

The History of Baseball

The Rise of America and its “National Game”

“Baseball, it is said, is only a game. True. And the Grand Canyon is only a hole in Arizona.” – George Will

History 389-007

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Robinson B 377D



Baseball. America’s National Pastime. The thinking man’s and thinking woman’s sport. A rite of spring and ritual of fall. A game that explains the nation, or at least that’s what some have contended. “Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America,” argued French historian Jacques Barzan, “had better learn Baseball.” The game is at once simple, yet complex. And so is the interpretation of its history.

In this course we will examine the development of the game of baseball as means of better understanding the United States. Baseball evidences many of the contradictions and conflicts

inherent in American history—urban v. rural, capital v. labor, progress v. nostalgia, the ideals of the Bill of Rights v. the realities of racial segregation, to name a few. This is not a course where we will engage in baseball trivia, but rather a history course that uses baseball as its lens.

Course Objectives

1. Analyze baseball’s rich primary resources
2. Understand the basic chronology of baseball history
3. Critique 3 secondary works
4. Interpret the rise and fall of baseball’s racial segregation
5. Write a thesis-driven, argumentative historical paper

Structure

The course will utilize a combination of lectures and discussion sessions. The typical format will involve a lecture on Mondays and a discussion on Wednesdays. Your grade will be composed of a primary resource paper, a secondary source analysis, class participation, reading quizzes and an essay format final exam.

Assignment Weightings

Participation/Attendance/Reading Quizzes	20%
Primary Source Paper	20%
Historical Analysis Paper	30%
Class Presentation	5%
Final	25%

Description of Assignments

Participation/Attendance/Reading Quizzes (20%)

This class is dependent on student reading and participation. Therefore you will be amply credited for being in class and for asking questions, sharing opinions, and generally contributing. For each lecture class you will earn 1 point for being present. For each discussion class (usually on Wednesdays) there will be 3 points possible. You earn 1 point for being present, 2 for contributing at least minimally, 3 for being a significant asset to the class discussion. Because “life happens” and everybody has off days, your lowest two discussion day totals (whether you were absent or just comatose) will be dropped. To put it simply, you cannot do well in this class without significant engagement and participation.

Also adding points to this category: We will have frequent, unannounced reading quizzes at the beginning of class. These will consist of anywhere from 3-7 questions. These **cannot be made up**, but your lowest quiz grade will be dropped. Reading quizzes will not cover the minutia of the reading, but rather simply test that you have read the required texts.

Primary Source Paper (20%)

For this 3-4 page paper, you will find, on your own, a primary document from before 1920. Whether from the Library of Congress, the GMU archives, or elsewhere, you will analyze this source to reveal what it teaches us about pre-1920 America. You will use at least three of the class readings to provide comparison. More details to come shortly.

Historical Analysis Paper (30%)

For this 5-6 page paper you will analyze a significant baseball-related development to shed light on American history. You will need to identify a question (i.e.: what does Babe Ruth’s popularity tell us about the 1920s) and also possible sources for a proposal that you will turn in to me. You will do some light research and also use the class primary and secondary resources to complete this project. More details to come shortly.

Class Presentation (5%)

Historical arguments, especially involving sports, are conducted both verbally and through the written word. To share your work with your classmates, and to help us review the topics we have covered, you will make a short presentation on your HAP to the class. More details to come shortly.

Final (25%)

There will be a comprehensive, essay-format exam to finish this course.

Required Readings The following books are available for sale in the bookstore:

Lawrence Ritter, *The Glory of Their Times: The Story of the Early Days of Baseball from the Men Who Played It*

Brad Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave: Curt Flood’s Fight for Free Agency in Sports*

Neil Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West*

John Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden: The Secret History of the Early Game*

All articles are available either on Blackboard or through the University’s database subscriptions

Schedule

**** All weekly readings must be complete in time for Wednesday’s discussion class**

Week 1:

August 29 – Course Introduction

August 31 – Lecture, The Roots of Baseball and Modern Sport

Reading: 1) “Cricket Mania,” *Harpers Weekly*, 1859

2) “Physical Fitness,” *Harpers Weekly*, 1860

Week 2: Baseball's Beginnings

September 5 – No Class, Labor Day

September 7 – Discussion, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*

Reading: 1) *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*

2) "The Myth of Baseball's Creation Endures," *New York Times*, 2010

Week 3: Organizing the Game

September 12 – Lecture, Rules, Clubs, and Standards before the National League

September 14 – Class Activity: A Game of Cricket

Reading: 1) "Editorial – Baseball as Manly Activity," *New York Times*, 1856

2) "Nation's Game is Purely American," *Sporting Life*, 1908

3) "Throwing v. Pitching," *Henry Chadwick Scrapbook*, 1872

4) "The Base Ball Convention," *New York Clipper*, 1870 (file is in two parts)

5) "The New Playing Rules of Base Ball by Henry Chadwick," *Outing*, 1887

Week 4: The First Segregations

September 19 – Lecture, Thomas Fitzgerald, Octavius Catto, and Baseball's First Race Line

September 21 – Discussion, Why segregation right from the start?

Reading: 1) Jerold Casaway, "Philadelphia's Pythians," *National Pastime*, No. 15, 1995, 120-123

2) "A Letter from the Pythian Delegate Reporting on the 1867 PA Baseball Convention"

3) "National Convention Colored Clubs Barred," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 1867

4) "The War of the Races," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 1869

5) "Prominent Colored Man Shot," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1871

6) "Why the Discrimination?" Letter to the Editor Weldy Walker, *Sporting Life*, 1888

Week 5: The Rise of Professional Baseball

September 26 – Lecture, The Industrializing World and Baseball's First World Series

September 28 – Discussion, 1st half *The Glory of Their Times*

Reading: 1) *The Glory of Their Times*, Rube Marquard–Al Bridwell

(Pick two players to report to the class on – i.e. most significant and interesting information)

Week 6: Labor v. Capital

October 3 – Lecture, The Reserve Clause and the Brotherhood War

Reading: 1) John Montgomery Ward, "Is the Baseball Player a Chattel?" *Lippincott's Magazine*, 1887

2) "Reserver Rule a Bulwark to Baseball," *Sporting Life*, 1916

3) "Players' Combine," *Sporting Life*, 1900

4) "The Baseball Players' Fraternity," *Baseball Magazine*, 1913

October 5 – Lecture, Baseball and US Hegemony

Reading: 1) Louis A. Perez, "Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868–1898," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (Sept 1994), 493–517. **Available through JSTOR**

Week 7:

October 10 – No Class, Columbus Day

October 11 – Individual Meetings Regarding Papers

October 12 – Discussion, Baseball Labor and the International Context

Reading: 1) Review last week's reading for discussion

2) *The Glory of Their Times*, Harry Hooper–Rube Bressler

Week 8: The Black Sox Scandal

October 17 – Lecture, Black Sox, Baseball, and Gambling, Begin watching *Eight Men Out*

October 19 – Watch *Eight Men Out* part II and Discuss Black Sox trial documents

- Reading: 1) “The Black Sox Trial: An Account,” University of Missouri, Kansas City, 2010
2) Joe Jackson, “This is the Truth!” *Sport Magazine*, 1949
3) Arnold Gandil, “This is My Story of the Black Sox Series,” *Sports Illustrated*, 1956
4) Robin F. Bachin, “At the Nexus of Labor and Leisure: Baseball, Nativism, and the 1919
5) Black Sox Scandal,” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Summer 2003), 941–961. **Available through JSTOR**
6) ** Also: Examine the Statistics and Confessions and Testimonies sections of the UMKC site: <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/blacksox/blacksox.html>

PRIMARY SOURCE PAPER DUE ON OCTOBER 19

Week 9: Babe Ruth and the 1920s

October 24 – Lecture, The Babe and His Impact

October 26 – Discussion, Babe Ruth, 1920s baseball, and the power of radio

Reading: 1) *The Glory of Their Times*, Babe Herman–Lefty O’Doul

(Pick two players to report to the class on – i.e. most significant and interesting information)

- 2) “Babe Ruth Tops a List of 60,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 1916
3) John E. Walsh, “Babe Ruth and the Legend of the Called Shot,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Summer 1994), 242–263. **Available through JSTOR**
4) “Sports Loving Nation Mourns the Death of Homer King Babe Ruth,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1948

Week 10: Baseball’s Slump

October 31 – Lecture, The Great Depression and Baseball

November 2 – Class Exercise, General Manager on a Budget

- Reading: 1) Charles Alexander, *Breaking the Slump* (Excerpt)
2) “A Dirge for Baseball,” *North American Review*, 1929
3) “Earnings in Baseball,” *North American Review*, 1930

Week 11: The Negro Leagues and Jackie Robinson

November 7 – Lecture, “Operating by Any Means Necessary:” The Negro Leagues

November 9 – Discussion, Negro Leagues and watch *The Jackie Robinson Story*

- Reading: 1) Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White* (Excerpt)
2) “Robinson Faces a Mean Test in Making Good,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 1947
3) “Robinson’s Life Threatened in Two Letters,” *Washington Post*, 1951
4) “Robinson Tosses Bat in Anger, Two Hurt,” *Washington Post*, 1954

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS PAPER PROPOSAL DUE NOVEMBER 9

Week 12: Baseballers Serving their Country

November 14 – Lecture, Baseball and World War II

November 16 – Discussion, WWII and Hank Greenberg

- Reading: 1) *The Glory of Their Times*, Hank Greenberg
2) Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Green Light Letter,” 1942
3) “War Changes Baseball,” *The Science News-Letter*, 1943
4) All American Girls Baseball League Rules of Conduct
5) “Baseball’s Big Contribution,” *New York Times*, 1942
6) “Servicemen Want Baseball to Stay,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 1943

Week 13: A Changing Nation

November 21 – Discussion, *The Dodgers Move West*

November 23 – No Class, Thanksgiving

Reading: 1) *The Dodgers Move West*

2) “Robert Moses on the Battle of Brooklyn,” *Sports Illustrated*, 1957

Week 14: Free Agency

November 28 – The Forgotten Trailblazer: Curt Flood; Discussion, *A Well-Paid Slave*

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS PAPER DUE NOVEMBER 28

November 30 – Class Presentations

Reading: 1) *A Well-Paid Slave*

Week 15:

December 5 – Class Presentations

December 7 – Steroids, MLB.com, etc: Baseball today and a course summary

Final Exam: Monday December 19, 7:30-10:30am