remote Soul.....	43
Baseball and the Human Murmur.....	52
"The Ordinary Life Behind the Thing".....	59
CHAPTER 3	
"PART WAY THERE": THE MEXICAN LEAGUE AND AMERICAN CONFLICT IN MARK WINEGARDNER'S <i>VERACRUZ BLUES</i>	65
Re-envisioning America in Mexico.....	67
We Are Our Contradictions.....	76
The Faith of 50 Million People.....	89
I Guess I'll Never Understand Mexico.....	92
CHAPTER 4	
"ONCE IT'S BEEN TOLD IT'S AS GOOD AS TRUE": NATIONALISM, THE NATIONAL PASTIME, AND MYTHIC SPACE IN THE IOWA BASEBALL CONFEDERACY.....	95
"The Fickle Iron Highway".....	99
Circles and Squares.....	110
CHAPTER 5	
SHADES OF GREY: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE BLACK SOX NOVELS.....	116
<i>Hoopla</i>	119
<i>Blue Ruin</i>	130
<i>Shoeless Joe</i>	138

CONCLUSION	
ALL IN THE FAMILY: THE EVOLUTION OF BASEBALL MYTH.....	149
WORKS CITED.....	159

Introduction:

Splendid Myths and Splintered Discourses

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation—or narration—might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west.

-Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*

The title of my dissertation, *Splendid Splinters*, reflects the major purpose of the work in a couple of ways. "The Splendid Splinter" is, of course, Ted Williams, the last baseball player to hit .400 and widely regarded as the best hitter in modern baseball history. His nickname, along with names like "The Babe," "The Yankee Clipper," and the "Say Hey Kid," continues to be widely recognized in American popular culture over forty years after his retirement. Nicknames such as these serve iconic, even mythic, functions, recalling images of baseball's often glorified past, generating an air of nostalgia around the sport itself. Ray Kinsella, the narrator and main character of *Shoeless Joe*, for instance, mourns what he perceives as the loss of good nicknames in contemporary baseball. His companion, a fictional J. D. Salinger, responds, "There's a

simple explanation....Baseball has become a business for the players as well as the owners. Guys who make a million dollars a year don't even want to be called by their first names. They want to be called Sir"(158). Certainly there is a perceived difference in the way the game used to be, and the way it is today.

Our understanding of the past, however, as individuals and as a culture, is not as complete as we often like to believe. In the case of "The Splendid Splinter," the nickname references the grace and power with which Williams swung the bat, perpetuating his heroic status. Yet at the same time it avoids acknowledging Williams' often icy relationship with the fans of Boston.¹ One aspect of his career, therefore, endures. Another fades out of memory.

It has been widely articulated over the past few decades, particularly in the extensive amount of published material regarding history and memory, that societies construct their pasts, their histories, to explain and accommodate contemporary conditions. Within what we have come to know as postmodern society, the general population's understanding of history has become increasingly simplistic, fragmented, and nostalgic. To

¹ For a wonderful account of Williams and his perception by the fans of Boston, see John Updike's "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu." Also see Ed Linn's biography *Hitter: The Life and Turmoils of Ted Williams*.



return to my title, contemporary perceptions of the past have become "splintered." Michael Kammen refers to nostalgia as "a pattern of highly selective memory" in which pleasant memories of the past are generally emphasized, while unpleasant memories are suppressed or forgotten. He continues to note that "[n]ostalgia is most likely to increase or become prominent in times of transition, in periods of cultural anxiety, or when a society feels a strong sense of discontinuity with its past"(618). And since the 1970s the United States "has been hankering after various imagined golden ages—for more innocent and carefree days"(626). Of course the public acknowledgement of such pleasant memories can create a sense of unity across cultural boundaries. Often, however, the more striking result of nostalgia is the development of a historical amnesia, a removal of conflict and hardship from the narratives of the past.

It is this oversimplified, nostalgic notion of the past, what Richard White calls the "cruel and idiot simplicities about history, identity and memory," that has largely informed the American public through the last quarter of a century (6). This is due, in part, to the rapidly changing nature of American culture. Both Michael Kammen and Lillian Weissberg note that commerce and

technology have begun to change at such a rapid rate that things become obsolete and disappear before they have had an opportunity to become part of historical consciousness.

Postmodern theorists such as Jean Baudrillard approach the problem of history and memory in a slightly different way. Technology, particularly the rise of the mass media, has created a proliferation of images and we, as consumers, are exposed to more than we could ever hope to digest. Much of our understanding of history now comes from the mass media. But media images have been largely removed from the cultural contexts in which they originally existed. As a result, our understanding of the past is not only fragmented, but also superficial. We, as a culture, have developed an understanding of history that is a product of "commercialization, vulgarization, and oversimplification," and an understanding that is removed from its original context (Kammen 628). In the end, history is not problematized and the status quo is perpetuated.

Dena Eber and Arthur Neal note that it is "through symbol systems such as language and art [that] we construct a reality of the past that informs our present and provides the basis for our memory"(6). Myth provides one of these symbolic systems. Richard Slotkin defines myth as "stories, drawn from history, that have acquired through

usage over many generations a symbolizing function that is central to the cultural functioning of the society that produces them"(16). This is certainly true of baseball, its stories, and its tradition of storytelling. Diane Westbrook explores this mythic quality within baseball literature:

This body of texts—baseball literature—has the status of a functional modern mythology...The mythicity of baseball's texts emerges almost of necessity from a mythicity in the game itself—its rituals and roles, its characters, the tropological nature of its space and time, its 'plot' (the progress and rules of play), its object (to make the circular journey from home to home), its ground (a solid stage in a shifting cosmos), and its ground rules (the principles of order within this [con]text).(10)

But drawing stories from history, as Slotkin suggests, can be problematic. The ways in which we choose to remember our past are not as benign as we may believe. Whether a kernel of historical fact sprouts into mythology, or whether it becomes a document of "history," these stories are constructed and reconstructed in and by American culture and its values and beliefs. Benedict Anderson notes that it is from these cultural systems of values and beliefs that nations are created.

Nation, then, is often negotiated and defined through narration. Bhabha writes:

To study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and

rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself. If the problematic 'closure' of textuality questions the 'totalization' of national culture, then its positive value lies in displaying the wide dissemination through which we construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life.(3)

In other words, when articulating the idea of the nation through language (for my purposes through the contemporary novel), the nation is defined from the multitude of perspectives that the novel allows. Ultimately, such diversity challenges the dominant narrative and continually redefines the boundaries of the nation. Bhabha continues, noting that

[t]he minority does not simply confront the...master discourse with a contradictory or negating referent. It does not turn contradiction into dialectical process. It interrogates its object by initially withholding its objective. Insinuating itself into the terms of reference of the dominant discourse, the supplementary antagonizes the implicit power to generalize, to produce sociological solidity.(306)

The marginalized elements of society, then, challenge the grand narrative, not by negating that narrative, but rather by entering that narrative. For the United States, no mythic system has been more prominent than that of baseball, and it is the ways in which the myths and legends of baseball are contested and reconceived over time that

gives us insight into the values and beliefs of American society.

Whether used as means of critiquing American culture or as a means of celebrating it, baseball has always been closely linked with the national character and what it means to be an American. Cordelia Candelaria notes that "the connection between the national spirit and fervor for the game is a staple of baseball fiction"(48). Similarly, David McGimpsey notes that there is a democratic element in the game. Baseball ritualizes "the hope that Americans are judged on performance rather than birthright and that the merit in their performance is quantifiable"(12). Indeed, the democratic ideal of each man coming to the plate, individually responsible for his own destiny, yet working collectively in the field to generate "outs," has often been regarded as an ideal symbol of American democracy. This is evident in the way the game itself has been portrayed during the past century and a half as reflecting the purity and the democratic ideals of the nation. Many of baseball's icons, both fictional and actual, are manifestations of an inherent nationalism. Williams and Ruth, Hobbs and Wiggen are all, in some way, representations of R.W.B. Lewis' "American Adam," a natural man, "an individual emancipated from history...standing

alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources"(5).

The parallel between baseball and America is also evident in the articulation of its pastoral imagery. Its expansive outfield recalls for many Americans the natural simplicity of the freehold democracy originally envisioned by Thomas Jefferson. Michael Novak notes that the pastoral field "carries imagination back to the days when America was a largely agricultural nation...almost fanatically individualistic"(45). Westbrook also sees the symbolic nature of the ballfield. It is a trope,

not abstract and mental but material and visible, a green pastoral opening in the urban ordinary...the field is, in a sense, negative space and time, where the syntax of history (as it proceeds at a personal or collective level) is suspended.(39)

Many contemporary baseball novels center their symbolic framework around the image of the field. Weissberg, after Halbwachs and Nora, comments that "memory depends on space and a notion of location"(16). Eber and Neal, in their introduction to *Memory and Representation*, state that "[r]eality perceptions do not stem so much from the objective qualities of the physical world, but from the subjective interpretations we impose on environmental stimuli"(4). It is often, then, through the symbolic

representations of the environment that the nostalgic grand narrative is contested.

The contemporary authors I have chosen to discuss use baseball imagery as a means of complicating the superficial, postmodern view of our collective past. Through events like the 1919 Black Sox scandal and the 1951 Dodgers/Giants play-off game, figures like Shoeless Joe Jackson and Babe Ruth, and mythic sites like Cooperstown and the pastoral ballpark of a small Iowa community, these authors explore the nature of history and memory. They look beyond figures, places, and events in the popular imagination and reconceive them as part of a more complex framing of the past, which, in turn, will help redefine contemporary America.

Richard Ford's *Independence Day*, the focus of chapter one, is not a traditional baseball novel. It is the story of Frank Bascombe, who has become isolated physically and emotionally from his son, and, in fact, has isolated himself from any significant relationship whatsoever. He is drifting through life in what he describes as an "existence period" which is a product of his place in the fragmented, superficial postmodern society. A trip with his son to Cooperstown and the Baseball Hall of Fame, however, acts as the symbolic catalyst that ultimately

brings Frank out of his existence period and back into meaningful contact with his son.

Chapter two explores Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, in which the home run baseball hit by Bobby Thomson in the 1951 playoff between the Giants and the Dodgers serves not only to structure the novel, but also as a metaphor for the way in which we, as individuals, construct history and identity. Just as base runners move in a counter-clockwise direction around the base paths, the novel has a counter-clockwise movement, beginning with a retelling of the game itself, and then moving from the present to the past, returning, almost, to the game once again at the end of the novel. That we never complete the circle is significant. Just as the gaps in this symbolic rounding of the bases prevent a 'return home,' there is a significant gap between the way the grand narrative of American exceptionalism appropriates the images of the game, and the ways in which individuals locate personal meaning and memory in Thomson's home run ball.

Mark Winegardner's *Veracruz Blues* is the focus of the third chapter. Though he certainly lacks the reputation of either DeLillo or Ford, Winegardner has received extensive critical praise. Tim Morris, for example, has called *Veracruz Blues* "possibly the best baseball novel of the

nineties." Winegardner sets baseball's nostalgic character in direct opposition to its socio-economic realities through the voices of a sportswriter and a handful of ballplayers who left the United States to play baseball in the Mexican League during the 1949 season. The novel directly critiques the mythic elements of baseball by exposing labor and race anxieties in the postwar years of the 1940s, a time when Americans think of war heroes triumphantly returning home to their major league day jobs, and Jackie Robinson's integration of the major leagues. More significantly, however, it also explores the complex and insidious nature of American cultural imperialism in Mexico.

The fourth chapter focuses on W. P. Kinsella's *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*. Kinsella is without question the most prominent of contemporary baseball novelists and his writings invoke the mytho-nostalgic nature of the sport. In *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*, however, he complicates the myth by setting its core symbol, the pastoral small town ballpark, against the image of the Native American, who is, of course, the victim of other enduring American myths. Kinsella here deals quite literally with cultural amnesia. His main character, Gideon Clarke, is researching an amateur league that he

knows existed, yet he can find no corroboration or documentation to prove it. Issues of collective memory are complicated as the spirit of *Drifting Away*, a Native American Chief who once lived in the area that is now Clarke's hometown of Onamata, Iowa, struggles to ensure that the past is not altered.

In chapter five I have chosen not to deal with a particular novel, but rather, with a prevalent subject in the contemporary baseball novel, the 1919 Black Sox scandal. Three baseball novels have been written in the past twenty years that hinge on this event, which marks baseball's loss of innocence. *Shoeless Joe*(1982), by W.P. Kinsella, approaches the event from the standpoint of a son whose father idolized Shoeless Joe Jackson, one of the eight White Sox players banned for life from major league baseball for their participation in the scandal. *Hoopla*(1983), by Harry Stein, traces the event from the perspectives of Luther Pond, the journalist who eventually broke the scandal, and George Weaver, the White Sox third baseman who was also implicated in the scandal. Branden Boyd's *Blue Ruin*(1991) is yet another retelling of the events of the 1919 World Series, this time from the perspective of the gambler Sport Sullivan.

All of these novels attest to the enduring fascination with the interaction between baseball's mythic qualities and its cultural realities. Gerald Early notes that "once the athletic event has ended, the discourse about it displaces the event"(132). This collection of novels, then, redefines the past events they engage. In a sense, they "splinter" the notion of history as an objective reality, and explore the ways in which myth and memory become vehicles for the revision of baseball's place American culture.

Chapter 1:

"HBP. Runners Advance:" Postmodernism and Baseball in Richard Ford's *Independence Day*.

Individually and cumulatively, [Ford's] works document the failure of our culture by displaying so well the peculiar afflictions which have spread so rapidly through life in the modern world: the individual's sense of alienation, restlessness, displacement, and fragmentation... (Guagliardo 5)

Certainly Huey Guagliardo's statement captures one of the central themes in Ford's Pen/Faulkner Award and Pulitzer Prize winning *Independence Day*. Frank Bascombe, the narrator and main character, drifts throughout most of the novel in what he describes as an "existence period," a phase where he has set few goals for himself, is content with few accomplishments, has distanced himself from any complex relationships (including those with his ex-wife and two children), and is generally happy to accept surface perceptions rather than probe for deeper realities. However, during a two-day vacation with his troubled teenage son, Paul, events begin to compromise his faith in this world view. It is Frank's intention that a weekend together will help "free Paul," in Frank's words, "from whatever holds him captive" and at the same time re-connect himself with his family and his life (16). Frank is hoping

to move toward a more holistic definition of himself, informed by the immediate and significant others in his life.

What becomes evident during the course of the vacation, which culminates, significantly, in Cooperstown, New York at the Baseball Hall of Fame, is that Frank's superficial, isolated feelings are widespread in America and a symptom of our postmodern culture. The setting is significant because, as Frank begins to emerge from this existence period, Ford uses a collection of baseball images that, as a whole, act as a transitional metaphor marking both the qualities of his existence period and the means through which he will ultimately move into a period of permanence.

What makes the Baseball Hall of Fame such an apt location for Frank to struggle within his existence period is the element of myth or façade that surrounds the Hall itself. Cooperstown is, of course, where Abner Doubleday allegedly invented baseball. That origin story, however, has long since been disproven. The game evolved from a variety of children's stick-and-ball games, most of them European in origin, that in the second half of the

nineteenth century began to resemble the baseball of today.¹ David McGimpsey notes that "[w]hile the Hall no longer officially endorses the Doubleday theory, it nevertheless does little to distance itself from the fiction"(66). This simple façade over a more complex reality mirrors Frank's existence period.

"We're All Free Agents"

Frank's existence period is perhaps best understood as a manifestation of the postmodern culture in which he lives. Contemporary American culture is marked, most significantly, by the constructed nature of truth, and the ambiguities that exist between the real and the imagined, particularly in the realm of the mass media. As Frederic Jameson further notes, "The emergence of a new kind of superficiality, in the most literal sense [is] perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms"(9). "Depth," he concludes, "is replaced by surface, or multiple surfaces"(17).

We can see these elements of the postmodern sensibility in Frank Bascombe's discussions of truth and the difference (or lack thereof) between "seeming" and

¹ Charles Alexander, in his book, *Our Game: An American Baseball History*, gives a concise history of the early development of baseball.

"being." He states, for instance, that writers (of which he is one) survive periods of self-reproach (brought on in Frank's case by divorce) "better than almost anyone, since they understand that almost everything...is not really made up of 'views,' but words, which, should you not like them, you can change"(248). This abandonment of past constructs, and the creation of a content, if not completely realized self, is the foundation of Frank's existence period. It is a construct designed to allow "interest [in other people to] mingle with uninterest,...intimacy with transience, caring with obdurate uncaring." In short, a system "patented to ward off unwelcome feelings"(292). His ex-wife, however, perhaps more accurately describes it as a willingness "to let 'seem' equal 'be'"(184).

Frank's preoccupation with this constructed or simulated existence mirrors that of the postmodern sensibility. Paradoxically, his reflections on the existence period are elaborate constructions that decontextualize him from his life, self-reflections that avoid reflections on one's self. They help him accept, if not forget, his past and they help him find contentment in diminished expectations for the future.

This tension between seeming and being is intricately woven into Frank's current relationships. For instance,

Sally, his lover, is a character whose relationship with Frank was initiated by a simulation. Sally sought Frank when she found what "seemed" to be a heartfelt reminiscence he wrote in a high school reunion program about a high-school buddy who eventually became Sally's ex-husband. Frank's story, as it turns out, was completely fabricated and, in fact, he remembers little of his classmate. Ironically, his relationship with Sally, which was established on this fiction, is now one of the factors which promise to pull Frank out of his existence period entirely and bring him back to the world of hope and expectation. William Chernecky observes that, for Frank, "[s]ocial interaction degenerates into little more than role playing"(171-72), and his relationship with Sally demonstrates.

There is a sense that Frank's decontextualization, his contentment with seeming, is not an isolated case. Jefferey Folks notes that Ford "expresses an urgency concerning the collective future of American Society, and...[his work] suggests the absurdity of a privatized solution to the malaise of contemporary middle class America,"(73). This condition is also evident in other characters in the novel. His son, who his wife Ann says is just like him (411), also seems to be enduring some sort of

self-absorption brought on by several traumas including the death of his brother, the death of his dog, and the divorce of his parents. Burgeoning signs of isolation and his frequent punning and word play are reflections of his fascination with language and surfaces. Frank states that, "[h]e, like me, is drawn to fissures between the literal and the imagined"(343).

Other clearly defined instances appear throughout the novel. Irv, Frank's brother-in-law, who longs to get out of the flight simulation business and find a greater sense of continuity; the Marhams, house-hunters hoping to find a sense of place and community; and even his ex-wife and his current lover, both of whom criticize the existence period, all find themselves at a stage in their lives where they are not feeling a sense of progress, have lost a definitive sense of self, and are unsure of, or reluctant to commit to, any intimate relationship.

There is also a sense that the nation itself is dwelling within its own existence period. Ford articulates this notion through Frank's monologues about the economy, and through images of the impending election between Bush and Dukakis. Frank notes, for instance, the separation of the individual from the community in an editorial he writes for the Lauren-Schwindell newsletter. While observing that

fifty-four percent of the people expect to be better off in a year (following the election), he notes that "only 24 percent feel that the country will be better off"(17).

Frank also observes a billboard depicting "Governor Dukakis smiling his insincere smile and surrounded by euphoric, well-fed, healthy-looking but poor children of every race and color"(263). This advertisement appears while he and Paul are driving through a part of Springfield where "[n]o garbage has been picked up...for several days, and a conspicuous number of vehicles are abandoned or pillaged along the streetside"(263). The surface of the billboard is immediately undermined by the context in which it is seen. It appears that politicians, and most voters as well, are also content to let "seem" equal "be."

Frank initially believes himself to be contentedly independent within the existence period. In fact, he believes the existence period actually "stimulates the condition of honest independence." He explains that

[i]nasmuch as when you're in it you're visible as you are, though not necessarily very noticeable to yourself and others, and yet you maintain reason enough and courage in a time of waning urgency to go towards where your interests lie as though it mattered you go there.(118)

Yet, for all his professed contentment within the existence period, there is a sense of anxiety throughout the novel

and numerous indications that it is perhaps time to reenter his life. Frank will come to realize that it is exactly the contact with others, which is so ephemeral in the existence period, that dictates where his ultimate interests lie. This is one of the points Ford is trying to make in *Independence Day*. In an interview with the *San Francisco Examiner*, he tells the paper that he never realized that independence "in its most conventional sense, means leave taking. It means putting distance between yourself and other people; so I thought I'd write about it and see if I could get it to mean something else, if I couldn't get it to mean making contact with other people instead."

Frank slowly becomes aware of the incongruity between independence and the existence period as the narrative progresses. One of his initial post-divorce attempts at fulfilling this need for community that is masked behind the superficialities of the existence period is the purchase of two houses on Clio Street. He views the purchase as "reinvesting in [the] community...[and] maintaining neighborhood integrity, while covering my financial backside and establishing a greater sense of connectedness"(27). The reader becomes aware of the irony, even if Frank does not. This hope for connectedness has

fallen through. The tenants with whom he did enjoy a good relationship moved out and the house remains vacant. The other tenants, the McLeods, avoid contact with Frank to the extent that he believes they would move out if he were to move in next door (31).

As the novel progresses, however, Frank realizes his need for contact, as is disturbingly illustrated the night he witnesses the aftermath of a murder at the Sea-Breeze Motel. As he lies in bed considering this most recent in a series of encounters with death, and the "life-affirming" experience he hopes to have with his son the following day, he is struck with a sudden panic;

[I]f I could, I would spring up, switch on the light, dial someone and shout right into the hard little receiver, "It's okay. I got away. It was goddamned close, I'll tell ya...But I made it. I survived. Wait for me. Wait for me. Not that much is left to do." Only there's no one. No one here or anywhere to say any of this to. And I'm sorry, sorry, sorry...(217)

Frank here seems to be coming to some half-conscious realization that the existence period has left him less connected, less content, than he has allowed himself to believe. This frantic impulse to reach out to someone articulates his lack of truly intimate contacts, and though he professes that he no longer needs intimacy, his anxiety indicates otherwise.

At one point in the novel Frank comments on the nature of the isolation within his own experience and the social environment around him. "The world," he says, "lets you do what you want if you can live with the consequences. We're all free agents"(270). This is an interesting choice of words that illuminates one of the key metaphors in the novel. The "free agent," the baseball free agent, articulates an independence afforded by the existence period, a freedom to do what he wants, to pursue self-interest without concerning himself with the welfare of his current team. Free agency, then, has been a factor in generating the nomadism and lack of continuity in the modern game. Frank's brother-in-law, Irv, will later say of the players early in the century, "Those guys played because they wanted to. Because they could. It wasn't a career for them. It was just a game. Now...it's a business"(371). Irv's nostalgia is, of course, oversimplified, but what he mourns is the loss of community (a lack of "continuity," as he would phrase it) in baseball and, by extension, in American life.

Cooperstown: Getting Behind the Façade

Indeed, Ford uses baseball imagery in a number of instances as a metaphor for the existence period and, in

turn, the postmodern condition. In fact, the mythic qualities of baseball, as defined by Deeanne Westbrook, sound very much like the qualities of the existence period.

Baseball, by creating a context, a plot in both senses of the term, its own space and time, provides a hospitable environment for evading the determinations of nature's time and space, and for producing in the ancient, often repeated, backward journey to the beginnings. The progress of the runner on the basepaths is counter-clockwise, and his end, his destination, is his beginning. (97)

The same decontextualization from "nature's time and space" is evident in the existence period. The second half of Westbrook's statement, however, reveals the possibilities of new beginnings through a journey that ends where it began. It is this potential that Frank and his son, Paul, hope to explore in Cooperstown.

Early in the narrative Frank reflects on a baseball game he attended with his daughter, Clarissa, and his son, Paul, in which Frank snags a foul ball, earning the admiration of his kids, as well as of the other fans. He states that "[h]ow I felt at that moment was that life would never get better than that - though later what I thought, upon calmer reflection, was that it had merely been just a damn good thing to happen, and my life wasn't a zero" (117). This moment stands alone for Frank as a positive image of himself as a father. Though he loves his

children, his spatial separation from them has created an emotional distance for which Frank blames himself. It is little wonder, then, as Frank looks to heal his son and regain a sense of pride, fatherhood, and purpose, that he is drawn to Cooperstown as the weekend's ultimate destination. Rather than any of the other Halls of Fame, or a weekend fishing trip, Cooperstown and the Baseball Hall of Fame signify fulfilling moments of the past that will hopefully provide a model for life after the existence period.

Even so, Frank observes that Cooperstown itself "seems" rather than "is." The idyllic small town setting appears to be a perfect place to "live, worship, thrive, raise a family, grow old, get sick and die," and yet Frank believes that

some suspicion lurks - in the crowds themselves, in the too frequent street-corner baskets of redder-than-red geraniums and the too visible French *poubelle* trash containers, and the telltale sight of a red double-decker City of Westminster bus and there being no mention of the Hall of Fame *anywhere* - that the town is just a replica (of a legitimate place), a period backdrop to the Hall of Fame or to something even less specific, with nothing authentic (crime, despair, litter, the rapture) really going on. (293)

In other words, the town itself seems to be some postmodern simulation.

This perception of the town becomes more apparent as Frank and Paul turn down the backstreets, or, in a sense, get behind the façade. Frank notices that many of the town's nicer homes are for sale. He comments that "Cooperstown, it seems, is up for grabs"(296). Cooperstown is generally a highly concentrated site of cultural heroism with the presence of the Hall of Fame and the Leatherstocking myth, but with the vacancy it becomes a symbol for America's lost sense of direction, and its ambiguity within the existence period.

Significantly, it is as Frank is making a mental note about the "For Sale" signs that he decides to ask Paul about his tattoo, which says "insect." Paul explains that

[i]n the next century we're all going to be enslaved by insects that survive this century's pesticides. With this I acknowledge being in a band of maladapted creatures whose time is coming to a close. I hope the new leaders will treat me as a friend. (296)

This response is, of course, Paul's answer to Cooperstown's vacancy. The self-absorption of the country, including both Paul and Frank, in the midst of the existence period is ultimately self-defeating.

This vacancy, this inability to establish any kind of community or common ground, is reiterated the following morning when Paul and Frank try to attend the Hall of Fame but are denied access by picketers. As Frank later

discovers, the protest was designed to gain recognition for "a loveable Yankee shortstop from the forties" who they thought should be in the Hall of Fame. Frank dismisses it as unimportant, but symbolically, at least, what the protesters represent is the fragmentation of the nation. They are trying to define their version of the American hero and the American character, a version that is not accepted as Hall of Fame material. Like Frank, they are looking for some way to define themselves that allows them to emerge from their own existence periods and progress towards some palpable future.

There is evidence, however, that the existence period is dissipating even as father and son enter Cooperstown. Just as they drive into town Paul rips a page from Frank's copy of *Self-Reliance*, a text Frank had hoped to use to help Paul cope with his problems and a text that provides Frank with a foundation for the existence period. Just as the book itself is being torn apart, the existence period is unraveling. Frank observes, as he tenses up as though he's "being gassed by fearsome dread," that the existence period "was patented to ward off such unwelcome feelings. Only it isn't working"(292).

The climax of the Cooperstown action, and the pivotal moment in the novel, occurs as the father and son, turned

away from the Hall of Fame by the protesters, arrive at Doubleday Field. The activities at Doubleday serve multiple purposes. Initially, we get an extended metaphor correlating baseball with the existence period and postmodern America. When Frank and Paul first arrive, they see a number of men dressed in the uniforms of the Oakland Athletics and the Atlanta Braves. Frank mistakes them for former professionals, but soon realizes his error. They are, in fact, members of a fantasy baseball camp. Again, seeming is mistaken for being. As Frank and Paul follow the campers into Doubleday, the aimlessness of the existence period is illustrated as the ersatz players stretch, get their photo taken, and then begin "straying towards the dugout and down the baselines, or just wandering out onto the infield...looking as if something memorable just happened but they missed it"(352). This fragmentation and displacement of postmodernity is also accentuated here by the teams chosen by Ford. The Athletics and the Braves are the only two teams in the twentieth century that have been twice displaced from their home city (the Philadelphia/Kansas City/Oakland Athletics and the Boston/Milwaukee/Atlanta Braves).

Exiting the (Batting) Cage

As father and son leave the stadium and approach some batting cages, we are reminded of the diminishing efficacy of the existence period in Frank's life. He reflects on the weekend:

A dead spot now seems to be where these two days have delivered us....I have just run out of important words, but before I've said enough, before I've achieved the desired effect, before the momentum of a shared physical act...can take us up and carry us to a good end. (352-3)

His preoccupation with words, with surfaces, has to this point prevented decisive action from occurring. Now that he is out of words, however, events unfold rapidly.

Frank is not yet willing to completely abandon the existence period, however. In another act of simulation, or "seeming," Frank steps into the batting cage, appropriating the batting stance of Stan "the Man" Musial. Significantly, he is unable to hit the ball. What we witness at the batting cages is one of baseball's classic paradigms where the son confronts the father and in which "the son is destined not only to survive, but to surpass the father" in a competition that symbolizes the spiritual and generational renewal of the culture (Westbrook 263). But here the confrontation is altered. Again we see the simulation theme revisited as the pitching machines

displace one of the participants. These pitchers are described as

[b]ig, dark-green, boxy, industrial-looking contraptions that work by feeding balls...through a chain-drive circuitry that ends with two rubber car tires spinning in opposite tangency at a high rate of speed and from between which each "pitch" is actually expelled. (354)

A machine acts as pitcher and as an extension of the existence period, preventing the direct human confrontation/interaction that normally signifies the confrontation of pitcher and batter, and the father's recognition of his son's coming of age.

At the batting cages the confrontation is denied. The artifice of the machine distances Frank from his son, literally separating them with a chain link fence as Frank bats and Paul looks on. This inability to make contact is further illustrated after Frank exits the batting cage and begins wrestling with Paul in a half-kidding way. Frank is desperately trying to reach his son, and as Paul struggles, he squeezes him harder, "intent on keeping him till he gives up the demon, renounces all, collapses into hot tears only [Frank] can administer to. Dad. His"(359). But he is ineffective in establishing paternal contact, and Paul seeks separation by going into the cage.

Yet Paul, perhaps looking to establish contact on his own terms, throws himself in front of the ball, which hits him in the eye and drops him to the ground. Contact, in a very literal and painful sense, has been made. Frank rushes to his son's side, and a movement out of the existence period begins. In a way, Frank now returns to where the baseball imagery in the novel began, with him catching a ball for his son (though now he "catches it" on the neck as he shields and attends to his son). At this point baseball's seminal archetype, the father-son confrontation, is at last satisfied. No words or artifice stand between them, and when Frank engages his son in the batting cage there is the possibility of a new start. Frank is aware that this event will possibly drag him out of the existence period and into the world of intimacy and commitment. As he rides towards the hospital, he acknowledges his displacement, "there is no *seeming* now. All is is"(369).

With Paul recovering successfully from surgery, and the weekend behind him, Frank assesses recent events and sees himself entering a new phase, a permanent period, a "long stretching-out time...when whatever I do or say, who I marry, how my kids turn out, becomes what the world - if it makes note at all - knows of me"(450). Relationships

and community, rather than self-reflection, will now define who he is.

The events in the final section of the book support Frank's observation. The friction he had been experiencing with Ann is smoothed out in a peaceful conversation in which they could have "talked for hours...and in that way soothe the rub of events"(411). In his relationship with Sally he envisions the possibility that he "will soon be married," and he believes Paul will eventually come to live with him (450). Ford provides additional closure for the frantic call he had wanted to make back at the Sea-Breeze Motel when he receives a late night call. Though Frank hears only silence followed by some indecipherable noises, he responds knowingly.

[S]uddenly I said, because someone was there I felt I knew, "I'm glad you called...I just got here...now's not a bad time at all. This is a full time job. Let me hear your thinking. I'll try to add a part to the puzzle. It can be simpler than you think."(451)

Having just arrived in the permanent period, he provides this unidentified caller with the human contact he felt he needed so badly at the Sea-Breeze, when he had no one he could call. Frank states outright that he "is no hero"(438), but having emerged from the existence period, he is now able to help others negotiate their way out. He has already assisted Irv, listening to him as he discusses

his continuity problems, and he will be able to help Ann as she enters a period in which she feels she has become "very impersonal"(411). The final baseball image Ford provides is along this line. In a moment of reconciliation, Frank and Paul talk about moving to Haddam and then about the miscommunications that led to the injury. Paul then sums up the incident, and to a large extent expresses the very essence of the novel, "HBP². Runners Advance"(401).

² "HBP" is the baseball scorekeeping abbreviation for "Hit by pitch."

Chapter 2:

'Local Affiliations': Identity and Place in DeLillo's *Underworld*.

"The endemic loss of historicity in many accounts of postmodernity might usefully be linked to a material and conceptual loss of space, confirming Lefebvre's argument that places contain the traces of the historical events that have shaped them, and so the effacement of history is never complete." (Smethurst 15)

The central image throughout Don DeLillo's 1997 novel, *Underworld*, is "the shot heard around the world," Bobby Thomson's winning home run hit off of Ralph Branca in the 1951 playoff game between the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers. For the novel's main character, Nick Shay, the game was a deeply personal experience, a defining moment in his youth. Yet as he ages, the physical manifestations of the game slowly disappear and become a symbol of his own lost sense of self. After the 1957 season both the Dodgers and the Giants abandon New York City for the West Coast. In 1964 the Polo Grounds, where the game was played, is destroyed. Bobby Thomson and Ralph Branca, while still alive, are appropriated by the grand narrative of consumer capitalism, and, as a result, become caricatures, simulations, rather than the rich stuff of memory.

Similarly, Nick's own sense of self has slowly dwindled. Once a wild, visceral youth, Nick has grown to embrace the confining, normalizing structures of society and finds himself, in 1992, a corporate man who, though he professes contentment in his suburban present, finds himself going to great lengths to re-establish contact with his urban New York past. What DeLillo tries to articulate through Nick, as well as a host of other characters, is the impact of the postmodern landscape on the balance between history and memory, and on the construction of American identity. The incorporation of Nick's identity is paralleled by the loss of the man-made, or 'built environment which defined his youth. The one remaining artifact from the Dodgers-Giants playoff game that the novel presents is the home run ball itself. As Nick struggles with his own identity, it is through this object that he holds onto what remains of his youth, and the sense of self that he once had and now has lost.

History, Memory, and Place

Identity is rooted in memory, in the way we structure and make sense of past experience. Walter Benjamin hints at this when he observes, "[r]eflection shows us that our own image of happiness is thoroughly colored by the time to

which the course of our own experience has assigned us. The kind of happiness that could arouse envy in us exists only in the air we have breathed, among the people we could have talked to, women who could have given themselves to us" (Benjamin, 254). Memory, in turn, is influenced by the environment. As Pierre Nora states, "[m]emory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects"(9). Familiar structures and landscapes become associated with events from the past. Similarly, historian Richard White notes of his own family stories that "[t]hese stories did not float free. They were set in a landscape. To move across the land was to move through the past. The landscape was a set of stories as much as it was fences, fields and buildings. To know the landscape was to know the stories"(50). Landscape is closely tied to our memory and, in turn, our sense of self.

History, on the other hand, is the antithesis of memory. It is defined by "temporal continuities," or the interpretation of events in a way that creates a cohesive narrative. It is a site of contestation, compromise, and conformity, and it implores the individual to accept the collective interpretation of an event over singular impressions. But as Benjamin states, "[I]n every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a

conformism that is about to overpower it"(255). History is in the hands of the victor and to not struggle against this conformist tendency is to succumb to the hegemonic designs of those in power and to abandon the uniqueness of the self.

This struggle against the grand narrative, however, is complicated in the postmodern era by the disappearance or appropriation of the stuff of the past. It becomes a landscape of corporate capitalism. Speaking of the Wells Fargo Court in Downtown Los Angeles, Frederic Jameson states that

[i]f this new multinational downtown effectively abolished this older ruined city fabric which is violently replaced, cannot something similar be said about the way in which this strange new surface in its own peremptory way renders our older systems of perception of the city somehow archaic and aimless without offering another model in their place?(14)

The homogenization and commodification of the contemporary landscape removes the very items in which memory is rooted. A perception of the city that reinforces the identity of the individual is no longer possible within a new cityscape. DeLillo explores this relationship throughout *Underworld*. Those characters who have roots in a built environment and continue to engage that environment have a strong sense of self. Those who abandon them, or have their

environments stripped from them, struggle with their individuality.

The Triumph of History

The novel's sixty-page opening section, "The Triumph of Death," is, in fact, a retelling of the playoff game. DeLillo swirls around the game, approaching it from a number of different perspectives, in order to establish the conflicting roles of history and memory. One of the central figures in "The Triumph of Death" is Russ Hodges, the Giants' play-by-play announcer. Hodges is almost as synonymous with the game as Thomson and Branca. His famous call, "The Giants win the pennant, The Giants win the pennant!...", a call that is very much alive today in the popular lore of baseball, provides a backdrop for the opening section of the novel. He, in fact, will provide the collective history for the 1951 playoff game. The fortuitous recording of his calling of the game is the only recording that exists, the one historic document, and has been the one consistent story throughout the following decades. As Duvall notes, "In the age of electronic media...an event has not entered history unless it is represented by that technology"(301). Hodges presents to us

the documentary history of the moment, without ever realizing that it is a mediated moment.

DeLillo creates Hodges as a character, however, not only to establish the collective experience, but also to introduce the reader to the fabricated nature of history. During a pause in the game, Hodges compares the enormity of this game to a Jack Dempsey fight he saw long ago. He states, "When you see a thing like that, a thing that becomes a newsreel, you begin to feel you are a carrier of some solemn scrap of history"(16). This statement early in the novel notes the relation between history (the newsreel retelling of the event) and memory (the "solemn scrap" which Hodges carries as his personally meaningful interpretation of the event).

DeLillo here makes an important comment about the nature of history as Hodges further reflects on his broadcasting days in Charlotte. He would narrate "ghost games" where he would receive the play-by-play over the phone, but would add his own color in the studio, creating, for instance, "a kid chasing a foul ball"(25-26).¹

¹ This is, of course, a metafictional moment in the novel. Just like Hodges, DeLillo has created the fictional Cotter Martin, a kid chasing a baseball. In doing so, he too is beginning the process of humanizing the event, wresting it away from the grand narrative. Similarly, Cotter becomes a microcosm of the novel itself as we watch Nick Shay, Marvin Lundy, and others chase the baseball through time and space.

The home run narrated by Hodges fits well into the grand narrative, the nostalgia, of baseball. Narrated by Hodges, it is in the hands of the winning team. Even the Dodgers' defeat, in fact, fits well into the sentimental narrative that has always left "dem bums" second best, and their loyal fans saying "wait 'til next year." The point is that even our "newsreel" narratives, our history, are fictionalized, and it is fictionalized in a hegemonic way without most of society recognizing it. Again, Duvall is perceptive in observing that "the moderation of the radio...has become as invisible as a wire tap"(303).

It is commonly stated that baseball exists outside of real time and space, almost a world unto itself.² Yet DeLillo illustrates the very connected nature of baseball nostalgia with the National narrative of the United States. Albert Bronzini, a school teacher who has spent his life in the Bronx, recognizes this when he picks up the paper the day after the game.

The front page astonished him, a pair of three column headlines dominating. To his left the Giants capture the pennant, beating the Dodgers on a dramatic home run in the ninth inning. And to the right, systematically mated, same typeface, same-size type,

² Deanne Westbrook, to give just one example, states that the field itself is a trope that is "not abstract and mental but material and visible, a green pastoral opening in the urban ordinary...the field is, in a sense, negative space and time, where the syntax of history (as it proceeds at a personal or collective level) is suspended"(Westbrook 39).

same number of lines, the USSR explodes an atomic bomb-*kaboom*-details kept secret.(668)

Bronzini wonders "why the Times would take a ball game off the sports page and juxtapose it with news of such ominous consequence." It is, however, very much because of the "ominous" news from the Soviet Union that this juxtaposition is necessary. The evident power of the Soviet Union does not fit within the national narrative of American Exceptionalism. Baseball does. To juxtapose the two is to deflect the Soviets' "shot heard round the world" with Thomson's. Baseball is, therefore, intimately tied to the grand narrative of American progress.

Duvall creates a context for "Pafko at the Wall"³ that links baseball to political ideology and suggests "that the early Cold War figuration of baseball inflicts the older concept of the game as 'the great American pastime' in a way that links the sport to a modernist sensibility and a belief in American Exceptionalism"(288). Weinstein further notes that in the postmodern world, myths are broadcast through the news, and that these myths are "devious utterances of our own private wishes and fears"(290). This is the case on the *Times* front page. Both wishes and fears are articulated.

The appropriation of baseball, and, more specifically, the Dodgers/Giants play-off game, into the national narrative is evident elsewhere in the novel as well. In the section "Long Tall Sally," Nick and his business associates, Brian Glassic and Simeon Biggs, discuss the Thomson and Branca confrontation. While Nick and Glassic discuss the depths of the tragedy, however, Biggs denies the tragedy. He notes that "Branca and Thomson appear at sports dinners all the time. They sing songs and tell jokes. They're the longest-running act in show business," and then, almost as if to emphasize Biggs' point, as they leave the bar he points to a photo of Thomson and Branca standing in front of the White House with President George Bush (98). Thomson and Branca are appropriated by the grand narrative of mass culture where they are not winner and loser, per se, but, rather, part of the narrative of American exceptionalism. The pair, in fact, appear in a photograph with every president from Nixon to George Bush at some point in the novel.

The most telling example occurs when the image of Thomson, Branca, and President Nixon appears amidst the chaos, confusion, and moral uncertainty of Vietnam.

³The first section of *Underworld* was originally published as a short story titled "Pafko at the Wall."

Significantly, the photograph of the three is posted in a quonset hut where Army surveillance tries to decipher images from aerial photographs in an attempt to gauge enemy movement. In such a place where agents of the United States government attempt to make sense of reality, Thomson and Branca make their appearance with the president (462). It is an attempt to restore the order and certainty of the grand narrative in a country and a situation that defy that narrative.

Identity, Place and the Remote Soul

DeLillo creates tension between this grand narrative and the experience of the individual. *Underworld* goes beyond the "newsreel history," and explores "the game and all its extensions..." The game is the site through which meaning is constructed on a local level as well as on the national level. DeLillo identifies

[t]he woman cooking cabbage. The man who wishes he could be done with drink. They are the game's remote soul. Connected by the pulsing voice of the radio...There's a sixteen year old in the Bronx who takes his radio to the roof of his building so he can listen alone, a Dodger fan slouched in the gloaming, and he hears the account of the misplayed bunt and the fly ball that scores the tying run and he looks out over the rooftops, the tar beaches with their clotheslines and pigeon coops and splatted condoms, and he gets the cold creeps. The game doesn't change the way you sleep or wash your face or chew your food. It changes nothing but your life.(32)

For people who have bought into the mythology of baseball, found profundity in its forms, there is a deep internalization of the moment that shapes itself in the memory of the individual. So, while many may have witnessed, either physically or via radio, the home run and been part of that collective experience, there is also a deeply personal way in which that experience is remembered.

One of these extensions, the one that DeLillo traces, is Nick Shay. Shay was a loyal Brooklyn Dodgers fan as a child in 1951, but we first learn this in the Stadium Club of Dodgers Stadium as he has dinner and "pretend[s]" to watch a game between the Dodgers and the Giants with three of his business associates. It is apparent from the conversation that Shay not only had a strong personal investment in the Dodgers as a child, but also that his experience differs from the way history (Hodges) tells the event. Brian Glassic notes that when JFK died people went inside and wanted to be alone, "but when Thomson hit the homer people rushed outside. People wanted to be together. Maybe it was the last time people spontaneously went out of their houses for something. Some wonder, some amazement." Glassic, here, is responding to the grand narrative, Hodges' documentary moment. For Shay, the young man who

listened to the games alone on the roof of his apartment, the experience was different. Shay, responding to Glassic, says that when Thomson hit the home run, he went inside, "I closed the door and died"(95). Here we see the conflict between history and memory. History is, of course, the property of the victor and we see Glassic's assumption reflect this. For Shay, however, it was an experience quite the opposite of the historical expectation.

Unfortunately for Shay, his statement was very much true; a part of him did die. Shay as a teenager was wild, violent, sexual, and reckless. In Dodgers baseball he found a sense of order that he did not have in his everyday life, and this order grounded his existence. In an interview with Tom LeClaire, Don DeLillo states that

[p]eople whose lives are not clearly shaped or marked off may feel a deep need for rules of some kind. People leading lives of almost total freedom and possibility may secretly crave rules and boundaries, some kind of control in their lives. Most games are carefully structured. They satisfy a sense of order and they even have an element of dignity about them...Games provide a frame in which we can try to be perfect. Within sixty-minute limits or one-hundred yard limits or the limits of a game board, we can look for perfect moments or perfect structures. In my fiction I think this search sometimes turns out to be a cruel delusion.(81)

Certainly Shay, at this time, was a person who had almost total "freedom and possibility." He struggles with the loss of his father, a small time numbers runner who simply

did not come home one day. Nick imagines unlikely scenarios in which his father is whisked away by mobsters, but others, his brother and mother, understand that the abandonment did not happen under such dramatic circumstances.

With the loss of his authority figure (his mother, who struggles silently with the loss of her husband, does not provide much structure in his life), Nick found little to order his life other than the self-imposed structure of baseball. But with the devastation of the play-off loss to the Giants, that structure was abandoned. The day after the game, Nick reflects that "he was done with baseball...the last thin thread connecting him to another life"(679). Significantly, within the year, Shay would kill the drifter George Manza. Weinstein states that DeLillo "is scrupulously attentive to the ways in which belief and passion are displaced, renamed, formatted, and commodified in a materialist age"(290). When Nick's belief in the Dodgers is abandoned, Nick's unchecked passion becomes fatal. In the wake of the shooting Nick seems to understand this and welcomes the strict regimentation of juvenile detention in upstate New York.

Shay's abandonment of the mythical environment of baseball and his forced removal from his physical

environment of the Bronx become a case study in the relationship between the environment and identity. The next forty years of his life are spent in seeking a new kind of order or structure in which to live his life. Among these are the structures of juvenile detention, of language itself, and most significantly of corporate capitalism. Each of these systems, he hopes, will displace, change, or mask his true identity. Paralleling these systems is an increasingly postmodern environment that allows them to exist unimpeded by memory.

The appropriation of identity by the postmodern environment is a theme that DeLillo has explored before. Weinstein observes that *White Noise* "registers with great accuracy the shrinking space we occupy, the limited autonomy we enjoy, the technological encroachments we endure, the peculiar hybrids we've become"(305). In *White Noise* DeLillo explores the invasion of television, tabloids, and the supermarket on our "limited autonomy." In *Underworld* he depicts the loss of identity through the diminishing of familiar environments.

As Shay tries to imbed himself within new kinds of structure, the environment becomes less real, more postmodern. While he is at the juvenile correction facility in upstate New York, a mini-golf course is installed. The

residents refer to this almost unreal piece of landscaping as "Disneyland," which, significantly, is one of the most postmodern of all environments(510). But what Nick had wanted or expected was to be taken into a system where the rules were "consistent and strict" and was disappointed when they did not provide the discipline he had expected (333).

Later when, through the influence of some neighborhood connections, he winds up at Voyageur, a Jesuit school in northern Minnesota, he says that when he entered correction he had wanted things to make sense. He wanted to believe in correction, that he could get rid of his bad start, remove the "[s]edimentary stuff of who I was. Gone in the dancing air of insects and pollen" (502). He tries to replace this "stuff" with outside structures. He says of Father Paulus, who takes Nick under his wing at the school, that "he was not influenced by climate or geography or the sense of special freedoms at Voyageur. He went black-suited and roman-collared and I respected this and found it reassuring"(538). He sees in Father Paulus the discipline and the displacement of passion for which he himself is searching. It is significant that his respect for Paulus is articulated in geographical terms. As Nick comments, one's relation to "geography" is linked to the depth of one's

personality. In this sense, we can see the Jesuit school as an extension of his "correction."

The brief part of the novel at the Jesuit school depicts Nick meeting with Paulus in his office during a "billowing white storm" making the landscape, literally, blank(537). Again, as Nick moves deeper and deeper into ordered systems, and away from his visceral self and the environment of New York City that helped shape that self, the landscape becomes less definable, less real.

Father Paulus, however, recognizes Nick's admiration of his own discipline and warns him against emulating him too completely. His life has been one without passion. He claims that he has no rage, and that "[r]age and violence can be elements of productive tension in a soul. They can serve the fullness of one's identity. One way a man untrivializes himself is to punch another man in the mouth"(538). If we are to believe Paulus here, then the order on which Nick has been so insistent has only hid or perhaps destroyed those productive elements of his identity.

His contemporary landscape, the landscape of the southwestern United States, is remote and reflects Shay's growing fragmentation. He says of Arizona, where he makes his home, that he "liked the way history did not run loose

here. They segregated the visible history. They caged it, funded it, bronzed it, they enshrined it carefully in museums and plazas and memorial parks. The rest was geography, all space and light and shadow and unspeakable hanging heat"(86). For a man who was looking to escape from himself, this geography is a symbolic fulfillment of that ambition. Artifacts, pieces of the built environment, that could trigger memory are contained and not part of everyday experience. He speaks of driving "out where the map begins to go white" (again DeLillo notes the blankness of the landscape, as in Minnesota) where he drives by "low stucco buildings" and a "neat clean minimal" shops (109). These generic and ubiquitous structures are the perfect embodiment of the postmodern landscape, undefined and without a past.

It is within this landscape that Nick, in a very real way, loses himself. After killing Manza, Nick surrendered himself to collective, proscriptive experience, and, years later as a mature adult, he finds himself a corporate man in every sense of the word. He says that he responds "to that thing you feel in an office, wearing a crisp suit and sensing the linked grids lap around you. It is all about the enfolding drone of the computers and fax machines...a sense of order and command reinforced by the office itself

and the bronze tower that encases the office and by all the contact points that shimmer in the air somewhere"(806). Clearly his corporate persona is an extension of his desire to be part of an ordered system. Note also how the description of how the "grids lap around [him]" and the "enfolding drone" of the machinery dehumanize the man by linking him to the machinery. He has lost his humanity, his sense of self and has become the 'peculiar hybrid' of which Weinstein speaks. He notes, for instance, that around the office he sometimes uses an Italian gangster voice that is "comically effective." Despite his professed contentment within this system, he is clearly in an identity crisis. He has become a simulated self. He is an Italian American with a fake Italian accent. He continues by stating that people "played at being executives," concluding that "it's not that you're pretending to be someone else. You're pretending to be exactly who you are"(103). His assimilation into corporate structures has left a very postmodern separation or fragmentation of the self. The contemporary Nick Shay struggles with his own identity to the extent that there is little self remaining at all, only his own simulation of that self.

At times, however, Shay recognizes his own fragmentation. His absorption into the corporate system

and his correlating loss of identity leave him distanced from his life. He says that, despite his love for his family, his wife, and two children, he feels like "an imposter"(339), as if his life was somehow not meant for him. He states that he was "living in a state of quiet separation from...the solid stuff of home and work and responsible reality...None of them ever belonged to me except in the sense that I filled out the forms"(796).

Baseball and the Human Murmur

Baseball, and the Dodgers specifically, becomes a benchmark through which the reader can measure the impact of the postmodern on the self. The Brooklyn Dodgers are a symbol of life and youth for Shay, and the ballclub was a symbolic extension of the environment. Note the way he describes the ritual of listening to the playoff game:

I stood on the roof [and]...faced southwest, looking beyond the hospital for the incurable and past the elevated tracks on Third Avenue, looking towards the river that cuts the boroughs. That's where the Polo Grounds stood, west by southwest, and I imagined the crisp blues and elysian greens on that great somber-skied day (133-34).

The landscape is part of the ritual, part of the significance of the Brooklyn Dodgers. He says that "[n]o one could explain the Dodgers who wasn't there"(93).

Significantly, when he says "there," he does not specifically mean the Polo Grounds. Remember, he listened to games from the rooftop of his apartment in the Bronx. The Dodgers, for him, are an extension of the built environment of working-class New York.

Yet within the decade the Dodgers and Giants would both be torn from their roots (both, like Nick, making their way west) and in 1964 the Polo Grounds would be destroyed as well. The cornerstone of Shay's childhood environment is displaced or destroyed, and with it part of his identity is lost. As he tells Glassic at Dodgers Stadium concerning his loss of faith in the Dodgers, "These are local affiliations. They don't travel"(94). Indeed, this seems to be true. Despite being "at" the game, they are only superficially so. Nick describes them as being "set apart from the field, glassed in at press level, and even with a table by the window we heard only muffled sounds from the crowd. The radio announcer's voice shot in clearly, transmitted from the booth, but the crowd remained at an eerie distance, soul-moaning like some lost battalion"(91). Nick's distance from the 1951 playoff game is as telling as his involvement with it. Removed from the textures and memories of the past, removed from a sense of the real (Brian Glassic says of their experience that "[w]e

need video helmets and power gloves. Because this isn't reality. This is virtual reality"[92]), Shay is literally unable or unwilling to connect with the game. The "soul-moaning" that Nick attributes to the crowd also acts as a metaphor for Nick's own fragmented soul.

The capitalist system's destruction or appropriation of nearly every aspect of the 1951 playoff game mirrors Shay's loss of his identity. But this appropriation is never complete. The one remaining unblemished artifact is the home run ball, and it is this ball that serves as the central symbol throughout the novel. It is a symbol of the inability of grand narratives to speak to the humanity of the individual, or interpret the truth about a historical event. History, throughout the novel, is represented by modern technologies. Hodges' radio broadcast is one example, but more pervasive throughout the novel is the photographic image. Images of Thomson and Branca, home footage of the Texas Highway Killer's victim, amateur footage of JFK's assassination, and film of the Vietnam landscape all appear to represent the truth, yet central elements of that truth remain mysteries. The amateur footage of JFK's assassination is inconclusive, but calls into question the official narrative, which implicates Oswald. The Texas Highway Killer footage does not capture

the killer himself and he remains at large. And the objects in the aerial photographs of Vietnam are attempts to recover "lost information,"(463).

The most thorough example of technology's inability to pinpoint truth is Marvin Lundy's search for Thomson's home run ball. Marvin's search becomes deeply involved with the photographic image.

At one point Marvin hired a man who worked in a photo lab and had access to special equipment. They studied news photographs of the left-field stands at the Polo Grounds taken just after the ball went in. They looked at enlargements and enhancements. They went to photo agencies and burrowed in the archives. Marvin had people sneak him into newspaper morgues, into the wire services and major magazines.(175)

Marvin's obsession becomes a "work of Talmudic refinement" searching for "specs of data"(177). Marvin, in fact, comes to believe that "Reality doesn't happen until you analyze the dots"(182).

Yet, despite his conviction, the "dots" never identify the owner of the ball. Tommy, an acquaintance of Marvin's who deals in print memorabilia, warns Marvin that "you cannot precisely locate the past." As an indication of the extent to which that past no longer exists, there is a photo in Tommy's shop of Thomson, Branca, and President Jimmy Carter(222-3). Marvin finds this, in the end, to be true. He says that by the time the location of the ball

serendipitously surfaces, he has resigned himself to "using rumors and dreams" to locate it. He continues that "there's an ESP of baseball, an underground what, a consciousness, and I'm hearing it in my sleep"(179). Significantly, it is not until Marvin abandons the photographic image and begins to follow rumors and dreams that he acquires the ball. The grand narrative of corporate capitalism is not ubiquitous and the baseball is a symbol of that which has slipped through its grasp. Marvin will elaborate later in the novel. He says the ball "inspired people to tell him things." Memorabilia seekers are drawn to the ball and other genuine artifacts in search of what Marvin refers to as "a forgotten human murmur," something embedded in their past for which history cannot account(320).

This murmur is different things to different people. Charles Wainright, who buys the ball the night after the game is played, is a man who in many ways parallels Nick. He is the quintessential corporate man and a product of the fifties. He speaks, though, about the baseball as a thing that identifies him as an ordinary guy. It is a "populist memento," an object that individualizes him and makes him human. And his one wish is to pass it to his son and have him value it and care for it. And Charles Jr., "Chuckie,"

does value it, but in a different way than his father. It was "the one thing he'd wanted to maintain between them"(611).

No, he'd never been a fan but the baseball had been sweet to have around-yes, sweet, beaten, seamed, virile and old, a piece of personal history that meant far more to him than the mobbed chronicles of the game itself.(615)

For owners of the baseball, its role in history is only a catalyst for the personal significance given to it through memory. For Marvin, in fact, the memorabilia had very little to do with the game itself. He notes, as he is selling off his possessions, that "[a]ll that frantic passion for a baseball and it was Eleanor [his late wife] on his mind...Memorabilia. What he remembered, what lived in the old smoked leather of the catcher's mitt in the basement was the touch of his Eleanor"(191-2).

For Nick Shay, a man who has lost his sense of self, embraced the values of corporate America as a surrogate, and recently become conscious of how isolated he has become from himself and his life, the ball is a link, perhaps the one remaining link, to his youth. He says of it that it was "the one thing in this life that he had to have"(97) and his language indicates that he needs it to preserve whatever small part of him still remains from his childhood. He notes how the hand works "memories out of the

ball that have nothing to do with games of the usual sort"(132). Though he withholds much of his past from his wife and family, he admits to a lover that "all the interesting things in my life happened young"(293). In the epilogue he comes to a realization that he longs "for the days of disorder. I want them back, the days when I was alive on the earth, rippling in the quick of my skin, heedless and real. I was dumb muscled and angry and real"(810). The ball serves as a physical connection to those days.

Antiques and the act of collecting connect us to the past. Richard Bishop, however, commenting on the widespread appeal of antiques appraisal programs in the 1990s (*Antiques Roadshow* and *Personal FX* are the examples he uses), notes that there are two narratives at work in these programs. The origin and history of the object is one narrative, and certainly this connects the owner to the past. The climactic moment in each appraisal, however, is when the expert discloses the monetary value of the object. Bishop concludes that, "in a capitalist society, only finding the value of an item seems to offer this closure we want so badly"(11). It is significant, therefore, that in *Underworld* it is the deep personal meaning, and not the investment potential, that generates such a desire for the

baseball in those that possess it. It is not part of the consumer capitalist narrative to which Thomson, Branca and other elements of the game have succumbed.

"The Ordinary Life Behind the Thing"

Other characters articulate a greater understanding of the relationship between the built environment, artifacts, and identity. As part of his attempt to access his "days of disorder," Nick seeks out Klara Sax, a woman with whom he had a few brief sexual encounters when he was young. Klara has since become a prominent artist whose medium is discarded materials, junk. Her current project is the painting of old B-52 bombers, now gutted and obsolete. Nick reads about the project in a magazine and feels compelled to seek her out in the New Mexico desert where she is working on the project. Again, the Southwest is exceptional for its ability to veil history. Their conversation upon meeting, in a way, addresses their presence in this landscape.

"I thought I owed you this visit. Whatever that means," I said.

"I know what it means. You feel a loyalty. The past brings out our patriotism, you know? We want to feel an allegiance. It's the one undivided allegiance, to all those people and things."

"And it gets stronger."

"Sometimes I think everything I've done since those years, everything around me in fact, I don't

know if you feel this way but everything is vaguely-what-fictitious.”(73)

While Nick struggles to articulate his presence in the desert, paralleling his struggle to maintain his sense of self in the landscape of corporate capitalism, Klara is more definitive.

Klara exists outside of the structures of corporate capitalism and has a much more secure sense of self. Significantly, she has not drifted so far away from the old neighborhood as Nick has. She still lives in New York, where the built environment triggers her memory and articulates who she is. Her relationship to the Fred F. French Building is a perfect example. In the section titled “Cocksucker Blues,” Klara is at a rooftop party and sees the building across the skyline. It triggers a series of memories that lead her to a defining moment as a young woman. The moment of reminiscence reminds her “how things were real and she was real in ways she’d forgotten how to be” (374). Nick, in correction, at the Jesuit school, or in Arizona, does not have these catalysts for his own memory and as a result struggles to define himself. At the end of the first chapter in this section, Klara further elaborates on the building:

[S]he looked across the ledges and parapets to the old skyscraper with the massed midsection and the sunburst

paneling, ten blocks north, and thought how wonderful it was, what an accidental marvel to come upon a memory floating at the level of a glazed mosaic high on a midtown tower-the old spoked sun that brings you luck.(400)

And this is the point of the built environment. It is riddled with memory and meaning and it keeps memory alive in everyday life. The everyday, the mundane, is the soul of identity. Those in *Underworld* who have the most defined sense of self are all steeped in familiar environments.

The "fictitious" element that Klara senses in the present is a product of the grand narrative of corporate capitalism, which, as we have seen with Nick, replaces the authentic with the simulated. Through her art she tries to create an alternative narrative to set in opposition to it. She says of her project with the airplanes in the desert that "What I really want to get at is the ordinary thing, the ordinary life behind the thing"(77).

We're painting, hand-painting in some cases, putting our puny hands to great weapons systems, to systems that came out of factories and assembly halls as near alike as possible, millions of components stamped out, repeated endlessly, and we're trying to unrepeat, to find an element of felt life, and maybe there's a sort of survival instinct here, a graffiti instinct-to trespass and declare ourselves, show who we are.(77)

What Klara is articulating here is defiant of grand narratives. She refuses to allow corporate capitalism and

its military-industrial complex to dictate who she will be and how she will be represented.

The graffiti instinct manifests itself, literally, in Ismael Muñoz who, known also as Moonman 157, was one of the greatest graffiti artists in New York during the 1970s. His painting of subway cars is similar to Sax's art. It appropriates the landscape, taking meaning away from the grand narrative and claiming it for alternative narratives. The subway allows a commercial metropolis to survive, carrying commuters from their home to their business and back each day. But "the whole point of Moonman's tag was how the letters and numbers told the story of backstreet life"(434). The grand narrative ignores many aspects of American life, issues of race and poverty specifically. Ismael sees the tag as an act of defiance demanding recognition. "Think of your tag," he says, "in maximum daylight rolling over the scorched lots where you were born and raised"(439).

Ismael, in fact, is Sax's inspiration in many ways. His painting of trains precedes her painting of airplanes. Similarly, after he has stopped tagging trains, he survives by salvaging car bodies that have been abandoned in the Bronx and selling them for scrap. He and his "crew" squat in an abandoned building in a burnt out section of the

Bronx called "the Wall." The building stood next to a vacant lot heaped with refuse of all kinds. "At the far end [of the lot] was a lone standing structure, a derelict tenement with an exposed wall where another building had once abutted. This wall was where Ismael Munoz and his crew of graffiti writers spray-painted a memorial angel every time a child died in the neighborhood"(239). Here Munoz becomes even more direct in his protest, making the building a literal testament to the violence and devastation that the larger narrative of American exceptionalism ignores.

LeClaire, citing Fritjof Capra, notes that "[m]echanistic principles used to analyze closed systems of entities in linear chains of cause and effect cannot adequately describe the circular causality of living systems, which are open and interacting with other systems"(4). Grand narratives, and the imposing nature of the postmodern environment, are incapable of incorporating the complexity of human experience, which is a lived experience deeply tied to the built environment. As such, these linear systems are not able to completely destroy that human element within corporate capitalist culture. Even in Nick Shay the core of his being, the baseball,

remains. Albert Bronzini here makes a general comment about

[h]ow children adapt to available surfaces, using curbstones, stoops and manhole covers. How they take the pockmarked world and turn a delicate inversion, making something brainy and rule-bound and smooth, and then spend the rest of their lives trying to repeat the process.(664)

Those who can remember and, at times, repeat these processes are able to maintain their identity and even defy those elements in society that attempt to appropriate or destroy that identity.

Chapter 3:

"Part Way There:" The Mexican League and American Conflict in Mark Winegardner's *The Veracruz Blues*.

"[I]n at least one sense the border is impermeable: the border has been able to prevent Americans from ever realizing the rich tapestry of baseball that has been woven in the country to the south"(5).

-Alan Klein

Richard Slotkin defines myths as "stories, drawn from history, that have acquired through usage over several generations a symbolizing function that is central to the cultural functioning of a society that produces them"(16). A number of seminal myths have long been identified in American scholarship: the myth of the American frontier, the myth of the American Adam, and the myth of the American Dream among them. For Americans, baseball has always been uniquely aligned with the spirit of American myth. The structure of baseball, in many ways, parallels elements of these myths. David McGimpsey, citing former Commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti, states that "in Baseball he sees the perfect meritocratic form where essentially virtuous Americans can assert their freedom in an irreplaceable expression of e pluribus unum"(28). This belief is part of the lore of baseball. Each player stepping to the plate, struggling alone against the pitcher, but for the good of

the team, is viewed as the perfect statement of an egalitarian meritocracy. That this struggle traditionally takes place on a baseball field, a pastoral landscape that is not urban, yet not an untouched natural landscape, engages the myth of the American frontier, another seminal myth of the United States.

Mark Winegardner, in his 1996 novel *The Veracruz Blues*, recognizes this relationship between baseball and American culture. In fact, his first sentence states that baseball and America "are of course mirror and lamp"(1). Myth, however, is more complex than it first appears. National myth is a construction of the dominant ideology, and while myth can have a unifying effect on disparate peoples, it can also work hegemonically. Slotkin states that national myth "affirm[s] as good the distribution of authority and power that ideology rationalizes"(19).

Winegardner establishes the metaphoric relationship between baseball and American culture as a way of problematizing the ideological nature of American myth. His fictional account of the 1946 "raid" of the Major Leagues by Jorge Pasquel's Mexican League brings issues of race and class to bear on these myths. More significantly, perhaps, he demonstrates how the globalization of corporate capitalism blurs the notions of nations and national

cultures. Winegardner does this largely through contextualizing selected elements of American cultural myth, including baseball; in doing so, Winegardner, however, also brings an international context to baseball. Jorge Pasquel's perception of baseball, its meaning to him as a Mexican nationalist, and his ambivalent feelings towards American culture, show both the international nature of "the American Dream," and also, almost paradoxically, a staunch resistance towards American cultural imperialism. As Klein notes in the epigraph to this chapter, the Mexican/American border has prevented Americans from seeing the "rich tapestry" of baseball, a tapestry woven with threads of imperialism and nationalism, assimilation and resistance.

Re-envisioning America in Mexico

Late capitalism, or the postmodern era, is characterized by some as an era of fragmentation, a disruption of grand narratives that have defined power relationships during the modern era. Certainly this is a positive trend that gives a voice to many historically disenfranchised people. Alfonso Del Toro, echoing sentiments from the likes of Lyotard, states that "Postmodernity is far from being solely disillusion or

nostalgia, or a reactionary, globalizing, and equalizing phenomenon. It is the possibility of a new organization of thought and knowledge in an open form through the relativizing of totalitarian paradigms and the decentralization of Discourse, History, and Truth"(30). Certainly this is part of Winegardner's purpose in *The Veracruz Blues*. Much of the novel's narration is from the voices of disenfranchised Americans in Mexico.

It is no surprise that disenfranchised Americans make their way south of the border. It is common in both the history and literature of the United States. Octavio Paz, one of Mexico's greatest men of letters, comments that "[i]n general," referring to American writers and artists,

Americans have not looked for Mexico in Mexico; they have looked for their obsessions, enthusiasms, phobias, hopes, interests--and these are what they have found. In short, the history of our relationship is the history of mutual and stubborn deceit, usually involuntary, though not always so.(115)

This is exactly what Winegardner's characters, and, indeed, what Winegardner himself is doing. Mexico is a site where Americans gain a new perspective on their relationship to the United States.

Danny Gardella, one of the wartime ballplayers who jumped to the Mexican League, speaking of 1946 says that despite appearances, behind the surface of Major League

baseball, things were not all "skittles and beer"(33). The season of 1946, of course, promised Americans the return of their baseball heroes who had served during the war. But the optimism generated by the returning veterans veiled some very real problems with America's pastime. Black Americans had served in the war in increasing numbers, but their homecoming promised nothing but a return to a continued system of segregation and second-class citizenship. For black baseball players it was no different. Lloyd Brown wryly comments that baseball "is a dramatization of America's cultural myths (the myth of white superiority, for example)"(249). Denied access to the Major Leagues through a "gentleman's agreement" among the owners, African Americans were forced into their own leagues in America.

It is only in Mexico, as Paz notes, that they find their idea of America. The owners and fans of the Mexican League welcomed the African American players openly. Pasquel declares "Ours will be baseball of first-class caliber, open to men of all races, with our concern being only how well the man plays the game"(25). Theolic "Fireball" Smith, a Negro League pitcher who followed Pasquel's money south, is the primary African American voice in the novel. He confirms Pasquel's claim, stating,

"Two years in Mexico changed my attitudes about the U.S.A. We were heroes to those fans. They treated us like they did their own. America was no democracy for a black man"(18). Clearly the equality and liberty that are such a large part of any American myth are undermined in any discussion of opportunity for African Americans. It is only in the Mexican League in 1946 that they experience this equality. Though Smith claims that the 1940 Veracruz Blues (which had Latin and Negro League legends such as Martin Dihigo, Josh Gibson, Ray Dandridge, and Cool Papa Bell on the roster) was the best team in baseball history, it is only in 1946 that those excluded from the Major Leagues were allowed to compete against talent from the Majors. When Max Lanier, a star pitcher with the St. Louis Cardinals, jumps to Mexico, and asks Ray Dandridge where all these talented players came from, Dandridge replies, "Man, we been here...Been here a while now, just waitin' for you"(144). It is the relative equality of the Mexican League, and the chance to compete against those presumed to be the "best" by white America, that the Negro Leaguers wanted.

Yet, echoing Paz's earlier statement, Smith is unwilling to abandon the United States entirely and embrace Mexico. After learning that the Negro Leagues, in accordance with the Major Leagues, have agreed to ban every

player who jumped to the Mexican League, Smith says, "I don't care what gripes you have against your country, it's still yours and it's still a blow to be barred from making a living there"(75). For Dandridge and Smith, Mexico is the promise of America.

The wartime substitute players also found themselves in a difficult situation as the war ended. They had filled up empty rosters during the war, but had no guarantee that they would have a job now that the regulars were returning. The reserve clause, which kept a player under the influence of a single club regardless of whether that player was under contract, left these players with no leverage in negotiations. As a result, many players found themselves either completely without a contract, or without a contract that represented their true market value. The power of the reserve clause came from the notion that baseball is not like other businesses and is therefore not beholden to the same anti-monopolistic rules. As a result, the players were at the mercy of the owners. As Frank Bullanger, a troubled American journalist who is given the job of Media Director by Pasquel, notes in one of his narrations, "perhaps the least-free enterprise in [the United States] is baseball, the so-called national pastime"(97).

Danny Gardella, a wartime player himself, becomes the seminal voice for the disenfranchised players in the novel. During spring training of 1946 it is clear that, with the regular players returning, the New York Giants have little use for him. When he arrives in Miami, he and a few other wartime players are forced to stay in "some dump" while the rest of the team stays in "the Venetian Hotel, the biggest place in Miami"(32). After being benched for much of spring training and being pressured by management to sign an insulting contract, Gardella finally accepts Pasquel's offer to play in Mexico. For Gardella, Pasquel's League liberates him from the second-class treatment and the monopolistic hold the New York Giants have on his career.

The Mexican League also gives the fledgling players union the leverage it needs to begin to get concessions from the Major League owners. The lack of any real competition to the Major Leagues allowed the reserve clause to remain unchallenged.¹ The competitively and financially viable alternative of the Mexican League gave the owners incentive to negotiate. While only a handful of top players

¹ The last real challenge to the American and National Leagues' monopoly on the top baseball talent was the Federal League, which existed from 1913 to 1915. During that time, most Major League stars received substantial raises to dissuade them from jumping. The Federal League was, ultimately, unprofitable, and was essentially "bought out" by the Major Leagues in December of 1915. A succinct history can be found in Charles C. Alexander's *Our Game: An American Baseball History*.

like Max Lanier and Mickey Owen left for Mexico (and only eighteen total jumped from the Major Leagues), the chance of losing others led Commissioner Albert "Happy" Chandler to blacklist all players who accepted Pasquel's offer. In the novel, Ray Dandridge shares rumors with "Fireball" Smith that articulate the deepest fears of the Major League owners. He states that "Pasquel offered Hank Greenberg a hundred thousand dollars to come down here. Said he even gave Ted Williams a blank check to come down here!"(73). With these rumors circulating, however, Winegardner suggests that blacklisting alone would not ensure the Major League's continuing hold on the top baseball talent.

Significantly, it is on the day of Mexican Independence (again, Winegardner is seeing America in Mexico) that the players learn the full impact of their jump to Mexico. Danny Gardella reads an article that states, "The owners had bought off the players' union, for the price of a \$5,000 minimum wage and a small pension fund. In exchange, the union more or less agreed to disband"(227). Gardella, however, understands how this came to pass:

Criminy. It was *us* whose jumping to Mexico gave the players' union credibility, *us* who paid the price of losing our right to work in the U.S.A. so that other men who still had the right would get more—but still

not enough—of what was rightfully theirs. It was
us! (227)

Gardella ultimately sues the Major Leagues upon his return from the Mexican Leagues and becomes the first player to really challenge the legality of the reserve clause.

Winegardner suggests that one of the reasons the reserve clause was able to survive so long was the connection between baseball and American myth. When confronted with the notion of organizing a players' union, Ace Adams, a Major Leaguer who jumped to Mexico for a short time, says, "[b]allplayers are individualists" (226). As noted earlier, this notion of the individual, the American Adam, a man "standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources" (Lewis 5) is deeply tied to the lore of baseball. With this notion of individualism embedded in the vision of both baseball and America, the hegemonic effect myth can have on the working class becomes apparent.

Further evidence of the power of this myth to overshadow the economic realities of the game appears in a discussion of baseball that surfaces during a party at Ernest Hemingway's cottage in Cuba. Frank Bullinger, a journalist, a would-be novelist, and the overarching

narrative voice in the novel, joins a party that includes Ernest Hemingway, Babe Ruth, the boxer Gene Tunney and his wife, Jorge Pasquel and his brother, the Mexican actress (and Pasquel's lover) Maria Felix, the legendary Cuban pitcher Dolf Luque, as well as Lou Klein and Fred Martin, two St. Louis Cardinals. After they shoot pigeons at a rifle club and then return to Hemingway's for dinner, "the boozing grew serious and the conversation sank to the level of baseball talk"(41). It is significant, especially considering the number of ballplayers present at the party, that the sport does not come up in the conversation until "the boozing grew serious." Baseball, Winegardner suggests, occupies a part of the American imagination that is not grounded in fact or reason. Its foundation is in nostalgia and idealism. Thus, when Bullinger comments that the biggest story of the year in baseball is the attempt to organize a players' union, the American members of the party scoff at him.

Bullanger argues the point to the players who are present:

"You've got no pension, you've got no minimum wage," I said. "They have you coming to training camp a month earlier than usual, and you don't get paid five cents extra for it. Attendance could double this year, but the owners won't give you guys any of that money if they don't have to"(42).

Lou Klein, however, dismisses him simply by commenting that the "Bawl-playahs don't cotton to unions...the American bawl-playah is an individualist"(42). The myth of American individualism embraced in the lore of baseball is, in fact, bolstering the monopolistic hold owners have over players. It is only in Mexico where disenfranchised players, Major Leaguers and Negro Leaguers alike, begin to approach the promise of American democracy.

We Are Our Contradictions

Winegardner's contextualization of these idealistic notions of baseball and America get behind the veneer of American myth. This kind of perspective is common in postmodern writing. But it is important to qualify the positive elements of postmodernism. Wladimir Krynski notes that "we must recognize that postmodernism is an ideological current with artistic, social, and political implications whose chief characteristic is the eclipsing of the real problems linked to late capitalism"(14). While many grand narratives have splintered, the workings of late capitalism have continued to expand towards a global level. Krynski continues,

Like globalization, [postmodernism] is founded on the expansion of a "unique way of thinking" ("Pensee

unique") and on the interpretation and reinterpretation of consumers' needs. What then develops is the phenomenon called by Habermas "collective will formation," and, as he notes, "In this process, free communication can be replaced only by massive manipulation, that is, by strong indirect control"(20).

This is where *The Veracruz Blues* becomes a complicated novel. Beyond issues of race and class, Winegardner explores the complicated relationship between the powerful capitalist/imperialist United States and Mexico, which struggles with its own national identity.

Until the past decade, American imperialism has been a subject that received little attention in academic circles. As the United States leads the world in establishing a global economy, however, the subject has begun to receive considerable attention. Amy Kaplan observes, in her introduction to *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, that scholar Philip Fisher sees the multiculturalism of American Studies as being characterized by the absence of monopoly power. Yet Kaplan notes that "[t]o reconsider the meaning of imperialism in American Studies is to make statehood unavoidable as precisely the site of the monopoly of power and the production of ideology which Fischer finds inherently un-American"(16). Donald Pease, Kaplan's co-editor of the volume, adds that while this monopoly is

based in military and economic power, "it depended for its efficacy on a range of cultural technologies, among which colonialist policies (exercised both internally and abroad) of conquest and domination figured prominently"(22).

Having identified this powerful "monopoly," Kaplan reminds us that

the power concentrated in an imperial state is not static...but is amassed both as an ongoing political, social, and cultural process in struggle with oppositions it gives rise to and responds to at home and abroad, and as a monopoly whose counters change over time in relation to those struggles.(16)

Pease again agrees, noting that, "[a]s an ongoing cultural project, U.S. imperialism is thus best understood as a complex and interdependent relationship with hegemonic as well as counter-hegemonic modalities of coercion and resistance"(23).

This cultural imperialism can be seen in the rise of modern sport. Joseph Arbena observes that "[o]ften, though not always, then, the global history of modern sport is characterized by a process of diffusion geographically outward from centers of innovation and hierarchically downward"(2). Latin America, under this framework, has largely been a "recipient region" that has adopted sports from the western powers. "What that suggests in turn is that the evolution of modern Latin American sport can be

used to analyze the various attributes of Latin America's increasing involvement in the capitalist world system" and that "sport vividly expresses the ways in which different peoples have reacted to the penetration of the so-called modern models"(3). Often these interactions take the form of the imperialist tendencies of assimilation and appropriation.

Certainly these tendencies manifest themselves in the earliest forms of baseball introduced to Mexico. Gilbert Joseph, who did a study of early baseball on the Yucatan Peninsula, saw plantation owners embrace the American import. In the colonial plantation atmosphere of the time, in which owners were dependent on foreign markets, "it was perhaps inevitable that the local oligarchs would embrace the North American pastime"(33). In a cultural trickle-down effect the impact of American culture can become felt by all in the plantation economy. Joseph notes that "an early team photograph suggests their seriousness of purpose, not merely to become champions, but to look the part in the best Anglo-Saxon manner, complete with striped polo shirts, knickers, hair slicked and parted down the middle, and waxed handle-bar mustaches"(35). Baseball, then, is an extension of the colonial will of the United States.

We see something similar happening on the northern border, where baseball was introduced (by some accounts) by railroad workers who were laying tracks between industrial centers in the U.S. and Mexico. As Klein notes, "[w]ith the arrival of the railroads in 1881, the two Laredos became structurally integrated into the socioeconomic mainstream of both countries"(28). While it is generally recognized that such industrial growth in Mexico did foster a sense of nationalism, it also bound Mexico to the powerful interests of the United States. Again, baseball becomes an extension of the economic imperialism of the U.S.

Cultural imposition of this kind, however, is often met with resistance, creating a complex interweaving of cultures. Winegardner attempts to explore the convoluted nature of Mexican/American cultural contact. At Hemingway's party at his Cuban home, this cultural complexity is evident. That this takes place in Cuba, a site that, within a decade, would become a site of conflict between capitalist/imperialist and revolutionary forces, is significant. It will be a frontier between opposing cultures, and this anachronistic spirit of contestation becomes apparent during the party as well. Cultural legends are set in opposition to one another. Latin American icons such as Pasquel, Luque, and Felix engage

Hemingway, Ruth, and Tunney. Late in the evening, in fact, Hemingway and Pasquel compete in an impromptu boxing match in Hemingway's living room. They spar ineffectually, tired and drunk, until Hemingway attempts to end the fight by kicking Pasquel in the groin. Luque, who has been slumped in a chair to this point, springs to life, fires a revolver into the air, and shouts, "Fight fair"(45)! Hemingway, an American icon and champion of rugged individualism, masculinity, and honor, reveals the man behind the façade. His underhanded attempt to win calls the whole of American myth and American dealings with Latin America into question.

In a reversal of the traditional American western imagery, Luque's gunplay is cowboy-esque. Now, however, it is the dark-skinned native who holds the revolver and ultimately deals with the injustices of the frontier, and the savage in need of civilization is Hemingway. Interestingly, the bullet Luque fires pierces Bullinger's manuscript, which he had brought for Hemingway to read and critique (but has been left on a table and neglected all evening), and which he had hoped would become the great American novel. In each instance, the myth of American exceptionalism is exposed or inverted, and the tone for the novel is established.

Cuba is also significant as the site of the party that sets the tone for the novel, because the Cubans were able to do what Pasquel, in some way, hopes to do: use baseball as a means of resisting the imperial presence of the United States. Milton Jamail notes that

[i]n the late 19th century, Cubans used baseball to project [an] important message: national identity. Fidel, like the Cubans fighting for independence with Spain, would also use baseball; only this time he would try to use the 'American game' as a weapon against a different enemy: the United States. Clearly Fidel understood that baseball is much more than an "American Legacy:" it is at the core of being Cuban. "One day, when the Yankees accept peaceful coexistence with our own country," said Fidel in a 1974 speech, "we shall beat them at baseball too, and then the advantages of revolutionary over capitalist sport will be shown" (27-28)

Pasquel, however, tries to create national identity through baseball, while embracing capitalism. In essence he tries to both embrace and reject the influence of the U.S.

Paz notes that "[t]he idea the Mexican people have of the United States is contradictory, emotional, and impervious to criticism; it is a mythic image" (115). Certainly we see this in the character of Jorge Pasquel. Mexican film star, and former lover of Pasquel, Maria Felix illuminates Pasquel's character. On his seventh birthday, Felix says, Pasquel had a baseball diamond built on his parents' polo grounds on which he and his friend Miguel Aleman could play. Pasquel, like the teams in the Yucatan,

imitated American uniforms, complete with a New York Yankees baseball cap. His play, however, was cut short by bombings authorized by Woodrow Wilson. Four hundred would die from the bombings and Veracruz would be occupied by U.S. Marines. Pasquel, paraphrased by Felix, says of that day,

I stood at home and tossed a baseball in the air. I wanted to hit it so hard it would go sailing out of our estate, over the city, and onto the deck of the American gunship, killing the captain. But I was a boy. I swung and missed. Only then did I see the irony of my Yankees cap. But I did not take off the cap and burn it. I did not switch my allegiance to another team. At that moment I became a man...who learned to despise American authority without forfeiting his love for American culture.(151)

But separating American authority from American culture is not as easy as Pasquel believes.

Miguel Aleman would become president of Mexico in 1946, and the parallel between the lifelong friends is instructive. The national revolution, which had defined the decades leading up to the Second World War, peaked with the nationalization of the oil industry in 1938. In the postwar years, however, designs for autonomous national industrial government were abandoned. This was against the best interests of most of the Mexican population (but very lucrative to those aligned with the government),

establishing an economic colonialism. Land reform projects begun during the revolution were rescinded and United States businesses were allowed to return to Mexico. While this trend is established with his predecessor, Avila Camacho, the embracing of foreign investment escalated and became "a virtual counter-revolution under President Aleman"(Niblo 187).

We see the cultural equivalent in Jorge Pasquel. Pasquel sees the Mexican League as symbolically putting Mexico on par with the United States. Baseball becomes an arena in which Mexican nationalism expresses itself as it challenges the talent of the American Major Leagues. Alan Klein notes that, "[a]s with many politically influential Mexicans, nationalism, particularly as an expression of resentment towards the United States, is a central element in the story of Jorge Pasquel"(71). On the one hand, the attempt to "steal" players from the major leagues is a statement of Mexican nationalism. It is a statement of defiance and a move towards equality. In the language Pasquel uses to recruit players, it is clear that he is trying to symbolically establish Mexico as America's equal, if not its superior. The new Mexican League, he hopes, will be "a true mestizo baseball"(158), where the only concern is "how well a man plays the game"(25). The

nationalist sensibility, implied in the statements above, becomes explicit when he states that the game will be "an egalitarian symbol of the new Mexico...a symbol that will ring throughout the world when we defeat the American baseball champion in a true World Series!"(158).

There is no mistaking the nationalist tone of those words. Yet Pasquel does not recognize the ways in which America has already assimilated him. Benedict Anderson, referring to a similar, though more intentional effect of formal English education in India, calls this "mental miscegenation"(91). He is referring to the effect the imposition of a culture can have on an individual, an almost unconscious undermining of the native culture.

The impact of American culture is evident throughout the novel. The descriptions of the ballparks attest to the imperial presence of the United States. "Meat" Stephens, a ballplayer who did not enjoy his stint in Mexico, says "I remember being struck by all the American brands on the outfield billboards: Coca-Cola, Valvoline, Seagram's, Calvert, Bacardi, like that"(91). Even by 1946 national boundaries have become obsolete for large corporations. Another metaphor for the ubiquitous influence of American culture is the railroad tracks that run through the outfield of the stadium in Tampico. Alan Klein notes that

railroads served multiple and at times contradictory purposes in Mexico. Towards the end of the 19th century it spurred industrial growth in the country and thus fueled a growing sense of nationalism. On the other hand, most of the first railroad lines were direct links to the United States. This led to an increased influence of American culture along these lines, as well as the "wholesale encouragement of foreign colonialism" (Klein 29-32). Trains, then, are a fitting symbol in this novel expressing Pasquel's ambiguous feelings towards the United States.

Anderson's term "mental miscegenation" is, of course, a term loaded with negative connotations and this negative sensibility informs its meaning here as well. "In Mexican Spanish," says Maria Felix,

there is a word, *malinchismo*, which means a preference for foreign things, particularly American things. The word comes from *Malinche*, the name of the Aztec princess who willingly married and bore the sons of the conquistador Cortez. It is a profound insult to call a Mexican a malinchist, as bad as saying his mother pays well-hung sailors to sodomize her and then fellates goats to orgasm—and swallows. That bad! (155)

Pasquel claims to be both a nationalist and a lover of American culture, but that very culture undermines his Mexican nationalism. He seeks approval in terms of baseball through the acquisition of white players, an element clearly not necessary to have quality baseball in Mexico,

but necessary to gain American approval of that baseball.² Even in his defiance of the Major Leagues, he is still deeply entrenched in the culture of the United States.

While he seeks approval from the Major Leagues, he begins to lose the approval of the Mexican fans. His team, the Veracruz Blues, is jeered at as it travels through the league. Bullanger asks a Monterrey reporter why the fans whistle when the Blues take the field, and the reporter responds, "They whistle because they resent the Pasquels for stocking the Mexico City teams [The Veracruz Blues, though named after Pasquel's home city, played their games in Mexico City] with all the imported talent, trying to buy a championship for the capital. It is no different in your country"(101). As Pasquel tries to make the League more competitive, it becomes less Mexican.

Pasquel attempted to appropriate the symbol of America from America and claim it for Mexico. But the contradictions within the man ran too deep, and the deep ties of baseball with American myth were too well knotted. Nowhere is this more evident than in Pasquel's relationship with Babe Ruth. If there is a personification of baseball,

² As noted earlier, the 1940 Veracruz Blues were regarded by many as the best team ever by many non-white baseball men. The 1946 Blues, who, significantly, had the largest percentage of white ballplayers in the league, including the great pitcher Max Lanier, however, struggle to get out of the cellar of the league all season.

it is the Babe. Pasquel, recognizing this, tries to appropriate his image for the Mexican League, first by offering him a managerial position, and then by inviting him to perform in a hitting exhibition. But Babe Ruth, his image and the myth, cannot be had. At a late season party at Pasquel's Mexico City mansion, a ping-pong tournament is organized.

The final game paired [Ruth] against Mr. Pasquel. Ruth wasn't taking things too serious, but he also wasn't a guy who let somebody win something. Mr. Pasquel was stripped down to his bathing suit, sweating heavily, You could tell he thought he could win. Ruth didn't look like he could beat anybody, but really there wasn't anybody he couldn't beat.(120)

Pasquel's desperate determination and Babe's matter-of-fact victory illustrate the nature of Pasquel's misunderstanding. He thinks he can beat the Babe and, in doing so, all that he represents. This is true of ping-pong and also of the Mexican League. Gardella, however, punctuates the match and the party, stating simply "Nobody overshadowed Babe Ruth"(121).

Maria Felix, speaking of Mexicans in general, but Pasquel in particular, says, "Americans can be hypocrites, but we are our contradictions"(152). This, ultimately, is what undermines Pasquel's vision. He does not understand the complexity of American cultural imperialism, and the ways in which it had already indoctrinated him in American

corporate capitalism. It is the contradictions within himself that lead to his failure.

The Faith of 50 Million People

Throughout the novel, Winegardner creates a parallel between Jorge Pasquel and Jay Gatsby. The correlation is explicit early on when Bullinger, speaking of himself and the players he writes about, comments that

[w]e were among the thousands of people whom the late Jorge Pasquel bought for his collection. Whether Pasquel was (a) Mephistopheles, (b) Gatsby, (c) Barnum, (d) an egomaniacal war profiteer, (e) a liberator of oppressed athletes, (f) a civil rights pioneer, (g) a philandering murderer, (h) a visionary who should be in the Baseball Hall of Fame, (i) all of the above, or (j) none of the above—this is a question I have wrestled with for forty-eight years and now, dear reader, leave to you.”(2)

The comparison, surprising as it may seem at first, is fitting. Both in many ways embody the qualities of the “American Adam.” One of the standard characteristics of the Adamic figure is that he is “bereft of history,” and certainly this applies to both Pasquel and Gatsby. Though we are given significant insights into their pasts late in each novel, rumors circulate throughout concerning their histories. The parallels are striking. Gatsby was rumored to have been a German spy during WWI, while Pasquel was

rumored to have made his money refueling German U-Boats during WWII. Both were rumored to have killed a man.

Both men rise to positions of power and influence. One guest of Pasquel observes that he "is good at exploiting a guy's crazy dreams"(121). When Bullinger interviews "Red" Hayworth about his time in the Mexican League, he tells the story of how he was not willing to go until Pasquel presented him with a brand new Cadillac, an extreme rarity during the war and early post-war years. Frank questions him further.

How did they know that was the kind of car you wanted?
Or that you were such a car buff?
[Frowns] I always figured you told 'em, Frank.
No. I didn't. I never said word one.(109)

This is not dissimilar to the way Gatsby is able to manipulate people with the use of his money. One of his guests says, "[W]hen I was here last I tore my gown on a chair...within a week I got a package from Croirier's with a new evening gown in it," leading another guest to comment, "He doesn't want any trouble with anybody"(47). Both Gatsby and Pasquel are products of capitalism and believe in the power of money.

It is in this belief that the parallel between the two characters is so informative. Both are ultimately denied their dream. In the end, Gatsby cannot have Daisy. Class

remains a barrier that money alone cannot overcome.

Pasquel's dream of a Mexico that culturally and economically rivals the United States is also unattainable. Despite his seemingly endless supply of money, the hegemonic influence of American commerce and industry undermines his project from the beginning.

Furthermore, each character illustrates how money impacts a game that, according to the myth, exists outside of regular time and space. This parallel is evident in the narration of "Fireball" Smith as he relates how he and Quincy Troupe were saved from the wartime draft by Jorge Pasquel. Pasquel offered 80,000 Mexican laborers to work for the U.S. war effort in exchange for the services of Troupe and Smith. Smith reflects that he "never quite got over the fact that I was playin' ball for a man who didn't have no military rank, no government office, nothin', and yet he bargained the lives of eighty thousand strangers like they was just so many boxes of cigars"(20).

Smith's narration expresses a similar kind of disbelief to that of Nick Carraway when he discovers that Gatsby's associate, Meyer Wolfshiem, had "played with the faith of fifty million people" when he fixed the 1919 World Series (78). Though the reference here is to Gatsby's associate, what is important is that both novels illustrate

the corruptibility of the baseball myth. Baseball is a product of its time rather than a pastoral escape from the workings of time. In *The Veracruz Blues*, baseball is woven into a global economy that is no longer contained within national boundaries, and is intricately tied to political and cultural influences.

I Guess I'll Never Understand Mexico

Ines, one of "Fireball" Smith's Mexican lovers, takes him to one of the ancient ball courts of pre-modern Mexico. She is an artist and an activist. Winegardner depicts her among the likes of Diego Rivera, Freida Kahlo, and other Mexican revolutionaries. Unlike Pasquel, she is searching for agency through indigenous games, trying to make a connection with the Americans without succumbing to their culture. She is partially successful. She tells the story of how when the ballgame was completed, one of the teams would lose their heads. As Ines says, however, it was not known whether the winners or the losers were sacrificed. Smith responds, "I sure as Hell don't understand Mexico"(146). As he reflects on those Mexican ballplayers, on how they lose if they win and win if they lose, he begins to associate their plight to the complex circumstances that brought him to Mexico. Ultimately, he

thinks to himself, "I believe maybe I was starting to understand it all too goddamned well"(146).

Arbena notes of the endurance of pre-modern games like the Mesoamerican ballgame that they represent "a source of self respect and even a type of rebellion among people who have seen much of their traditional culture destroyed"(4). Ines, then, stands in contrast to Pasquel. While he tries to appropriate American culture, and ends up reproducing many of its prejudices and injustices, Ines expresses pride in her own culture. In doing so, she resists the influence of American corporate capitalism and is able to communicate on a meaningful level with Smith. Homi Bhabha notes that

[t]he 'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity..."(4)

Winegardner explores just how fluid concepts of nationalism can be. Smith and Ines find a tenuous solidarity that he does not feel with white Americans, and that Ines does not feel with Pasquel. Identifying the "other," in this tale of two nations, is more complicated than it first seems.

In the end, Frank Bullanger reflects on his narration:

I have known these people: Babe Ruth and Satchel Page, Ernest Hemingway and "Diana James." Their stories you know. I wanted this story to be about people you have never heard of, who had the same exact dreams and got

partway there. That's not nothing. It is, I now
believe, everything.(250)

Bullanger, then, finds meaning beyond myth. In telling a story of those who "got partway there," *The Veracruz Blues* reveals what the myths hide, the complex dynamics of race and class, assimilation and resistance, and nationalism and imperialism that are part of the history of baseball and America.

Chapter 4:

"Once It's Been told It's as Good as True": Nationalism, the National Pastime, and Mythic Space in *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*.

In *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*, Gideon Clarke and his friend Stan Rogalski are magically transported from Onamata, Iowa in 1978, to Big Inning, Iowa (a town that occupies the very spot of present-day Onamata) in 1908. The life-work of Gideon, like his late father, is researching and proving the existence of The Iowa Baseball Confederacy, a turn-of-the-century league that, according to all records and all memory, never existed. By travelling back in time, Gideon and Stan hope to learn not only the mystery of the Confederacy, but also how Big Inning came to be replaced by Onamata. Gideon and Stan, however, are not the only ones who converge on Big Inning. The 1908 Chicago Cubs, a Native American warrior named Drifting Away, a cemetery statue known as the Black Angel, and even Theodore Roosevelt and Leonardo da Vinci make their way to the small town in order to witness or participate in a game between the Chicago Cubs and the Iowa Baseball Confederacy All-Stars.

While *The Veracruz Blues* uses baseball as a metaphor for the ambivalent nature of cultural boundaries between

nations, *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* uses baseball as a way of exploring the complex internal dynamics involved in defining a nation. Baseball has, from its beginnings, been seen as a metaphor for the American experience. Educator and historian Jacques Barzun's famous statement that "whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball" has become a truism within American cultural consciousness. Kinsella, the most prolific writer of baseball fiction in the late twentieth century, echoes Barzun's sentiments. When questioned why a Canadian author such as himself uses Iowa as a setting for his baseball fiction, he responds simply that "[b]aseball is an American game."

As noted in the introduction, Homi Bhabha observes that exploring national identity through "narrative culture" goes beyond simply bringing "attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself." In exploring the narration of a national image it becomes apparent that the dominant national identity is a construct that emerges from the ever changing values and beliefs of a society. The "ambivalence of language" has the ability to illuminate the pluralistic experience behind the linear national narratives constructed by the dominant ideology(3). Bhabha continues:

In a sense then, the ambivalent, antagonistic perspective of nation as narration will establish the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as containing thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production.(4)

Stan, himself a minor league ballplayer at the end of his career, notes towards the end of novel that "1908 was when baseball really meant something. It was America..."(251). That Stan locates this statement in the past implies dissatisfaction with the present. The cultural boundaries that define baseball and, in turn, define the nation have shifted. In fact, both Gideon and Stan see something, an element of "magic," in baseball's past that has been lost in the present.

Walter Benjamin states that "Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably"(255). In *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*, Kinsella uses baseball to create a mythic space where disparate elements of American history and culture converge to struggle over a redefinition of the national identity, or, in Bhabha's terms, a redefinition of the "cultural boundaries of the nation." In doing so, Kinsella hopes to retrieve elements of America before they are swallowed by the dominant narrative of America and "disappear irretrievably."

The mystery of *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* begins to unravel when Stan takes Gideon to a train yard where he has discovered a long abandoned and barricaded "baseball spur" between Iowa City and Onamata. Stan discovered it while visiting the yard, exploring job opportunities now that his baseball career was coming at an end. Gideon thinks that the long-forgotten baseball spur may be a piece of evidence that will finally prove the existence of the Confederacy. Stan returns that night with Gideon and a sledgehammer to the barricaded track.

Stan squares his shoulders, takes the sledge and swings it back sideways as if he were going to ring a gong, and brings it forward, landing a mighty blow to one of the ties. The barricade barely budes. But Stan swings again and again, chipping the ties, splintering them, breaking them away from the blue-headed bolts. He sets down the hammer and lifts the broken ties one by one and tosses them into the ditch.(93)

The railroad is a central image in the novel, and the breaking of the ties to the "baseball spur" is significant for two reasons. First, the railroad itself is a rich symbol in American myth. As such, the characters' relationship to the railroad in *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* parallels their relationship to the American national ideology. Secondly, Gideon and Stan, in "splintering" the ties, open a path long closed on this symbolic railroad, which precipitates their journey to Big

Inning and reveals elements of American history that were in danger of fading entirely out of memory.

"The Fickle Iron Highway"

One of the defining myths of American culture has been the myth of the American frontier. The myth portrays the Western frontier as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, which can be transformed by the characteristics of vitality and independence, so prevalent in the American character, into a garden paradise. As such, the frontier acts as a safety valve for American democracy and thus "defined the promise of American life"(Smith 123). The draw of the frontier would keep wages high and the social stratification that comes with industrialization minimized in the East. The frontier, then, would foster feelings of self-reliance and progress throughout the nation, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of many of the industrial societies of Europe.

Henry Nash Smith notes, however, that by the second half of the nineteenth century the "virtuous yeoman," the quintessential American in this garden ideal, could not "stand his ground against the developing capitalism of merchant and banker and manufacturer"(156). The railroad is the harbinger of these influences on the western frontier. The frontier myth attempted to explain the presence of the

railroad in the west as necessary for taking full advantage of natural resources, but as Richard Slotkin notes, "the railroad was a symbol that represented 'the industrial revolution incarnate'" (214). The presence of the railroad signals the beginning of the end of this pastoral frontier landscape, and ushers in the age of monopoly, industry, and corporate capitalism.

It is in the pastoral, mythic nature of the game that Kinsella locates the "magic" that Gideon and Stan do not see in the game in 1978. This element is represented by The Iowa Baseball Confederacy All-Stars, a collection of small-town and farm boys with colorful names like Arsenic O'Reilly and Bad News Galloway. The rural Iowa of Big Inning/Onamata represents the pastoral landscape and the agrarian lifestyle that was an American ideal before the surge of industrialization and urbanization and, like the Baseball Confederacy, this ideal is on the verge of extinction.

Prior to the beginning of the game, Gideon is asked if he will join the church band in a rendition of "I Shall Not Be Moved." A man comments that "[i]t's sort of become the theme song for Big Inning - we tried to make the railroad come here, instead of our having to go to them, over to Iowa City. We lost. As you can see, all we got is that

miserable spur line. But we're still here. Stubborn as tangle grass"(154). But the persistence of the independent, pastoral agrarian lifestyle is fading. Gideon notes of his *de facto* parents, John and Marylyle Baron, that they are "both over eighty, [and] still live on their farm a mile out of town in the direction of Onamata Catholic Church, which was built in anticipation of a new railroad and never relocated after the fickle iron highway chose another route"(39). The Barons represent this agrarian ideal, but the symbolic change of plans by the railroad company casts their legacy in doubt. John, who played shortstop for the All-Stars, farmed all his life. But John dies towards the end of the novel and there are indications that Marylyle is not far behind. Their one adopted child, Missy, suffers from Down's syndrome, and though she is portrayed as "natural" and a "Child of God," there is little hope that she will be able to preserve the agrarian legacy. As the Barons pass, then, the yeoman farmer moves closer to being erased from America's collective memory.

Replacing the agrarian ideal is the America of corporate capitalism. The Chicago Cubs represent the rise of corporate capitalism in America both past and present. Their triumphant arrival in Big Inning comes directly from

the railroad's baseball spur. They are brought to the field "garlanded in red, white and blue, followed by children running and yelling. The Chicago Cubs are standing there in the wagon box, smiling, tipping their hats to the crowd"(146). Though the squad itself is the great 1908 Cubs, the organization has symbolic roots in the present (time, for Kinsella, is malleable) where strikes, inflated salaries, inflated egos and free agency destroy the continuity of the game. Brian Aitken quotes literary critic Esepth Cameron who states that "evil, according to Kinsella, lies in the institutions that run our lives: organized religion, banks, bureaucracies, military service, schools"(62).

Kinsella's depiction of the Cubs organization definitely falls under the category of a bureaucracy. The organization is one of the first sources to which Gideon appeals for verification of the existence of the Confederacy. His continuing appeals are met with increasing shortness until he ultimately decides to infiltrate the organization, posing as a new employee to gain access to their records. What he finds is that the Cubs represent the movement in America, and in baseball, towards an impersonal corporate capitalism. As Gideon looks through file cabinets of information he notes that "[i]t

was sad to find out that, to the Cubs, baseball was not the least magical; it was strictly business. The files contained little but contracts, tax forms, medical expense forms. There were no elaborate personnel files, no newspaper clippings, no fan testimonials"(6).

Modern baseball is riddled with this kind of impersonal bureaucracy. When Gideon's father is killed by a line drive at a Braves game, the Milwaukee organization's response is calculated.

The Braves were so afraid I was going to sue them for some astronomical amount and win that they paid for my father's transportation back to Iowa City, the hearse and the undertaker, and the silver-handled oak casket—that was a settlement in itself.(52)

The organization also gives Gideon lifetime season tickets. Any hint of sincerity in any of these gestures is undermined when Gideon sarcastically notes that his "lifetime pass...of course, expired with the team in 1965" (when they became the Atlanta Braves)(52).

Stan is also a victim of baseball's increasing interest in the bottom line. While in Onamata recuperating from an injury, he receives a telegram which he assumes is an official release from his contract, but he cannot bear to open it and "the yellow telegram just lay there on the linen runner like a stain"(86). When he tells Gideon of the

telegram he adds, "I told the club there was no phone there - I couldn't stand the thought of some secretary phoning to tell me I'd been cut"(85). Clearly there is no "magic" for Kinsella in the professional aspects of the game.

The Cubs, then, mark the prominence of the capitalist state, while the All-Stars mark the pastoral, idealized time in American history. But Annette Kolodny, in analyzing the myth of the frontier, problematizes both of these visions. She states that

[i]nsofar as Western civilization involves a patriarchal social organization within which separate male-centered families compete, all movement into unsettled areas inevitably implies conquest and mastery...[the nation was] busily proving their worth, and their manhood, by overcoming and dominating the natural world. The result...was the transforming of nature into wealth.(133)¹

Drifting Away and the women who carry in them the spirit of Onamata are representations of these conquered and forgotten elements of American identity. As with the pastoral ideal, the coming of the railroad signals the end of Drifting Away's way of life. Drifting Away reflects that

[a]t first the white man followed the Indian trails, but, always in a hurry, he could not take time to follow nature; he had to defeat nature. The white man's trails were straight, no matter that sometimes the going was impossible. Then came the straight iron rivers, always intersecting at right angles.(48)

¹ Richard Slotkin's Trilogy, *Regeneration Through Violence*, *The Fatal Environment*, and *Gunfighter Nation* also looks extensively at the conquest and mastery of the West, at its enduring place in the consciousness of our nation.

When these men who want to "stake out the earth" try to force Drifting Away onto a reservation, he refuses. Ultimately, he resists, and as a result Onamata, his wife, is slaughtered by the settlers. What is significant about this is that Drifting Away's story, too, is unknown to anyone but Gideon. In 1978 there is not "a shred of proof" that he, like the Confederacy, ever existed (41).

There are a few exceptions. Gideon notes that Drifting Away's likeness appears on the five dollar "Indian Head" gold piece that was originally commissioned by Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt sees Drifting Away when they both converge on Big Inning to participate in the game, and upon seeing the Native American, Roosevelt sees the image he wanted on a coin of "definitive American design"(243). It is definitively American in that it marks the conquering of the continent's native inhabitants. Roosevelt's purpose is to summon the representation of the noble savage (an image that endures to this day, most visibly in the representation of sports teams like the Milwaukee/Atlanta Braves), but in doing so layers of meaning are being stripped from the encounter between Native Americans and settlers. The cultural production of Native American images is so narrow that any three-dimensional

representation of the Native American simply does not exist in American popular culture.²

Similarly, Onamata is all but erased from history. Though the present day town of Onamata bears her name and does give a very superficial sense of the former Native American presence on the land, the complex and violent history between the two cultures is forgotten. In fact, Gideon points out that in *Place Names of Iowa*, Onamata is defined as Blackhawk for "magic"(24), yet we come to learn later that, indeed, it is Arapaho for "travelling woman"(101). The alteration may seem trivial, but that is the point. To mistake definitions, indeed, to mistake Native American nations, is to trivialize these cultures.

While certainly Onamata's heritage is a primary factor contributing to her disappearance, her place as a woman also makes her a victim of history. Women are another forgotten element in the construction of American identity. Kolodny notes that Western civilization is a "patriarchal social organization," and as such, women too have remained marginalized to the extent that they are absent from traditional conceptions of American national character.

² For an extended discussion of Native American Mascots in sports see D. Stanley Eitzen's *Fair and Foul: Beyond the Myths and Paradoxes of Sport*, Luarel Davis' "Protest Against the Use of Native American Mascots: A Challenge to Traditional American Identity," and Ward Churchill's "Crimes Against Humanity."

Westbrook notes how this marginalization manifests itself within baseball literature. "Mothers," she notes, "and with them all women, are excluded from baseball and the lives of men as part of the American way"(251), and, in contrast to fathers, are presented as an "unattractive, abusive, cruel, unnatural, mad, and sexually flawed gang of grotesques"(247).

Upon Onamata's death, her spirit "fled to the four corners of the earth," and were slowly begin making their way back towards Drifting Away (187). Her spirit, in fact, resides in Darlin' Maudie, Sunny, Enola Gay, and the Black Angel, a cemetery sculpture located in Iowa City. These women, like Onamata herself, are lost to history. Both Gideon's mother and his wife are "transient women"(82). They leave the men who love them dearly for indeterminate lengths of time, and return without explanation or apology. In this sense they are, as Westbrook notes, "abusive and cruel." Their absences torment their husbands.

Their physical transience, however, is not nearly as compelling as their historical transience. Gideon's mother, Darlin' Maudie, met his father while working at a travelling carnival, and even after their marriage refused to reveal her past to him. Despite probing by Gideon's father, Maudie simply responds, "My name is Maude Huggins

Clarke. I'm nineteen and I used to travel with a carnival. That is all you knew when you asked me to marry you; that is all you ever need to know"(30-31). She is excluded from Matthew's and Gideon's obsession with the confederacy by her inability to comprehend its meaning to the two men. "Why," she says, "can't you treat that baseball stuff like it was somethin' useless you was taught in school?"(96). She is unable to comprehend the value of this knowledge, and, as such, is excluded from this defining metaphor in American culture.

Summer, Gideon's wife, is similarly absent of a past. On their first meeting, they share a drink at a bar. She excuses herself to go to the bathroom and when she returns she has thrown away the dress she was wearing and has put on a change of clothes, declaring, "I have more lives than a cat...I just used one of them up. What's past is past."(79) And in fact Gideon will learn very little about the other lives that she has left behind.

The emotional cruelty of these women is paralleled by Gideon's sister, Enola Gay. Named a year before the bomber that bears her name dropped its cargo on Hiroshima, she is a harbinger of the destructive capabilities of the modern age, in which a single bomb can erase an entire city from history. After the death of their father, Enola too

disappears from history, becoming "one of America's first urban guerrillas"(54), blowing up a Dow Chemical plant, doing hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of damage. Gideon says "every post office in America has posters showing Enola Gay as she looked some fifteen years ago and as they imagine she might look today"(54). That she has existed outside of the grand narrative, remained unphotographed, for fifteen years demonstrates the extent to which she is lost to history.

The Black Angel statue, according to the memories implanted in Gideon's mind, "grew out of the earth" from the site where Onamata was buried (101). In the popular culture of Iowa City, however, little is known of its origin and it is the subject of speculation and legend.

For these women, the railroad is, again, an effective symbol for identifying their place in history. When the Dark Angel inexplicably begins to move from the Iowa City cemetery and make her way towards the baseball game in Big Inning she appears on the railroad tracks "trespassing on the good will of the Burlington Northern"(262). She does not belong, nor is she wanted, on the tracks laid by the dominant ideology. The transient nature of the other women also keep them on the peripheries of the grand narrative. Sunny, for example, is a hitchhiker and, by definition, is

subject to the whims of those who will or will not give her a ride.

Clearly, women and Native Americans have no place in the linear narrative of American history, beyond that of superficial stereotype. For women, they are either virgins (the pure Missy, who suffers from Down's syndrome) or they are dangerous women who conceal their pasts. It is only through the re-envisioning of the American character, through the myth of baseball, that Kinsella attempts to create a more inclusive American identity.

Circles and Squares

Kinsella brings all of these disparate elements, the marginalized and the mainstreamed, the nineteenth century and the twentieth, across time and space to Big Inning, Iowa in 1908 in order to revise the discussion of national identity. His vehicle for generating this discussion is the baseball game between the Chicago Cubs and the Iowa Baseball Confederacy All-Stars. Central to the meaning of *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* is an understanding of Kinsella's construction of time and space. Like many modes of differentiation, time and space have become problematic in the postmodern era. Paul Smethurst notes that while modernist history tends to be linear and future oriented,

postmodern history is defined by fragmentation. "It is," he states, "an eclectic mix of times and spaces in which an unfinalised modernity continues to loop back upon itself"(84). He uses imperial history, in which the experiences of diverse peoples are subsumed into the grand narrative of a single nation, as an example of modernist history. Under a postmodern framework, multiple histories from diverse and subjugated peoples co-exist with a nation's dominant narrative, and, as such, the traditions and memories of subjugated peoples are kept alive. One mode of accessing that history is through the exploration of space. Smethurst, citing Lefbvre, notes that "places contain the traces of the historical events that have shaped them, and so the effacement of history is never complete"(15). This blurring of the spatio-temporal division has the distinction of, in turn, problematizing other distinctions such as race, gender, and class as well.

Gideon Clarke's father, who first received the information about the Confederacy, notes that "time is out of kilter here in Johnson County," and that "[t]here are layers of history upon this land"(7-8). In the novel, in fact, these layers seem to be existing simultaneously, or, "looping back upon themselves," as Smethurst would say. This simultaneity of existence allows Gideon and Stan to

step through cracks in these realities and emerge in Big Inning, Iowa in 1908. As the name suggests ("beginning"), they emerge at a mythical juncture.

Gideon compares the game between the All-Stars and the Cubs to "[a] few Indians holding off a well-equipped army" (220). The Indians, in this case, are all of those groups who have been marginalized by the dominant narrative in this novel, the Native Americans, women, and small-town Americans as well. If the "Indians" win over the powerful, corporate Chicago Cubs, it will essentially mark a rewriting of history, and allow all of these dispossessed elements in the novel to re-emerge in history.

Drifting Away notes that "baseball is the one thing the white man has done right" (177). In fact his holy vision was of baseball. Drifting Away describes the white settlers as being at odds with nature, while the native Americans live in harmony with the environment. White men, then, surround themselves with squares and sharp angles. Native Americans use the circle as their fundamental geometry. When he first sees baseball in his vision, he is floating high above the land, looking down with the grandfathers of his nation, "'It is a very holy business' I said to the grandfathers, 'But there are white men doing the ceremony. Will they learn our ways? Have we become one

people with them?"(180) Drifting Away makes note of the unusual dimensions of the field. The convergence of circles (the ball, the circumference of the bat, the circumference of the infield and the pitching mound) and squares (the diamond, the bases). Baseball for Kinsella, is a unifying metaphor.

Indeed, it is Drifting Away's magic that helps sustain the undermanned All-Stars against the Cubs, and eventually, he will pinch hit in the bottom of the 2,614th inning and drive in the winning run. The Black Angel, representing women, eventually takes her place in right field. She's not much of a hitter, but in the field "she glides after the ball as if she is on ball bearings"(263).

The Iowa Baseball Confederacy All-Stars, on a towering home run by Drifting Away, will win the game on the fortieth day signaling, for Kinsella, a redefinition of America towards that more inclusive, less commercial time that the confederacy represents. Perhaps more telling of this change is how the game affects the Cubs. After eighteen innings, Frank Luthor Mott, the commissioner of the Iowa Baseball Confederacy, calls the captains of the Cubs and the All-Stars together. He wants to call the game a tie, saying to Frank Chance "You have fulfilled your obligation. Already, then, the Cubs players are distancing

themselves from the Cubs organization. Again, the train proves a useful metaphor. At noon on the second day, Mott is concerned that the Cubs will miss their train back to Chicago, but Chance says defiantly "Let it wait"(188). When, after eighty-four innings, the Cubs return to Iowa City for the night, Chance again "ignored a half-inch-high batch of telegrams" from Cubs executives (193). Despite Chance's ill-temper, it is the game itself, and not their duty to their employer, that now spurs the Cubs on.

Hye notes that "In its synthesis of circles and squares, baseball might be capable of making whites and Indians one people, but not in Big Inning"(203). Kinsella's departing image, though, is not without ambiguity. When Gideon and Stan return to Onamata in 1978, Gideon visits Marylyle and Missy on the farm. As he walks with Missy, he sees a couple who he recognizes as Drifting Away and Onamata. They have now re-entered history.

Prior to Gideon's journey to Big Inning, Marylyle told him a story about the unusual death of a local resident named Sigmund Foth. Gideon, unbelieving, asks if such a story could possibly be true. Marylyle responds, "It's the story that counts, Gid. Once it's told it's as good as true"(110). Her statement gets to the core of the cultural work done in the novel. Retelling of stories incorporating

national myths such as baseball begin to redefine the national character, regardless of their veracity.

Kinsella's fantastic narratives do not make the bringing together of marginalized groups on a mythic field any less effective in the cultural work they do.

Chapter 5:

Shades of Grey: Historical Perspective and the Black Sox Novels

From 1982 to 1991, three novels were written that dealt in depth with the World Series fix of 1919, *Shoeless Joe* (1982), *Hoopla* (1983), and *Blue Ruin* (1991). In a discussion of the "Black Sox" label placed on the players who fixed the 1919 World Series, Peter Carino notes that "[a]s the opposite of White Sox, it brands the players as antithetical to their kind, erasing any shades of gray from the history of the fix and closing off debate on the extenuating circumstances of their guilt"(282). This wave of Black Sox re-imaginings, which also included films, biographies, and stage performances, attempts not only to bring shades of gray back to the fix itself, but also to show how the fix reveals the grays of American culture.

Frederick Jameson, in his book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, says of the historical novel that it "can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only 'represent' our ideas and stereotypes about the past"(25). In his dissertation, *Saying it's so: A Cultural History of the Black Sox Scandal of 1919*, Daniel Abraham Nathan considers the Black Sox scandal and the circumstances that made it "a dominant

cultural metaphor" for the 1980s (206). The eighties were a time of increasing conservatism under Ronald Reagan, whose emphasis on family values and restoring America to a nostalgic golden past (that never really existed) seemed to fly in the face of the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and the widespread corruption both in government and society. Nathan observes that these peculiar cultural developments of the Reagan years made the cultural climate particularly receptive to the complexities of the scandal.

These three novels impact our collective memory and complicate the myth of the Black Sox. Nathan comments that, "[m]uch like the Pocahontas narrative, the Salem witch trials, Nat Turner's slave revolt, the battle at the Alamo, the battle of the Little Big Horn...the Black Sox Scandal has successfully resisted fading into obscurity"(9). David McGimpsey explains the reason for this, noting that "[t]he legend of the Black Sox Scandal has become a centerpiece for discussion about baseball's place in America. The fix has been mythologized to the point where it stands as a historical marker of baseball's so-called 'fall from grace' where the want of a buck overtook the great national game"(51). The Black Sox scandal, then, is a pivotal moment in American history. It acts as a transitional moment between old America and new America, and though each novel

does so from a different perspective, they all mark this change.

In Harry Stein's *Hoopla*, this change is marked, primarily, by Luthor Pond, whose self-serving, sensational form of journalism marks this shift from a style that was at least perceived as objective. *Blue Ruin*, by Brendan Boyd, marks the rise of consumer capitalism through one of its less legitimate enterprises, gambling. Finally, W. P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe* mourns the passing of the agrarian lifestyle where land and family were valued over profit margins and social status. Baseball has long been perceived as a reflection of American culture and, beyond these themes that Nathan has observed as being appropriately reflective of the eighties, these novels also begin to explore the nature of history. The narrators of these novels, Luthor Pond, a journalist (*Hoopla*), George "Buck" Weaver, Black Sox third-baseman (*Hoopla*), Sport Sullivan, gambler (*Blue Ruin*), and Ray Kinsella, son of a White Sox fan (*Shoeless Joe*), all tell different versions of the World Series fix of 1919. In doing so, memory and history merge, and historical truth becomes elusive.

David McGimpsey brings a very perceptive insight to the discussion of the fix. Speaking of the 1980's own fix, the Pete Rose betting scandal, he observes that

[i]f professional baseball can be seen as inherently corrupt, 'cheating' becomes more abstract and refracted within its compromises, just as we can be cynically unmoved by the ethical breaches of politicians. And if the peculiar industry on behalf of which Giamatti acted is in fact unfairly controlled, and the fix is indeed on, what integrity do rules really have? What obligations does the hero...have to these rules? Rules are also cherished by cheats, and the baseball cheat can also be a credible antihero, whose consciousness is not defined by the "saps" who believe everything is on the up and up.(30)

Seen in this light, the anti-hero, whether ball-player, gambler, or journalist, is exonerated, and clearly there are elements of this in each of these novels. The "fall from grace" that the scandal seems to represent is nothing more than a myth, constructed in subsequent decades. In truth, from its very beginning, baseball as a professional endeavor was "inseparable from the commerce and corruption around it"(Candelaria 11). In many ways these novels complicate this notion of the Black Sox fix as a "fall from Grace," yet at the same time they each find a way to retain baseball's mythic dimension as a pure and untainted game.

Hoopla

The story of the Black Sox scandal is, in many ways, the story of the press. McGimpsey, in fact, lays profound importance at the feet of the media when discussing the baseball myth. "Though much has been made of baseball's

cherished oral history," he states, "every canonical story, from Babe Ruth's called shot to the George Brett 'pine-tar incident,' was established with the direct aid of the commercial media"(52). The World Series fix is a case in point. Eliot Asinof, whose *Eight Men Out* is generally considered the seminal text on the scandal, says of his research that it was severely limited by two factors; first, "the official documents relating to the scandal had disappeared; and second, most of the participants had died without talking, while those who survive continue to maintain silence"(xii). In the end, he states that newspapers were his primary source. It is interesting that, though Asinof himself notes the complicity of the media in the scandal (or in suppressing the scandal), particularly *Baseball Magazine* and *The Sporting News*, each of which vilified Hugh Fullerton in his attempt to expose the Black Sox, it is these very sources that provide the bulk of information on the fix. *Hoopla* explores the role of the media in society during the early decades of the twentieth century, and calls into question the reliability of the print media as a source of truth.

Hoopla suggests that the Black Sox scandal is, indeed, pivotal in American culture. Buck Weaver, the White Sox third-baseman and one of two narrators in the novel,

observes that "Nobody ever forgets the Black Sox and that's the truth," adding that, for Americans, 1919 conjures images of the Black Sox instead of other significant events, like the forming of the League of Nations(45). Later Weaver will expand on this, saying, "Nineteen nineteen. There is that word and already I know what is going on in your skull. I suppose I cannot blame you, for it is the same with everyone. It is almost like saying 1776 or some year like that"(256). Nathan observes that "[b]y comparing 1919 with 1776, not only does Weaver explicitly link baseball with national history, but he places baseball within that broader historical context, and thus enables his narrative to draw upon the mythology of baseball as America's cultural common denominator"(238).

Stein also sets the fix within the context of numerous significant events during the second decade of the twentieth century. In fact, the novel begins not with the fix, but with the 1910 boxing match between Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries. The fight was billed as "the Fight of the Century," and, as Luthor Pond reflects from the vantage point of the 1970s "it looks like they were right...nothing else has even come close"(7). Yet the Black Sox are the focal point of this novel, and, though the Johnson-Jeffries fight is still remembered, certainly it does not live in

American collective memory to the extent the Black Sox fix does. The two narrative voices of *Hoopla* suggest that this is, in part, due to the handling of the event by the media.

Nathan observes that "Pond's crass, self-serving account lacks the integrity of Weaver's narrative"(239). While this may be true, Luthor Pond's is the pivotal voice in the novel. It is through his perception of events and the way they are translated, or not translated, into print that gives the reader insight into the unreliability of the media as a source of the 'truth.' In fact, we see this element of unreliability from the very beginning of the narrative. Pond, reflecting on his career, comments on what it took for him to get ahead, to achieve his American Dream; "In a world so at ease with mediocrity as this one, the qualities I possessed in such abundance—energy, personal style, forthrightness, a sense of the dramatic—were exceptional"(3). As with so much in the 1920s, there is a marked change in the qualities that made the successful man from previous decades. Character is replaced by style, manners by forthrightness, veracity by drama. The impact this has on the telling of history is illuminated by Pond's narrative. This novel seems to be largely about the influence of the press on the scandal, and how it manipulated people and events. Luthor Pond is a

sensationalist and openly admits to fabrications in his column. Reflecting on his career, he welcomes the fame it brought him, commenting, "I rarely demurred in the face of [compliments], no matter how exaggerated they became. So what if I did not actually have a source within Hitler's general staff"(3).

Though Pond distinguishes himself from the journalists of his day, certainly his questionable reliability is not confined to his own journalistic stylings. His comments regarding his own paper, the *New York Evening Journal*, hardly give the impression of reliable reporting. The *Evening Journal's* headline on April 16, 1912, for example, read "ALL SAFE ON TITANIC"(64). In another example, speaking of the safety of the subway system, Pond says, "Just the previous week, *if my paper was to be believed*, a wealthy young woman...had her handbag torn from her wrist at the new Columbus Circle station [my emphasis]"(132). That Pond perceives his own newspaper as unreliable is significant, but he also implicates the *New York Times* as an institution as well.

The managers of the *Times* have, for almost a century now, themselves been able to dictate the inheritance of future generations, and they have always been able to keep the record clean...In a sense, it was hard not to feel a grudging admiration for the *Times* organization which had, after all, in a mere couple of decades, succeeded in projecting the impression that

the paper was above commerce—in itself a remarkable commercial achievement. (191)

The implication, of course, is that all media are subjective and, in noting the *Times*' "remarkable commercial achievement," that this subjectivity is impacted by commerce. If these are the sources of veracity in society, if these are the very sources that Asinof relied on in constructing his narrative of the fix, then it reveals the extreme relativity of truth.

Unlike other sports reporters, Pond was "free to wander in virtually any direction I chose, writing about crime one week, a sporting subject the next, the theatrical scene the one after that"(207). Of course the irony here is that the Black Sox scandal is all of the above, crime, sports, and theater. The difference between "the Pond style" and the traditional style, however, was one of emphasis rather than veracity. When Pond, for instance, is granted an interview by Ty Cobb, which ultimately leads Pond to discover that Cobb's father was murdered by his mother, his editor will not print the story. Pond is stunned. His editor says it's a great story, "[s]ure it is. I'll tell all my friends. But we happen to not be in the business of hero reduction at this paper"(155). As Asinof noted, many journalists not only saw baseball as

incorruptible, but also realized that baseball paid their bills. To undermine the integrity of the sport or its stars was to threaten their own livelihood (134-135).

Joe Albers, the beat writer for the Detroit Tigers, represents the prototypical sport journalist of his time. Stein depicts him as not only protecting the players in print, but also as acting as their personal advisor and friend. Stein implies through Albers, however, that it is becoming more difficult to cover up all that is wrong in baseball. Speaking of corruption and the off-the-field incidents (betting, violence, labor issues) Albers says that these things have always been around, "[i]t just isn't always this obvious...and it's getting worse by the year"(86). Clearly the implication is that Albers' form of journalism cannot endure in the modern world.

Pond, however, has a different take on "protecting" the institutions he covers and generally has little concern for the way his column impacts the lives of others. He says that "[t]he conscientious newsman has little use for reflection; it is more than time wasted, it is time ill spent"(131). Pond's style, this new journalistic form, is sensationalistic, filled with rumors, implications, and hearsay (293). Pond notes that "a columnist, far more than a reporter, was expected to have his facts in order. Nor

was that expectation without a certain pragmatic basis. Readers would not identify with, would, indeed, soon turn their backs on, the mud artist." According to Pond, then, a column is factual because readers want facts. But Pond discovers something else. He notes that readers would certainly abandon a mud artist, "but not, I knew, as readily as they would desert a bore"(300). News, for Pond, is entertainment. Pond is unapologetic about his style. He says, rather, that it is the newsmen that claim objectivity who are the con artists, "[t]he pretense of standing above the fray, *that* was a moral infirmity"(196).

George "Buck" Weaver's narrative accentuates Pond's, and acts as a case study in the difference between what is documented and what is true. Weaver's first appearance in the novel illustrates this link between the two narrators. He states, "Maybe it's time some individual set down the actual truth for a change, instead of the other way"(48). The writing of Weaver's narrative is set, significantly, in 1944 (30 years before Pond's). This is important because it is prior to the first publication of Asinof's *Eight Men Out*, which sympathizes with the players. The newspapers at this time remain the only source of information on the scandal, and, as Douglas Noverr notes, the newspapers demonstrated "no sympathy or regret for the fate of the

ballplayers"(30). So, Weaver's "truth" can only be set in contrast to the "other" narrative of Pond and his fellow newspapermen.

Weaver's narrative is littered with comments meant to "set the record straight," and contest the reported accounts of baseball history and the fix. This begins with the baseball world tour organized by Charles Comiskey, owner of the White Sox, and John McGraw of the New York Giants. The trip is comical with exhibition games at times played in torrential rain, or in front of an audience that has no idea what is going on. Moreover, as the trip comes to an end in London, Comiskey makes a condescending comment about the English to the London press. He amends the statement the next day, but, ultimately, the tour does little to make baseball an international pastime.

When Comiskey arrives back on American shores, however, he proclaims the trip a huge success to the newspapermen who meet them at the dock. "Baseball," he says, "has advanced a hundred fold in popularity as a result of the trip"(112). But Weaver, who was naïve and accepted people at their word at the beginning of the trip, is more cynical upon his return. He says of Comiskey's comments to the reporters that "he did not mention what the tour had brought in for him financially, which I later

heard was seventy-five thousand dollars, or even about all the fuss in London. But I guess no one in the states gave a hoot any way. See Comiskey was once again a hero, like always, and heroes do not have to give answers like that"(112). Implicated here are both Comiskey and the press who cater to him. Stein suggests that the newspapermen who are entrusted with documenting history, slant their narratives in favor of the rich and powerful.

Weaver again contests "the record" during his trial. Unable to take the stand (Comiskey's lawyer, Alfred Austrian, did not want players testifying to their on-field activities, particularly after their original confessions were "lost"), Weaver is prevented from exonerating himself. "I do not mean to sound smallish, I know this is how the laws work," he says, "but just tell me what else this trial was supposed to be about, if not what went on on the diamond. My job in that World Series was to hit the orb, and run the bases, and field the number three bag, and I had done so like a champion! What does it matter what was said in some hotel room?"(347). Again, what is said, what is a matter of record, does not coincide with what actually happened. The very heart of the matter is avoided. Though Weaver did not get paid, and there is no indication that he did anything to lose any of the World Series ballgames,

these elements are not addressed. Comiskey again constructs truth via the public record to meet his own needs.

Ultimately, Weaver even takes exception to the legend of the boy who pleads with Shoeless Joe Jackson to "say it ain't so." Weaver says, "Joe swears it never happened, and I'll bet he's right. I bet it was made right up by Hughie Fullerton or Jim Crusinberry and them other scribes that just wanted to sell papers from another man's misery"(47).

Though *Hoopla* complicates the traditionally accepted narrative of the scandal, the purity of baseball remains intact. Those who are implicated in the fix are beset by the moral weight of tarnishing the national game. Shortly after the players agree to go along with the fix, Weaver says that "all at once most of us guys that were in on the racket started acting queer"(269). Pond is not above this feeling either. Pond notes that because he exposed the fix in his column,

[h]enceforth, those eight sorry souls who came so close to destroying the institution that had brought them recognition and financial reward beyond rational measure would be as conveniently pigeonholed as scoundrels as were the rough riders as heroes; and, more importantly, I myself would be forever associated, on the record, with their undoing.(286)

His personal gain, as we see throughout the novel, takes precedence over the "sorry souls" about whom he writes.

Even he, however, is beset with reservations. He reflects

that as proud of this as he is, and as career-making as the exposure was,

the eight or ten month period of my life of which the Black Sox case was the centerpiece was anything but a happy one for me. I was in fact, in a state of agitation throughout much of it. What should, by rights, be a time treasured in memory - for it was the time I at last achieved so much of what I had earnestly sought - was instead one which, above all, evokes memories of depression and self-doubt.(287)

To undermine the purity of baseball, in any way, is to go against one's own moral fiber. Baseball is resilient, and after its brush with reality, Stein seemingly returns it to its level of myth. Pond, after suffering an embarrassing career setback, looks to the ballpark for solace. Even after the scandal, Pond notes that "nowhere in the vast metropolis was a man under pressure more likely to find a semblance of peace"(307).

Blue Ruin

This exploration into American moral fiber and the consequences of tarnishing the American pastime for personal gain continues in Brendan Boyd's *Blue Ruin*. In this novel it is the gamblers themselves, and, more specifically, Sport Sullivan, who narrates the novel. The same shades of gray that *Hoopla* uses to color the players and the journalists Boyd brings to Sullivan.

The gamblers who fixed the series, even in the nostalgic 1980s, had remained, to a large extent, the criminals. In *Blue Ruin*, however, Boyd graces Sport Sullivan with something of a poetic sensibility. As the fix progresses, for instance, Sullivan spends a week in Saratoga:

What I recall of that week are singular moments: a thunderstorm, early on, pouring unannounced from a brilliant afternoon sky, a marble doorway providing me shelter...Or the racetrack, the next afternoon, the limp sunlight hanging on the eighth pole, the crowd growing progressively quieter, watching time folding into itself.(50)

Or later that week:

It was one of the loveliest mornings of my stay. The sky was sheer blue. A slight breeze ruffled every visible awning...I had a pleasant morning's reading behind me, and a serene afternoon's racing yet to go.(59)

That this characterization of Sullivan seems unlikely is beside the point. Boyd is probing beyond the stereotypical depiction of the gambler. As Sullivan himself ruminates, "Nobody ever asks me why I did it. They assume they know. I did it for the money. Why else do gamblers do anything?"(101). But Boyd creates a Sport Sullivan who is often sympathetic and sensitive. Through this moral complexity, Sullivan is ultimately depicted as being as much a victim of the fix as any of the other participants.

For Sullivan the fix was less about money than making a name for himself. "Baseball," he observes, "was the people's choice just then. So it had to be mine"(90). Baseball (keeping with Pond's correlation of theatre, crime, and sport) is America's largest stage. It is baseball that made Luthor Pond's reputation, so will it be baseball that makes Sport Sullivan's.

But Sullivan is conflicted over his role as fixer. He states, "I'd felt no guilt at past manipulations, but this one made me queasy. Here were thousands of innocents nursing one common delusion. I alone knew how delusory, for I alone had ordained it"(120). The source of his misgivings is not the size of the fix, however. It is because it involves baseball. In a conversation he has with Arnold Rothstein, the man who ultimately bankrolls the fix, both admit that their earliest dreams were of attaining "immortality" playing baseball(71). After the fix is complete, Sullivan wanders aimlessly around the country, and pauses in Los Angeles where he finds boys playing baseball early one morning. "I sat beneath an aspen," he says, "pulling cornsilk through my teeth. It aroused too many emotions in me to separate: love of the game's simplicity, grief that such directness was now lost to me, and, of course, intransigence"(233). Sullivan's

ambivalence about his own fix is evident. Nathan says of *Blue Ruin* that, ultimately, Sullivan's "twinge of morality does not deter Sullivan from participating in the fix: after all, he is chasing a version of the American Dream"(247). With the achievement of the dream, however, comes disillusionment (for oneself and others) and regret. Like Luthor Pond in *Hoopla*, Sullivan suffers for having tainted the American game.

Blue Ruin, in highlighting Sullivan, and despite his own protests to the contrary, approaches the fix from the perspective of capital. This alone is indicative of the impact the scandal has had on culture. America is transitioning from the world of localized business (represented by Sullivan and his Boston associations), to the world of national, if not international, business (Boyd quotes Rothstein as saying that "With one black telephone and a pot of heavy java...I could make a running start at taking over the universe"[89]). And Sullivan notes that he is doing exactly that on the national level. Rothstein "was manipulating an event the whole country cared about, queering it without precedent or sponsorship, from one tiny room in the Adirondacks"(89).

Sport states about Rothstein that "[h]e might have begun to imitate old money, but he still knew what he

was"(28). In other words, he is the new rich, wealth without pedigree, capital personified. Sullivan, recalling a conversation with another small-time gambler, Sleepy Bill Burns, says "How could God look like you Bill...when everyone knows he's the spitting image of Arnold Rothstein?"(24). That capital is the new god, and that the Black Sox scandal is mythically linked to this emerging age of consumer capitalism, echoes throughout the Black Sox novels.

The only other character who rivals the authority of Arnold Rothstein in the novel is Alfred Austrian, Comiskey's lawyer. Sullivan says of Austrian, "A.A. wasn't even a baseball fan. To him it was just business, like anything else"(157). Austrian and Rothstein, the lawyer and the international businessman, personify the new economic landscape of both America and its national pastime. While Sullivan flounders with the complexities of the fix, wondering, "[I]s it only by accident that anybody accomplishes anything?"(31), Austrian and Rothstein stand behind the scenes manipulating the events as they unfold. Sullivan concludes, as he begins to write his story of the fix, that "No one will ever know the whole story I suppose. There will always be gaps, to be filled in, as I have tried to, over the years. There is no truth, only versions. This

is mine"(7). Whether this is true or not, Arnold Rothstein claims to have manipulated the entire fix and to, indeed, know the "whole story." He says "You didn't fix anything, Sport. I was one step in your nines all the way. I did it"(327). And it is even Rothstein who gives Sullivan his ultimate fate by sending him down to Mexico. Again, Rothstein controls everything, including exile.

Similarly, Austrian is able to manipulate even the powerful Comiskey. Once he is finally convinced of the likeliness of the fix, a confused and concerned Comiskey enlists the services of the lawyer. In their initial meeting, Austrian takes control, speaking "soothingly" and listening "sympathetically" as Comiskey rages about his damaged organization and his wounded pride. Ultimately, he convinces Comiskey of the proper course of action and Austrian is able to leave the meeting, knowing that "[a]fter the series, he and Comiskey would destroy [the eight players]"(157-158).

Because Sullivan represents an older, localized type of commerce, he is, in large part, lost within his own fix. To attempt to fix the World Series is to threaten the cornerstone of the national character. It is a world "where the values associated with cultural prominence are challenged" and Sullivan realizes far too late that it is

also "a world where scams are run at every level"(McGimpsey 58). Nathan notes that "[a]s Sullivan tells it, the fixed World Series was a poorly planned and executed labyrinthine episode of deceit and double cross whose driving forces were opportunity, greed, and happenstance. 'Only fixers know how random fixes are'"(249). Throughout the novel deceit plays a part in the fix. The relationship between Sullivan and the Chicago first baseman, Chick Gandil, is illustrative. Gandil is Sullivan's contact among the ballplayers, yet neither Sullivan nor the first baseman is willing to admit that they are struggling to live up to their end of the deal. Sullivan notes, in communicating with Gandil from Saratoga, "It was the third wire to cross Lake Erie that weekend. It brought no one closer to the truth than either of its predecessors"(67).

Boyd, in part, uses Sullivan to illustrate the dangers of memory. Sullivan notes early in the novel that, "I don't keep a scrapbook myself. In my line it would be hardly advisable. And though I'm unjustifiably attached to my own history, I've never required relics to evoke it"(10). As a result, he must rely on his memory to evoke his place in relation to history. For all of his apprehensions during the series, in its wake Sullivan begins to believe he had been in control the entire time. He begins to explore new

investments with confidence and abandon, noting in retrospect that "I'd already forgotten the series' shortcomings. Desire has no memory"(202). Michael Kammen refers to nostalgia as "a pattern of highly selective memory" in which pleasant memories of the past are generally emphasized, while unpleasant memories are suppressed or forgotten(618). For Sullivan, this has disastrous consequences. Unwilling to admit that he was a part of larger manipulations, he begins to travel around the country, looking for an inspiration for his next big scam, all the while watching his Series winnings shrink substantially. Sullivan reflects that, "I'd wanted to *make* the truth, not bow to it"(207). In the end Sport Sullivan, banished to Mexico by Arnold Rothstein, is dreaming up new scams and reinventing old ones, dreaming about what he would have done differently in the World Series fix, like not going to Burns for advice or Rothstein for money, and betting the series differently. In the dream, however, he states "I do none of these things, but only imagine them, keeping it all a dream"(339). It is, in a sense, combining dream with reality that has left him exiled from his country.

The future of baseball is much more optimistic in the wake of its fall from grace. Sullivan notes that, when the

eight players were banished from baseball, "[t]he last fix had been put in by professionals"(337). In fact there are indications that the ballplayers of the future are impervious to the fix. This new ballplayer is represented, of course, by Babe Ruth. Sport, trying to re-establish himself after the Series, tries to approach Ruth about fixing a game. Ruth takes his money, but does not throw the game. Speaking with a colleague, Slaveship Hoolihan, years later, he finds that Ruth did the same thing to him. Hoolihan concludes that "He just didn't get it, Sport. He thought we just liked him. He didn't know he was supposed to do anything for it"(296). Baseball, apparently, has returned to the naïve and pure timelessness of myth in the wake of the fix.

Shoeless Joe

Like Stein and Boyd, W. P. Kinsella questions the veracity of history. Unlike these other authors, however, Kinsella uses fantasy rather than plausibility in constructing his alternate "truth." *Shoeless Joe* argues against the impersonal and oppressive nature of the corporate capitalist system. While the Black Sox are certainly central images of victimization and redemption in the novel, the pivotal trope is the ballfield itself.

Ray Kinsella speaks of "the unlucky eight" who were banished for "supposedly betraying" the game, in a fashion similar to his father, John(23). John Kinsella

insisted that Shoeless Joe was innocent, a victim of big business and crooked gamblers..."He hit .375 against the Reds in the 1919 World Series and played errorless ball," my father would say, scratching his head in wonder. "Twelve hits in an eight-game series. And *they* suspended *him*," father would cry. Shoeless Joe became a symbol of the tyranny of the powerful over the powerless.(7)

The powerful for Kinsella, as demonstrated in the last chapter, are the business interests, legitimate and otherwise, that exploit the vulnerable position of the ball players and taint the purity of the game. Ray is respectful towards Joe Jackson and his reasons for accepting money, "When he comes I won't put him on the spot by asking. The less said the better. It is likely that he did accept money from gamblers. But throw the series? Never!...It was the circumstances. The circumstances. The players were paid peasant salaries while the owners became rich"(9).

For Ray Kinsella, then, the Black Sox scandal marks the starting point of baseball's control by big business. Ray mourns the loss of the human element in the contemporary game. He regrets, for instance, that there are so few good nicknames in the Major Leagues. J. D. Salinger, who Ray seeks in response to a voice that tells him to

"ease his pain," offers this explanation, "Baseball has become a business for the players as well as the owners. Guys who make a million dollars a year don't even want to be called by their first names. They want to be called Sir"(158).

Nathan notes that "[r]esponding to a society overrun by disappointment, greed, and cynicism...Kinsella create[s] fictional universes where perfection is possible"(226). The return of Jackson contrasts starkly with the money-hungry, nickname-less modern players. Upon arrival Jackson reflects on his banishment, saying that he would have "played for food" or "played for free and worked for food. It was a game, the parks, the smells, the sounds"(15). So, Kinsella rejects the standard version of the Black Sox scandal, as do Stein and Boyd. But Kinsella's revision of the past is more fantastic than that of *Hoopla* or *Blue Ruin*. McGimpsey notes that "[t]hough Jackson's innocence is the occasion of Ray's indulgence, all the banned players show up for play and express camaraderie"(McGimpsey 41). This is notable since players like Chick Gandil and Swede Riisberg certainly did take the gambler's money and purposefully threw games, but also because, by all accounts, these players did not enjoy each other's company and there is no indication of any lingering bitterness when they take Ray's

field. In fact, when Shoeless Joe appears in Ray's left field he is quite insistent on bringing his teammates to the field with him.

Jackson loves and respects the game, and sees in it more than a paycheck. Ray shares this reverence, noting that "baseball is a ceremony, a ritual, as surely as sacrificing a goat beneath a full moon is a ritual. The only difference is that most of us realize it is a game." (84) This comparison between the idealized, mythical past and the tarnished present is most evident in the ballpark environments Kinsella creates. When Ray follows the voice which tells him to "ease his pain" out east to the doorstep of J. D. Salinger, he is compelled to stop at ballparks along the way. These stops attest to the depraved state of both the game and the nation under a corporate capitalist economy. In Chicago, after checking into a "decaying hotel" and leaving his car in a "locked, guarded lot," Ray walks through the south side projects towards the stadium.

It is unwise for a white person to walk through South Chicago, but I do anyway. The Projects are chill, sand-colored apartments, twelve to fifteen stories high, looking like giant bricks stabbed into the ground. I am totally out of place. I glow like a piece of phosphorous on a pitch-black night. Pedestrian heads turn after me. I feel the stolid stares of drivers as large cars zipper past. A beer can rolls ominously down the gutter, its source of locomotion

invisible. The skeletal remains of automobiles litter the parking lots behind the apartments. (44)

This description is almost post-apocalyptic in nature and gives the reader a sense of the modern baseball environment. After being accosted by some young women in the neighborhood, he approaches the ballpark, which is "bleak and raw," and inside "a few hundred fans huddle miserably under blankets. [Ray] purchase[s] a box seat, but the rain forces [him] to retreat to a drier, less expensive seat higher up. The wind is cold and ice-pick sharp"(46). There is, for Ray, no warmth or familiarity in the modern baseball experience.

This feeling is confirmed when he arrives in Cleveland where he watches a game in "cavernous Cleveland ballpark on a blustery afternoon"(47). After the game, in a nearby diner, he and several customers are held at gunpoint while a couple publicly displays their domestic dispute. America and baseball have lost their hold on the imagination. They are cold, impoverished, and depressing.

Even in traditional stadiums like Yankee Stadium in New York or Fenway Park in Boston there is no sense of serenity surrounding the games. In New York "[t]he man next to [Ray] has paid thirty dollars a ticket for his family. His wife is surly and disinterested, and his sons too small

to concentrate for long. He spends the game trekking back and forth to the concessions"(53). In Fenway Park the environment speaks to the urban decay that plagues America's cities. Ray narrates, "I park the car and walk in the sun along a sleazy street outside Fenway Park, where winos, unkempt as groundhogs, sun themselves and halfheartedly cadge quarters, supposedly for food"(53). In all of these instances the purity and ceremony of the ball game are lost among the images of moral and economic collapse.

Contemporary love of profit has even spread to Ray's doorstep in Iowa. Because of the time, money, and land involved in creating his ballpark, his farm, which was just barely getting by, is now woefully behind on its mortgage payments. Mark, Ray's brother-in-law, is a professor of agriculture at the University of Iowa and offers to buy the land from Ray to help him survive, but Ray will not sell to Mark and his partner.

They...own, or have optioned, several thousand acres of farmland that is planted and harvested by a crew of hired hands headed by a foreman who wears a black hat and looks like Jack Palance. It is curious that at one time the land barons owned prairie ranches as far as the eye could see. Their authority was eventually undermined, and the farmers took over, dividing the land into checkerboards, each square crowned with a white castle of sorts, Now a new breed of land baron is buying out farmers one by one, and I suppose corn

farms like mine will eventually be run by computer. (72)

Mark, then, is part of the corporate capitalist structure that has dehumanized and run down every element of society it has touched. The pride and beauty of the family farmhouse, the "white castle," are replaced by the cold mechanization of the computer.

The mixture of fantasy and reality that manifests itself on Ray's ball field, however, struggles against the bureaucracy of corporate America. Ray's connection with his farm is spiritual and the ball field he builds is "virtually prelapsarian, a cultural space devoid of stain, unsoiled soil" (Nathan 224). It is a place that, to date, the grabbing hands of corporate capitalism have not touched. Ray says "I think of where we are, banked around this little acreage. The year might be 1900 or 1920 or 1979, for all the field itself has changed. Here the sense of urgency that governs most lives is pushed to one side..." (85). This mythical site brings fiction and reality together. When Shoeless Joe first appears, the words he uses to describe the field are significant. "'It is,' says Shoeless Joe, 'It is true'" (13).

Kinsella's fiction merges history and fantasy to reach a kind of spiritual perfection. The case of Archie

"Moonlight" Graham is particularly interesting. Sent to Chisholm, Minnesota by the voice that tells them to "go the distance," Ray and J. D. Salinger search for the player who played only one inning and never had an official at bat in the Major Leagues. When they arrive, however, they learn that Moonlight Graham has been dead for some time. Salinger and Kinsella collect news clippings and interview people who knew Graham to try and understand why they were brought to Chisholm. One of Graham's friends comments that he had forgotten all these stories of Graham until Kinsella and Salinger came to town. Since they began asking about him, though, "It's almost like [they] brought Doc back to life." (129) One night after collecting these stories, Ray walks through the town and discovers that he has magically returned to 1973, prior to Moonlight Graham's death, and meets Graham walking down the street. Graham tells the story of his one inning, and his longing for one at-bat. When Ray suggests that he come to Iowa, Graham refuses, but the next day, as Ray and Salinger leave town, they pick up a young hitchhiker who claims to be Archie Graham. Archie travels with them to Ray's ballpark, where his dream will be realized. Ray thinks that "[t]he young Archie Graham is like a doll Jerry and I have conjured up to satisfy our desire that fantasy turn into truth" (158). What is

interesting, though, is that their research is very much comparable to the research Asinof did to "conjure" the story of *Eight Men Out*, which was written largely from newspaper accounts and second-hand interviews. Ray's fantasy, Kinsella suggests, is not that far from Asinof's truth.

The same can be said for the story of Eddie "Kid" Scissons, who claims to have played for the Chicago Cubs just after the turn of the century. As Ray discovers through research, however, Scissons never played for the Cubs. Yet when Scissons is brought to Ray's field, he will get a chance to pitch in the Major Leagues. In both cases, history is adjusted to accomplish some kind of spiritual justice. The journey to Ray's field satisfies the yearnings of all who can see it. Salinger disappears into the gate in left field where he will live his childhood dream. Graham, "Kid" Scissons, and the eight Black Sox get to play ball in the Major Leagues, and Ray is reunited with both his brother and his father.

It is also the ballfield that ultimately preserves the entire farm, saving not only the mythic nature of baseball, but of America as well (193). As his brother-in-law threatens to foreclose on the farm, Ray imagines the farm being worked not by loving human hands, but "run from one

concrete bunker the size of a transformer station"(193). But as Salinger tells Ray, "people will come" and pay him twenty dollars apiece for the privilege of seeing his field and its ghostly images of the past, because "it is money they have and peace they lack"(252). In this sense, then, the field preserves the American individualism of the agrarian past from an impending take-over by capitalist forces.

The revisions of Ray's ballfield, however, are more complicated than they first appear. As Alison Graham notes, "Reconstructing a mythical past may begin as an act of love, but the ultimate materialization of that fantasy, we are told repeatedly these days, hardly satisfies our desire to possess the past; if anything, it aggravates our sense of estrangement"(152). Both Luthor Pond and Sport Sullivan, in telling their versions of the Black Sox scandal, reveal their ambivalent feelings at having such a central role in tarnishing baseball's mythic purity.

Shoeless Joe is also ambiguous about the liberating potential of such sweeping revisionism. Salinger, in responding to Ray's requests to return to writing, from which so many people draw pleasure, returns "'You're putting all this pressure on me, but how much sharing are you willing to do? Be honest. If you've got what you say

you have there in Iowa, then it shouldn't be hidden"(89). He continues to point out that, by sharing it with the public, Ray will cheapen the experience and end up selling "little plaster statues of Shoeless Joe Jackson with a halo over his head"(90). Ray is horrified by the notion, yet in the end Ray commodifies his baseball field by accepting twenty dollars from people who magically find their way to his field and would like to see the game. While the gate money will preserve the farm, it has simply become a different kind of capitalist venture than the one Mark proposes. It is, as Nathan notes, a "miraculous formula for regeneration, completely in step with the quick-fix ethos of the 1980s. Kinsella's fantasy must have been particularly attractive for those caught in the midst of the farm crisis, which ravaged the midwest during the decade"(231).

Each of these novels, then, brings shades of gray to the Black Sox scandal, complicating the historical narrative offered originally by Asinof by revising the scandal through the lens of the contemporary cultural landscape (primarily through corporate capitalism and the rise of the mass media). Yet, in doing so, each author finds a way to preserve the mythic dimension of baseball.

Conclusion:

All in the Family: The Evolution of Baseball Myth.

What this dissertation has attempted to explore are the ways in which these novels illustrate the relationship between baseball and American culture. Baseball has, virtually from its inception, taken on a mythic status in America, and as such its narratives have, to a large extent, conventionalized and simplified our notions of the past. Simply put, America's nostalgic view of baseball has tended to "disarm critical analysis" and rationalize existing power structures (Slotkin, *Gunfighter* 6).

Upon first glance, it seems as if these novels begin to undermine baseball's mythic hold on American culture. Each narrative engages both baseball's and America's past and, in doing so, presents perspectives on the game and the culture that complicate the nostalgic and superficial nature of American collective memory.

This impression is accurate to a point. Certainly each of these authors is conscious of the superficial nature of baseball and examines the troubling impact nostalgia can have in masking problems in society. But in each of these novels what we see, rather than simply undermining baseball

and its myths, is more like an expansion of the rigid borders that have traditionally contained these myths. In doing so, the myths endure in a form that is able to accommodate the fragmented nature of contemporary culture. Slotkin notes that "the work of myth-making exists 'for the culture' that it serves"(*Gunfighter* 8). Thus, as the culture changes, the myths that serve it must also adjust if they are to remain resonant. While these novels shy away from the contemporary ballplayer with whom the population can no longer identify (David McGimpsey notes that "A successful modern player can no longer be 'just like us': their celebrity and wealth make them unlikely recipients of empathetic response"(38)), these narratives do exhibit postmodern concerns of fragmentation and superficiality that exist on the personal, cultural, and even the international level. Each novel to a greater or lesser extent shows, in fact, that baseball myth is more pervasive and more inclusive than it has ever been in the past. In this way, the core mythology of baseball is able to evolve and remain a powerful symbol in American culture.

While each chapter demonstrates this in a variety of ways, it is perhaps easiest to see this pattern if we focus on a single trope, baseball's most resonant trope, the father playing catch with the son. Deanne Westbrook notes

that "[i]f there is a compelling preoccupation central to baseball's mythology, it may well be found in the realm of kinship relations, and specifically in the father-son relationship"(Westbrook 245). Through a brief examination of this trope in each of these seven novels, we can see how the element of the father and son endures in the postmodern era, but in ways that go beyond the parameters in which this relationship has traditionally been conceived.

Westbrook continues, stating that "[t]here is a blessing, a speaking by the father, in anticipation of death or at death that exerts an irresistible influence on the son, determining his behavior as he struggles with adult life"(Westbrook 259) and when a son fails to receive a blessing "the result is psychologically debilitating, in effect denying the son his adulthood"(Westbrook 261). In Richard Ford's *Independence Day* there is certainly a sense that Frank's son, Paul, needs some kind of "blessing" from his father as he struggles with adolescence. There is nothing unusual about this. But in the postmodern world, as Ford illustrates, this separation of the family, of father and son, occurs without the finality of death. In many ways, Frank Bascombe is still struggling with adulthood as well, and his struggles have, in part, created the emotional distance between father and son. How can the

father pass along the "blessings" of adulthood to his son when he has yet to discover those blessings for himself? The death of his son, the divorce from his wife, and the subsequent separation from Paul and Clarissa, his two living children, have left him in his "existence period" in which he avoids commitments of any kind. While he stays in his existence period, he is unable to offer any kind of blessing to his son. As he himself says, he has "run out of important words"(353).

Baseball offers the metaphor for this existence period as he and his son vacation in Cooperstown, which seems to be a façade without any real depth. But, interestingly, baseball also provides the metaphor that will bring him out of his existence period and towards a commitment to his son. The batting cage, as noted in chapter one, is at once both a symbol of the postmodern isolation from which Frank suffers, and also the ability of baseball to bridge the generation gap and transmit cultural values from father to son.

In DeLillo's *Underworld*, the history of the home run ball hit by Bobby Thomson is marked by fragmented father-son relationships. The most apparent example is the relationship between Manx Martin and his son Cotter. DeLillo inverts the pattern of the father-son relationship

here. Rather than Manx bestowing a blessing upon Cotter, he steals the Thomson home run ball from his son, who dug it out of the left field bleachers at the Polo Grounds. Manx, who is unemployed and spends more time in the bar than with his family, has no boons to bestow on his son. In fact, his wife says that all Cotter wants is to be "[l]eft alone to grow up without advice from [Manx]"(149). Manx steals the precious object from his son and sells it in front of Yankee Stadium for thirty-two dollars and change.

For Charles Wainright and his son Chuckie, the ball is a symbol of hope. Charles is a driven marketing executive who wants to provide the best for Chuckie, but his son rejects his father's offerings and opts for a life of expulsions from prestigious prep schools, petty crimes, and drug use. Their relationship is one of frustration and disappointment. Yet until Charles' death, the baseball symbolizes the possibility of reconciliation. Though Charles questions his son's ability to keep and care for the object, he thinks to himself that "he wanted his son to have it, for better or worse, love or money, real or fake, but please Chuckie do not abuse my trust"(535). Similarly, Chuckie understands that the ball is a "peace-offering, a form of desperate love and a spiritual hand-me-down" from his father (611). And though Chuckie isn't interested in

baseball and, in fact, loses the ball after his father's death, he does appreciate the nature of the gift.

No, he'd never been a fan but the baseball had been sweet to have around-yes, sweet, beaten, seamed, virile and old, a piece of personal history that meant far more than the mobbed chronicles of the game itself. (615)

There is a similar kind of hope at the end of the novel as Nick Shay sits in his chair late at night holding the ball. It contains the personal history of his father's abandonment and his youth on the streets of New York.

For Manx and Cotter, the difference seems to be one of race. As Marvin Lunde researches the history of the ball, he says that he has been able to document its entire lineage except for its first owner. Marvin, who employs a host of photographic technologies to discover the "missing link," commenting that "reality doesn't happen until you analyze the dots," (182) is still unable to "see" Manx and Cotter. Manx, who participated in the race riots of 1943, now in 1951 wanders the streets of Harlem unemployed, but these problems are not part of any documentary history.

While the father-son relationship is peripheral to the main narrative of *The Veracruz Blues*, Frank Bullanger's divorce, which was partially responsible for his involvement with the Mexican League, has also driven a wedge between him and his son Jerome. Unable to see his son

on a regular basis, Frank writes his son letters in which he vows to be honest about the adult world. "Adults," he says, "are so phony with kids, maybe that's why there are so many troubled adults. I vowed to err on the side of genuineness and honesty. Even if it meant to err grotesquely"(84). When he does see his son, the encounters are telling of the emotional distance between the two. Upon graduation from college Jerome announced at his dinner celebration that he was a homosexual. Frank did not handle the news well. "I confess that I told Jerome I blamed myself. I confess that I thought it was something for which someone deserved blame"(244). As in the relationship between Charles and Chuckie in *Underworld*, however, baseball provides a common ground on which hope for understanding exists. On one of the occasions that he is able to see his son in his childhood, it is at a St. Louis Cardinals baseball game. Frank comments that "my son caught one of the home runs [Tito Herrera] gave up, which I got Herrera to sign and which Jerome still had among his effects when he died"(122). That Jerome holds onto the ball through his life indicates that baseball still acts as a symbol of possibility for the future between fathers and sons, even when these relationships falter.

W. P. Kinsella's novels are fairly straightforward in the way they play with the father-son trope. In both *Shoeless Joe* and *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* sons inherit the passion of the fathers and ultimately fulfill the dreams of their fathers. In each case, though, there is an interesting twist. For Ray Kinsella, who inherited his father's passion for the White Sox, the quest on which the voice sends him is both a quest to bring his father (never more than a Class B catcher) into the "major leagues" with the phantom Sox, but also, unbeknownst to him, a quest to reunite his father and his twin brother, who left home after an argument with his father. There is also a reversal of sorts here. While traditionally it is the father who gives way to the son as the son challenges and then surpasses the father, here it is Ray who makes way for his father's return to the game, and the father is ultimately able to surpass himself on the ballfield.

The father-son relationship precipitates some more significant possibilities in *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*. Gideon inherits his father's knowledge of the Confederacy rather than his skill in the game. But, as in more traditional baseball tales, Gideon is able to surpass his father in proving the existence of the Confederacy. Here the trope is not only interesting because of the postmodern

shift from playing the game to documenting the game, but also because of what this documentation reveals. In rediscovering the Confederacy, Gideon also discovers a more inclusive version of the national myth in which Drifting Away and the Black Angel participate in a seminal game. Theoretically, the circle-based religions of Native American culture and the square-based philosophies of western culture (this according to Kinsella's novel) merge to form the perfect game. The game's correlation to America remains intact, if not more valid, as the foundations of the game shift from western influence to a joint western and Native American influence.

Hoopla stands out as an exception among these novels. While it is possible to read a father-son relationship into the relationship between Pond and Hearst, or Comiskey and Weaver, the actual father-son relationships are mentioned only in passing. In *Blue Ruin*, however, Sport Sullivan's father is essential to the narrative. The death of his working-class father, who had "faded beneath life's predictable disappointments," inspires, or, in Sullivan's words, "forces" him to embark on his grand scheme to fix the World Series.

Sullivan carries with him the imprint of his father. He comments, comparing his notes with the notes his father

used to keep, that "they were the same size, the same shape, contained nearly the same number of words. The handwriting on them was undeniably similar"(6). Similarly, disappointments intrude upon his scheme as they did upon his father's life. Miscommunications, falling odds, and poor timing make the scheme less profitable than it could have been. The biggest disappointment, however, comes as the fix is investigated and Arnold Rothstein, the man who bankrolled the fix, pays him a visit. Rothstein tells Sullivan, as he sends him out of the country, "You didn't fix anything Sport...I did it. That's why it worked"(327). For a generation, the first in American history that will not out-earn their parents, perhaps this is a fitting transformation to the father-son trope. The son is unable to surpass the father.

Each of these novels challenges the traditional father-son archetype and, as such, the efficacy of baseball myth as a representation of American culture. In the end, however, all of these novels find a way to revise baseball tropes. Whether the changes are motivated by new perspectives on race and class, ethnicity and nationality, or time and space, the ways in which these authors deal with baseball myth allow the resonance of the myth to endure.

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