The Baseball Film in Postwar America

A Critical Study, 1948–1962

RON BRILEY

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On the cover: *center* Jackie Robinson in *The Jackie Robinson Story*, 1950 (Photofest)

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Preface

For me, as a member of the post–World War II baby boom, the years from 1949 to 1962 were formative in my youth. Yet, my family never seemed to quite fit the model of middle-class bliss presented by the white picket fences of such television shows as *Leave It to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriett*. Rather than reflecting the affluent society of postwar suburbia, my father, who was semi-literate after dropping out of school during the Great Depression, was constantly worried that he might suffer a lay-off from his railroad job. To supplement the family income, my mother, unlike television's June Cleaver, was forced to seek employment outside of the home. During the summer and fall, I joined my parents and grandparents in the cotton fields of West Texas. We did not yearn for a comfortable suburban home, which was beyond the reach of our meager resources; rather, my father dreamed of a nice mobile home in a fancy trailer park. He never attained that new mobile home, but we did finally purchase a small house with indoor plumbing.

Even though I enjoyed white privilege in my racially segregated small town, it was certainly apparent to me that my family was not living up to the expectations of the 1950s consensus as defined by advertising and the media. Feeling somewhat economically and socially alienated, I found solace and a sense of meaning in the game of baseball. I craved all things baseball — collecting baseball cards (many from the 1950s which I keep in my office), inventing numerous dice baseball card games, and playing sandlot games in which I impersonated my heroes such as Nellie Fox of the Chicago White Sox. In the evenings there was Little League where my baseball aspirations were shattered by the label "good field, no hit." Recognizing at a young age that my playing abilities were rather limited, I devoured baseball literature, and my father, for whom reading was difficult, introduced me to the movies. It was there that I discovered the baseball film genre.

The early post–World War II years were a great time for baseball fans at

the movies. Although many of the films were juvenile and plagued by low production values, between 1948 and 1962 Hollywood produced over 20 films focusing on the national pastime. They ranged from biographical pictures to musicals and fantasies to patriotic films in which baseball played a supporting role for the American military. On the surface, these baseball films appeared to support what some scholars would later term the post–World War II liberal consensus: a celebration of American exceptionalism in which it was assumed that the nation's social problems would be solved through an expanding capitalist economy. Thus, there was no reason to protest or rebel. James Dean's rebellion in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) was really pointless and without a cause, according to the consensus. However, there was one threat to the promise of American life and expanding markets. The serpent in the postwar American Garden of Eden was the international communist conspiracy centered in Moscow. Thus, the consensus required that one adhere to the tenets of capitalism, consumerism, and anticommunism.

But these principles did not necessarily make me feel more secure. We didn't really have much money to buy things, and those duck-and-cover drills failed to convince me that Cold War strategies of deterrence were going to keep me safe. The postwar baseball film was supposed to reassure me that all was well with America and the national pastime. There might be challenges, but all problems would be resolved in the final reel.

Of course, life was not quite this simple. And these seemingly simplistic baseball films suggested contradictions and insecurities which would plague America throughout the 1950s and explode in the social upheaval of the 1960s. The dislocations brought about by the Second World War are evident in closer readings of the postwar baseball film genre, exposing fears of changing gender, class, and race relations as the hegemonic order of the white patriarchy seemed under assault from working women and restive minorities. Concerns about another depression or war contributed to the fragility of the postwar consensus, and reform movements which might have ameliorated these discontents were discredited by the extreme rhetoric of anticommunism. The baseball films tried to suggest that these societal ills could be addressed through personal readjustments in which supportive girlfriends and wives would help threatened males adjust to the postwar demands of a corporate economy, emphasizing the values of consensus and cooperation rather than the individualism of an earlier era. To succeed in the postwar consumer society, one needed to be outer- rather than inner-directed and conform to the demands of suburbia and the organizational man. The contradictions contained within this society were apparent in the baseball films which failed to resolve these dilemmas, culminating in the feminist and civil rights movements, campus unrest, social upheaval, gay liberation, antiwar activities, and the birth of a counterculture.

Rather than a period of conformity and consensus, the postwar era may be more accurately described as a period of ambiguity and paradox in which women's participation in the workforce grew as female domesticity was celebrated in the popular media; poverty existed in rural areas and the inner city amidst the prosperity of suburbia; conformity was challenged by the Beats, a grassroots civil roots movement in the South, and cultural rebels such as James Dean and Marlon Brando; and America's anticommunist foreign policy overthrew democratically established governments in Iran and Guatemala. These ambiguities were apparent in the postwar baseball film genre which mirrored the insecurities of American society, just as baseball itself reflects the larger culture. While offering a certain amount of nostalgia, these baseball films could not actually provide a shelter from the storm gathering in postwar America which was challenging conventional notions of race, gender, and class. By 1962, it was evident that the baseball genre film could no longer even attempt to paper over the inequities of American society. It was time for the nation to directly address the economic, social, racial, and gender issues alluded to in these films. Accordingly, the baseball film genre of the postwar era was more than a nostalgic enterprise in which young people (similar to my West Texas experience) could seek to escape reality. Instead, these films deserve our serious attention as we seek to understand the role played by postwar concerns and insecurities in creating the contemporary society in which we live. Coming to grips with the ambiguities, paradoxes, and contradictions of the so-called postwar liberal consensus may help us better cope with our modern world.

As American flocked to ballparks after the Second World War, Hollywood sought to tap this market by releasing *The Babe Ruth Story* in 1948. The film was also influenced by the commercial success of *Pride of the Yankees* (1942), in which Hollywood celebrated the heroism of Lou Gehrig, with Gary Cooper in the title role. The Ruth film, however, featured character actor William Bendix in the role of Ruth, and the movie was rushed into production as the former Yankee slugger was suffering from terminal cancer. Despite the low production values of the Ruth picture, it served as a model for other baseball biographical films in which strong spouses were essential helpmates for their husbands coping with the challenges of modern life. In fact, the wisdom, integrity, and strength of these baseball spouses suggest a great deal regarding the insecurities of the patriarchy in the postwar period. In Ruth's case, Bendix portrayed the Yankee great as the quintessential American innocent. Having grown up in an orphanage, Ruth, with his rugged individualism, needed to be domesticated, and Claire Trevor as Claire (Hodgson) Ruth helps her husband mature and adjust to a work environment in which cooperation is required to succeed — essentially the values of the post–World War II consensus.

A similar process occurs in the baseball biography films dealing with Monty Stratton, Jackie Robinson, Grover Cleveland Alexander, Dizzy Dean, and Jimmy Piersall. Each ballplayer is confronted with a personal crisis which he must overcome to find his place on the ball field and in society. And this adjustment is guided by a supportive spouse who often seems to have greater resolve than her baseball-playing mate. In *The Stratton Story*, James Stewart as Monty Stratton must deal with the loss of a leg in a hunting accident, while Ronald Reagan as Grover Cleveland Alexander battles drinking problems. A product of rural poverty, Dizzy Dean (played by Dan Dailey) struggles with his lack of formal education, and Jimmy Piersall (Tony Perkins) suffers from mental illness. This 1949 film was the last of the baseball biographical pictures which suggested that the strains of the postwar world are contributing to mental breakdown and collapse. While Piersall also benefits from the services of a professional psychiatrist, in most of the biographical features spouses are the therapists; they support their husbands in finding their proper place in society. And these films also emphasize that it is individual therapy and adjustment which is required rather than societal change.

Although this assumption is somewhat questioned in *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950), in which Robinson, portraying himself, and Ruby Dee (as his wife, Rachel) are plagued by racists. With his quiet dignity, Robinson, however, is able to win over many of his critics. The United States is not a racist society, but there are individual bigots who must be brought into the consensus. Thus, *The Jackie Robinson Story* becomes a celebration of the American dream and consensus in which all citizens, regardless of race, enjoy the opportunity to succeed. Consideration of Jim Thorpe's story, however, raises some important questions regarding race and the promise of American life.

Accordingly, it is appropriate to examine Hollywood's depiction of Thorpe, an athlete better known for his achievements in football and track rather than on the baseball diamond. In *Jim Thorpe: All American* (1951) further light is shed upon issues of assimilation and the American consensus. In a pivotal scene from the film involving baseball, the Native American Thorpe (played by Anglo film star Burt Lancaster) eschews a bunt signal and slugs a home run. Thorpe is incredulous that manager John McGraw, preferring teamwork and discipline to unbridled individualism, is angry with him. Thorpe struggles to fit in with the team and American society, and he often wallows in self-pity and alcoholism. Unlike the other baseball pictures featured in this work, only Thorpe's marriage is depicted as resulting in divorce — perhaps raising some issues of miscegenation and racial boundaries in a union between a white woman and a Native American man. Thorpe, however, is rescued by a representative of the white patriarchy in coach Pop Warner (Charles Bickford) and rehabilitated in the film's conclusion. And Thorpe's

problems are essentially perceived as a product of his own insecurities rather than a racist culture as Thorpe's Native American friends from Carlisle Indian School make successful adjustments into white society.

The only real threat to the American dream was conceived as coming from an external source — the Soviet Union. Thus, *The Jackie Robinson Story* concludes with Robinson's testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, refuting Paul Robeson and asserting the loyalty of African Americans to the United States and the promise of the American dream — although later in life he would come to regret this appearance. Baseball's dedication to the anticommunist crusade is also evident in *Strategic Air Command* (1955). While the film focuses far more on issues of national defense than the game of baseball, it, nevertheless, well depicts the close alliance between Organized Baseball and American militarism during the Cold War era. Dutch Holland (James Stewart) is an All-Star third baseman called back to active military duty. After some soul searching, Holland and his wife (portrayed by June Allyson) recognize that for baseball and the American way of life to survive, it is essential for their family as well as baseball to sacrifice and play their respective roles in the anticommunist crusade.

Despite the firepower represented by the Air Force in *Strategic Air Command* and the personal adjustments made by the heroes of the biographical films, the insecurities of the era persisted, and the only way out of the ambiguities of life in postwar America appeared to be through some type of supernatural intervention. Thus, in a series of fantasy films, including *It Happens Every Spring* (1949), *Angels in the Outfield* (1951), *Rhubarb* (1951), and the musical *Damn Yankees* (1958), American families found a degree of security in a somewhat magical formula that allowed a ball to elude a bat; featured a chorus of angels or a lucky black cat; and allowed an escape from a pact with the devil. And indeed, the postwar era witnessed a resurgence of religion to accompany these supernatural interventions.

Nevertheless, the baseball film, as reflective of the larger American consensus, struggled to find answers for the increasingly restive youth, women, minorities, and working poor who chafed at the restrictions of a society which failed to deliver peace and prosperity for all of its citizens. It was a gathering storm of discontent which exploded in the 1960s with the breakdown of the consensus. The postwar baseball film genre was reflective of this societal shift; failing to find answers in therapeutic adjustments or supernatural interventions coupled with often hollow-sounding pronouncements regarding the American dream safeguarded by militarism. Accordingly, in 1962 the last of the postwar baseball films was released, and the sport would not appear again on the silver screen until the mid–1970s with *Bang the Drum Slowly*. By 1962, the genre was apparently out of gas and solutions to hold the consensus together against

the gathering winds of change. The film retreated to the juvenile formula of New York Yankee stars Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle seeking to help a young boy reconnect with his father. But the ideological baseball consensus constructed by the Yankee stars was revealed to be a sham amidst the growing violence in Vietnam and the streets of America. The false innocence of Ruth, Maris, and Mantle could not provide shelter from the gathering storm.

Preparing this book has been a labor of love, revisiting a series of films which connected my passion for both baseball and cinema. As a young person, I wanted to believe in these films, but the reality of my family's economic struggles led me to question the consensus as did my generation's experience with the social unrest unleashed by the Vietnam War which unmasked the shortcomings of the consensus and Cold War culture.

The post–World War II baseball film genre included approximately 20 films, and this study investigates a dozen of these films in considerable detail; along with *Strategic Air Command* and *Jim Thorpe: All American*, in both of which baseball plays an important supporting role. Film scholars note that genres often depict the ideology of the time period in which they were produced. Thus, the baseball films of the 1950s shed light upon the paradoxes and ambiguities reflected in the ideological construct of the post–World War II liberal consensus; just as the baseball films of the 1980s, such as *The Natural* (1984) and *Field of Dreams* (1989), suggest the retreat to nostalgia employed during the presidency of Ronald Reagan. Film genres, accordingly, may be employed to better help us understand the development of post–World War II America, Cold War culture, and the legacy of that past for the present.

I appreciate the opportunity that Trey Strecker and the late Bill Kirwin have provided to share readings of these films with other baseball scholars at the collegial *Nine* Spring Training Conferences. Colleagues such as Dick Crepeau, Larry Gerlach, Steve Geitschier, Sam Regalado, Robert Elias, Jean Ardell, Lee Lowenfish, and Colin Howell have contributed insightful critiques of my work. The Cooperstown Symposium at the Baseball Hall of Fame, organized by Bill Gates and Bill Simons, has also offered an opportunity to share my thoughts regarding the post–World War II baseball film genre. The 2001 proceedings of the symposium included an earlier version of my chapter on supernatural interventions in *It Happens Every Spring*, *Angels in the Outfield*, and *Rhubarb*, the only portion of this book which has previously appeared in print.

I hope that readers will enjoy visiting these postwar film texts, but at the same time take them seriously. Baseball and cinema both are too important in shaping our lives to be taken lightly and should not be simply relegated to the entertainment pages. The politics of baseball reflect power relationships in American society, and as Robert Elias asserts in *The Empire Strikes Out*

(2010), baseball's connection with globalism and militarism has supported an aggressive foreign policy which has antagonized many people in the world. So read and carefully consider these analyses of baseball, film, and post–World War II society. The suggestions of my colleagues have helped clarify my thinking, but any shortcomings are strictly the fault of the author.

I would again like to thank the folks at Photofest in New York City who were helpful in locating film stills. My wife, Kathleen, and our children, Shane, Meghan, and Rosemary, have heard far more about baseball cinema and consensus than they ever wanted, but they make life worth living. I also appreciate my film history students at Sandia Preparatory School, who share my passion for cinema and politics. Finally, I would like to dedicate this book to my hard-working father, F. C. Briley, who died much too young from a heart attack. He may have lacked a formal education, but he introduced me to the fascinating and complex medium of cinema. Thanks, Dad.

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Introduction

The Post–World War II Consensus and the Baseball Film Genre

In the 1952 anticommunist classic film *My Son John*, Helen Hayes portrays a distraught mother whose Ivy League–educated son has joined the Communist Party and is using his government position to spy on behalf of the Soviet Union. Confronting John (Robert Walker), Hayes gazes upon a photograph of her other two sons who are fighting in Korea. The photograph shows two young men in football uniforms, and as if to explain John's political orientation, his mother exclaims, "That's right, John, you never did play football." The scene establishes a connection between manhood and susceptibility to communist propaganda that was evident in the vitriolic speeches of Joseph McCarthy and his supporters which evoked images of liberals as communist sympathizers who were "soft" on communism. Surely, those "soft" on communism lacked the attributes of American manhood as defined on the competitive plane of the football field or baseball park.

Most reviewers recognized the over-the-top propaganda employed by director Leo McCarey in *My Son John*. Having John's father (Dean Jagger) as an American Legionnaire who literally thumps his son over the head with a Bible is, indeed, a bit much. A review in *The Christian Century* ironically noted that *My Son John* "suggests that brilliant mentality, admiration for 'liberal' professors, sympathy with the underdog, distaste for American Legion superpatriotism and reluctance to participate in athletics and volunteer for army service provide sufficient grounds for identifying one who possesses them as a 'Communist.'" In a similar vein, Philip Hartung, writing in the Catholic journal *Commonweal*, urged readers not to be seduced by the anti-intellectual simplicity of *My Son John*. Hartung concluded, "As Americans we must do battle against a spirit which would save the nation from internal sub-

version by forcing on us monolithic slogan patriotism. *My Son John* has at least performed one great service. It has shown us the extent of the danger."[1]

Yet films such as *My Son John* and politicians such as Senator Joseph McCarthy played upon the post–World War II fears and insecurities of Americans. Anticommunism could be used to mask a number of postwar apprehensions. In *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*, K. A. Cuordileone writes, "Racial integration, secularism, affluence, materialism, apathy, youth rebellion, commercialism, conformity, Jewish upward social mobility, internationalism, welfare statism, modernism in art, and sexual liberalism were all trends that could be imagined as subversive to American order and thus discouraged under the aegis of anticommunism."[2]

Nevertheless, many Americans continue to view the early postwar years and 1950s through the rose-colored glasses of television family situation comedies such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, Father Knows Best*, and *Leave It to Beaver*. In these television programs, idealistic white suburban families are portrayed with fathers commuting to the office, mothers at home preparing pot roast for dinner, and children whose most complex problems involve a crush on a teacher or asking for an increased allowance.[3] But the reality of the 1950s was far different from these media-constructed families. Nostalgia usually fails to account for the fear that depression would return with the decline of war time production. Accordingly, Americans clung to the notion that conformity, the organization man, and following "outer" directed values rather than "inner" direction would allow them to participate in what economist John Kenneth Galbraith termed the "affluent society." To make sense of the period, scholars often employ the ideological construct of the postwar liberal consensus.[4] The concept is best exemplified by the twin pillars of anticommunism and capitalist economic expansion which address the inequities of race, gender, and class. Since increasing prosperity will cure all the nation's ills, there is no reason for dissent or protest. Within the confines of this ideology, the American government is as understanding and reasonable as Jim Anderson of *Father Knows Best* and Ward Cleaver of *Leave It to Beaver*.

The corporate state, enhanced productivity, and technology, however, did not necessarily usher in a safer and more secure world. Many historians, such as William H. Chafe, perceive the immediate postwar years as being better characterized by ambiguity and paradox rather than consensus. Chafe writes that the 1950s appear "as much a time of complexity and contradiction as blissful complacency."[5] As Michael Harrington documented in *The Other America*, pockets of poverty in both rural and urban America remained invisible from the tranquil suburbs.[6] The independence of owning one's own home in suburbia was limited by community conformity; women were discouraged from pursuing professions, but had to work outside of the home to support

the consumerism which fueled the affluent society; and the ideology of consensus was challenged by teen rebels, the image of James Dean, the beat culture, and the civil rights movement.

Thus, a more sophisticated examination of the postwar period should take the themes of insecurity and instability into consideration. Spy scandals, the explosion of an atomic bomb by the Soviet Union, and a shooting war in Korea reminded Americans that the world was a very unpredictable place. Frustrated by the failure of the liberal consensus to provide the promised land, many Americans sought scapegoats in the anticommunist crusades of the postwar period which limited freedom of expression; silencing political, cultural, and artistic discourse.[7] Some social scientists even blamed mothers in the work force for contributing to the problems of juvenile delinquency, for many teens were alienated from the culture of affluence.[8]

These insecurities were reflected by Hollywood feature films of the postwar years. A darkness in the soul of America after the war was evident in the development of film noir as a genre. Film noir is characterized by such elements as protagonists who are corrupt and corruptible, often victims of sinister forces which they are unable to control or comprehend. The settings are usually an urban environment of moral ambiguity, and the plots "frequently focus on deadly violence or sexual obsession, whose catalogue of characters include down-and-out private eyes, desperate women, and petty criminals." Postwar examples of the film noir genre include such classic Hollywood films as *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), *Naked City* (1948), and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955).[9]

Elements of corruption and cynicism were also evident in sport films of the postwar era. Many film scholars view the period between 1947 and 1957 as the golden age of boxing cinema. In features such as *Body and Soul* (1947), *Champion* (1949), *The Set-Up* (1949), and *The Harder They Fall* (1956), promising fighters are betrayed by dishonest gamblers and managers, who are driven by the evil influence of money. In these films (several of which were scripted by writers who were later subjected to the Hollywood blacklist) greed denies fighters control over their means of production. Accordingly, the sleaze found in the underworld of boxing mirrors the moral ambiguity of the larger society, raising questions regarding American individualism and the possibility of attaining the American dream.[10]

If prizefighting was employed to portray the dark side of American capitalism and culture, then Hollywood baseball films of the postwar era are often considered as championing the values of the American consensus. Between 1948 and 1962, the film studios issued approximately 20 films with baseball themes during a period when studio production was curtailed due to the challenge of television, yet a closer examination of a number of these films—

aimed at primarily adult rather than juvenile audiences — indicates that Hollywood's embracing of the national pastime was unable to escape the elements of ambiguity and paradox which characterized the culture of postwar America.

Organized Baseball was also experiencing difficulty adjusting to the postwar environment. The end of the war in 1945 witnessed a new high of nearly 11 million fans attending major league games. This mark was shattered in 1946, when over 18 million spectators jammed major league parks, perhaps reflecting a "pent-up" demand for sport following the turbulent war years. Attendance continued to climb in 1947 and 1948, reaching a figure of over 20 million customers in the latter year. Major league attendance, however, took a nose dove in 1950, dropping over 13 percent from 1949. In addition, Congressman Emmanuel Celler's subcommittee on monopoly was investigating allegations of antitrust violations by the sport. Meanwhile, fan support continued to erode. Paid admissions in 1952 were down over eight percent from 1951, itself hardly a banner season. A multitude of factors were blamed for baseball's apparent decline in popularity: huge bonuses for signing young players, selective service, the domination of the sport by the New York Yankees, lack of good business promotion skills by some owners, players who were more interested in salaries and golf rather than competition like old-timers such as Ty Cobb, the challenge of television, and the fact that children were watching westerns rather than playing baseball. Similar to Hollywood, the changing demographics of American life in the suburbs were initially lost upon much of baseball ownership.[11]

Even the seemingly more heroic baseball biographical features of the period were burdened by the forces of darkness and instability looming on the American horizon. In films such as *The Babe Ruth Story* (1948), *The Stratton Story* (1949), *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950), *Jim Thorpe: All-American* (1951), *The Winning Team* (1952), *The Pride of St. Louis* (1952), and *Fear Strikes Out* (1957), ballplayers overcome poverty, physical disability, racism, alcoholism, lack of education, and mental breakdown in order to participate in the American success epic. Although based upon a fictional script, director Robert Aldrich's *Big Leaguer* (1953) also fits well into this genre. Edward G. Robinson portrays real-life scout John Lobert running a Florida training camp for the New York Giants in which young athletes must work hard and prove themselves worthy of being classified as major league players.

These biographical pictures embraced the agrarian origins of such protagonists as Monty Stratton, Jim Thorpe, Grover Cleveland Alexander, and Dizzy Dean; they extolled the virtues of hard work and the American success ethic as contained in Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* and the nineteenth-century Horatio Alger stories. In the more cooperative corporate society of the 1950s, however, it is necessary for the heroes to tone down their individ-

ualism in order to form healthy relationships with teammates or family members. This sense of self-sacrifice is also a theme common to the cinema of World War II, in which individualistic heroes must learn to function as part of a military unit as exemplified in such films as *Air Force* (1943). This toning down of personal goals in favor of the team fits well into the organizational society values of the 1950s. The problems which the heroes confront in these baseball biographical films indicate the insecurity of post–World War II society. On the other hand, they are essentially conservative in calling for adjustment on the part of the individual rather than fundamental societal change. They are consensus films in that the system eventually works for the protagonist.

Nevertheless, a closer reading of these films reveals a crisis within American masculinity and the patriarchy; for these baseball heroes are insecure, often weepy with feet of clay, and are increasingly dependent upon female assistance or rescue. For example, Grover Cleveland Alexander (portrayed by Ronald Reagan) in *The Winning Team* is unable to achieve his heroics in the 1926 World Series until his wife, Aimee (Doris Day), arrives at the ballpark.[12]

Postwar insecurities regarding the role of women, many of whom asserted their independence in the workplace during the war years, are evident in such films as the melodrama *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and the *femme fatale* of the film noir genre. In the baseball biographical pictures, strong women are tamed by having them employ their talents and energies in support of their husbands. The threat of independent women to the patriarchy and the traditional family is considered in more humorous fashion in the films *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (1949) and *The Great American Pastime* (1956). In the Busby Berkeley musical *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, K. C. Higgins (Esther Williams) inherits the ownership of an early twentieth-century baseball club. But when star players Dennis Ryan (Frank Sinatra) and Eddie O'Brien (Gene Kelly) find out that the new owner is a beautiful woman who actually knows something about the sport, there is dissension on the team until romance restores the proper gender roles and balances. *The Great American Pastime* focuses upon Little League coach Bruce Hallerton (Tom Ewell) whose marriage appears threatened by widower Doris Patterson (Ann Miller), who wants her son to be the team's star pitcher. In a similar vein, Lola (Gwen Verdon) poses a threat to the domesticity of Joe and Meg Boyd (Robert Schafer and Shannon Bolin) in *Damn Yankees* (1958).

While these baseball features depicting the threat of independent women to the patriarchy conclude with traditional values and gender roles intact, baseball films dealing with supernatural intervention may indicate a more troubling sense of unease with post–World War II society. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, three baseball fantasy films opened to mixed reviews and mediocre box-office returns. *It Happens Every Spring* (1949), *Angels in the*

Outfield (1951), and *Rhubarb* (1951) were initially perceived as lightweight cinema in which supernatural intervention of some type was required to rescue the protagonist from the clutches of evil or corrupt forces. A closer reading of these films within the historical context of post–World War II America, however, reveals societal insecurities regarding the promise of American life. Film historian Gary Dickerson finds these films enigmatic, observing, "Maybe the answers to many questions that Americans had about future wars, technology, communism, and bombs simply could not be supplied. Possibly, these films were a response to that predicament."[13] Although released later in the decade and based on an acclaimed Broadway musical, *Damn Yankees* (1958) also fits well within this genre, even questioning the American success epic epitomized by baseball's most celebrated franchise, the New York Yankees.

During the Cold War, Organized Baseball attempted to assure its place within the American consensus with goodwill tours of Korea by major league players, celebrating the service of Ted Williams in both World War II and Korea, extolling baseball as an antidote for communism in Asia and Latin America, and even launching a boomlet for deposed General Douglas MacArthur for baseball commissioner. Although these efforts often obscured the fact that baseball owners placed profit above adherence to the ideological struggle against international communism, *Strategic Air Command* (1955) well illustrates the patriotic image which the baseball establishment fostered.[14] Dutch Holland (James Stewart) is a star player for the St. Louis Cardinals who is recalled to active duty during the Cold War. While Holland is initially reluctant to surrender his lucrative baseball career, he and his family are finally reconciled to his patriotic duty as baseball enlists in the Cold War.

By the early 1960s the post–World War II liberal consensus was unraveling under the pressure of challenges from the civil rights movement and restive youth. The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 (during which the world teetered on the brink of nuclear annihilation) indicated that the mutually assured destruction embraced by *Strategic Air Command* did not assure safety for American citizens. The assumption that the liberal consensus was based upon a secure foundation of reason was lampooned in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Stangelove* (1964)—a film which argues that an adherence to the ideology of anticommunism will lead to world catastrophe. As baseball appeared increasingly out of step with the violence of the 1960s, football replaced the national pastime in the hearts of American sport fans. Hollywood retreated from its postwar cinematic depictions of baseball with *Safe at Home!* (1962), a feature aimed at a youthful audience by exploiting the home run race between Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle in 1961, constituting the last picture in a postwar series of baseball films dating back to *The Babe Ruth Story* in 1948. But were Americans really safe at home?

The shortcomings and inconsistencies of the post–World War II consensus were exposed during the 1960s as the nation was ripped asunder by political assassinations and civil unrest fueled by the war in Vietnam. Beginning with the murder of President John F. Kennedy in November 1963, America was haunted by the specter of political assassination, with the shooting of such figures as Medgar Evers and Malcolm X, culminating in the 1968 assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. Evening news programs were dominated by images of violence in Vietnam, while the body bag count proliferated. The war in Vietnam, cultural changes, and a transition in university clientele led to violent confrontations between students and the educational establishment. Frustrations regarding the lack of economic progress made in fulfilling the promise of the civil rights movement helped ignite America's cities; where high unemployment rates, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., or an incident of police brutality might produce the spark for an urban inferno.

Within this historical context, the baseball films of the post–World War II era — from *The Babe Ruth Story* through *Safe at Home*, which (with the exception of *The Jackie Robinson Story* and *Jim Thorpe: All-American*) present an exclusive white America — appear as an effort by Hollywood to offer simplistic solutions to the ambiguities and paradoxes of the postwar world which exploded during the 1960s. Yet, the United States and the institution of baseball both survived the crisis of the 1960s, but not without changes reflecting a more diverse and complex society. The baseball film has not returned as a Hollywood staple, although pictures from the 1980s such as *The Natural* (1984) and *Field of Dreams* (1989) may be interpreted as attempting to capture Ronald Reagan's nostalgia for the 1950s before minorities and women challenged the patriarchy.[15] The baseball feature films of the post–World War II era may be credited with exposing the insecurities and ambiguities of the period, while offering more conservative solutions that would not fundamentally alter the patriarchy of the consensus society. They mark valuable popular cultural sources for examining the ambiguities and paradoxes of the 1950s which exploded during the 1960s and 1970s. Not even the most intense efforts of the conservative administrations of presidents Ronald W. Reagan and George W. Bush have been unable to fully restore the ascendancy of the patriarchal consensus order in a more diverse nation and world. The anticommunist fears of the late 1940s and 1950s manifested in *My Son John* are apparent today in concerns about terrorism, creating a new age of insecurity. Still, we must not allow this anxiety to erase the gains made in civil liberties and freedom for all citizens since the crisis of the post–World War II patriarchy as reflected in the baseball films from 1948 to 1962.

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The Babe Ruth Story (1948) and the Myth of American Innocence

With the Japanese attack of 7 December 1941 on Pearl Harbor, the United States was able to assume the role of an international innocent and pose as the victim of unprovoked aggression. The reality of the American experience in the Hawaiian Islands, as well as the diplomatic background of the Open Door Policy and Japanese expansion into China, is considerably more complex than the myth of national innocence. In order to achieve victory in the Second World War, considerable sacrifice was required by Americans on both the battleground and home front. In addition to personal sacrifice, the unconditional surrender of the Axis powers required that the United States employ punitive military measures such as the fire bombings of Tokyo and Dresden, in addition to the ushering in of the atomic age with the dropping of atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Victory in World War II brought with it a loss of innocence which Americans were reluctant to acknowledge. The mythology of an innocent and naive America was perpetuated in the Hollywood tribute to baseball icon Babe Ruth, released in 1948, as Ruth was dying from cancer.

The Babe Ruth Story, with veteran character actor William Bendix in the title role, was also seeking to build upon the commercial success of *The Pride of the Yankees* (1942), in which Gary Cooper portrayed Lou Gehrig who was stricken by amyotrophic lateral sclerosis at the peak of his baseball career. *The Pride of the Yankees* was critically acclaimed with 11 Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture and Best Actor. In his review of the film, Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* wrote, "*Pride of the Yankees* is primarily a review of the life of a shy and earnest young fellow who loved his mother, worked hard to get ahead, incidentally became a ballplayer for two reasons — because he loved the game and also needed the cash — and enjoyed a clumsy romance which eventually enriched his life and then at the

Babe Ruth gives some much-needed advice to William Bendix in *The Babe Ruth Story* (1948).

height of his glory, was touched by the finger of death."[1] While the relationship between Ruth and Gehrig was sometimes troubled, Ruth certainly gave his blessing to the Gehrig film project by portraying himself in the picture.

Nevertheless, there were problems inherent in capitalizing upon the Gehrig story. While the Gehrig image was that of a taciturn and modest ath-

lete, the flamboyant Ruth established a reputation for excess in his habits of eating, drinking, and carousing. But the studio executives at Allied Artists refused to let such characterizations stand in the way of portraying Ruth as a post–World War II hero in the image of Gehrig. *The Babe Ruth Story* also avoids direct comparisons by writing Gehrig out of the film and focusing upon the innocence of Ruth. While Ruth might succumb to the temptations of alcohol and beautiful women, he was never cruel or mean-spirited, while others sought to take advantage of his inherent goodness and honesty. As depicted in *The Babe Ruth Story*, the Yankee slugger epitomizes the quintessential American innocent who is able to rise from rags to riches in the best tradition of Benjamin Franklin and Horatio Alger. This parallels the story of American society during the postwar era. Beset by fears of another depression, evolving gender relationships symbolized by Rosie the Riveter and the working women of World War II, growing insistence by racial minorities that they be included in the promise of American life, and the insecurities fostered by the atomic bomb and emerging Cold War with the Soviet Union, Americans sought solace in traditional values and the formation of a postwar consensus in which the sustained growth of gross national product would provide a secure foundation for the development of a white middle-class society.

Ruth's development from an impoverished background to financial success and national prominence was reassuring during a troubled time. The omniscient narrator in *The Babe Ruth Story* espouses that the Babe was "the superman of baseball, the most famous and colorful athlete in the game's history," who was as "American as the hot dog, soda pop, and chewing gum." But in order to attain this iconic status, Ruth had to learn the values of community and consensus. Accordingly, baseball cinema scholars Marshall G. Most and Robert Rudd describe *The Babe Ruth Story* as a film in which Babe's "lifestyle is presented as part of a larger pattern of irresponsibility and lack of discipline. It is only when Ruth reforms himself, by giving up this way of life and rededicating himself to the game and hard work it demands, that he is able to revive his sagging career and find true fulfillment through his marriage to Claire, who wanted little to do with baseball's greatest player ever, until he had matured."[2]

Although the film conveniently ignores Ruth's first wife, Helen Woodford, and her death in a house fire after the couple separated, it is the former showgirl Claire Hodgson (Claire Trevor) who domesticates the unruly Babe. Claire assumes the role of both a lover and mother to her man/child, who, when not partying to excess, was likely to wallow in self-pity. The assumption of the strong, yet nurturing, spouse role would become a fixture in the baseball biographical picture of the postwar era ranging from *The Babe Ruth Story* to *Fear Strikes Out* (1957). In these films, baseball heroes as diverse as Ruth,

Monty Stratton, Jackie Robinson, Grover Cleveland Alexander, Dizzy Dean, Jim Thorpe, and Jimmy Piersall battled poverty, disability, racism, alcoholism, inadequate education, and mental illness, respectively. But they are able to come to grips with these private and public demons through the guidance of their patient but, nevertheless, assertive spouses. (An exception to this pattern is the film biography of Thorpe, suggesting some reservations about the process of assimilation for Native Americans.) The dependence of these athletes upon strong women suggests the degree of uncertainty and confusion in the culture regarding gender roles after the crucial role performed by women in the nation's defense industries during the Second World War. The competence of women could no longer be realistically challenged, but the postwar consensus increasingly encouraged women to exercise their influence over their husbands and households through the power of consumption.

And the consumption ethic would have no greater symbol than Babe Ruth, whose 1948 film biography established the mold for the post–World War II cycle of baseball cinema, reflecting the uncertainty with which many Americans perceived the postwar consensus values of affluence and the organization man. In his insightful account of the national pastime's depiction on the silver screen, Howard Good asserts that beginning with *The Babe Ruth Story*, "Baseball biopics foster social quiescence by stressing the nobility of sacrifice and the grace inherent in hard work without thought of reward. The virtues the films preach — conformity, sobriety, humility — belong more to the good employee than to the rugged individualist." Thus, in *The Babe Ruth Story* when the Babe signs his first professional contract with the Baltimore Orioles of the International League, the young man is supposedly shocked to discover that one may be paid to play baseball. The innocent Ruth, however, quickly adjusts to being compensated for his services, and the film depicts the athlete's growing appetite for food, drink, automobiles, and clothes. While seeking to tame individualism in favor of teamwork in the corporate postwar economy, the consensus recognized that freedoms circumscribed in the workplace could now be reclaimed within the market place through consumption — a transition which may also be interpreted as the feminization of American society. In his study of postwar baseball cinema, Good thus concludes that the films reflect the ambiguity of a culture in which "the Protestant ethic may have been fine on the frontier and in the days of cutthroat, competitive capitalism, but no more. An affluent consumer culture had little use for frugality or sobriety or other self-disciplinary values."[3]

According to William Chafe, consumption was one of the dominant values of the emerging postwar middle-class society of the American suburbs. Arguing that the idea of consumerism came to fruition in the 1950s, Chafe writes, "In many areas of the country weekend entertainment consisted of

visiting the local 'Mammoth Mart' and buying the latest gadget to make life easier, from electric carving knives to automatic shoe shiners. The use of electricity tripled during the 1950s, in large part because of the appliances purchased. Between 1945 and 1960 advertising increased 400 percent, amounting to three times the nation's annual investment in higher education.... As shopping centers proliferated and a new culture of buying took control, suburban residents were bombarded with the message that they could not enjoy the good life without a motorized lawnmower, a new convertible, or the latest imported wine."[4]

The consumption ethic emerged during the 1920s, but its expansion was thwarted by the Great Depression and Second World War. While government policies such as the G.I. Bill fostered the post–World War II affluence, the consumption ethic of the 1920s was often associated with Babe Ruth and the instant gratification of the home run as opposed to the nineteenth-century values of rugged individualism espoused by Ty Cobb, who still holds the major league record for lifetime batting average at .366. In *A Brief History of American Sports*, Elliot J. Gorn and Warren Goldstein describe Cobb as an "acquisitive, calculating individual" who "made the most of his lean build and terrific speed and took instant advantage of every opportunity." On the other hand, Gorn and Goldstein perceive Ruth as "a player of power rather than calculation," and that "rare 'natural' who seemed to have been born with instinctive knowledge of the game." Accordingly, Cobb, with his aggressive tactics emphasizing singles and base stealing, or scientific baseball (as traditionalists liked to call it), appeared to embody the work ethic and Social Darwinist view of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, while Ruth focused the game's attention on the instant gratification of the home run, spending a great deal of his free time playing hard at drinking, eating, and seeking female companionship.[8]

Ruth was also credited with saving baseball following revelations that eight members of the Chicago White Sox conspired with gamblers to fix the 1919 World Series. To restore confidence in the sport, team owners appointed Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis as Commissioner of Baseball. In an effort to provide some moral integrity in the game, Landis suspended the tarnished players for life, but he could not put spectators in the seats of major league baseball stadiums. That task fell to Ruth who, following the 1919 season, was sold by the Boston Red Sox to the New York Yankees. In his first season with the New York club, Ruth slugged 54 home runs and revolutionized the game of baseball. Sportswriters such as F. C. Lane celebrated Ruth's impact on the sport, proclaiming, "He has batted home runs at so dizzy a pace that he has fired the imagination of the entire country. He has not only slugged his way to fame, but he has got everybody else doing it. The home run fever is in the

air. It is infectious. There is a disposition on the part of managers not to hold their own men back, but rather to encourage them.... Babe has not only smashed all records, he has smashed the long accepted system of things in the batting world, and on the ruin of that system, he has erected another system, or rather lack of system whose dominant quality is brute force."[9]

When Ruth retired in 1935 as an active player with 714 lifetime home runs, he continued to cast a great shadow across American culture. For example, it was reported that Japanese soldiers during World War II antagonized Americans by shouting, "To hell with Babe Ruth!" When it was announced that the Yankee slugger was suffering from terminal throat cancer in 1948, the nation was placed on a death watch. On 13 June 1948, fans at Yankee Stadium, "the house that Ruth built," paid their final tribute to the ailing ballplayer. Two month later, he was dead, and a period of national mourning ensued. *The Sporting News* eulogized Ruth in iconic terms. He was credited with saving the sport following the 1919 Black Sox scandal. The paper described the Yankee slugger as "the greatest exemplar in baseball history because, among other achievements, he made over the game to suit the modern tempo of American life, and the modern love for the action." The editorial concluded, "Ruth was not merely a ballplayer. He was the idol of the youngsters of America. He will continue on that pedestal even in death. Ruth was the champion of the turnstiles. He was the human epitome of baseball drama. He was the friend of all, the enemy of none, a man whose sovereign virtue lay in his keen sense of humor, his smile, his willingness to serve, and his high appreciation of the tremendous debt he owed to baseball."[10]

The hyperbole of *The Sporting News* and other sport publications were ridiculed in a *Time* magazine piece complaining, "No death since Franklin Roosevelt's had moved the people — and the press — to such maudlin excess. Between the pumped-up sentimentality of the public mind and the morticianly [sic] manners of the public prints, it was impossible to decide which influenced the other more. The genuine tributes to flamboyant George Herman Ruth were drowned in a messy fog of tear-jerking pictures and prose." Nevertheless, the cynical *Time* piece acknowledged that hundreds of thousands filed past his bier while Ruth was lying in state at Yankee Stadium, and more than six thousand people attended the funeral mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral, presided over by Cardinal Francis Spellman. New York governor Thomas Dewey and the mayors of New York City and Boston served as pallbearers. Over 100,000 residents of New York City watched his cortege pass by on way to interment at the Gate of Heaven Cemetery.[11]

To take advantage of this adulation, executives at Allied Artists rushed *The Babe Ruth Story* into production. The screenplay was based on the Ruth ghost-written biography by Bob Considine, who received a screenwriting

credit along with legendary sportswriter Grantland Rice, whose overwrought rhetoric was responsible for the excess of the film's narration. Ruth was expected to serve as a consultant for the production, but his declining health allowed only one visit to Hollywood in the spring of 1948 when filming was virtually complete. Reportedly, Ruth met with William Bendix and attempted to provide the actor with some hitting tips. Evidently, Ruth failed to exert much influence for Bendix's efforts to impersonate a baseball player were almost uniformly derided by critics. (A lifetime baseball fan, Bendix was more convincing as an umpire in the 1950 low-budget Columbia comedy, *Kill the Umpire*.) Director Roy Del Ruth (no relation to the Babe) was a veteran filmmaker, who got his start in the silent comedies of Mack Sennett before directing such successful MGM musicals as *Broadway Rhythm* (1944) and *It Happened on Fifth Avenue* (1947). But the pathos surrounding Ruth and the urgency of completing the film before his death proved too much for Del Ruth. Hal Erickson in his *Baseball Filmography* asserts that "the film's final scenes were hastened before the cameras with little thought given to script rewrites, accuracy, or production polish; the studio wanted to get the picture to the public before Ruth succumbed to cancer."[12]

The result was a film which many critics insist is the worst sports film ever made, but in its rush to the screen, the Del Ruth film reflects many of the post–World War II insecurities depicted in the later baseball biographical films of the 1940s and 1950s. *The Babe Ruth Story* opens with compilation footage of the Baseball Hall of Fame, with an omnipresent narrator repeating the myth that General Abner Doubleday invented the game of baseball in Cooperstown, New York. After asserting that the Hall is a shrine to fair play, conveniently ignoring that major league baseball's color line was only broken in 1947, the camera focuses upon Ruth's Cooperstown plaque. The narrator describes Ruth as a superman but with a common touch; for he was as American as "hot dogs, soda pop, and chewing gum."[13]

The film then picks up the story of a young Ruth living amid the squalor of the Baltimore waterfront in 1906. The boy (Robert Ellis) is being chased by the proprietor of a Chinese laundry for breaking a window while playing baseball. This is one of the few examples of racial and ethnic diversity in the film, and it is played primarily for laughs. The Chinese man chases George Ruth into the saloon owned by the boy's father (Ralph Dunn). The patriarch placates the Chinese laundry proprietor with a beer, while insisting that his son get to work cleaning tables in the saloon where he is teased and humiliated by the patrons. The bar scene represents a bourgeoisie perspective of a decadent working-class culture. Just as his father seems on the verge of striking the boy, Brother Matthias (Charles Bickford) of St. Mary's Industrial School for Boys arrives and restrains the father. The saintly Brother Matthias seeks

to rescue young Ruth from the unfit working-class environment. Observing that George's mother was deceased and his father running a saloon, Brother Matthias explains that George should return to St. Mary's where he was originally institutionalized for being incorrigible. Perceiving St. Mary's as his true home, the boy begs to return and his father grants permission. Class bias permeates this scene by suggesting that therapeutic organizations such as the church are better qualified than families to guide working-class youth into society.

At St. Mary's, Ruth finds a home where, under the guidance of Brother Matthias, he proves to be better at playing baseball than learning a trade as a tailor's apprentice. According to Ruth biographer Robert Creamer, George Ruth spent seven of the ten years between 1904 and 1914 at St. Mary's, where he resided until age 21. Regarding the relationship between Ruth and Matthias, Creamer writes that Ruth "revered" the religious leader; it was a remarkable, almost parental, bond "considering that Matthias was in charge of making boys behave and that Ruth was one of the great natural misbehavers of all time. But Ruth — homely, overgrown, loud, boisterous, aggressive, probably annoying and irritating, certainly badly behaved — was graced with undeniable charm."[14]

The film picks up the relationship on Christmas Day 1913 as Ruth breaks a school window while working on his curve ball. Ever the understanding patriarch, Matthias shakes his head, and film audiences are introduced to a fully grown Big George, as the kindly Matthias now refers to his athletic man/child. The casting and production values of the film certainly detract from this scene. In the first shot of Bendix as Ruth standing outside in the snow, we are supposed to perceive a boy of eighteen. Yet, Bendix looks all his 41 years, and his pudgy body and movements fail to capture the athletic grace of Babe Ruth. And not only does Bendix appear to be a poor choice for the Ruth role, but Charles Bickford as Brother Matthias fails to age a day in the forty years covered by the film. Nevertheless, it is neither the production values nor historical accuracy that makes *The Babe Ruth Story* worthy of analysis. Rather, it is how the film depicts the postwar consensus views of innocence, mobility, individuality, religion, gender, and consumption which make for historical relevance and significance.

The film moves forward rapidly in its chronology, and the exact passage of time is unclear. Ruth's prowess at throwing the curve ball leads to Brother Matthias's introduction of Ruth to Jack Dunn, owner of the Baltimore Orioles in the International League. Dunn (William Frawley) provides Ruth with the nickname of Babe and offers the young man $6,000 a month to pitch for the Orioles. An incredulous and innocent Ruth remarks, "You mean I'll get paid for playing baseball." In this response, baseball film historians Most and Rudd

note that Ruth's is endorsing one of baseball's beloved myths that "those who play the game, even professionally, do so for no other reason than a pure love of the game." While injecting a note of humility into the life of a professional athlete, this myth of playing for the love of the game also tends to foster a regressive faith in the consensus or establishment as it can be viewed as providing a rationale for "continuing to work within an economic system which is neither necessarily fair nor democratic in terms of rewards." This romantic rendering of professional baseball thus ameliorates the incentive to challenge ownership and such practices as the reserve system.[15]

The Babe Ruth Story, however, seeks to deflect such cynical interpretations by portraying Ruth as the innocent who is the object of hazing by his older but less talented teammates. The Babe is depicted eating a large sandwich in his train berth. The scene could be perceived as evidence of gluttony, but Ruth's impoverished background tends to negate that reading as does Bendix's rather childish nightgown. Ruth's pitching exploits in the International League are acknowledged through a montage of newspaper headlines, culminating in the selling of his contract to the Boston Red Sox. Newspaper headlines and later file footage tend to reduce the amount of screen time in which the awkward Bendix has to depict a gifted athlete.

Ruth continues his success with the Boston franchise until opponents notice that the left hander was tipping his curve ball. A despondent Ruth seeks solace in a restaurant where a female patron informs the pitcher that he sticks out his tongue when he throws a curve ball. An incredulous Ruth procures a mirror to check on the mystery woman's scouting tip. After ascertaining that she was correct, Ruth attempts to congratulate the woman who has fled the scene. While disappointed that he failed to get the name of the beautiful female, Ruth does, nevertheless, follow her pitching advice and regains his groove. Ruth's pitching dominance is portrayed in a scene from St. Mary's as the forever young Brother Matthias shares a newspaper clipping noting the Boston hurler's 29 consecutive scoreless innings in World Series play. The boys at the industrial school are excited that they too may share in this social mobility.

And the Babe is, indeed, doing well. A fancily attired Ruth shows up at a nightclub and decides to treat local newsboys to all the ice cream they can eat. When the maître d' complains that the table commandeered by the boys is already reserved, his protests are silenced when the Babe slips him a $200 tip. This scene establishes Ruth's generosity and rapport with the youth who share the athlete's sense of innocence. While at the nightclub, Ruth notices that one of the singers is the beautiful woman who saved the pitcher's career with her restaurant scouting report. An unabashed Ruth joins Claire Hodgson onstage, performing "Singin' in the Rain" (although the song was

not actually written until a decade later), much to the singer's chagrin and embarrassment.

Spurned temporarily by Claire, Ruth is depicted as learning to play the outfield during Red Sox spring training. After making a shoestring catch and hammering a home run, Ruth walks past a young boy confined to a wheelchair. The Babe waves and says, "Hiya kid." The boy is mesmerized and rises to his feet as his father weeps at the healing miracle performed by the Babe. This is the first of several miracles accomplished by Ruth, who was, after all, the product of a Catholic education. The film's employment of Christian symbolism fits well into the postwar consensus in which the Judeo-Christian tradition was contrasted with the official atheism of communism and the Soviet Union. Thus, Frank Ardolino argues that in *The Babe Ruth Story* the athlete's "life was recast as the Greatest Story Every told, with the Bambino presented as the savior of baseball, a Christ-like worker of miracles on and off the field."[16]

Yet, this so-called saint also faced the temptations of wealth and fame which fostered individualism somewhat at odds with team and corporate values. Ruth's sale from the Red Sox to the Yankees following the 1919 season is simply handled with a newspaper headline and scene featuring the ballplayer signing his first contract with the Yankees — there is no reference to the later constructed curse of the Bambino. In the signing scene, Yankee owner Jacob Ruppert (Matt Briggs) introduces his new outfielder to manager Miller Huggins, explaining to both men that he expected a winner. The serious, dour-faced Huggins (Fred Lightner) appears disenchanted with the flamboyance and lack of respect for authority displayed by Ruth, who places the smaller manager in a boyish bear hug while ruffling his hair. Ruth inks a contract for $20,000 and seals the deal with a beer — Prohibition is apparently of little concern to Ruth throughout the picture.

While Huggins continued to harbor doubts about Ruth's personal habits and off-the-field reputation for carousing, there is little doubt that Ruth delivered on his promise to Jacob Ruppert. In 1920, Ruth hit a record 54 home runs and shattered that mark the following season with 59, but the cross-town rival New York Giants prevailed over the Yankees in the 1921 and 1922 World Series. *The Babe Ruth Story* employs file footage and a newspaper montage to display this drama, while the "voice of God" narrator proclaims that Ruth saved baseball following the 1919 Black Sox scandal.

The Yankees finally gained their first world championship of the Ruth era in 1923, and Babe enjoyed one of his best seasons with 41 home runs and a .393 batting average. The film omits the 1922 six-week suspension of Ruth by Commissioner Landis for violating his edict on post-season barnstorming games, but *The Babe Ruth Story* does attempt to provide its take on the stormy

relationship between Huggins and Ruth which resulted in the manager suspending the outfielder and fining him $5,000 for violating curfew rules during the 1925 season.

While the film offers some recognition of Ruth's tendency to delve into the party scene, his suspension by Huggins is chalked up to a misunderstanding. The innocent Ruth is simply performing another one of his miracles. Ruth is taking batting practice in Chicago when he hits a foul ball that strikes a young boy's dog. The boy begs a distraught Ruth to save Pee-wee, and the ballplayer gathers the dog in his arms. Still in uniform, Ruth hails a cab to take them to the nearest hospital. Nurses try to explain that the hospital does not treat animals, but Ruth is insistent, convincing a doctor to operate on the dog. Of course, the operation is successful and Pee-wee lives. Ruth, however, is so concerned with the boy and his dog that he misses the day's game and is suspended by Huggins. If any further evidence is needed to establish the purity of Ruth's motives, it is provided when gamblers approach the athlete about fixing games when he returns to the Yankee line up. Ruth defends the integrity of the game by attacking the gamblers. Incarcerated for fighting, Ruth is told by Huggins that he belongs in jail.

Unjustly treated by Huggins, Ruth takes solace in drink. Viewers see an inebriated Ruth dressed in a Santa Claus outfit with a bag of toys stumbling into a hospital. A surprised Ruth encounters Claire who is exiting the hospital. She takes the opportunity to lecture Babe about his responsibilities. He cannot let the children see him in this drunken condition, for Claire asserts that the ballplayer must recognize that he represents the dreams and ambitions of millions of American youth. Ruth listens to Claire as the voice of conscience, surrendering his toy bag and placing himself in the care of Claire, who takes him home.

In this scene, Ruth begins the transition from great baseball player to a national hero through the intervention of a loving and intelligent woman who needs to guide and provide discipline for her wayward athlete — it is a formula treated in many baseball biographical films as spouses take on the duties of wife and mother. Commenting on the role of Claire in *The Babe Ruth Story*, Most and Rudd observe, "While it may have been Babe Ruth who saved baseball, it was Claire who saved Babe Ruth — first by spotting the flaw in the delivery of his curve ball, then as the source of moral virtue in convincing Ruth to reform his personal life, and finally as the source of inspiration, whose love gives Babe the strength and determination to redeem both his career and his life."[17] The film script, however, disregards the fact that when the ballplayer began his relationship with Claire, he was still married to his estranged wife, Helen Woodford Ruth. The reality of divorce and adultery — with which many in the film audience might be familiar as the war years placed consid-

erable strain upon the institution of marriage — was unacceptable for a baseball hero symbolizing the postwar consensus values of the traditional family.

Through a montage of newspaper headlines, the film reveals that the Yankees and Ruth slumped during the 1925 and 1926 seasons as the Washington Senators replaced the Yankees atop the American League standings. Miller Huggins is depicted in a meeting with Yankee ownership, while Ruth waits outside the room. Ruppert is critical of Ruth's conditioning and production, but a combative Huggins defends his star, asserting that Ruth's illness during the 1925 season was due to management's exploitation of the athlete. Huggins contends that the Yankees placed Ruth in exhibition games during inclement weather, and in his eagerness to help the club, the Yankee star played when he should have been resting. Huggins concludes by once again lauding Ruth as the man who saved baseball, and the manager wants the Babe on his team. Ruth overhears the remarks and humbly thanks Huggins for his support. As with most episodes in *The Babe Ruth Story*, the reality of Ruth's 1925 "stomachache," which kept him out of the Yankee lineup for much of the season, was more complex. Ruth biographer Leigh Montville acknowledges that many in baseball believed that the athlete was suffering from a sexually transmitted disease. The biographer, however, concludes, "Possibly some other situation could have been involved, some hernia or rupture or some need for a colostomy bag for a time, some kind of nether-region difficulties that no one wanted to detail for strangers. The net result, whatever the problem, was that the Babe stayed in St. Vincent's Hospital for a lot longer than expected."[18]

Thus, *The Babe Ruth Story* continues to perpetuate the myth of Ruth's innocence and claims to be a loyal company man. After the travails of the 1925 season, a determined Ruth is depicted enjoying a coffee with Claire and Brother Matthias, who provide the family love and guidance which the ballplayer lacked in his youth. Again casting Ruth as a Messiah figure, Brother Matthias reminds Ruth that he must rededicate himself to the religion of baseball, for crippled children around the country need the example of his determination. The omniscient narrator then reminds viewers that the more disciplined Ruth leads the Yankees to American League pennants in 1926 and 1927. Ruth's shattering of his home run record with his 60th round tipper in 1927 is portrayed in one of the few baseball scenes featuring the awkward Bendix. Cementing the connection between the public and private self-discipline Ruth now practices, the Bambino sends his 60th home run ball along with a marriage proposal to his beloved Claire.

While Ruth is forming a new family unit with Claire, another of his father figures is dying. After the Yankees subdue the Pittsburgh Pirates in the 1927 World Series, a jubilant Ruth notices that Huggins is not sharing in the celebration. In a quiet moment on the team train, Ruth expresses his concern

for the manager's health, while Huggins tells Babe that he is the greatest player in baseball. Following their honeymoon, the newly wed Babe and Claire go to visit Huggins in the hospital. But they are too late, as the Yankee skipper has expired. Ruth then repents for his breaking of team rules as he understands that Huggins was only trying to help Ruth and the Yankees achieve victory. Babe, however, assures the departed Huggins that he never gave anything other than his best effort on the playing field. With his marriage to Claire and belated reconciliation with Huggins, Ruth has reached maturity and puts his frivolous days behind him. He is ready to take his place within the American consensus.

The film then jumps forward to the 1932 World Series between the Yankees and the Chicago Cubs and Ruth's famous called shot. While most commentators believe that Ruth was actually pointing at the Cubs dugout as the Yankees and Ruth were angry with the Cub players for failing to vote former Yankee Mark Koenig a full World Series share. *The Babe Ruth Story*, however, uses the called shot to document another Ruth miracle. The Yankee slugger agrees to autograph a baseball for an ailing Johnny (Gregory Marshall), who remains comatose even when Ruth visits his bedside. In an effort to reach the boy, the Yankee slugger promises that he will strike a home run for him. The next day at Wrigley Field, Claire reminds her husband about Johnny, and Ruth points at the center field bleachers where he deposits the next pitch. Johnny and his family are listening to the game on the radio, and the boy appears to be drifting into a coma. But when he hears the radio call of Ruth's home run, Johnny's eyes flicker open, and he smiles at his family. Not only does Ruth have the power to make the lame walk, but apparently he is able to raise the dead. At this point Ruth is the American hero who has overcome poverty and a lack of self discipline to assist others in less fortunate circumstances.

But as the film's narrator observes, Father Time finally did catch up with Ruth in his human form. After the 1934 season, Ruth was dealt to the Boston Braves so that he could pursue his goal of managing. The Braves offered Ruth a position as assistant manager and vice-president, but the financially strapped team actually needed the Babe as an on-the-field drawing card. Ruth tries his best with the Braves, but he is slow on the base paths and the field. With the narrator exalting that champions don't quit without a fight, Ruth responds to the criticism of a young teammate by slamming three home runs in one game. When he singles during his fourth at bat, an exhausted Ruth calls for the younger player to replace him at first base. The young outfielder apologizes for his obnoxious behavior, but Ruth insists that it is time for him to step aside for more youthful players. But Ruth does have one piece of advice for the young man, asserting that if one is good to the game then baseball will be good to him.

Ruth's faith is quickly tested. After his three-home-run game, he retires and plans to accept an executive position with the Braves. (While the film places the three home runs and Ruth's retirement on the same day, several weeks actually passed between the two events.) The Braves, instead, dismiss Ruth as they have no interest in him off the playing field. Nevertheless, the mature Ruth refuses to drink from the cup of bitterness. When a reporter inquires as to whether Ruth plans to take legal action against the Braves, Babe is incredulous, proclaiming that "suing baseball would be like suing the Church." Babe Ruth is a company man and loyal member of the Church of Baseball and accepting of his part in the consensus. Although Ruth biographers document that Babe was upset that the Yankees failed to offer him a coaching or managerial position with the club, *The Babe Ruth Story* prefers a Ruth reflective of the post–World War II consensus as described by journalist David Halberstam in his history of the 1950s. Halberstam writes, "In the years following the traumatic experiences of the Depression and World War II, the American Dream was to exercise personal freedom not in social and political terms, but rather in economic ones. Eager to be part of the burgeoning middle class, young men and women opted for material well-being, particularly if it came with some form of guaranteed employment."[19]

But Ruth struggles to find a suitable niche following his retirement from baseball. He regrets not accepting a minor league managing position in the Yankee farm chain, and surprisingly, at the suggestion of Brother Matthias, he tries his hand at refereeing women's professional wrestling matches. But Ruth's days in the wilderness are cut short as a television news bulletin announces that Babe Ruth is terminally ill. *The Babe Ruth Story* concludes with an overly long and overwrought deathbed scene. Claire is at her husband's bedside while an angelic chorus of young men serenades Babe with "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." Claire is reading Babe fan letters from dignitaries, but Ruth, ever the American innocent, prefers the sincerity of young people. Ruth is also elated by a letter from the Ford Motor Company requesting that Ruth join the company in sponsorship of American Legion Baseball. Ruth tells Claire that he is back in the game and has so much to do, justifying his faith in baseball and corporate America.

Ruth's condition, however, is terminal, and his doctors are planning on sending him home to die. Seeking a miracle, Claire pleads that there must be some treatment that they have not tried. The doctors reluctantly inform her that a serum which has not been subject to human experimentation might hold promise. The professionals determine that Ruth must make the decision as to whether he is willing to undergo the experimental treatment. (Ruth was subjected to the new practice of chemotherapy with the drug teropterin, but the treatment was hardly the miracle cure suggested by the film.) The doctor,

who just happens to be the physician who treated the injured dog Ruth brought to the hospital in Chicago, explains to Babe that the serum may be dangerous. Ruth, however, insists upon accepting the serum for it may help others. As Ruth is taken into the operating room, the narrator proclaims that Ruth was willing to offer his life so that others might live. The narrator concludes that *The Babe Ruth Story* is the tale of a ball, bat, and boy. The final footage consists of enthusiastic young boys playing baseball, although they were all white as were the suburbs of America and almost all of major league baseball in 1948.

The final maudlin scene of the film elevates Ruth to a Christ-like figure who is willing to sacrifice his life so that others, especially the children who also flocked to Jesus, might continue to live. Frank Ardolino sums up the religious symbolism of the film's conclusion, observing, "This operation is presented as Ruth's sacrifice to pay back his fans for their support. He is taken from the bed and wrapped in a sheet, an action resembling the deposition of Christ from the cross, and wheeled down the corridor toward the blinding light of his imminent resurrection as the abiding spirit of baseball, wherever there is a ball, bat, and boys playing."[21] In other words, Babe Ruth died for our sins, restoring the grace of American innocence.

Short on baseball scenes and long on religious symbolism, *The Babe Ruth Story* was rushed into production and enjoyed its premiere on 26 July 1948 at New York's Astor Theater. Among the crowd of over 1,400 attending the screening was Ruth, who left Memorial Hospital for the performance. Greeted with a standing ovation, Ruth fell ill and returned to the hospital before the film's completion. New York film critics panned the production. Otis L. Guerusey, Jr., of the *Herald Tribune* asserted, "It would be hard to find a more colorful American figure than the Babe for motion-picture documentation, and it would be difficult to do a worse job with him than has been done here." Wanda Hale of the *Daily News* echoed these sentiments, writing, "The story, as it emerges on the screen, bears little resemblance to the book, which had drama and suspense aplenty, or to the simple facts." And Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* lamented, "The film has much more the tone of low-grade fiction than it has of biogrpahy."[21]

Sportswriter Dan Daniel attempted somewhat of a defense for the film, arguing that movie critics and baseball writers should not expect too much from *The Babe Ruth Story*, which was geared toward the general public. Daniel observed, "I realize that, in order to tell the screen story to the best advantage, certain liberties must be taken. A picture of that sort cannot afford subtlety. It must use a slam bang style, overplay, and overdo. Drama must be turned into pathos. And there certainly is plenty of that in the Ruth picture." But Daniel's major objection to the film, reflecting the continuing sensitivity of

the baseball community to the Black Sox scandal, was the allegation that Ruth was approached by gamblers to fix games. Daniel stated that the story was a lie and representative of Hollywood's sensational bent.[22]

The Sporting News also expressed its dissatisfaction with *The Babe Ruth Story*. The self-proclaimed Bible of Baseball editorialized that filmmakers defamed the sport with its depiction of gamblers approaching Ruth, while the story of the sport's greatest player contained little baseball action. The paper concluded, "The film had to be over-dramatized and turned into a sermon for Young America. This is accomplished. But baseball still is waiting for the true delineation, the true portrayal, in a film having to do with the diamond."[23]

Thus, baseball, like American society, proclaimed its innocence in the post–World War II period. Still plagued by the fall from grace associated with the 1919 World Series, the baseball establishment heralded its patriotic contributions to the war and embraced the promise of the post–World War II consensus in the figure of Babe Ruth — the man who had saved baseball. Although the cost of victory in World War II was the shedding of innocence, Americans clung to the visions of purity, redemption, social mobility, consumerism, and religion contained in *The Babe Ruth Story*.

Although *The Babe Ruth Story* was not a particularly well-crafted film, it offered a formula for more serious baseball biographical pictures in the postwar era. The baseball hero, however, also reflected the insecurities of Americans in the 1940s and 1950s as they sought to attain middle-class status in the suburbs. Yet this vision of the American dream required that individualism be tamed in favor of more corporate values, while the pressures of consumption led to conformity and status anxiety. And, of course, the middle-class suburbs were almost exclusively reserved for white Americans due to restrictive lending policies by government agencies such as the Federal Housing Administration in conjunction with the real estate industry. The postwar consensus in many ways represented the feminization of American culture, and individuals such as Babe Ruth needed a strong woman, such as Claire, to aid in this adjustment. The essential spousal role pioneered by Claire Hodgson Ruth was a fixture for the baseball biographical film and family of the American consensus. But independent women could also be a threat to the family and transition to consensus values. Rosie the Riveter, like the character K. C. Higgins in *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (1949), needed to be tamed in service of the postwar consensus and mythology of American innocence.

2

Taming Rosie the Riveter

Take Me Out to the Ball Game (1949)

Baseball biographical films such as *Pride of the Yankees* (1942) and *The Babe Ruth Story* (1948) depicted the ballpark as a proving ground for masculinity. Nevertheless, this supposedly male preserve is historically an arena in which gender roles have been contested. In her path-breaking study *Breaking into Baseball: Women and the National Pastime*, Jean Hastings Ardell observes that composer Jack Norworth had never set foot in a ballpark before writing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" in 1908. But Norworth must have known a female baseball enthusiast upon whom to pattern the baseball-mad Katie Casey, who insisted upon inclusion during a time when her mere presence at the ballpark was controversial to some males. Ardell observes, "'Take Me Out to the Ball Game' reminds us that women have always been among the game's most devoted and knowledgeable fans. Yet for many years, Organized Baseball showed a complex ambivalence toward the female presence at the ballpark."[1]

Perhaps it is not surprising then that in the contested gender environment of post–World War II, America filmmakers turned to the nostalgic era of the early twentieth century. For the Katie Caseys of America in the 1940s were extending their influence well beyond the cozy confines of the ballpark. The Second World War sent confusing and conflicting messages to American women. During the Great Depression, women in the workplace were discharged as they might pluck a scarce job from a male who needed to serve as the breadwinner for his family. This situation changed in the early 1940s with manpower shortages in the defense industries due to military conscription. Women were called upon to render their patriotic duty in the nation's factories, and the World War II icon of Rosie the Riveter was created. Over six million women joined the workforce, increasing the number of female workers by nearly 60 percent. As wages increased, women enjoyed a greater sense of inde-

pendence, although discrimination and inequities in pay scales between male and female workers persisted throughout the war years.[2]

There was also considerable social discomfort with mothers deserting family responsibilities, and pressure was placed upon working women to assume their domestic duties in the postwar era. In addition to concern that absent mothers contributed to growing juvenile crime rates, many Americans feared that the country would again descend into depression if returning male veterans were unable to replace working women on the assembly lines. And, indeed, women were eased off the factory floor and out of the workforce in the immediate postwar period. By 1947, however, the number of women entering the labor force exceeded those working outside the home during the war years. Many of these women were engaged in part-time employment in order to support the consumerism that fueled the growth of suburbia and the affluent society during the 1950s. Unlike television's June Cleaver, housewives in the real world did not stay home all day cleaning house, preparing pot roast, and primping for their husband's imminent return to the home.[3]

Postwar insecurities regarding the role of women were manifested throughout popular culture, especially in Hollywood cinema. *Femmes fatales* in the film noir genre demonstrated aggressive behavior and manipulated helpless males. In her Oscar-winning performance in *Mildred Pierce* (1945), Joan Crawford proved that a woman was capable of running a successful business, but in the final analysis the working woman was vulnerable and required a husband to protect her from sentimentality as well as the sexual advances of unscrupulous males. Gender issues were also paramount in post–World War II baseball biographical pictures, such as *The Stratton Story* (1949), *The Winning Team* (1952), and *The Pride of St. Louis* (1952), in which strong women/wives played essential roles in helping their husbands struggle with issues of self-doubt regarding disability, alcohol abuse, and lack of formal education. While their husbands basked in the spotlight of athletic success, in numerous ways the spouses were the stronger silent partners. After the talents displayed by women in the workforce during the Second World War, it was difficult for popular culture to discount women's potential. On the other hand, it was important to tame Rosie the Riveter and place her considerable abilities in pursuit of more traditional gender roles.[4]

Seeking to bolster these mainstream societal relationships, the professional baseball establishment continued to stereotype women during the postwar period. While baseball played a dramatic role in the civil rights movement when the Brooklyn Dodgers signed Jackie Robinson to a contract in October 1945, the sport remained rather reactionary in its treatment of women, perpetuating the stereotypes of the "Baseball Annie" or sexual predator along with the shrill, fanatic such as the legendary Hilda Chester of Brooklyn's

Ebbets Field. Baseball executives, however, preferred women in the role of consumers who would be attracted to ladies' day promotions. Sexuality was still a major factor in such promotions as franchises assumed the presence of women at the ballpark would spur male attendance.

The sexism prevalent in baseball was displayed in a July 1946 *Collier*'s piece by Stanley Frank entitled "Cheesecake at the Ball Park." The photographic images accompanying the article reflected the gender stereotypes embraced by the baseball establishment. Women were objectified as models in swimsuits interacting with members of the Brooklyn Dodgers atop the male preserve of the dugout. While welcoming the attention of these bathing beauties, males were concerned that the friendly confines of the ballpark might cease to provide a refuge from the shrew's violent and scolding temperament. Accordingly, Frank's article included a photograph of Hilda "Howling" Chester with her clanging cowbell. The caption under Chester's picture reads, "She is being taken away on transports of delight — but not far enough, perhaps." Women such as Chester might know their baseball, but females needed to refrain from boisterous behavior or the characteristics of a hag threatening man's place of dominance at the ballpark. The final image by photographer David Perkin-Pix, thus, emphasized the preferred combination of sexuality and consumerism. Female fans attracted to the game by the promise of free nylons were shown hoisting their skirts to reveal shapely legs adorned by consumer goods often unavailable during the war.[5]

This stereotypical portrait ignored that female athletes played an exciting brand of baseball in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) between 1943 and 1954. Over 600 women displayed their athletic skills in the AAGPBL, which drew over 450,000 spectators during the 1945 season in smaller Midwestern industrial markets. As with major league baseball, AAGPBL attendance declined in the early 1950s. The league folded in 1954, but the women of the AAGPBL demonstrated, in a fashion somewhat similar to that of Rosie the Riveter on the factory room floor, that females were capable of competing in domains usually reserved for male privilege. Unfortunately, many in American culture forgot about the women of the AAGPBL, but director Penny Marshall's 1992 film *A League of Their Own* restored these female athletes to their proper place in popular memory. Marshall described the purpose of her film as telling "people not to be ashamed of their talent. If you're good at something, I don't care what it is, be proud. These women were seen as misfits, because they were able to play ball, something they weren't supposed to be able to do in that period."[6]

Yet, in the period immediately following the Second World War it was certainly evident that Rosie the Riveter and the women of the AAGPBL were able to excel in traditional male enclaves. It was impossible to dismiss the

(Left to right, from bottom) Eddie O'Brien (Gene Kelly) attempts to revive teammate Dennis Ryan (Frank Sinatra) with the support of Shirley Delwyn (Betty Garrett) and team owner K.C. Higgins (Esther Williams) while gambler Joe Lorgan (Edward Arnold) and others assess the situation in *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (1949).

talent of these women, so the essential goal for those seeking to restore more traditional gender roles was to recognize these abilities and harness them in pursuit of love and marriage. This was true for more serious biographical baseball films as well as lighter fare such as the 1949 musical *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*. In this old-fashioned Busby Berkeley musical set in the early twentieth century, K. C. Higgins (Esther Williams) inherits a championship ball club. But when star players Dennis Ryan (Frank Sinatra) and Eddie O'Brien (Gene Kelly) discover that the new owner is a beautiful woman who actually knows something about the sport, there is dissension on the team until romance restores the proper gender roles and balance. In *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, K. C. Higgins represents the capable woman who needs to be domesticated for the post–World War II consensus. Rosie the Riveter and the AAGPBL must make way for the feminine mystique.[7]

Take Me Out to the Ball Game owes it origins to the commercial success of the Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra song-and-dance vehicle, *Anchors Aweigh*

(1945). In that MGM musical, two sailors on leave in Hollywood search for romance — a fitting scenario for returning servicemen and the strains of World War II upon the nation's sexual mores. Producer Joe Pasternak envisioned a Kelly/Sinatra sequel in which the two male stars depict sailors who convert their aircraft carrier into a swinging nightclub. Kelly hated the idea, and, working with his assistant choreographer Stanley Donen, produced a seven-page treatment which became the basis for *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*. A performer who loved baseball, Kelly envisioned a Tinker-to-Evans-to-Chance double-play combination featuring Kelly, Sinatra, and Brooklyn Dodger manager Leo Durocher. The controversial manager was unable to fit the film into his schedule, but Durocher's Hollywood contacts and lifestyle eventually landed him in trouble. Allegations of gambling involving actor George Raft and organized crime, along with his marriage in Mexico to actress Laraine Day shortly after her divorce, convinced baseball commissioner A. B. "Happy" Chandler to suspend the volatile manager for the 1947 season. Durocher was replaced in the script and at first base by Broadway performer Jules Munshin. In his original treatment Kelly asserted, "I've worked out an Irish jig that Sinatra and Durocher will be able to dance and which will carry on the myth of Frankie's terpsichorean ability (and believe me, this will top any of our joint numbers in *Anchors Aweigh*). And, too, I guarantee not a dry seat in the house when the crooner does one of those sentimental Irish ballads."[8]

The seven-page outline was purchased by MGM producer Arthur Freed for $25,000 and assigned to director Busby Berkeley. Kelly had hoped that he and Donen would be able to direct the film, but the legendary musical director was a sentimental choice for Freed. Acclaimed for his musical extravaganzas from the 1930s such as *Gold Diggers of 1935*, Berkeley had not worked for MGM since his removal from *Girl Crazy* in 1941. Beset by personal problems and artistically representative of an earlier era, Berkeley, nevertheless, turned in a credible job with *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, demonstrating the good sense to leave most of the film's choreography to Kelly and Donen. In fact, *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* proved to be Berkeley's last directorial credit. For the musical numbers, Freed tapped the veteran Broadway song writing team of Betty Comden and Adolph Green. Although the film score produced some catchy tunes such as "Yes, Indeedy" and "It's Fate, Baby, It's Fate," Comden, speaking for the songwriters, described *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* as "not one we like to talk about."[9]

The casting of the female lead also brought controversy to the production. Kelly wrote the role of K. C. Higgins for Kathryn Grayson, but Freed replaced her with Judy Garland. The troubled actress, suffering from depression, drug and alcohol abuse, and marital problems, was unable to honor her contract. Kelly was disappointed when the Higgins role was finally assigned by the

studio to MGM's aquatic star, Esther Williams. Alterations were made in the script to include a swimming scene for Williams, while second female lead Betty Garrett's singing and dancing numbers were increased. Donen termed the selection of Williams "a mistake," proclaiming, "She was extremely nearsighted. She was practically blind. She'd rehearse her scenes wearing her eyeglasses, and everything would be fine, but then, came time to shoot; she'd take off her glasses and she would crash into the set." While other participants in the film made no such claims, the resentment expressed by Donen and Kelly made *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* a miserable experience for Williams. The actress, however, appreciated the friendship and support offered by Sinatra, whose professionalism was touted by Williams as well as by Betty Garrett.[10]

Just as the United States was undergoing tremendous transition during the postwar period, Sinatra's career was in flux. Moving from the teen idol of bobby-soxers, Sinatra was attempting to become a mature actor — a status he would attain in the dramatic roles provided the singer during the 1950s beginning with *From Here to Eternity* (1953). But in 1949 Sinatra's career appeared on the ropes. The singer was drawing smaller, less enthusiastic crowds to his concerts, and influential music magazine *Downbeat* listed Sinatra as only the number five male singer in the United States. Sinatra had been included in the top three spots since the late 1930s, and *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* did little to restore the performer's sagging reputation. Sinatra biographer Will Friedwald writes, "Once Sinatra had conquered picturedom with *Anchors Aweigh*, he doesn't seem to have given a damn about his films. He wasn't even willing to use his records to plug his pictures; recording only one song from *Ball Game* and none of the score to *On the Town*. Yet all he contributed to music meant little at the box office, though, with Bing Crosby and Doris Day, he was one of the few great singers (from the jazz and band world) to make it as a leading player." *From Here to Eternity*, nevertheless, provided the slight Sinatra with an opportunity to assert a more traditional image of American masculinity in a military uniform.[11]

Sinatra in a baseball uniform for *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, however, failed to exude masculinity. In the few baseball scenes from the movie, Sinatra looked awkward at the plate, lunging at the pitch in a fashion that would make it almost impossible to drive the ball. In addition, his character is awkward and shy around women, playing against Sinatra's public image as a playboy and womanizer. Sinatra's Dennis Ryan well reflects postwar insecurities regarding gender relations. And these societal concerns about gender also had crucial political implications during the early years of the Cold War. Many scholars of Cold War culture note the extent to which anticommunist crusaders coupled concerns with assertive women, masculinity in crisis, homosexuality, and national security. K. A. Cuordileone writes, "It is hard to escape the con-

clusion that underlying the excesses and inanities of the anti-communist imagination — of which the image of the subversive-as-homosexual was the most lurid — was an anxiety about troubling trends at home as well as abroad, not least among them sexual disorder." And David Landers, in his study of Cold War persecution of gays and lesbians in the federal government, goes so far as to suggest, "In 1950, many politicians, journalists, and citizens thought that homosexuals proved more a threat to national security than Communists."[12]

These insecurities regarding sexual orientation and gender roles were displayed in the disquieting image of film noir, but also in lighter Hollywood fare such as *Take Me Out to the Ball Game.* The film begins with concerns that the double play combination of the defending world champion Wolves has failed to report for spring training. Where are Ryan and O'Brien? The scene then shifts to reveal that the ballplayers were on the vaudeville circuit, which was not that unusual during the early years of the twentieth century when vaudeville performances offered an opportunity for underpaid athletes to earn extra money during the off season. Second baseman Ryan (Sinatra) and shortstop O'Brien (Kelly) — accurately reflecting the strong Irish influence on the game at the turn of the century — are adorned in red-and-white peppermint suits singing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." After the performance, they are on the train traveling to join the team, but O'Brien is reluctant to report as he would prefer to stay in show business. But this should not be interpreted as a sign that O'Brien is in any way effeminate. Instead, O'Brien chooses show business over baseball because there are women available in vaudeville. In fact, Kelly's friend Stanley Donen observed, "As in *Anchors Aweigh*, Kelly's character is that of an oversexed wolf."[13]

While being a song-and-dance man fails to interfere with O'Brien asserting his masculinity, Ryan is more intimidated by strong women. Nevertheless, both men, like returning servicemen in the postwar era seeking to prove their sexual prowess, want to impress their teammates with their sexual conquests during the off season. And these exploits become the basis for the Comden-Green tune, "Yes, Indeedy." The need by Ryan to so publicly assert his manhood especially underscores postwar concerns about the threat to the male order presented by independent women. Of course, such boasting was easier when not tested by the presence of a woman in the male enclave of baseball.

The Wolves, however, would be unable to continue with this idea of dismissing women as the passive sexual objects of male desire. Ryan and O'Brien pay little attention to their manager, Michael Gilhuly (Richard Lane), when he explains that the team is under new ownership as K. C. Higgins has inherited the club. The double play combination reassures their manager that the new owner will be an awesome guy; never imagining that baseball management might fall into the hands of a woman. Later that evening, O'Brien

notices an attractive young woman dining at the team's hotel. The womanizer approaches her, inquiring about a night on the town after dinner. He suggests that they should dance all night, but she retorts that ballplayers are supposed to follow curfews. O'Brien expresses his contempt for management, proclaiming that what the boss "doesn't know won't hurt him." At this point, the tables are turned on O'Brien when the young woman informs him that she is K. C. Higgins and now in charge of the Wolves (a clever double entendre on the behavior of O'Brien and the other players). Enjoying her position of power in the conversation, Higgins tells her employee that it is past his bedtime and curfew.

But Higgins, like her World War II counterparts Rosie the Riveter and the women of the AAGPBL, does not simply owe her position to good fortune. Higgins proves to be a talented businesswoman who is athletic and knowledgeable about baseball. When O'Brien encounters difficulty with his hitting the next day, Higgins notices that he is pulling away from the ball and putting his foot "in the bucket." To make her point, Higgins actually places a bucket of water in the batter's box and takes a couple of swings, even though she is wearing a dress with a fashionable hat and parasol. Never one to let an opportunity to pass him by, O'Brien wants to make sure that he understands the hitting tip by placing his arms around Higgins while she is in the batter's box. But Higgins demonstrates her dominance over the aggressive shortstop by striking him firmly with the bat. As she strolls off the playing field after apologizing for interrupting the practice, Higgins fields a batted ball from Ryan and makes a strong throw. The second baseman for the Wolves is smitten and confides to O'Brien that Higgins is the woman for him as she is just what he has been seeking—a girl who can play baseball. O'Brien and Ryan are shocked by Higgins's athleticism, although film audiences in 1949 had the accomplishments of the AAGPBL to affirm the connection between women and playing baseball. After women's service during the war years, the abilities and talents of the so-called fairer sex were hardly in doubt, yet insecure and threatened males still sought to domesticate Rosie the Riveter.

That evening the players are on their best behavior as Higgins joins them for a team meal. For entertainment, the ballplayers perform the musical number "O'Brien to Ryan to Goldberg," celebrating the double play combination as well as extolling the ethnic melting pot elements of Irish and Jewish humor. For example, Nat Goldberg (Jules Munshin) sings that his mother wants him to play an instrument rather than become a ballplayer. (The French-Canadian Durocher might not have quite filled the Goldberg role.) After the musical interlude, Ryan and O'Brien both make advances upon Higgins whom they now refer to by her given name, Katherine.

As one might expect from a film featuring Esther Williams, Katherine

is taking a swim after dinner; although her revealing one-piece bathing suit is not exactly redolent of early twentieth century styles. Ryan is the first to approach Katherine, but romance fails to blossom as the two end up playing catch and talking baseball. O'Brien then tries his luck by serenading Katherine in a balcony scene reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet*. There is clearly a spark between Katherine and O'Brien; however, the two attempt to downplay the obvious attraction. In fact, Katherine fines O'Brien for violating curfew. She is still an independent woman, but it is apparent that her taming is well under way.

After a brief training montage in which both O'Brien and Ryan attempt to impress Katherine, the Wolves open their season with President Theodore Roosevelt in attendance. Seeking to impress the president, Katherine, adorned in a pink dress, expects her players to be on their best behavior by refraining from clowning and arguing with the umpire. When a decision goes against the Wolves, Katherine, however, is unable to follow her directive. She storms onto the male bastion of the playing field and initiates an altercation with the umpire which degenerates into a riot. While played on a comic level, this scene seems to suggest that chaos may result if independent women intrude upon traditional male activities and lines of authority. The doctrine of separate spheres articulated by many male opponents to women's suffrage, insisting that women would lose their moral superiority if engaged in the masculine domains of business and politics, is symbolized by Katherine's descent into a violent confrontation at the ball game.

While one may assume that the filmmakers were not necessarily intent upon establishing historical links between the post–World War II era and America at the turn of the twentieth century, it is interesting to note that scholars describe both periods as characterized by a crisis in masculinity. For example, below the self-assured surface of Teddy Roosevelt and progressivism were fears that American males were becoming over-civilized and feminized as the nation moved from the producer capitalism of the self-made man and nineteenth century into the corporate and consumer economy of the twentieth century. To thwart this feminization of the culture, males, according to E. Anthony Rotundo, needed to practice a "passionate manhood" in which athletic contests and physical fitness were proper outlets for aggression and ambition. Large-scale spectator sports such as baseball, football, and prize fighting became a focal point for male bonding both on and off the playing field. The presence of independent women in the workforce and military fueled similar concerns in the post–World War II period. According to Peter Biskind, postwar corporate capitalism embraced values of cooperation rather than competition, and men were expected to express their feelings both in the home and boardroom. Biskind asserts, "By the fifties, the tough, hard-boiled Hemingway

male of the thirties and forties, the man who hid his feelings, if he had any, behind a facade of glacial indifference, the man who endured adversity alone with proud, stoic silence or wooden unconcern had seen his best day."[14]

But the feminization seemed to come with a psychological price reflected in the male insecurities underlying even such a light musical comedy as *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*. Katherine's confrontation with a male authority figure brought havoc to the ballpark. While Katherine at least depicted a competent businesswoman, other more stereotypical females were also a threat to the male athlete. Gambling was an early menace to the integrity of major league baseball and culminated in the "fixed" World Series of 1919. Gamblers were also reported to employ women as sexual objects to seduce athletes. These sexually aggressive women of the criminal underworld were often represented in film noir as *femmes fatales*. Their threatening presence for males was evident in the misogynistic backlash of writers such as Mickey Spillane.[15]

In *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, the scheming woman working on behalf of the mob takes on a more benign quality with Shirley Delwyn (Betty Garrett) who falls in love with Ryan, the object of her seduction. Gambling boss Joe Lorgan (Edward Arnold) wants Shirley to use her feminine wiles upon the unsuspecting ballplayer, but Shirley finds herself smitten by the diminutive Ryan. She chases him around an empty ballpark while singing "It's Fate, Baby, It's Fate." Shirley finally corners her helpless prey and hoists the slight man over her shoulder. It is a comical scene, yet it certainly plays upon fears of the emasculated male fostered by the changing gender relations wrought by a world conflict.

Ryan, however, continues to harbor feelings for Katherine, so Shirley invites the team to a party hosted by the gamblers. While Lorgan and his associates are unable to recruit any players, it is during this party scene that the romantic relationships of the film are solidified. Ryan and Katherine follow their dance with a kiss, but there is simply no passion to their embrace. Instead, Ryan finds greater solace in the lips of Shirley, who tells the ballplayer that the team does not feed him well enough and that she is the one best suited to take care of him. Shirley was willing to exchange her assertive *femme fatale* persona for a more domestic role. Thrilled with this turn of events, Ryan encourages his keystone partner O'Brien to pursue Katherine. No longer concerned that he might be stealing his best friend's girl, O'Brien approaches Katherine, and the two share a lingering kiss. However, they remain reluctant to articulate their mutual feelings. The happy players conclude the evening by dancing a lively Irish jig.

With Shirley's sexual aggression now domesticated in a romantic relationship, the gamblers decide to take advantage of O'Brien's love for vaudeville and reputation as a womanizer. The Wolves were dominating the league with

O'Brien leading the team in hitting, and the gamblers did not believe the shortstop would succumb to a monetary bribe. Instead, Joe Lorgan offers the ballplayer the male dancing lead in a new musical production with 30 lovely chorus girls. Rehearsals, however, must commence immediately, and O'Brien begins to burn the candle at both ends. By day he is the shortstop for the championship Wolves, but every night he breaks curfew for dance rehearsals. The gamblers' plan works to perfection as the play of an exhausted O'Brien starts to suffer, and the Wolves fall in the league standings.

Manager Michael Gilhuly misinterprets the reason for O'Brien's faltering play and assumes that the athlete is "love sick." The manager believes that if the team owner would give O'Brien some romantic attention, the athlete would regain his focus. Katherine, who is in love with O'Brien, decides to abandon her neutral business demeanor and employ her feminine charms. She dons an attractive evening gown and over dinner informs O'Brien of her sentiments. O'Brien reciprocates by telling Katherine that she was the prettiest owner in baseball, to which she replied, "And, you're the prettiest shortstop." O'Brien now realizes that with Katherine he does not need a vaudeville show and 30 chorus girls to be happy. The conflict in the film appears resolved as Katherine assumes a more traditional gender role.

Before O'Brien is able to sever his relations with the gamblers, however, Katherine learns the truth about her shortstop's nocturnal activities, and she feels betrayed. Assuming the role of team owner, Katherine dismisses O'Brien from the club for violating curfew. Yet, without O'Brien the Wolves continue to lose, until they are tied by the Indians, forcing a one game play-off. Meanwhile, the fans, in a movement somewhat orchestrated by the shortstop, demand the reinstatement of O'Brien, to which Katherine finally concedes. In his *Baseball Filmography*, Hal Erickson describes Gene Kelly's Eddie O'Brien as one of "the most self-serving, unregenerate heels ever depicted in a film about ballplayers. O'Brien is obviously out for Number One from fade-in to fade-out. His crocodile tears over 'letting the boys down' when his nocturnal rehearsing begins to hurt his game are shed more for his own bruised ego, and when he campaigns for his comeback with the Wolves, he does rely shamelessly on exploiting the affections of his youthful fans."[16]

Nevertheless, O'Brien apologizes to Katherine and returns to his position on the field. Shirley, however, warns Ryan that the gamblers plan to kill O'Brien if he plays in the game. Accordingly, the ever-loyal Ryan, who covered for O'Brien's missed curfews, beans his teammate so that he will not be murdered by the mobsters. When O'Brien regains consciousness in the locker room after being awakened by a kiss from Katherine, he is furious at Ryan for hitting him and charges onto the field. In an improbable finish which defies the rules of baseball as well as physics, Ryan hits a home run. Before

he is able to circle the bases, however, O'Brien grabs a bat and slugs another home run and begins to chase Ryan around the bases. Both men cross home plate and are reunited with their girlfriends, while the Wolves win the pennant and the gamblers are arrested. Everything is in order at the film's conclusion, as independent and capable women are domesticated and tamed through romance.

A concluding musical number unites concerns from the past and present. The four leads are performing a vaudeville act and singing "Strictly USA." The song refers to the character relationships between Ryan and Shirley and Katherine and O'Brien. But the actors move out of character, referring to their real names and careers. The song-and-dance number seems to suggest that the problems of gender roles and a crisis in American masculinity may be reconciled through consensus whether we are living at the turn-of-the-century or the postwar era. In this final musical number celebrating the American way of life, *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* embraces the cultural imperialism of the United States during the Cold War. Film, music, and baseball were all employed in this ideological struggle for world supremacy, but *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* also assumes that the United States of America was a white nation as no people of color are cast in the film which is reflective of the Jim Crow period in which the movie was set.

This irony was largely lost upon critics who were lukewarm at best to the film. Reviews also dismissed *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* as light entertainment, refraining from comment on the film's gender relations. *Time* wrote the movie off as summer box-office fluff, while *Newsweek* concluded that the musical numbers were "only fair," and the film's comedy was "distinguished only by its persistence." Philip T. Hartung was somewhat more complimentary in his commentary for *Commonweal*, writing, "Since this is a musical comedy, it is not to be taken seriously; but unfortunately its director, Busby Berkeley, lets the involved plot get in the way of the fun, and a rather tedious story frequently interrupts the well staged musical numbers." Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* accurately described *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* as a musical rather than a baseball film. The critic admired the work of the movie's four leads, but in the final analysis he could not recommend the film, concluding, "For all its high spots, however, the show lacks consistent style and pace, and the stars are forced to clown and grimace much more than becomes their speed. Actually the plotted humor is conspicuously bush-league stuff. Don't be surprised if you see people getting up for a seventh-inning stretch." Despite the film's less-than-stellar reviews, it was a moderate hit at the box office, earning $3,400,000 in U.S. rentals. The commercial appeal of *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* continued the pairing of Sinatra and Kelly in the far more lucrative *On the Town* (1949).[17]

If critics found it difficult to seriously consider the gender insecurities manifested in a musical comedy such as *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, there could be no ignoring the biographical feature of White Sox pitcher Monty Stratton (James Stewart) in *The Stratton Story*, also released in 1949. Stratton's tale of losing his leg during a hunting accident resonated with veterans from the Second World War dealing with disabilities. *The Stratton Story* also focused upon changing gender relations. While Stratton wallowed in self-pity, it was his wife, Ethel (June Allyson), who picked her husband up and placed him back on the pitching mound. Essentially, *The Stratton Story* and *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* deal with similar themes — how does society tame the independence of the talented Rosie the Riveter and restore her to the home? Unfortunately, the capable K. C. Higgins was not taken as seriously as Ethel Stratton standing by her man.

3

Getting a Leg Up in Postwar America

The Stratton Story (1949)

On 16 March 1949, *The Sporting News* announced that MGM studios would release *The Stratton Story*, a film biography of Monty Stratton who pitched for the Chicago White Sox in the late 1930s before losing a leg in a hunting accident. *The Sporting News* acknowledged that baseball films were usually considered "box-office poison" by Hollywood, but the film industry was re-evaluating this assumption following the success (at least on a commercial level) of *The Babe Ruth Story*.[1]

MGM also hoped to recapture the box-office appeal of Hollywood's most popular baseball offering, *The Pride of the Yankees* (1942), by assigning the film to veteran director Sam Wood. In the film biography of Lou Gehrig, Wood and screenwriter Herman J. Mankiewicz provided a formula which was resurrected in a series of post–World War II baseball biographical films. The gifted athletic hero would face a major obstacle such as disease, poverty, physical disability, racism, alcoholism, or mental illness. After a brief period of self doubt, the hero would regain his dignity and offer an example of courage. And this resurrection was usually accomplished with the support of an adoring spouse. This scenario was most dramatic in the case of Gehrig confronting a disease which robbed him of his life. But certainly the story of Stratton losing a limb during his athletic prime offered similarly moving material.

Physical disability was, unfortunately, a fact of life with which many young men and their families were coping following the Second World War. For example, Harold Russell, who lost both arms in the war, received an Academy Award for his supporting role in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). In his *Baseball Filmography*, Hal Erickson observes, "Like Harold Russell,

Stratton served as an inspiration not only to those filmgoers who'd been similarly maimed but to their families and friends, who found it simpler to adapt to the misfortunes of their loved ones after seeing those misfortunes mirrored and conquered on the big screen."[2]

Monty Stratton (James Stewart) embraces wife Ethel Stratton (June Allyson) as they contemplate the challenge of Monty pitching with one good leg in *The Stratton Story* (1949).

To star in the film, MGM tapped a real Hollywood war hero in James Stewart, who flew combat missions as a B-24 Liberator bomber pilot and was twice awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Supposedly, Van Johnson was the first choice of MGM for the role; however, Stratton and his wife, Ethel, preferred Stewart after watching Johnson's somewhat unconvincing baseball workouts. For the part of Ethel Stratton, June Allyson was selected, assuming the role of supportive spouse to Stewart that she would reprise in *Strategic Air Command* (1955). The rather conventional screenplay of *The Stratton Story* by Douglas Morrow and Guy Trosper garnered an Academy Award, and the film earned over four million dollars in its initial release.[3]

In many ways *The Stratton Story* was anything but a conventional film, as it was made during a period of crisis for the American patriarchy. The Great Depression was a difficult time for American masculinity as males who defined themselves through occupation and workplace were unable to retain or secure employment. Failing to maintain the traditional male role of breadwinner and provider, many men abandoned their families in search of elusive jobs. Meanwhile, women struggled to support their families through such traditional female tasks as sewing, laundry, cleaning, childcare, and cooking. In many ways women emerged from the depression as stronger and more independent than males who were emasculated by the vicissitudes of the 1930s.

Male insecurities were further exacerbated during the Second World War as women were recruited into the industrial workforce to replace males who were being drafted into the military. As men moved back into the labor market following the war, many women did not want to surrender their wartime positions, and there were fears that the country might descend into another depression. In a study of American manhood during the Cold War era, K. A. Cuordileone observes, "The Second World War accelerated multiple cultural, political, and economic currents that made the fear of a 'decline' in manhood especially acute. Aside from ushering in an unprecedented concern with military defense and an uneasy sense of national vulnerability, the war was a catalyst for rapid social and economic change that disrupted sexual and racial relations. The glorification of the family and the revival of domestic ideals after 1945 emerged as a check against an unrestrained (female) sexuality and the rising tide of working women in the 1940s and the 1950s, especially during the war when women poured into the labor force and experienced a relative sense of autonomy." Cuordileone concludes that behind much of the rhetoric regarding restoring traditional gender roles were concerns about the perceived threat of homosexulaity.[4]

The idea that the American male and family were under assault also fits into the post–World War II politics of Hollywood. Believing that Hollywood communists were responsible for films that cast American values, foreign policy, and capitalism in a negative light, while extolling class conflict, Sam Wood led the film industry's assault upon the Hollywood Ten and other alleged leftists. Wood served as president of the ultra-conservative Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals and was an enthusiastic witness before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947. In addition to his baseball films, Wood directed such major pictures as *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1939), *Kitty Foyle* (1940), *Kings Row* (1942), and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1942). But he is perhaps best known today for his conservative politics which were certainly on display in *The Stratton Story*.[5] The baseball picture certainly embraces such traditional American values as hard work, dedication to family, well-defined gender roles, frugality, and social mobility — essentially the principles of Ben Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* and the post–World War II consensus.

Nevertheless, the way in which these ideas are developed in *The Stratton Story* suggests considerable unease with postwar society. For example, Monty appears to exemplify the idea that talent and hard labor will allow one to escape the despair of the depression. The welfare state and New Deal are not necessary. When Monty suffers his accident, thus, there is no state agency to aid in his recovery. He has to be self reliant, yet Monty wallows in self pity and is only able to get back in the game of life and baseball through the inter-

vention of his determined spouse. This suggests considerable insecurity regarding the continuing dominance of the patriarchy through the depression, World War II, and the Cold War. An emasculated Stratton finds himself dependent upon his wife, Ethel, in what some perceived as the "softening" or feminization of American culture often associated with liberalism. Historian K. A. Cuordileone asserts, "Whatever the form or context, the accusation of softness always carried with it the insinuation that liberals lacked sufficient masculine toughness to rise to the occasion of the cold war, and were downright feminine in their New Deal political orientation."[6]

Linked with feminine values was the consensus emphasis upon cooperation rather than conflict as essential for success within the corporate society of post–World War II America. While Ethel helps Monty regain his self confidence, the rugged individualism of nineteenth-century capitalism nearly destroys Monty. The film concludes with Monty's attempt to stage a comeback, pitching with a prosthetic leg. The opposition decides that Monty cannot field his position because he is not mobile with his artificial leg. Accordingly, they employ a strategy of bunting on the former White Sox star. One needs to win the game by any means necessary. But as Peter Biskind observes in *Seeing Is Believing*, such unfettered capitalism and competition was increasingly frowned upon by the postwar consensus. Biskind writes, "If people as solitary individuals were neurotic or sinful (depending on your point of view), if people in mobs — aggregates of solitary individuals — were hysterical and dangerous, membership in groups could be counted on to save themselves, protect them from their own worst instincts. The big picture was a group shot."[7]

Yet baseball as well as capitalism was based upon competition. The postwar consensus, however, focused upon finding the vital center between teamwork and conflict. A more cooperative approach to sustaining economic growth would assure a classless society, preventing another depression and social conflict along class lines. Biskind concludes, "This was the fifties, the decade in which it seemed that the United States had solved most of the basic problems of modern industrial society. The miracle of the economy, the seemingly endless flow of consumer goods, the constant technological innovation, ironically promised to realize Marx's dream of a harmonious, classless society, not in the Soviet Union, but right in the heart of capitalist America. The thirties, in other words, were obsolete, and the political alignments that characterized them had shifted dramatically."[8] Thus, Sam Wood, who characterized himself as an ultra-conservative, was embracing the tenets of the post–World War II liberal consensus. *The Stratton Story* well reflects the insecurities of postwar society that the ostensibly more cooperative values of the consensus would address and resolve. The rugged individualism that had char-

acterized Monty Stratton and American capitalism in an earlier era was not enough to sustain the ballplayer after his accident. Deprived of his ability to support his family through a career in major league baseball, Stratton finds himself an emasculated male who is increasingly dependent upon his wife. The competence and strength of Ethel Stratton cannot be denied, just as the experience of the Great Depression and World War II demonstrated that women were most capable of making a significant contribution to the economy as well as maintaining the family. But somehow this talent and independence must be contained within the consensus and American family. Much like the Puritans who sought to tame what they assumed to be the natural proclivity toward evil of women by making them handmaidens of their husbands, who were the equivalent of a deity within the family, it was imperative that a threatened masculinity maintain its position and status where liberalism and the cooperative values of a more feminized culture were the dominant values.[9] In *The Stratton Story*, Monty and Ethel Stratton struggle to find the equilibrium within their relationship and an economy shifting from the values of competition to cooperation. Nevertheless, the baseball biographical picture, with the exception of *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950), seemed to envision the postwar world as dominated by whiteness.

Thus, *The Stratton Story* begins with homage to the traditional values of hard work in rural white America. Seeking to survive in the small Texas town of Wagner during the early depression years, Monty is pitching semi-professional baseball for three dollars a game. After his baseball duties are completed, Monty walks home nine miles and picks cotton on the family farm. But hard work and talent alone are not enough to rise in American society. It also takes a great deal of luck, and Monty is fortunate to be discovered by baseball scout Barney Wiles (Frank Morgan), who is hoping to find a young prospect who will be his meal ticket back to the big leagues. Wiles implores the young pitcher to accompany him on a journey to California for a tryout with Jimmy Dykes and the Chicago White Sox. Monty, however, asserts that he cannot desert his widowed mother (Agnes Moorehead). In fact, Monty is dominated by his mother who finds baseball frivolous, proclaiming that the only sure thing in life is land. In his dependence upon strong women, Monty appears to exemplify the male weakness and "momism" deplored by Philip Wylie in *Generation of Vipers*. In his 1942 best-selling book, Wylie argued that the male self was in danger of being annihilated by the "destroying mother" intent upon establishing a "matriarchy in fact if not in declaration."[10]

Recognizing the power of Mrs. Stratton over her son, Wiles attempts to gain the confidence of the mother by assisting Monty with the farm chores. Living and working on the Stratton farm, Wiles becomes a missing father figure and even calls Monty "son." With this re-establishment of the patri-

archy, Wiles is able to gain Mrs. Stratton's permission for Monty to accompany him to California. The frugal Mrs. Stratton gives her son five dollars for traveling expenses, and the two men hitchhike to the West Coast. The film appears to embrace the rural values of rugged individualism and self reliance, but Monty only perceives the possibility of social mobility in the city, where he will be dependent upon others, including teammates, for success. Thus, film scholar Gary Dickerson employs the suburban organizational man to describe Stratton, asserting that Monty as a rational male "embraces the traditional, civilized roles of society and knows he must do what is expected of him in order to be a contributing member of society."[11]

Before he is able to assume this mature role, however, the rube struggles in his adjustment to city life. The country boy is shocked by the price of a city haircut, and he is down to his last quarter before he enjoys some success with a slot machine. With his winnings he is able to help a teammate by covering his blind date with Ethel (June Allyson) from Omaha who is in Los Angeles visiting friends. Monty is embarrassed that he lacks such social graces as being able to dance, but Ethel wins his heart by being patient and understanding.[12]

Meanwhile, Stratton is able to impress Jimmy Dykes and the Chicago White Sox, earning a contract with the club which also signs the loyal Wiles as a coach.[13] Initially, Stratton sees little action with the White Sox, and the pitcher, reflecting his strong work ethic, informs Wiles that he feels as if he is stealing money when he receives a paycheck for doing nothing. Reality, however, sets in when Monty faces the New York Yankees and Bill Dickey (portraying himself), who touches the pitcher for a home run. Monty is then sent back to the minor leagues for additional seasoning, but, as luck and a screenplay would have it, the pitcher is assigned to Omaha, the home of his sweetheart, Ethel.

Their romance is rekindled, but Monty insists that marriage must wait until he proves himself on the playing field. In depression-laden America, where the male status of breadwinner is under assault, Monty must first demonstrate that he can support a family. Gary Dickerson argues that Stratton, thus, fits into the Andrew Carnegie model that "a young man should first succeed and then he will receive the best of all possible rewards, a wife. Make no mistake the wife should come after success, not before."[14] After winning six straight starts at Omaha, the parent White Sox call for Stratton's return. Monty is now in position to assert his manhood by marrying Ethel. In the film's next scene, Stratton is once again pitching against the Yankees, but this time Ethel is in the stands, beaming her approval of Monty's performance as he strikes out Dickey to win the game.

Following the season, and the screenplay reduces the 1934–1936 seasons

to one year, Monty takes his new bride to meet his mother. Mrs. Stratton is won over when Ethel embraces farm chores and announces that she and Monty are going to have a baby. Essentially, Monty now has his mother, wife, and child to support. He responds to the pressure by pitching well, although his outing on the day his son is born proves to be a little shaky. Monty, nevertheless, wins 14 games for the White Sox with four shut outs. Jimmy Dykes proclaims that he would not trade Stratton for any other pitcher in the American League. Monty returns to Texas as the leading right-handed pitcher in the league. Again the film compresses time by reducing the 1937 and 1938 seasons into one. Stratton was 15–5 with a 2.40 earned run average in 1937, while the following season he again won 15 games, although Monty's earned run average rose to 4.01.

In *The Stratton Story*, Monty and his family return to the farm for the off-season. A degree of intrigue is introduced when Ethel becomes concerned with Monty's frequent absences. She begins to suspect that he may be involved in an affair. Infidelity, however, is a subject which the baseball biographical picture eschews. The protagonists may have to deal with racism, lack of education, poverty, disability, alcoholism, and even mental illness, but they never betray their devotion to a beloved spouse. Rather than straying from the fold, Monty is secretly taking dancing lessons in order to surprise Ethel. While Monty is learning to be light on his feet, he also stays in touch with his masculine side through hunting. Just as Monty is mastering how to use his feet on the dance floor, he is ironically involved in a hunting accident which leads to the amputation of a leg.

The focal point of the film becomes how Monty will adjust to this crisis, and it is an issue to which Americans who had suffered through the trauma of a depression and world war might well relate. Monty initially wallows in self pity and anger, summarized by Barney Wiles's comment, "He had some innings." He refuses to answer letters of condolence and support from fans. Monty remains inactive and will not use his prosthetic leg. Disengaged from his son's efforts learning to walk, Monty exclaims, "He's got two legs." His frustration boils over when he angrily tosses a baseball through a window.

While Monty wallows in self pity as an emasculated male who is no longer able to assume his traditional masculine role, the women in his life remain strong and resilient, just like their "sisters" during the depression and war years. Ethel informs Mrs. Stratton that Monty has never seen her cry, while Mrs. Stratton reassures her daughter-in-law that Monty has good instincts and will eventually come to his senses. In the meantime, the women cannot detach themselves from Monty, who is dependent upon them. When Monty is stumbling around in the middle of the night, he is comforted by Ethel. Monty embraces his wife, proclaiming, "I got me some gal." Slowly,

Monty comes out of his depression thanks to the encouragement of his wife and mother.

Monty straps on his prosthetic leg and begins to help his son learn to walk. As Monty becomes more comfortable with his artificial limb, Ethel attempts to draw him into baseball. Dressed in masculine attire of blue jeans and a plaid work shirt with her hair in pig tails, Ethel assumes the role of a catcher and asks her husband to throw his best fast ball. Monty winds and fires a pitch, knocking Ethel off her feet. As Monty helps Ethel off the ground, she announces that she is pregnant. Ethel's strength was instrumental in allowing Monty to regain his self confidence, but she cleverly knows when to assume a more traditional role. Monty is no longer an emasculated male. He still has athletic skills, should be able to support his family, and is able to father a child.[15]

The Stratton Story concludes with a 15-minute scene in which Monty publicly affirms his manhood. Although he has not informed Ethel, Monty plans on pitching in a Houston all-star game. In reality, Stratton returned to the mound in the East Texas League during 1946, after a coaching stint with the White Sox. When Barney Wiles informs Ethel of her husband's plans, she rushes to Monty's side. Monty tells her that he is afraid to pitch. Ethel assumes her more assertive persona, insisting that Monty is a ballplayer and cannot quit trying. Inspired by her faith, Monty takes to the mound, and Ethel returns to her more passive role as a spectator cheering for her husband. This is more attuned to the housewife status which she abandoned during Monty's crisis. Monty pitches well, but he falls down when running to first base in pursuit of a base hit. Ethel and the crowd groan, but the gritty Stratton makes a joke about his lack of speed. The next time at bat, Monty gets a hit to give his squad a 2–1 lead. Monty holds this advantage until the ninth inning, and the opposition reluctantly concludes that the only way they can win the game is by bunting as Monty cannot field his position on an artificial leg. While cooperative values are emphasized in the corporate postwar society, the idea of competition still reigns on the ball field even if the game is only an exhibition contest. The inning begins with two-bunt base hits, but Monty is not ready to surrender to the aggressive tactics employed by the opposition. He tells his catcher and manager that he will simply have to get off the mound faster to field his position. When the next batter lays down yet another bunt, Monty is able to throw him out at first base. The other two runners, however, advance to second and third bases. Monty then bears down and records a strikeout for the second out of the inning. The right hander gets the last batter to ground out back to the mound. As he turns to make the throw to first base, he gazes at his "gal" in the stands, acknowledging with a nod and smile the role Ethel has played in Monty's recovery and triumph.

As the film concludes, an omnipresent narrator celebrates Monty's achievement, employing a "voice of God" technique missing from the film until that moment. The narrator asserts, "Monty Stratton has not just won a ballgame. He's won a greater victory as he goes on pitching, winning, and leading a rich full life. He stands as an inspiration to all of us. He's living proof of what a man can do if he has the courage and determination to refuse to admit defeat."[16] If one's knowledge of baseball history were limited to the film, it might be surmised that Monty Stratton was able to recapture his major league career even with the disability of an artificial leg. Instead, Stratton's return to the pitching mound was limited to the lower minor leagues. In 1946, Stratton was 18 and 9 for Sherman of the Class C East Texas League, while the following year he had 7 wins and 7 losses for Waco in the Class B Big State League. Although he did coach at the major league level, Stratton was never able to resurrect his big league career.[17]

The Stratton Story, however, did symbolize the struggles of American manhood during the depression and war years as well as the promise and insecurity of American life in the postwar period. Thus, the film resonated well with film audiences, earning box-office receipts exceeding four million dollars. Critics also celebrated the film. *Newsweek* trumpeted *The Stratton Story* as a "rare achievement, a baseball movie that makes its point on the ball field without sacrificing its validity as a personal drama." Philip T. Hartung in *Commonweal* was even more enthusiastic in his analysis of the film as embracing traditional American values. Describing *The Stratton Story* "as American as blueberry pie," Hartung wrote that Monty Stratton "is straight out of the Alger tradition." Other reviewers focused upon the traditional gender relations depicted by the film. Writing in *The New Republic*, Robert Hatch asserted that June Allyson as Ethel Stratton is "the girl any boy's mother would be happy to welcome into the family even if he did meet her on a blind date."[18]

The Stratton Story was also welcomed by the baseball establishment. Baseball Commissioner, and former United States Senator from Kentucky, Happy Chandler arranged a private screening of the film for his former colleagues in the Senate. *The Sporting News* reprinted favorable reviews of the film from *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Daily Variety*, while the paper's editor, J. G. Taylor Spink, secured an interview with White Sox president Grace Comiskey. She exclaimed to Spink, "How about that terrible blow we suffered when we lost Monty Stratton? He would have been one of the greatest pitchers in American League history. If you haven't seen that movie *The Stratton Story*, don't miss it." Pretty lavish praise, indeed, for a pitcher whose lifetime record was 36–23 with an earned run average of 3.71. In Hollywood, meanwhile, Jimmy Stewart and Luke Appling, representing Monty Stratton, received awards

from the Kiwanis Club's Crippled Children's Hospital for "their inspiration to crippled children."[19]

It is interesting to note, however, that while critics commented upon how the film celebrated the American success ethic and supportive role of women, there was no mention of the fact that the film depicted a white America which certainly reflected the growing suburbanization of America. Nevertheless, Hollywood was aware of the burgeoning civil rights movement and the impact of Jackie Robinson's breaking of baseball's color line. The same week that MGM released *The Stratton Story*, United Artists placed *Home of the Brave* in theaters. In *Home of the Brave*, a black soldier is paralyzed from the racism and guilt he experienced while on a reconnaissance mission in the South Pacific. A white psychiatrist is able to "cure" the soldier by having him confront his fears and insecurities. Film historians Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy dismiss *Home of the Brave* as an integrationist feature in which "blacks should be allowed to enter white society as equals, that is, as white black men."[20] Yet, *Home of the Brave* does examine racial issues, while *The Stratton Story* envisions an America in which everyone is white. With the House Un-American Activities Committee investigating allegations of communist influence in the film industry, social problem films were replaced by ostensibly safer topics such as baseball. The major exception to this trend in the baseball biographical picture was *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950), in which racial integration was placed conservatively within the American consensus.

The Stratton Story, thus, is often perceived as a conservative, or even reactionary, film for its adherence to whiteness and traditional gender roles. For example, in a 2006 obituary for June Allyson in *The New York Times Magazine*, Anthony Giardina argues that Allyson's screen persona was shaped by her performance as Ethel Stratton. Giardina writes, "All of June Allyson's movies in the first decade after the war tell, essentially, the same story. We meet her as a girl ensconced in a large house behind a white picket fence. An ambitious young man, often played by Jimmy Stewart, shows up and sweeps her off her feet." Their life is then one of bliss until a tragedy, such as Monty's accident, befalls them. Giardina concludes, "It is then that the classic Allyson moment happens: a few tears and a pass at weakness before the summoning of pluck, determination, and the willingness to go on."[21]

It is certainly true that most filmgoers remember Allyson in the domestic terms described by Giardina. A closer examination of gender relationships in *The Stratton Story*, however, challenges this interpretation of Allyson as Ethel Stratton. American males had their economic status challenged by the Great Depression and unemployment. This male insecurity was exacerbated during the Second World War as women performed admirably in the workplace and defense industries. Males returning from the war were plagued with fears of

another depression and assertive females who were accustomed to a greater degree of independence during the war years. All of this translated into a sense of malaise in which masculine values of power and control were seemingly under assault from strong women, communists, and homosexuals.

This anxiety is an important element of director Sam Wood's *The Stratton Story*. Monty Stratton is a hard-working farm boy with a talent for throwing a baseball. The country boy moves to the city, but he is lacking in self confidence. Replacing his dominant mother, Ethel becomes Monty's biggest supporter and assumes the traditional roles of housewife and mother. After Monty's hunting accident, however, the athlete descends into anger and depression. The emasculated Monty is unable to provide for his family, but through the love and determination of Ethel, Monty is able to regain his equilibrium and get back in the game of life. Nevertheless, the restored gender balance is an uneasy one as film viewers know that Ethel is really the stronger partner in the marriage. Masculinity was in crisis following the Second World War, and Ethel Stratton did not necessarily ease the concerns of many organizational men who were considered "soft."

The issues of emasculation were certainly not amusing to Americans in the postwar years, yet in the 1980s the story of Monty Stratton was the source of some comedy to fans of filmmaker Woody Allen. In *Radio Days* (1987), Allen provides a spoof of the hyperbole employed by 1940s sports announcer Bill Stern describing the exploits of Monty Stratton. In the film, "Bill Kerns" praises a ballplayer who "loses an arm, a leg, and finally his sight, but keeps on playing because he has heart." Even after death, Kerns's hero goes on to "win eighteen games in the big league in the sky."[22] But such issues were more disturbing for Americans following the Second World War. American males were insecure and the patriarchy seemed unstable. The effort of *The Stratton Story* to restore traditional gender relationships was only partially reassuring. The emerging post–World War II consensus was threatened by both restless and assertive racial minorities as well as strong women. In *The Jackie Robinson Story*, the baseball biographical film was used to champion racial progress in America and brand as unpatriotic those attacking the nation for its racist history and practices.

4

The American Dream in Service of the Cold War and Civil Rights Movement

The Jackie Robinson Story (1950)

The Stratton Story (1949) resonated with post–World War II viewers insecure about acceptance of war-related disabilities as well as evolving gender roles. Its box-office appeal fostered further Hollywood studio features such as the baseball biographical films *The Winning Team* (1952) and *The Pride of St. Louis* (1952). These features also focused upon the capacity of strong women to aid their athlete husbands in dealing with alcoholism, disease, and lack of education. Nevertheless, these baseball films failed to directly address two cornerstones of the post–World War II consensus: anticommunism and a belief that sustained economic growth would alleviate concerns regarding racial and class inequality in the United States. According to the consensus, there was no reason for protest against an expansive and benevolent capitalism, whose only real threat was found in the Soviet Union and spread of international communism. In 1950, *The Jackie Robinson Story*, featuring Robinson portraying himself, depicted the African American ballplayer as embodying the twin pillars of the consensus ideology.

In the ideological Cold War between the Soviet Union and United States, the two superpowers sought to gain influence within the so-called Third World or former European colonies largely populated by people of color. The Soviets were often able to score propaganda points by focusing upon the treatment of black Americans in a segregated society. Thus, the story of Jackie Robinson and the integration of major league baseball offered an opportunity to refute Soviet propaganda, illustrating that the American dream was within reach of all American citizens and that the promise of Thomas Jefferson's

Jackie Robinson testifies before the House Un-American Activities Committee, challenging the assertion of Paul Robeson that black Americans were not willing to defend the United States in *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950).

Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal" remained an essential element of the American creed. *The Jackie Robinson Story* opens with Robinson as a young boy walking down a road, while a narrator proclaims, "This is the story of an American boy, and a dream that is truly American." Thus, Robinson is portrayed in the Horatio Alger mold of an American success story in which the hero gains fame and fortune through hard work and perseverance. While there are bigots along the way, the liberal establishment, in the person of Branch Rickey (Minor Watson), helps pave the way for a peaceful racial integration and reconciliation.[1]

The film's conclusion adds an element of anticommunism to the mix by focusing upon Robinson's 1949 testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). At the urging of Rickey, who was a staunch anticommunist Republican, Robinson agreed to appear as a witness to refute the statement by entertainer and former All-American football player Paul Robeson that African Americans were not prepared to defend a racist society and nation during the Cold War. In an effort to reassure white Americans,

Jackie Robinson enters the all-white locker room of the Brooklyn Dodgers in *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950).

Robinson appeared before Congress, insisting, "Democracy works for those who are willing to fight for it, and I'm sure it's worth defending.... I'm certain that I and other Americans of many races and faiths have too much invested in our country's welfare to throw it away or to let it be taken from us."[2]

In the final scene of the film, Robinson embraces the consensus and is used as a symbol to convince African Americans that radical change has no place in post–World War II America. Although Robinson later expressed misgivings regarding his HUAC testimony, Gary Dickerson argues that in his film autobiography, Robinson "was depicted as a man who was thankful for the American status quo. Without the help of the men in power and in control of the game of baseball, he would never have had an opportunity to succeed." Dickerson concludes, "Throughout the film he works within 'the system' to achieve his success." In a similar vein, Howard Good extols the consensus ideology of *The Jackie Robinson Story*, writing, "His success brings Americans of different colors and creeds together. Let Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth heal the lame; he heals an entire nation." Rob Edelman agrees, suggesting that in

The Jackie Robinson Story, the great ballplayer fails to display his intensity and is presented "as nothing short of a candidate for sainthood," while the film is "overloaded with fair-minded white men."[3]

Nevertheless, in the post–World War II period, Hollywood was beginning to move away from simplistic racial stereotypes and address the nation's race relations. In the year before the release of *The Jackie Robinson Story*, films such as *Home of the Brave*, *Pinky*, and *Intruder in the Dust* demonstrated the industry's willingness to address the issue of race. These social problem films tend to emphasize that American society was sound in its adherence to the nation's democratic principles of equal opportunity and fair play, but bigots sought to undermine these principles with their social prejudice and discrimination. American society was not in need of fundamental change, however, as racist malcontents were maladjusted individuals whom the therapeutic state and good liberals would have to educate and change. These films were integrationist in nature. In their history of the social problem film, Jim Purdy and Peter Roffman argue that in these consensus integrationist works, "Blacks should be allowed to enter white society as equals, that is, as white black men. The barriers to integration are found in blacks, with their inferiority complexes, and some whites with their patronizing view of blacks." In films such as *No Way Out* (1950), Sidney Poitier became the prototype for the noble black man who "endures and patiently waits for white society to recognize his rights rather than go out and demand those rights. To be too insistent would only threaten white society and thereby prolong social inequality."[4] The Poitier character is exactly the model which Branch Rickey expected Robinson to assume while ignoring the entrenched power of institutional racism.

Of course, the racial reality of post–World War II America was far more complex than *The Jackie Robinson Story* suggests, and even the social problem film was abandoned for more escapist entertainment under the conformist pressures of HUAC and the Hollywood blacklist. During the Second World War black employment opportunities increased in defense industries, and many Southern blacks moved northward in another great migration. While racial wage discrepancies persisted, the war provided an economic foundation for black Americans to challenge segregation in the postwar period. Historian William Chafe asserts, "Simultaneous with new exposure to travel, the prospect of better jobs, and higher expectations came the reality of day-to-day contact with Jim Crow in the Armed Forces, housing, and on the job. The juxtaposition could not help but spawn anger and frustration. The possibility of some improvement generated the expectation for still more, and when those expectations were dashed, a rising tide of protest resulted."[5]

After making sacrifices for the nation in defense industries and the mil-

itary, black Americans did not share equally in the postwar affluence. The growth of middle-class home ownership in the suburbs was fostered by government programs such as the G.I. Bill and Federal Housing Administration (FHA). The policies of the FHA, in conjunction with the real estate and banking industries, were discriminatory toward African Americans, denying loans to qualified blacks and creating white suburbs. With the government-financed exodus of the white middle class, the tax base for urban centers eroded. In his study of resistance to the post–World War II consensus, Robert J. Corber writes, "FHA programs hastened the decline of the inner cities and reinforced the racial and class segregation of the suburbs, the consequences of which did not become fully apparent until the urban uprisings of the sixties and seventies."[6] These contradictions, of course, were ignored by *The Jackie Robinson Story* which in its rush to embrace the consensus failed to acknowledge the racial and class issues of postwar America.

The simplistic rendering of the complex realities of the 1940s and 1950s in *The Jackie Robinson Story*, nevertheless, should not detract from the courage and significance of Robinson's struggle to integrate major league baseball. The color line in professional baseball was established during the Jim Crow era of the 1880s after catcher Moses Fleetwood Walker was released by the International League. Walker's biographer David Zang argues, "Walker and Robinson had some common experiences, but while Robinson played at a time when the historical tide was carrying society toward integration, Walker stood as a nearly solitary figure attempting to play ball as an ebb tide swept away popular support for racial equality." Robinson as a symbol of the changing times and promise of American life after the Second World War is acknowledged by Richard O. Davies, who asserts that the ballplayer "epitomized the struggle of all black Americans to achieve fundamental rights within a nation whose laws and customs were still discriminatory." America and its sporting culture would never be the same after Robinson signed with the Dodgers in October 1945. The late Jules Tygiel refers to the Rickey and Robinson collaboration as "baseball's great experiment." Writing in 1983, Tygiel argues, "In the three and a half decades since Robison and Rickey eliminated baseball's color line, the elements that contributed to the desegregation of baseball — direct confrontation and personal courage, economic pressures, and moral persuasion by the mass media — have been re-created in many other areas of American life.… And if the vision of an integrated and equal society, free from racism and discrimination, which impelled Rickey and Robinson to launch their 'great experiment,' remains unfulfilled, their efforts have brought it closer to reality." In 1997, fifty years after Robinson took the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers, major league baseball retired Robinson's number 42, and Long Island University sponsored a three-day popular and academic symposium on Jackie

Robinson entitled "Race, Sports, and the American Dream." In their introduction to the conference proceedings, Joseph Dorinson and Joram Warmund proclaim of Robinson, "On his massive shoulders and his bowed but muscular legs, Brooklyn, as a microcosm of America, achieved an apotheosis. Transcending personal gain or glory, Jackie Robinson acted as a great catalyst in a noble experiment that had to succeed. His triumph translated into America's as well."[7]

The fact that Jackie Robinson transcended baseball in his importance to American history and culture was apparent in 1950, only three years after he entered major league baseball. During his initial 1947 season, Robinson batted .297 with 29 stolen bases and was selected as National League Rookie of the Year. With the addition of Robinson to their lineup, the Brooklyn Dodgers won the 1947 National League pennant and battled the Yankees in a seven-game World Series in which the powerful New York City franchise prevailed. Robinson certainly did not suffer from a sophomore slump in 1948, batting .296 with 22 steals, although as a club the Dodgers fell to third place behind the St. Louis Cardinals and the surprising Boston Braves. The Dodgers rebounded in 1949, again capturing the National League flag behind the exploits of Robinson who led the league in hitting with a .342 average and 37 steals. Robinson's achievement was acknowledged with his selection as the National League's Most Valuable Player. Although the Yankees again subdued the Dodgers in the 1949 World Series, Robinson was prepared to take advantage of his reputation as a fine athlete following the season. The quiet dignity which Robinson expressed in dealing with racial taunts also impressed many whites, and Robinson biographer Arnold Rampersad describes the ballplayer's endorsement of products such as a line of men's slacks, the breakfast cereal Wheaties, and Chesterfield cigarettes (although Robinson was never a fan of smoking). He also hired Martin Stone, a Yale School of Law graduate and early television pioneer who was involved with *The Howdy Doody Show*, as his financial advisor.[8]

One of Stone's first tasks was to take advantage of Hollywood interest in a Robinson film. Stone purchased the rights to Jackie Robinson's *My Own Story*, written with African American reporter Wendell Smith and released by the small New York publisher, Greenberg, in 1948. According to Stone, the deal Robinson signed with Greenberg was disadvantageous for the ballplayer. In the fall of 1949, Hollywood enthusiasm for the Robinson story peaked following the athlete's Most Valuable Player season and testimony before HUAC, along with the film industry's foray into the social problem film. Producer William J. Heineman of the Eagle-Lion Studio, however, was only able to secure $300,000 for the project, which assured that *The Jackie Robinson Story* would be a low-budget film. The production called for a 30-day shooting

schedule, beginning in February 1950 and finishing by early March, so that Robinson could report to spring training. The filmmakers also hoped to take advantage of box-office interest in the new baseball season.

But the film was almost killed by Branch Rickey before the project got off the ground. Rickey was dissatisfied with the script provided by screenwriter Lawrence Taylor, assigning his assistant Arthur Mann to oversee the production. Mann, who entertained reporters with his impressions of Rickey, initially expressed interest in portraying his boss in the film, but Rickey quickly nixed the idea and announced his satisfaction with the casting of veteran character actor Minor Watson. The Dodger executive primarily wanted Mann to assure that the baseball establishment was not portrayed negatively in the film. According to biographer Lee Lowenfish, Rickey never publicly criticized the segregationist sentiments of key baseball figures such as Connie Mack, the legendary owner and manager of the Philadelphia Athletics. Thus, Lowenfish concludes, "Rickey took pains to make sure baseball's initial foes of integration wouldn't be caricatured in the movie."[9]

Although the 1950 season would mark the end of the three-year moratorium that Rickey placed upon Robinson for not responding directly to racial slurs, the Dodger executive did not want the film to have any type of militant edge. Rather than revolutionary, Rickey perceived the civil rights movement as an evolutionary struggle guided by conservative businessmen such as himself who believed in such basic American principles as equality of opportunity. Arnold Rampersad, accordingly, maintained that for *The Jackie Robinson Story*, "Baseball would be integral to the story, and Robinson at its center, but ultimately it would be about the triumph of democracy and of Americans of goodwill, including both Robinson and Rickey." Arthur Mann, well representing the views of Rickey, insisted that Robinson's saga be placed within the traditional rags-to-riches mythology of the self-made man. Thus, the film, as did a 1946 piece on Robinson by Mann in *Collier's*, celebrated the athlete's work ethic as a young man, shining shoes and delivering papers to accumulate money for education, while ignoring Robinson's brief brushes with the law as part of a youth gang.[10]

The low-budget film project, however, was able to attract some talent. *The Jackie Robinson Story* was directed by Alfred E. Green, whose work on *The Jolson Story* (1946) was well received in the industry. And upcoming young actress Ruby Dee was tapped to portray Jackie's wife, Rachel. As an inexperienced actor, Robinson was often embarrassed in some of his romantic scenes with Dee, but he appeared to relax a bit when Rachel and the couple's two young children visited the film set in California. Dee was complimentary to both Jackie and Rachel, asserting that the ballplayer was "at ease with his fame and with his performance," while Rachel was "a stronger person than I

portrayed." Dee, however, was more conflicted regarding Robinson's cooperation with HUAC. Along with her husband, Ossie Davis, Dee was an active participant in the civil rights movement and opposed the Hollywood blacklist, but she did understand the difficult circumstance in which the ballplayer was placed. Speaking of Robinson and the domestic Cold War, Dee observed, "People got caught in the dilemma in different ways. Because being black, you just don't know what a challenge that is. You had to do many things to survive."[11]

Others in the production praised Robinson, who was essentially comfortable with his performance. Director Alfred E. Green found the ballplayer to be a cooperative performer with a certain natural ease. Renowned actor John Barrymore, Jr., who was visiting the set, asserted that the athlete needed no acting tips, quipping, "He could teach me!" Robinson also earned accolades for his loyalty, insisting that old friends such as former UCLA football star Kenny Washington be assigned a role. Robinson told reporters that the constant repetition of filmmaking was tiresome, proclaiming, "I never had any spring training in which I worked any harder." Writing in his autobiography two decades later, Robinson was somewhat more realistic in his appraisal of the film, observing, "It was exciting to participate in it. But later I realized it had been made too quickly, that it was budgeted too low, and that, if it had been made later in my career, it could have been done much better."[12]

Nevertheless, the financially strapped picture performed well at the box office, and Robinson generally earned praise from most film critics. Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* applauded Robinson's film work, writing, "The magnificent athlete conducts himself with dignity, speaks his lines well and clearly and faces the camera squarely, with neither shyness nor conceit." But the critic recognized that the real appeal of the film was its traditional story of the American dream in which racial prejudice had no place. Thus, Crowther concludes that *The Jackie Robinson Story* was "a frank and familiar perusal of the old pluck-and-luck routine, with the hero making a grand-slam off Jim Crow in the ninth." Other reviews echoed similar sentiments. *Newsweek* observed that *The Jackie Robinson Story* follows the typical baseball cinema formula of "poor-boy-makes-good," but the review argued, "It is a great more significant than that in its frank, quietly realistic presentation of the Jim Crow antagonisms that are carried over even into the field of sports." In *Commonweal*, Robinson's acting earned accolades, and the positive message of the film was celebrated with the observation that "while there was bigotry in the nation, viewers could cheer others, including Robinson and the makes of this movie, for their courageous fight against prejudice." The *Christian Century* also found the message that Americans were confronting racism and putting it behind them to be a comforting tonic for contemporary difficulties.

The religious publication concluded that *The Jackie Robinson Story* stressed the "overcoming of racial discrimination by the sterling character and good sense of Robinson, courageous management by Rickey, and demonstration of will to 'turn the other cheek.'"[13]

These reviews clearly placed *The Jackie Robinson Story* within the ideology of the post–World War II liberal consensus. Indeed, there were problems of racial prejudice, but these irrational impulses could be tamed through sustained economic growth, undermining the fears that fueled hatred and discrimination. Thus, black Americans confronting Jim Crow should not succumb to the siren song of communism and class conflict. Instead, the application of reason, capitalistic expansion, and the growth of a pluralistic society, devoid of ideology, in which diverse interest groups could compete on an equal basis for their fair share of the American dream, would bring the bigots into the consensus which harbored no room for irrational behavior such as racism.[14]

This is the concept of consensus so warmly embraced by Branch Rickey and *The Jackie Robinson Story*. The film begins with Robinson as a young boy in 1928. As the lad trudges down the road, a narrator reminds viewers that this is truly the story of an American boy and his dreams. Of course, the young man just happens to be black during the 1920s when the Ku Klux Klan enjoyed its greatest influence in national life. But *The Jackie Robinson Story* is all about overcoming such prejudice as black Americans find their place in the consensus. The black lad approaches a group of whites playing baseball. The coaches are hitting balls to the boys, and even though he does not have a baseball glove, young Jackie Robinson (Howard Louis MacNeely) asks the coach to hit him a hard one. While many of the white kids are struggling to catch the hard-hit balls while using fielder mitts, Jackie handles them flawlessly employing only his bare hands. The coaches are impressed and give the youth an old dilapidated glove, and Jackie is thrilled. He rushes home to share his good fortune with his mother (Louise Beavers), who agrees to sew Jackie's glove as well as the pants he tore while playing ball.

This opening scene introduces several points which will be crucial to the ideology of the film. First, the story begins in 1928, with Robinson residing in Los Angeles. Omitted is any reference to Jackie's Southern background. Robinson was born on 31 January 1919 in Cairo, Georgia. His father was a sharecropper who deserted the family when Robinson was only six months old. The Robinson family became part of the Great Migration in which many Southern blacks sought economic opportunities in the North and West. The Robinson family moved to Pasadena, California, settling in a predominantly white neighborhood which did not accept the black migrants with open arms. His mother supported Jackie, his sisters, and older brother Mack by accepting

employment as a domestic. By ignoring the Southern origins of Robinson, *The Jackie Robinson Story* does not offend the region by raising questions regarding sharecropping and Jim Crow. After all, it was important that the South be integrated into the postwar consensus rather than ostracized. While the film never comments upon what happened to Jackie's father, it is interesting to note that throughout the film, Jackie enjoys the privilege of white surrogate fathers. The white coaches give Jackie his first glove, an honor usually bestowed by a father playing catch with his son. The essential white patriarch, of course, is Branch Rickey, who became a father figure for the athlete, forging a close relationship which transcended Robinson's playing days. The film also never precisely explains how Jackie's mother supports the family. She always seems to be home, fitting into the stereotypical housewife of consensus ideology. Nevertheless, *The Jackie Robinson Story* deserves praise for providing Louise Beavers with a positive characterization, moving beyond the "mammy" roles which she was often assigned.

The next montage segment establishes Jackie's Horatio Alger and self-made man credentials. He is not too proud to shine shoes and deliver newspapers. The hard work culminates in Jackie entering Pasadena Junior College, where he achieved junior college All-American honors in football. Jackie is recruited by UCLA, and the film audience is treated to an incredibly wooden acting performance by the school's athletic director William "Bill" Spaulding, portraying himself. Spaulding asserts that the college does not care whether Robinson is colored as long as he is clean cut and carries a B average. Then several scenes develop Robinson as a college athlete excelling in both basketball and football. Ironically, baseball was Robinson's worst college sport, although the basketball scene where Robinson's stomach protrudes over his shorts does suggest the struggles which the athlete often experienced with his weight.

The film focuses its college segment on football, and the audience is introduced to Jackie's brother Mack (Joel Fluellen) in the grandstand. Although Jackie is being pounded by his opponents, his white teammates support Robinson, admiring his toughness and work ethic. Meanwhile, Mack is attending the game with Jackie's girlfriend, Rae. The bleachers are integrated, and Mack begins a conversation with a man who ran track against the elder Robinson brother during his college days at Oregon. Mack is clearly embarrassed when the man asks him what Mack currently does for a living. Later that evening, when Jackie brings Mack a sandwich, it is revealed that the former athlete, a college graduate who finished second to Jesse Owens in the 200-meters at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, works as a street sweeper. Yet Mack refuses to complain, asserting that while he does not have a good job, at least it is steady work. This is one of the most powerful scenes in the film for suggesting the level of economic and racial inequality in the United States.

It also reminds viewers of the discrimination faced in the 1930s by such famous black athletes as Jesse Owens and Joe Louis. Nevertheless, the message of the film is that such discrimination should not produce anger or resentment. Instead, it is important to retain one's work ethic and belief in the system.[15]

Jackie, however, is discouraged by Mack's experience, but at the same time he wants to marry Rae and find a job. Accordingly, he drops out of school and pursues a coaching position. But Jackie only receives numerous rejection letters. Although not overtly stated in the film, it is assumed that racial prejudice is the motivation for many of these rejections. Jackie, however, does receive a letter from President Franklin Roosevelt conscripting him into the military. There is certainly no discussion of Malcolm X's assertion that World War II was a white man's war. Despite the institutional and overt racism of a segregated military during the Second World War, Robinson joined the war effort and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant. While stationed in Texas, Robinson challenged segregation practices and refused to move to the back of a military bus. Robinson faced a court martial, but he was acquitted by a military jury and received an honorable discharge. This incident in the athlete's life was not mentioned in *The Jackie Robinson Story*, although in the 1990s the military trial served as the basis for a television film on the Turner Network with Andre Braugher in the title role. Emphasizing this more assertive side of Robinson's character was incongruent with the image of the athlete fostered by *The Jackie Robinson Story*. Jackie was to be depicted as the "noble Negro" in the Sidney Poitier fashion rather than as a civil rights activist challenging the consensus.[16]

When Robinson returns from the military, he faces the problem of finding employment in the postwar era. He has neither finished college nor been able to find a coaching position, so he leaps at an opportunity to play in the segregated Negro Leagues with the Black Panthers. The irony of this 1960s symbol of black power and resistance in a film embracing consensus values is not lost upon contemporary audiences, but Robinson's real Negro League career with the Kansas City Monarchs is omitted due to litigation and hard feelings by Negro League representatives who resented Rickey's failure to compensate the Monarchs for Robinson's contract. One can certainly see Rickey's hand in the depiction of the Negro Leagues as characterized by clowning, pranksters, and unsound business practices which led to unscrupulous exploitation of players. Although other owners such as Bill Veeck of the Cleveland Indians followed a policy of compensation toward the Negro Leagues in the signing of black players, Rickey biographer Lee Lowenfish asserts that the Dodger executive was not being hypocritical when he "denounced the existing Negro American and Negro National Leagues as 'organizations in the zone of a racket.' He decried their lack of formal contracts with the players," Lowenfish writes,

"and the absence of a reserve clause that bound players to their teams and forced them to honor their obligations to perform." The puritanical Rickey was especially appalled by Negro League owner William "Gus" Greenlee of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, whose baseball ventures were financed by the numbers racket in Pittsburgh. In his study of the Negro Leagues, Neil Lanctot paints a more complicated picture of black baseball than that presented by Rickey. Lanctot depicts the Negro Leagues as important black businesses during segregation which failed to survive the transition to a more integrated society. According to Lanctot, "Providing entertainment for thousands of fans throughout the country, baseball functioned as a critical component of the separate economy catering to black consumers in the urban centers of the north and south. While most black businesses struggled to survive from year to year, professional teams and leagues operated for several decades, representing a major achievement in black enterprise and institution building." Nonetheless, Lanctot acknowledges that the tendency of Negro League teams, such as the Kansas City Monarchs, to rely upon informal agreements with players "underscored black baseball's age-old failure to require standardized contracts of all teams and to address the issue during the war."[17]

While the depiction of the Negro Leagues presented in *The Jackie Robinson Story* is told from Rickey's perspective and presents somewhat of a negative image, the film does include a scene which underscores the racial prejudice confronted by the Negro League players. The Black Panthers are on a bus on a late night barnstorming tour. The bus stops for food, and as a rookie, Jackie is assigned to inquire whether the eating establishment will serve Negroes. Robinson is informed that the cook is willing to prepare sandwiches which the players may eat on the bus — but they are not welcome to eat in the restaurant or use the wash room. This painful scene also certainly reflects one of Rickey's favorite stories. As a college coach at Ohio Wesleyan in 1903, Rickey brought his team to South Bend, Indiana, where black player Charles Thomas was denied lodging. An indignant Rickey brought Thomas to his room, refusing to accept segregated housing for his first baseman. Nevertheless, Thomas was distraught, attempting to rub off his black skin. Rickey never forgot this injustice, proclaiming, "Whatever mark that incident left on the black boy, it was no more indelible than the impressions made on me. For forty years, I've had recurrent visions of his wiping off his skin."[18] Cast as a hero, Rickey vowed to correct such discrimination if presented with the opportunity.

Thus, after the Second World War, Rickey moved to integrate the Brooklyn Dodgers and major league baseball by signing the first black player since Fleetwood Walker was driven out of baseball in the 1880s. Rickey's motivation included elements of self interest. He would be able to tap a new source of inexpensive talent from the Negro Leagues, while at the same time the con-

servative businessman was a sincere opponent of racial discrimination who believed in integration. In *The Jackie Robinson Story,* racial reconciliation is controlled by the benevolent paternalism of Branch Rickey. The film ignores the grass roots nature of the civil rights movement in sport and society. In *The Unlevel Playing Field*, David K. Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller observe, "It was African-American activists more than anyone else who initiated the erasure of the color line in sport." Thus, Rickey often expressed consternation at the campaigns of black sportswriters, such as Wendell Smith of the *Pittsburgh Courier* and Sam Lacy of the *Baltimore Afro-American*, to bring about the shattering of baseball's color line through boycotts and picketing. Even more offensive to the staunch anticommunist Brooklyn executive were integrationist pressures brought to bear upon Organized Baseball by the Communist Party. Lester Rodney, sports editor for the Communist Party *Daily Worker*, was an articulate voice against baseball's racial policies, calling for direct action and protest to place pressure upon Organized Baseball. In describing the baseball initiatives by the Communist Party, Jules Tygiel writes, "The communists did not confine their campaign to newspaper rhetoric but challenged the baseball executives with political actions and direct confrontations as well. Delegations to major league teams demanded tryouts for black players. Petition drives collected signatures to protest discrimination. Elected officials from the Communist and American Labor parties continually pressed the issue." Rickey insisted that these communist activities were counterproductive and delayed integration by associating civil rights with radicalism. Tygiel, however, disputes Rickey's dismissal of grass roots pressure, observing, "Nonetheless, the success of the communists in forcing the issue before the American public far outweighed the negative ramifications of their sponsorship."[19]

The Jackie Robinson Story eschews this political agitation, and change comes from above, through Rickey and the Dodgers. Similar to the gift of Jackie's first baseball glove, through his talent, character, and hard work, the ballplayer is again the recipient of white acceptance and generosity. After a game with the Black Panthers, Jackie is approached by a white man identifying himself as Dodger scout Clyde Sukeforth (Billy Wayne). The baseball player initially dismisses this overture as some type of prank or joke, but when the scout awakens Jackie early the next morning to board a train for New York City, Robinson recognizes that this is really a summons to meet the great Rickey. Although not considered in the film, Robinson had every reason to be wary. After all, Robinson, Sam Jethroe, and Marvin Williams were subjected to a sham 1945 tryout by the Red Sox in response to pressure from Boston councilman Isadore Muchnick.

The meeting between Robinson and Rickey as witnessed by Sukeforth

becomes the pivotal scene of the film. Punctuating his points with a cigar, Rickey begins his interrogation of the quiet, dignified Robinson by informing him that scouting the athlete for Rickey's Negro League club the Brown Dodgers was merely a ruse. Rickey wants Robinson for the Brooklyn Dodgers. The first question that Rickey asks Robinson is whether the ballplayer is married. Jackie acknowledges that he does have a girl, Rae, who is studying for nursing school. The crusty Rickey then insists that Robinson marry the girl as the ballplayer will require the support of a wife. Although Rickey was certainly an advocate for marriage and the traditional family, unspoken here is concern that Robinson not violate the racial taboo of associating with white women. Rickey also proclaims to Robinson that he was a businessman who wants to win baseball games, and he is relieved to learn that the athlete does not have a formal contract with his Negro League club. Rickey then moves on to the rhetoric of equal opportunity and the American dream, asserting that a box score reflects a game and nation based upon the democratic concept of merit, in which race, creed, and color do not matter. Acknowledging that Robinson will face racial slurs and physical intimidation, Rickey concludes that he is looking for a man with the courage not to fight back. Ricky maintains, "I want a man in there for everything he's got. But you'll have to take it — not fight back — and yet, do it so that somehow it's no discredit to you — so that somehow the crowd will sense it's not cowardice that is stopping you but something deeper." Robinson assures Rickey that he can turn the other cheek, and the executive pledges that Robinson will only need to hold back three years in order to protect the experiment and pave the way for other black athletes. Robinson and Rickey seal the deal with a handshake, and the Dodger president expresses his understanding of the risk that Robinson was taking. Ever the loyal organization man, Sukeforth interjects that it might take more courage for the Dodgers and Rickey to challenge baseball's entrenched color line.[20]

A dutiful son, Robinson asks permission to call his mother in California, seeking her approval before joining the Dodgers. Jackie's mother suggests that he should obtain religious guidance, embracing yet another core principle of the postwar consensus. Robinson goes to visit a Harlem minister who asserts that the athlete must take on this challenge for his race but the ballplayer should always remember that God will help him. In the final version of the film, this conversation takes place in a church rectory, but in the script draft the dialogue occurs as Jackie and the minister stroll through Harlem. Although perhaps cut due to financial considerations, the inclusion of the scene as written would have placed Jackie within a black milieu which is missing from the film. The draft script reads, "We see Harlem at night and get the feeling of humanity so congested, and sometimes suppressed, that it overruns its bound-

aries both physically and emotionally. Yet there is also the music and laughter of Harlem, and the spirit of a people not to be overcome. Song and violence, rowdy kids and sober elders, church and saloon, and always the streets crowded, the buildings giving an appearance of being stuffed." This scene would have embraced black culture and moved beyond the white hegemony of Rickey and the postwar consensus.[21]

Following his meeting with the minister, Robinson proposes to Rae, and the two newlyweds are off to spring training in Florida with the Montreal Royals, the Dodger farm club in the International League to which Robinson was assigned. Jackie and Rae ride in the back of a commercial bus and are met at the training camp by a black businessman who informs the couple that they will be staying with him rather than at the team lodgings. In addition, an exhibition game is canceled as Robinson's presence on the field violates segregationist statutes. These scenes certainly demonstrate the impact of Southern segregation upon spring training, but they fail to fully develop the hardships experienced by Jackie and Rae. For example, when Rae expresses her fear that Jackie might be hurt for integrating the game, her black Southern host reassures Rae that most of the violent threats are simply talk and not to be taken seriously. This bit of consensus reassurance, however, tends to dismiss the history of lynching in the American South.[22]

Robinson begins the 1946 season at Montreal, facing discrimination from his teammates, opponents, and bigoted fans. For example, Robinson's Montreal manager is Southern-born Clay Hopper (Richard Lane), who insists, like many others in the film, in calling Robinson "boy" and asks Rickey whether his new player is really "a human being." International League president Frank Shaughnessy (Harry Shannon) begs Rickey to cancel his experiment, but the Dodger executive lectures Shaughnessy on the principles of democracy and fair play represented by baseball. But the primary focus in this part of the film is upon the racial hatred that Robinson experiences from hostile opponents and fans. Jackie is spiked at second base, while opposing players mock Jackie by eating watermelon, asking him to shine their shoes, and using derogatory racial slurs such as "nigger lips"—although the word "nigger" is used sparingly in the film, suggesting that such bigoted language is outside of the consensus. Antagonistic fans place a black cat on the field, but rather than causing an altercation, Jackie cares for the abandoned animal. In addition, there is a group of white men in the stands, ostensibly members of the Ku Klux Klan, who plan to assault Jackie after a game. When they corner Jackie outside of the club's dressing room, the ballplayer is rescued by his teammates while "America the Beautiful" plays in the background. A nation that stood up to intolerance and welcomed Robinson into the consensus was worth celebrating.

As the 1947 season dawns, Rickey is prepared to promote Robinson to the parent club. One of Robinson's biggest boosters is now Clyde Hopper, who was won over by Robinson's quiet dignity and stellar play, which included the 1946 International League batting title. But there is a rebellion among Dodger players who do not want the racial pioneer as a teammate. Rickey meets with the recalcitrant players and quashes the revolt. In reality, this insurrection was put down by Dodger manager Leo Durocher before he was suspended for the 1947 season by Baseball commissioner A. B. "Happy" Chandler for associating with gamblers. The film uses fictitious names and identities for the rebellious players. Ricky accosts one player about his parents who immigrated to the United States from Italy. Employing the rhetoric of the American melting pot, the Brooklyn executive reminds the Italian-American player about how his parents struggled to achieve the American dream, and now he wants to deny that same opportunity to a hard-working black athlete. Rickey asks whether he is really an American, and the contrite player asks for Mr. Rickey's forgiveness. Karpen (Pat Flaherty), a Dodger pitcher, remains a holdout, and Rickey informs him that a trade will be arranged. There is no room in the Brooklyn consensus for Karpen. And, indeed, with its diversity, Brooklyn appears to be an excellent model for the pluralism preached by the consensus.[23]

After suppressing the revolt, Rickey gives Robinson a first baseman's mitt, asserting that although the athlete has never played the position, he must learn to do so for the good of the team. Robinson agrees, earning the respect of his teammates, including Karpen, who supports Jackie when an opposing player attempts to start an altercation. In the symbol of the glove, the film's introductory and concluding segments are connected. One may interpret this as the white man bestowing the gift of inclusion upon Robinson, but in the language of the consensus, Robinson is deserving because he has embraced the American dream rather than attempting to challenge the system. The film does little with Robinson's first three seasons with the Dodgers. A montage shows Robinson succeeding on the field, gaining the respect of fans and teammates. Most of the bigoted opposition to Robinson was featured during his 1946 season, although one of the reasons Robinson was originally assigned to Montreal was the city's reputation for tolerance. The failure of the film to depict the racism dished out by major league clubs and cities, such as the prejudiced antics of Philadelphia Phillies manager Ben Chapman, reflects Rickey's desire not to embarrass his fellow owners in the baseball establishment.

In the final scene of the film, Robinson is called upon to testify before HUAC during the 1949 season. Rickey informs the player that it is now acceptable to fight back. But it is unclear whether Rickey is referring to the

threats of racism or communism, both of which endangered his beloved consensus. Robinson refutes the views of Paul Robeson by extolling the democratic possibilities for blacks in the United States, and viewers again hear the refrains of "America the Beautiful," while the omnipresent narrator returns to the theme of the American dream, proclaiming that the story is not Jackie's alone. It is a story that could only happen in the United States where every boy has the opportunity to be president or play for the Brooklyn Dodgers. The film ends upon the optimistic note that the American dream was alive and well for black citizens as the nation entered the second half of the twentieth century.

But the reality for Jackie Robinson and black Americans was far more complex. In 1950, Robinson's father figure Rickey was pushed out of Brooklyn by Dodger owner Walter O'Malley. The deteriorating relationship between Robinson and O'Malley culminated in Jackie's trade to the New York Giants and retirement following the 1956 season. At the time of his retirement, the pace of baseball's integration celebrated with Robinson remained excruciatingly slow. During the 1956 season, the Texas League acquiesced in the segregationist policies of Louisiana and the Shreveport Sports, while the Detroit Tigers and Boston Red Sox remained segregated clubs. Robinson was disappointed that following his playing days, baseball had no room for his services as a coach and manager. Recognizing the need for continued civil rights agitation, Robinson, according to John Vernon of the National Archives "raised funds for and sat on the board of the NAACP, was named National Churchman of the year by the National Council of Churches, presided over the American Committee on Africa, and co-chaired the American-African Student Foundation, an organization in the United States for qualifying African youth. Eventually, he supported Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference and appeared at many of the formal civil rights rallies, beginning in 1957 with the Prayer Pilgrimage in Washington, D.C., and including the 1963 Peace March and the 1965 Selma March."[24]

In the late 1960s, Robinson's pro-business and Republican sympathies, shared by his father figure Rickey, led to bitter disputes with younger and more militant advocates of black power. When Robinson published his autobiography, *I Never Had It Made*, shortly before his premature death from a heart attack in October 1972, he expressed a degree of bitterness inconsistent with the consensus values of *The Jackie Robinson Story*. Robinson, impatient with the pace of racial progress, asserted that a quarter of a century after Mr. Rickey's noble experiment, "I cannot salute the flag; I know that I am a black man in a white world. In 1972, in 1947, and at my birth in 1919, I know that I never had it made." Robinson also expressed some reservations about his testimony before HUAC. Although Robinson did not refute his statement, he did consider ludicrous the idea that communist agitation was responsible

for racial unrest. Robinson concluded, "I have grown wiser and closer to painful truths about America's destructiveness. And I do have an increased respect for Paul Robeson who, over the span of twenty years, sacrificed himself, his career, and the wealth and comfort he once enjoyed because, I believe, he was sincerely trying to help his people." Thus, Robinson had little problem with Robeson's 1946 appearance before HUAC in which the entertainer proclaimed, "The success of a few Negroes including myself or Jackie Robinson did not atone for the fact that thousands of black families in the South had a yearly income of seven hundred dollars, living still in kind of semi-slavery."[25] Robinson's pursuit of the American dream came with a high personal price, leading to considerable ambivalence with consensus values espoused by *The Jackie Robinson Story*. Jules Tygiel described Robinson as "the Jim Thorpe of his race," and Hollywood also attempted to force-fit Thorpe's troubled story and Native Americans into the consensus with *Jim Thorpe: All-American* (1951), featuring an Anglo Burt Lancaster in the title role.[26]

5

Hollywood and Assimilating the American Indian Through Sport

Jim Thorpe: All-American (1951)

Although not primarily a baseball film, the Warner Bros. feature *Jim Thorpe: All-American* (1951) provides some insight into how Hollywood perceived American sport as a vehicle for social mobility by minorities as long as the athlete embraced the white middle class values of hard work and the American consensus. Although Jackie Robinson encountered vitriolic racial prejudice, *The Jackie Robinson Story* presents the African American athlete as a noble individual who retains his sense of dignity and belief in the promise of the American Dream. The story of Jim Thorpe is more problematic. Thorpe was a gifted college athlete in football and track, who played major league baseball before devoting himself to professional football. In the final analysis, however, *Jim Thorpe: All-American* has the Native American athlete overcome his alcoholism and self-pity to gain his place within the American mainstream.

Thorpe is probably best known for his superlative performance at the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm. The Native American earned gold medals in the grueling pentathlon and decathlon. King Gustav of Sweden pronounced Thorpe "the greatest athlete in the world." The following year the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) stripped Thorpe of his medals, ruling that the athlete violated his amateur status when he played professional baseball in a North Carolina summer league.

After forfeiting his amateur status, Thorpe signed a baseball contract with the New York Giants. He often clashed with the Giants' temperamental manager John McGraw, and Thorpe's baseball career was mediocre at best. Between 1913 and 1919, Thorpe played for the Giants, Cincinnati Reds, and

Boston Braves, with a lifetime batting average of .252 and seven home runs. Thorpe's passion, however, was football, and he played an important role in the fledgling National Football League performing for the Canton Bulldogs, Cleveland Indians, Oorang Indians, Rock Island Independents, New York Giants, and Chicago Cardinals before retiring in 1929 at age forty.[1]

Thorpe's personal life was troubled with bouts of alcohol abuse and three marriages. During the 1930s, Thorpe worked as a construction worker in Los Angeles, and he was an extra in Hollywood Westerns. Generally forgotten by many Americans, Thorpe was rediscovered in 1950 when a poll of 400 sportswriters named him as the Greatest Male Athlete for the First Half of the Twentieth Century. Warner Bros. attempted to capitalize on this notoriety by making a feature film of Thorpe's life.

Desperately in need of money and working as a greeter for a Los Angeles bar, the former athlete served as a paid and credited consultant for the film. In November 1951, Thorpe underwent surgery for cancer of the lip. On 28 March 1953, he was found dead in his trailer home in Lomita, California. Following his death, Thorpe finally garnered much of the recognition which was due his athletic prowess. In 1963, he was named a charter member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and almost two decades later the International Olympic Committee returned Thorpe's Olympic medals to his family. The Thorpe legacy was assured with the successful campaign of his daughter Grace to have Jim Thorpe named as the Greatest Athlete of the Twentieth Century.

These accomplishments, notwithstanding, the 1951 feature film biography elected to dwell upon Thorpe's struggles with alcohol and self-control before taming his self-destructive habits and accepting assimilation into the American consensus. Historian John Bloom maintains that *Jim Thorpe: All-American* perpetuates the idea of the Sac and Fox Indian as a flawed and tragic hero. Bloom asserts that the Hollywood version of the Thorpe story portrays the great athlete as a "natural, but emotionally immature man who craved the spotlight and indulged in self-pity whenever tragedy took it away."[2] Thorpe biographer Jack Newcombe laments that this focus upon the tragic in Thorpe's story limited public recognition of his athletic achievements as well as preventing Thorpe "from reminding the world of his heritage as an Indian or his predominance in the unique Indian athletic emergence in America."[3]

One might have expected more from Warner Bros., a studio that gained a reputation for socially conscious filmmaking during the 1930s. The studio assigned the film to veteran director Michael Curtiz, whose work includes some of Hollywood's most acclaimed films: *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *Casablanca* (1942), and *Mildred Pierce* (1945). But the film script by Douglas Morrow and Everett Freeman was formulaic, often reducing Thorpe

Jim Thorpe (Burt Lancaster) accepting Olympic Gold in Stockholm in *Jim Thorpe: All-American* (1951).

to a caricature. As was the custom in Hollywood at the time, an Anglo actor rather than a Native American was selected. The role of Thorpe was given to Burt Lancaster, a promising young actor acclaimed for his role in *The Killers* (1946). Although Lancaster, perhaps best known for flashing his toothy grin, certainly did not appear to be Native American, he at least performed well as an athlete.

Lancaster grew up in East Harlem, New York, the youngest of five children in an impoverished family. Developing an interest in gymnastics, Lancaster enrolled at New York University and hoped to become a gym teacher. However, he dropped out of school, briefly worked as an acrobat in the circus, and then served in the army during World War II. Lancaster returned from military service to pursue a career on the stage and screen. Known for his liberal politics and support for the civil rights movement, Lancaster acknowledged that it was awkward portraying a Native American legend and that the

filmmakers really did not know what to do with Thorpe, who was paid $15,000 to serve as an advisor for the film.[4]

Also in light of the ideological Cold War, it appears that Hollywood was becoming more cognizant that the nation's reputation was influenced by how the Indigenous People of the Americas were depicted in cinema. Efforts to win the hearts and minds of people in the Third World were not necessarily encouraged by films celebrating the extermination of Native Americans and triumph of Manifest Destiny. Representative of the revisionist Westerns advocating peaceful coexistence between Anglos and Natives (and allegorically between the Soviets and United States) was *Broken Arrow* (1950). In this critically acclaimed film, Thomas Jeffords (James Stewart) attempts to bring peace to the Arizona territory by negotiating a treaty between whites and the Apache leader Cochise (Jeff Chandler). The noble sentiments of Jeffords are nearly thwarted when rapacious whites murder his Native American bride, Sonseeahray (Debra Paget); however, Cochise insists that Jeffords must not allow his desire for revenge and a few evil men to endanger the peace. While *Broken Arrow* does mark a departure from more traditional Westerns, its stereotypes of the noble savage Cochise and the beautiful Indian maiden Sonseeahray are portrayed by Caucasians Chandler and Paget. In addition, the power of the voice is denied the Native as the story of Cochise is told by Jeffords. But Hollywood was certainly not done with the brutal savage image as is evidenced by the John Ford classic, *The Searchers* (1956).[5]

Jim Thorpe: All-American represents somewhat of an innovation in Hollywood's portrayal of Indigenous People as it brings them out of the frontier past and into the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the power of constructing a narrative is denied to the Native American Thorpe, for the athlete's story is told by his coach Glenn Scobey "Pop" Warner (Charles Bickford). It is a white narrative of assimilation and social mobility into which Thorpe must be molded.

The film begins with a tribute banquet given to honor Thorpe in his native state of Oklahoma. Governor Roy Turner introduces the legendary Pop Warner, whose description of Thorpe is a flashback which constitutes the bulk of the film's running time. Warner begins his chronicle by placing Jim Thorpe as a boy within the historical context of nineteenth-century frontier conditions. Jim's father is conveying the young boy via horse and wagon to the Sac and Fox Indian Agency School near Tecumseh, Oklahoma. After he is deposited at the school, the boy flees, racing across the countryside, in the words of Warner "with the wild grace of a young deer."[6]

This depiction of the youthful Thorpe presents the Native American as a natural athlete who does not have to depend upon training and teamwork as do less gifted white athletes. In emphasizing Thorpe as a natural, the filmmakers

are portraying the Native American as lacking the tools for success based upon hard work and thrift proclaimed by *Poor Richard's Almanack* and the Horatio Alger model. As John Bloom notes, Thorpe is, thus, represented as a young man "who had natural abilities but knew little about self-discipline or sacrifice."[7]

Running like a wild deer, the boy is able to reach home ahead of his father, who is actually rather impressed with his son's feat. This is not the case with Jim's mother, who chastises both father and son, insisting that the reluctant father must punish Jim for his disobedience. His father patiently explains to Jim that he must attend the white man's school and make something of himself. Jim is told to "let the white man teach you his ways." The message here is clearly one of assimilation, but there is also some regret about a way of life which must be discarded if the Indian is to attain his place within the progressive American consensus. This scene portrays Jim's mother as being correct but also harsh and unfeeling — perhaps a commentary on what happens to gender roles in a more matrilineal culture.

Jim grudgingly accepts the advice of his father, and we next see him in 1903 enrolling at Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. The Carlisle School was established in 1879 by Richard Henry Pratt, a reformer who believed that Indian children could be educated and assimilated into white culture through off-reservation industrial boarding schools. While Pratt was successful in obtaining federal funding for the Carlisle School, and over 15,000 Native American attended the school between 1879 and 1918, many critics claimed that Carlisle and other Indian industrial schools provided skills which failed to serve their pupils when returning to the reservation. In her study, *Education and the American Indian*, Margaret Connell Szasz writes, "When the pupils returned to the reservation, they often became objects of ridicule. This situation was complicated by the fact that the training they had received had little or no application to reservation life. Thus these pupils became the first victims of the 'either/or' policy of assimilation. The education forced them to choose either the culture of the white man or the culture of the Indian; there was no compromise."[8]

These issues are downplayed in *Jim Thorpe: All-American*, which clearly endorses the assimilation policies advocated by Pratt. When Jim arrives at Carlisle, he is informed that he must abandon his Native name Bright Path and that "Indian" will not be spoken on the campus. At orientation the students are told that they must prepare for a new way of life. A recalcitrant Thorpe is at first uneasy with his assigned roommates, Ed Guyac (Dick Wesson) and Little Boy Who Walk Like Bear (Jack Bighead, one of the few Native Americans to appear in the picture), but they ultimately become his friends and teammates as well as examples of successful assimilation.

Thorpe is depicted as struggling with academics, although it is interesting

to note that his education is more traditional and book-centered than vocational. The female students at Carlisle, however, are portrayed as learning such useful skills as sewing. When a frustrated Thorpe can no longer endure dealing with the academic curriculum, he simply runs like the wind as he did during his reservation days. But Jim does not don athletic attire for his run; instead, he sprints through the campus wearing his dress shirt, slacks, and everyday shoes. As he cuts through track practice, the young sprinting athlete in street clothes draws the attention of Carlisle track and football coach Glenn "Pop" Warner.

Warner played football at Cornell University, where he gained the nickname Pop because he was older than most of his teammates. After graduating from Cornell, Warner coached at the University of Georgia and Cornell before assuming his coaching duties at Carlisle. Warner would make the Carlisle Indians a national football powerhouse between 1909 and 1914, but there was a dark side to the winning football at Carlisle under Warner. In his study of Warner's coaching rival Knute Rockne, Murray Sperber asserts, "Warner was one of the great buccaneer coaches of the era, openly paying and lavishly housing his 'athletic boys,' scheduling long money-making tours for his team, personally pocketing part of the game receipts, and betting heavily on his own and other games. A congressional investigation in 1914–1915 ended his Carlisle career, but he went on to fame and fortune at Pitt and Stanford."[9]

The Pop Warner presented in *Jim Thorpe: All-American* is a father figure who is simply interested in the growth and development of the Indian youth. As portrayed by Charles Bickford, Warner is a proponent of the philosophy that athletic competition builds character, and the kindly patriarchal symbol is deserving of the youth football league named in his honor. In the film, Warner initially approaches Thorpe about running track and discourages the young man's interest in football. Warner well articulates the film's message of assimilation when he explains to Jim that Carlisle was founded so that Indians would no longer have to sell blankets. Pop admonishes Jim not to be like some Indian boys and take the easy path of sloth and drink. Instead, athletics would help Jim relax, build character, teach self-discipline, and help him discover a vocation. Warner concludes that Jim is a natural athlete who is like a wild stallion that needs to be tamed. Sport would provide an avenue for Jim to become assimilated into the mainstream white society. An impressed Thorpe accepts the fatherly advice rendered by Warner and joins the track team. He also informs Warner that after college he would like to be a coach, a choice which the patriarch endorses.

But Jim is unable to forget about football. Rather than being recruited by Warner, *Jim Thorpe: All-American* depicts Thorpe as embracing football because he wants to impress Margaret Miller (Phyllis Thaxter)—whose real

name was Ivy Miller. Thorpe perceives football as being more masculine than track, and he wants to compete with his rival football player Peter Allendine (Steve Cochran) for the attentions of Margaret. Thorpe proved to be an excellent football player, and this is the sport for which he displayed the greatest passion. In 1908, he was named to sportswriter Walter Camp's third-team All-American squad.

Football fit well into the assimilation visions of Carlisle founder Richard Henry Pratt. In addition to bringing recognition for the school, Pratt believed that football represented the values of white America. The sport taught teamwork, discipline, self-control, and a sense of "winning" in fair competition. The ability to defeat white college teams was an indication that the Indian youth were internalizing the values of the dominant culture. The Carlisle Indians football team was also a lucrative endeavor for the school, with prestigious universities such as Harvard and Yale regularly providing Carlisle with purses of $5,000 to $15,000 per game.[10]

In the summer of 1909, Thorpe, along with other Carlisle athletes, worked as farm laborers in North Carolina. Thorpe abandoned his job in the fields to play semi-professional baseball with a team from Rocky Mount, North Carolina. This was a common practice for college athletes who often competed in summer leagues under an assumed name. In the film, Thorpe appears to eagerly embrace playing baseball in order to avoid hard work in the fields, reinforcing a stereotype of Native Americans as lazy and unable to adapt to white work habits. On the other hand, Thorpe is hardly disingenuous as he naïvely agrees to perform under his real name — a decision which would later cost him his amateur status and Olympic gold medals. The film presents Pop Warner as having no knowledge of Jim's professional baseball activities. In reality, however, Warner often made such arrangements for his players. To protect his own career, the renowned coach denied having any previous knowledge of Thorpe's professionalism, while the loyal athlete never publicly questioned the veracity of his mentor. In his biography of Thorpe, Bill Crawford argues that Warner intentionally misled Thorpe and congressional investigations because the coach placed profits and his reputation above the interests of his players. Crawford concludes, "If the drinking, smoking, profane, gambling Pop Warner were alive today, he would probably not be allowed to coach Pop Warner football."[11]

At this point in the film, an effort to compress Thorpe's biography into conventional film time provides some confusion regarding the chronology of the athlete's life. Struggling with academics, Thorpe dropped out of Carlisle in 1910, but he returned to school the following fall, leading the Carlisle Indians to an 11–1 record and earning All-American honors. In *Jim Thorpe: All-American*, the athlete's character is tested when Margaret does not return to

Carlisle. It seems that Margaret was not Native American and she did not want to disappoint Jim, who often spoke about how important it was for both of them to celebrate their Indian culture. An angry Thorpe takes out his frustration on the playing field, leading Carlisle to a position of national prominence in college football. But Jim is motivated more by anger than the values of hard work and teamwork. Recognizing this fact, Warner arranges for Margaret's return to Carlisle as a school nurse. The lovers reunite, and Jim begins to plan for marriage and a coaching career. Jim's version of the American Dream appears within his grasp when he learns that Allegheny College is considering him for a coaching position. In a key game against the University of Pennsylvania and star running back Tom Ashenbrunner (Hubie Kearns), Thorpe drop kicks a 50-yard field goal to earn a 13–13 tie for Carlisle. Jim is so obsessed with impressing Allegheny officials attending the game that he coerces his roommate Little Boy into playing with an injury which results in the termination of his football career. It seems that Jim still does not understand that competition and individualism must be coupled with a sense of cooperation and teamwork.

Perhaps the Allegheny administration noticed that Thorpe failed to internalize white values, for the coaching position is offered to Thorpe's Pennsylvania rival, Ashenbrunner. When Pop breaks this news to Jim, the athlete lashes out, asserting that he was denied the job because he was an Indian. Warner states that he simply does not know whether questions of race entered into the decision. But even if Jim is the subject of discrimination, it is simply another hurdle for him to clear in the game of life. A winner does not quit and express self-pity. Inspired by Pop's rhetoric, Jim vows to train for the 1912 Olympic Games. Appearing to fully acknowledge the values of assimilation, Jim tells Pop that he will train hard for the Olympics, but not simply to attain personal glory. Instead, his work ethic will gain success at the Olympics and pave the way for marriage and a coaching career.

Thorpe returned from his Olympic victories as a national celebrity, captured in a film montage culminating with a New York City ticker-tape parade. This joy was short-lived when the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) investigated accusations of professionalism against Thorpe for accepting money to play summer baseball. Pop agrees to represent Jim at a hearing before the AAU, insisting that the Native American was a hard worker who simply did not understand the rules. Nevertheless, the AAU rules that ignorance is no excuse, and Thorpe is stripped of his amateur status and Olympic medals. Pop concludes that Jim got a "rotten deal," but *Jim Thorpe: All-American* makes no reference to Warner's culpability in this matter. The film embraces the patriarchal values of Warner as the father, while often expressing doubt about Thorpe as the prodigal son.

It is interesting to note that the film suggests that the athlete still has the potential to fit into the consensus, emphasizing Thorpe's training for the Olympics. Many biographers perpetuate the myth that Thorpe was simply a natural athlete devoid of a work ethic. For example, Gene Schoor reports that on the sea voyage to Stockholm, Jim was the most relaxed athlete on the American team. Schoor writes, "Certainly Jim didn't train the way a man who wins medals usually trains. He lounged in his steamer chair, found a hammock to swing on, looked out on the green water and the endless blue horizon. He liked to watch the big fish jumping over the surf."[12] Other witnesses and scholars, however, dispute this depiction of Thorpe. Teammate Ralph Craig, who won gold medals in the 100-meter and 200-meter events at the Stockholm games, acknowledged that Thorpe was born with tremendous athletic ability, but he concluded, "Like all successful 'natural' athletes, however, Thorpe knew that it took hard work to refine these gifts."[13]

When the scandal denies Jim a coaching job at the University of Virginia, Pop offers to help Jim financially. Jim, however, refuses Pop's assistance, demonstrating a sense of self-reliance and asserting that he will not be a charity case. This may be read as Jim's characterization of the reservation system as making government wards of the American Indian. But Jim's individualism is still fueled by a sense of bitterness as he smashes a glass and walks out on Pop.

Jim marries Margaret and signs a professional baseball contract with the New York Giants. The film offers only one scene from Thorpe's baseball career, but it is a revealing one. Thorpe is at bat and receives the bunt sign from manager John McGraw. Jim ignores the orders from McGraw and hits a home run to win the game. But McGraw is less than pleased and fines Jim 50 dollars. A perplexed Thorpe decides to quit the team. This brief segment demonstrates the film's perspective that while Thorpe might speak the language of hard work and self-reliance, he did not understand that these values must be tempered with a respect for authority and a willingness to sacrifice for the good of the team. These were the cooperative values of the postwar consensus replacing the rugged individualism of an earlier America.

But Thorpe's association with McGraw and the Giants was a little more complicated than the one at-bat presented in *Jim Thorpe: All-American*. Thorpe was offered major league contracts by eight clubs, but he selected the Giants because they offered him the most generous deal—$6,000 a year for three years, a figure comparable to that paid some of the game's stars. But the offer rendered by the Giants was somewhat disingenuous as McGraw perceived Thorpe's signing primarily as a publicity stunt that would increase ticket sales for the Giants. McGraw also envisioned Thorpe and his new bride as drawing cards for a baseball promotional world tour in 1913–1914, organized in con-

junction with Charles Comiskey of the Chicago White Sox. In his study of the tour, James E. Elfers asserts that Thorpe's loss of his Olympic medals had not tarnished the athlete's international reputation. Elfers writes, "McGraw's investment in the Olympic hero paid off handsomely. Thorpe became the tour's greatest attraction, drawing standing ovations all over the United States. When the tourists left America, Thorpe's fame preceded them. In places where baseball had not been heard of, Thorpe and his accomplishments enticed large and curious crowds to games that otherwise might have seen sparse attendance. Next to McGraw and Comiskey, Thorpe's name got mentioned most often in the press."[14]

Thorpe's passion was for football not baseball, and it was more than ignoring one bunt signal which led to his departure from baseball in 1919. Meanwhile, Thorpe was a two-sport athlete, signing a contract with the Canton Bulldogs in 1915. *Jim Thorpe: All-American* depicts Jim as being more obsessed with his young son than football. Seeking revenge against those forces which deprived him of his gold medals, Jim pushed the young boy to become an athlete who would restore his father's name and reputation. Seeking to live life through his son, Jim was unable to cope with the death of the child, descending into self-pity and alcoholism. His former roommates, Ed Guyac and Little Boy, along with his former Carlisle rival Peter Allendine, attempt to comfort Jim and Margaret, but the three Carlisle graduates are now all successful businessmen and models of assimilation. They have no interest in going on a drinking binge with Jim, who could have achieved similar gains if not for his personal failures of pride accompanied by self-pity. The values of the post–World War II liberal consensus are evident in that it is Jim rather than society which is dysfunctional.

After the three friends depart, Margaret and Jim quarrel. The athlete blames his wife for his problems, proclaiming that he will not go back to the reservation and make blankets. An exasperated Margaret gives up on reforming her husband and leaves Jim — casting doubts upon miscegenation. With his athletic skills waning, Jim continues abusing alcohol and soon finds himself bankrupt. In 1932, we find him in Los Angeles, dressed in stereotypical Plains Indian headdress, monitoring a dance marathon — a caricature of the "cigar store Indian" that Thorpe had always resisted. It is interesting to note that *Jim Thorpe: All-American* omits the story of the Oorang Indians for whom Jim played football from 1922 to 1924. This football team was comprised of Native Americans recruited by Thorpe. In addition to performing on the football field, the athletes entertained during halftime with traditional Native American singing and dancing to promote owner Walter Lingo's Oorang Airedale Kennels. This episode in Thorpe's life may be read as prostituting Native American culture in pursuit of the almighty dollar, or it may be inter-

preted in light of the Native American trickster tradition of manipulating a white audience.[15] The latter interpretation seems lost upon the filmmakers for the power of the trickster is not bestowed upon Thorpe in *Jim Thorpe: All-American*.

As Jim descends into greater despair, he is visited by Pop Warner, now coaching at Stanford, who offers Jim a ticket to the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Pop admonishes Jim for his self-pity, asserting that Jim had gone "haywire." Somehow the athlete had picked up the notion that the world owed him something. An angry Pop concludes that when the going got rough "the great Jim Thorpe proved to be a powder puff." Jim's descent is not the fault of a society in which opportunity is available for Native Americans as exemplified by his Carlisle teammates.

Jim gathers himself together and does meet Pop at the games. His former coach points to the politician opening the games and observes, "Vice President Charles Curtis — Indian." The lesson here is obvious. America is a society based upon merit and social mobility. Certainly racial prejudice exists, but if one is willing to work within the system then individual success is possible. Those who fail to advance within such a society are maladjusted. These are certainly the values of the liberal consensus, although Curtis as a representative of the discredited Hoover administration may not have constituted the best Depression-era example.[16] The Curtis model of assimilation and Pop's rhetoric force Jim to reconsider his life in a flashback sequence, recognizing that his plight is due to the bad choices he has made.

We next see Jim apparently gainfully employed, driving a truck. He accidentally runs over a football belonging to some boys playing on a vacant lot. Jim buys the boys a new football and agrees to coach their team. At last Jim is master of his own fate as he punts the football and basks in the admiration of the boys.

The film concludes by returning to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame dinner where Pop Warner is finishing his introduction of Thorpe. Pop proclaims that Bright Path has finally found the right path. Jim rises to accept the accolades of the crowd with actor Lancaster flashing one of his patented smiles. *Jim Thorpe: All-American* ends before the athlete begins his speech. Jim regains his self-respect and is now accepted by white society, but the Native American remains voiceless and without the power to narrate his own story.

While *Jim Thorpe: All-American* well represented the values of the post–World War II liberal consensus, the critical response to the film was lukewarm at best. *The Christian Century* found *Jim Thorpe: All-American* to be "a straightforward, credible film, with Lancaster giving a commendable portrait of a man who found tremendous satisfaction in sports but could not meet the challenge when the going became tough." *Newsweek* noted that the film

omitted a number of facts from the Thorpe biography, such as Thorpe's two other marriages and his additional children. Nevertheless, *Newsweek* found Lancaster, with his hair dyed black "convincing both as an Indian and as a solid, taciturn Thorpe." *Time*, on the other hand, believed that the film suffered from a script which was unable to decide whether Thorpe was "unstable by nature or embittered by circumstances."[17]

But clearly the focus of these commentaries was upon Thorpe's shortcomings and not the sordid history of how white society treated Native Americans. In *Jim Thorpe: All-American*, assimilation is the answer for Indigenous People, but Jim Thorpe failed to take advantage of this opportunity. In the 1952 films *The Winning Team* and *The Pride of St. Louis*, however, white athletes from the countryside enjoy more success in overcoming problems and finding their place within the consensus. *Jim Thorpe: All-American* did little to keep the reputation of the Native athlete alive in American popular sporting culture. This task was undertaken by Jim's daughter Grace Thorpe's campaign to see that her father was named the Greatest Athlete of the Twentieth Century.

6

The Retreat to Nostalgia

Grover Cleveland Alexander, Ronald Reagan, and *The Winning Team* (1952)

As Speaker of the House of Representatives in the 1980s, Democrat Tip O'Neill enjoyed telling the story of President Ronald Reagan's admiration for the Speaker's desk. O'Neill remarked that the desk had once belonged to Grover Cleveland, to which Reagan replied, "That's very interesting. You know I once played Grover Cleveland in the movies."[1] Of course, the president had not portrayed President Cleveland. Instead, Reagan appeared in the 1952 Warner Bros. production *The Winning Team*, in which the actor was cast as the Baseball Hall of Fame pitcher Grover Cleveland Alexander, who was named after the nineteenth-century president. Such stories are often quoted by biographers to demonstrate the impact of Reagan's film career upon his politics, as well as how the president often appeared to blur the line between film and the real world, viewing contemporary politics through the rose-colored glasses of cinematic nostalgia. This was certainly true of the Alexander film biography as the uncertainties of post–World War II America could be rendered less threatening by addressing them through the vehicle of early twentieth-century baseball—an era before the assumptions of many white Americans were challenged by the Cold War, Rosie the Riveter, and the civil rights movement.

The commercial success of *The Stratton Story* (1949) convinced Hollywood that baseball biography was a fertile field to plow during the early 1950s as the nation struggled to deal with the social changes wrought by the Second World War and its aftermath. Reagan had attempted to convince Jack Warner to purchase the Stratton property, but the producer insisted that audiences did not want to see pictures about "cripples." Evidently, Warner changed his mind following the critical acclaim and box-office appeal of *The Best Years of*

In this publicity photograph, Grover Cleveland Alexander (Ronald Reagan) lifts wife Aimee Alexander (Doris Day), but Aimee does most of the heavy lifting in *The Winning Team* (1952).

Our Lives (1946) and Jimmy Stewart's portrayal of Monty Stratton. Accordingly, Reagan got his baseball picture when he was tapped to depict Grover Cleveland Alexander's battle with alcoholism and epilepsy (although the film's script insists upon referring to Alexander's disabilities under the vague rubric of "double vision").[2]

Of course, in true baseball biographical fashion, Alexander was essentially helpless without the love and support of his wife, Aimee (Doris Day). In

1952, Twentieth Century–Fox also offered its answer to *The Stratton Story* with Dan Dailey as Jerome Herman "Dizzy" Dean dealing with class issues and a lack of formal education. And the following year, MGM released the low-budget *Big Leaguer* with Edward G. Robinson, while the comedies *Angels in the Outfield* (1951) and *Rhubarb* (1951) indicated that perhaps only divine intervention or good luck charms could cure the problems of American society as manifested on the baseball diamond. Hollywood's experience with baseball and racial integration was almost as glacial as the pace of the sport's progress in civil rights. For example, when Jackie Robinson retired after the 1956 season rather than play with the New York Giants, the Detroit Tigers and Boston Red Sox still had no black players on their rosters. Thus, following *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950) and *Jim Thorpe: All-American* (1951), cinematic depictions of the national pastime remained defined within the realm of whiteness.

The retreat into nostalgia with the Reagan vehicle of *The Winning Team* allowed the filmmakers to avoid divisive racial issues as well as postwar concerns regarding the American family and changing definitions of American masculinity. The nostalgic appeal of *The Winning Team* is most apparent when it is contrasted with *Big Leaguer* (1953). With a small budget and shooting schedule of only 14 days, MGM selected television filmmaker Robert Aldrich to direct his first feature film. Although Aldrich would later be acclaimed for such films as *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) and *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), the budgetary restraints of *Big Leaguer* led the director to rely upon a documentary approach filmed in stark black and white. *Big Leaguer* tells the story of real-life New York Giants scout Hans Lobart (Edward G. Robinson) conducting a Florida training camp. The young players are given a two-week tryout under the experienced eyes of Lobart. There is a degree of diversity in the young athletes assembled by the Giants, although the character of Chuy Aguilar (Lalo Rios) embodies some of the Latino stereotypes lamented by Roberto Clemente. The script, however, focuses upon Adam Polachuk (Jeff Richards), the son of a Polish immigrant miner who assumes that the boy is at college rather than pursuing a career in baseball. Polachuk also develops a romantic relationship with Lobart's niece Christy (Vera-Ellen), and in the end the young man is accepted by both his father and the baseball scout. Nevertheless, Lobart complains about the number of fathers at the camp placing pressure upon their sons — an example of insecurity on the part of the patriarchy which culminated in the mental breakdown of Jimmy Piersall in *Fear Strikes Out* (1957), the last of the post–World War II era baseball biographical films.[3]

But in the final analysis, *Big Leaguer* seeks to place baseball within the framework of the American dream based upon talent rather than the circumstances of one's birth. It is a somewhat of a gritty effort to perpetuate the self-

made ethos of Benjamin Franklin and Horatio Alger into the postwar era. *Big Leaguer* presents a world view in which talent and hard work may allow one to reach the major leagues, although the reality is that few will be able to achieve this dream. It seems to resonate with the rugged individualism of an earlier era rather than the corporate values of the postwar consensus. This stab at realism is in stark contrast with the retreat of *The Winning Team* into a nostalgic rendering of a past free of aggressive women and minority groups; perpetuating the idea that the individual will be able to achieve the dream only through personal readjustment and the support of an understanding spouse.

Thus, a review of the film in *Saturday Review* asserts that *Big Leaguer* "stresses that the heart of baseball is to be found, not in Yankee Stadium during a World Series play-off, but in the schoolyards and sandlots where kids discover the meaning of sportsmanship, teamwork, and loyalty." In fact, the issue of loyalty played a major role in the production of *Big Leaguer*, raising questions of whether such traditional values would withstand the pressures of the Cold War, McCarthyism, and the Red Scare. The reason that such an established star as Edward G. Robinson appeared in a low-budget film which failed to earn a first-run premiere has to do with questions regarding the politics of Robinson. The actor was accused of supporting various left-wing causes and for being a premature anti-fascist for appearing in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939). Under the cloud of the blacklist and the investigation of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) into Hollywood politics, Robinson found it difficult to find film work.[4]

Of course, as president of the Screen Actors Guild from 1947 to 1952, Ronald Reagan played a major role in the post–World War II Hollywood Red Scare. Although he served as a secret paid informer for the FBI, on the surface he tried to present a more balanced approach to the political controversies rocking postwar Hollywood, culminating in the blacklist which ruined many careers in the film industry. For example, in his October 1947 testimony before HUAC, Reagan was adamant in his opposition to the influence of the Communist Party in the Screen Actors Guild, but he expressed concern that anti-communists should be circumspect in their application of democratic principles. Speaking of communists, Reagan asserted, "In opposing those people, the best thing to do is make democracy work. In the Screen Actors Guild we make it work by insuring anyone a vote and by keeping everyone informed. I believe that, as Thomas Jefferson put it, if all the American people know all of the facts they will never make a mistake. Whether the party should be outlawed, that is a matter for the government to decide. As a citizen, I would hesitate to see any political party outlawed on the basis of its political ideology. However, if it is proven that an organization is an agent of a foreign power,

or in any way not a legitimate political party — and I think that the government is capable of proving that — then that is another matter."[5]

It is interesting to note here that as a presidential candidate, Reagan insisted that government was the problem, but in his HUAC testimony the union leader was more than willing to place considerable power in the hands of Congress to stifle dissent. At the time of his appearance before HUAC, Reagan was going through a significant transitional phase in his life. Although his Hollywood career began in 1937 and ten years later he earned a Best Supporting Actor nomination for his role in *Kings Row*, Reagan never achieved "star" status. In 1949, his nine-year marriage to actress Jane Wyman, whose performance in *Johnny Belinda* (1948) garnered an Oscar for Best Actress, ended in divorce. He married again, in 1952, to lesser-known actress Nancy Davis. His political transition from Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal to the Republican Party was completed when the actor endorsed the presidential candidacy of General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Thus, 1952 was a convenient time for Reagan to retreat from the uncertainties of postwar America, reflected in the realism of *Big Leaguer*, to the more simplistic early twentieth-century nation, depicted in *The Winning Team*, into which the future president was born and raised. [6]

Ronald Wilson Reagan was born on 6 February 1911 in the small Illinois town of Dixon. The family moved numerous times when Reagan was a boy, but in the 1920s the Reagan family settled in the small community of Dixon. Reagan often described his youth as an idyllic small-town Huckleberry Finn-type of existence. Reagan biographer Garry Wills, however, notes that Mark Twain harbored few illusions that the twentieth century would offer a haven from the "superstition, racism, and crime" that characterized the communities along the Mississippi River in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1886).[7] Reagan's nostalgic view of his youth allowed him to ignore some unpleasant realities. Reagan's father was a shoe salesman with drinking problems, and many of the family's relocations were just ahead of bill collectors. Nelle Reagan, the matriarch of the family, held the Reagans together and devoted herself to the Protestant evangelical Disciples of Christ. She encouraged the athletic and theatrical interests of her son, who graduated from Eureka College in 1932. Reagan supported himself during the summers of his youth by serving as a lifeguard and is credited with saving over 70 lives. In his controversial official biography of Reagan which blended elements of fact and fiction, Edmond Morris argues that Reagan's often unhappy youth and his activities as a lifeguard contributed to the president's later efforts to "rescue" the nation.[8] Seeking to forget the difficult days of youth and remembering the past as it never was, Reagan was amiable and sought to place a positive spin on events and uplift those around him.

These qualities made Reagan a popular radio announcer following his college graduation, working first with station WOC in Davenport, Iowa, and then accepting a position with WHO in Des Moines, re-creating accounts of Chicago Cubs games based on teletype summaries of the games. One of Reagan's favorite and oft-repeated broadcast stories concerns a game in which the teletype went dead, and Reagan had the batter fouling off pitch after pitch until the relay summary of the game was restored. As an announcer, Reagan did not want to shatter the illusion that he was providing a live account rather than a re-creation.

As Garry Wills suggests, Reagan's broadcasting was an effort to blend the new technology of radio with the nostalgic appeal of sport by celebrating such traditional values as "innocence, moral struggle, and the challenges of growing" in which memory tends to "improve" the sporting feat over time. Brought up on the hyperbole of sportswriters such as Grantland Rice, Reagan, argues Wills, provided an imagination that "bridged the gap between the fans' sports ethos and the radio station's economic strategy. The use of technical gimmickry, literally deceptive, was 'absolved' by Reagan's quality as a surrogate spectator — one who shared the fans' loyalty, imagery, and values. Hidden things were happening — some normal like the link-up itself; some exceptional like the break in that 'feed' — under the illusion of permanency, of the game as one had always seen it, or heard people who had seen it tell their tale. The fabulator's art, based on the nostalgic reliving of the game, supplied the deficiencies of the report's information at the moment."[9] Thus, Reagan had no problem with re-creating an illusion for his audience; providing listeners and baseball fans with sporting memories that often superseded more objective realities. These qualities of Reagan as sports announcer were also later incorporated into his political rhetoric which did not let the facts stand in the way of the president's eternal optimism.

His broadcasting work also provided Reagan with an opportunity to launch a film career. While he was in California to cover the spring training of the Chicago Cubs in 1937, the handsome young man was given a screen test by Warner Bros. and offered a standard studio contract. Appearing in a variety of roles, Reagan became best known for his role in a sports film. In 1940, the actor portrayed Notre Dame football player George Gipp in the popular *Knute Rockne — All American*, featuring Pat O'Brien in the title role. Reagan's most famous line from the film was whispered by the dying athlete to his coach, requesting that when the going got rough if Rockne would ask the players to "win one for the Gipper." This memorable line would find its way into many of President Reagan's speeches. When asked to give the commencement address at Notre Dame in 1981, Reagan reminded graduates of the famous Rockne film, seeking to enlist the Notre Dame students in a cru-

sade that would "transcend communism." The president remarked that the greatness of Rockne could be found in his belief that the "noblest work of man was molding the character of young men"—especially young men who would be inoculated into such American values as hard work, teamwork, honesty, and patriotism. In 1940, *Knute Rockne—All American* extolled the values of assimilation and unity that would be needed in the gathering global conflict of World War II. As president, Reagan wanted the graduates to "win one for the Gipper" and join him in a crusade against international communism.[10]

Throughout his political career, Reagan was a master at employing the past to render contemporary problems less threatening through comforting his fellow citizens with visions of a nostalgic and innocent America. Accordingly, in his study of cinematic cultural narratives from the 1980s and President Reagan's America, Alan Nadel argues the president, or the "Great Communicator" as some supporters labeled him, employed the rhetoric of nostalgia for an earlier America free from the divisions of racial, gender, and class conflict. Nadel concludes that Reagan's identification with traditional consensus values of classlessness and whiteness in nostalgic films such as *The Winning Team* found expression in the 1980s with the policies and rhetoric of the president as well as cultural film narratives such as *Field of Dreams* (1989). Both *The Winning Team* and *Field of Dreams* seek relief or "rescue" from present-day tensions through return to a more simplistic past. Blurring economic and political realities with cinematic nostalgia, just as Reagan himself integrated his presidential and film identities, Nadel insists, "Embodying both the perfect movie image and the ideal moviegoer, he made identification easy, allowing the public to see itself as the beneficiaries rather than the victims of the rampant lack of regulation he fostered. Identifying with him, they could project themselves as the heroes of an America that heralded the dismantling of social programs, the collapse of savings and loans, the relaxing of health and safety standards, the spread of influence peddling, the abuse of credit for leveraged buyouts, and the deflection into private pockets of billions of dollars in public funds, in short the demise of its credit surplus and its standard of living."[11]

The stage for Reagan in the 1980s was a world platform, while in the early 1950s his retreat into the nostalgia of *The Winning Team* reflected personal insecurities shared by many Americans coping with postwar adjustments and fears of the Cold War, atomic bomb, another depression, juvenile delinquency, working women, decaying cities with the rise of suburbia, and the rise of minorities. If the consensus was difficult to sustain in the present, perhaps it could be found in an earlier, simpler, and whiter America.

The premiere of *The Winning Team* was scheduled for 7 June 1952 in Springfield, Missouri. A crowd of over 700 residents greeted Ronald Reagan

and his new wife, Nancy. But the film's premiere was upstaged by the arrival of President Harry Truman who was attending a reunion of his World War I infantry division. An estimated crowd of nearly 10,000 were on hand when the president's plane landed in Springfield. Truman and Reagan had met on several occasions, but in 1952 the actor had deserted the Democratic Party and was supporting Eisenhower. Truman was scheduled to attend the screening of *The Winning Team*, but, instead, he snubbed Reagan and received visitors at the hotel. The president supposedly considered inviting Reagan and his new bride to dinner, but the publicity surrounding Reagan's divorce and remarriage was apparently too much for the Trumans, who wanted no part of any "Hollywood riff-raff." Of course, Truman underestimated Reagan. As Stephen Vaughn notes in his account of Reagan in Hollywood, the actor would bring about a greater respect for entertainers as "the union between the entertainment industry and political power reached its peak during his presidency, less than three decades later."[12]

The Springfield premiere of *The Winning Team*, nevertheless, indicates that the project was not a high priority for Warner Bros. who released Reagan from his studio contract following the film. At age 41, Reagan was a little old to be portraying a young ballplayer, and his co-star Doris Day received top billing. The film was assigned to aging director Lewis Seiler, who was best known for his Tom Mix Westerns of the 1920s. Writers Merwin Gerard and Seelig Lester would garner most of their credits in the emerging medium of television.[13]

Although he was a Hall of Fame pitcher, Grover Cleveland Alexander, with his reputation for alcoholism, did not exactly generate the same public sympathy as Monty Stratton attempting to make a comeback on one leg after a tragic hunting accident. But the studio had an opportunity to cash in on the recent death of Alexander on 4 November 1950. Warner Bros. also employed Alexander's widow as a consultant for the film, which may explain in part why the Doris Day character of Aimee Alexander comes off as so much stronger than Reagan's Grover Cleveland Alexander.

The film takes considerable license with the Alexander biography. Grover Cleveland Alexander was born 26 February 1887 in Elba, Nebraska. As a young man, he worked as a telephone lineman and semi-professional pitcher until signed by Galesburg, Illinois, of the Class D Illinois-Missouri League in 1909. He was injured at Galesburg when he was struck with a thrown ball while attempting to break up a double play. After recovering from a severe case of double vision, Alexander resumed his career with Syracuse of the Class B New York State League. After winning 29 games with Syracuse, he was drafted by the Philadelphia Phillies in 1910. During his 1911 campaign with the Philadelphia club, the 24-year-old rookie won 28 games, demonstrating

the pinpoint control which characterized his career. In 1915, Alexander won 31 games and led the Phillies to the National League pennant before bowing to the Boston Red Sox in the World Series. The right-handed pitcher also established 30-game win seasons in 1916 and 1917.

When Alexander was conscripted for military service in World War I, the Phillies sold his contract to the Chicago Cubs. After returning from the war and deaf in one ear from artillery fire, Alexander pitched well for the Cubs, winning 126 games for Chicago between 1919 and 1925. But due to concerns about his drinking and health, he was traded to the St. Louis Cardinals in 1926. Alexander suffered from epilepsy as well as alcoholism, and manager Joseph McCarthy of the Cubs no longer considered him dependable. Alexander, nevertheless, led the Cardinals to a 1926 World Series victory over the New York Yankees, winning two games and pitching excellent relief in the final game. In 1930, he retired shortly after a trade back to his original team, the Phillies. In his 20 years in the major leagues, Alexander won 373 games, posting a career-earned average of 2.56 with 90 shutouts. His years after baseball were troubled with drinking and financial problems.[14]

Warner Bros. and Ronald Reagan, however, attempted to put a more positive twist on the Grover Cleveland Alexander story. *The Winning Team* begins with young Alexander working as a lineman for the phone company, establishing the working-class origins of the protagonist. Alexander is engaged to Aimee Arrants (Doris Day), and the young man is saving his money for down payment on a farm. He is scheduled to meet Aimee and her father (Frank Ferguson) at a neighboring farm, but Alexander is lured away from the rendezvous by the opportunity to pitch against a professional team from Galesburg, Illinois. Alexander pitches the locals to a victory over the Galesburg club, impressing manager George Glasheen (Gordon Jones). Meanwhile, he has failed to meet Aimee and her father who, as a wedding gift, was planning to place a down payment on the farm. Mr. Arrants warns his daughter not to marry someone like Alexander who places frivolous games such as baseball above earning a living for his family.[15]

Aimee is angry with her fiancé but, still in love, she assumes that she will be able to guide her immature lover into more respectable pursuits than baseball. While Alexander and Aimee are attending a lecture by a visiting professor on the attractions of Norway, the meeting is disturbed by George Glasheen of the Galesburg club seeking to sign the young pitcher to a contract. Alexander eagerly leaves the lecture, introducing a note of anti-intellectualism into the film, and, with a boyish grin on his face, he begins to play catch with Glasheen. To the consternation of Aimee and her father, Alexander signs with the Galesburg team.

While enjoying considerable success in his first professional season,

Alexander does not forget Aimee, writing her every day and sending his money home as a down payment for a farm — establishing a sense of rugged individualism as the young couple will not be dependent upon Mr. Arrants for the acquisition of property. Mr. Arrants, however, continues to be dubious of Alexander's maturity and future prospects, even going so far as to forbid the perky Aimee from singing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." But Alexander's budding baseball career is cut short when he is struck on the head by an infielder's throw during an attempt by Alexander to break up a double play. Aimee rushes to the bedside of her fallen hero, assuming the motherly role of caring for her sick boy. Alexander is suffering from double vision, and the doctor announces that his baseball-playing days are over. Aimee beams as her young man will now have to settle down and pursue a respectable lifestyle.

The couple marries and purchases their farm, but Alexander is clearly unhappy and moody. While the Alexander and Arrants families celebrate Christmas, Aimee treats them to a holiday song (the only Doris Day musical number in the film). Meanwhile, Alexander is struggling with his double vision while attempting to string popcorn. This scene of domestic bliss is just too much for a young man whose Christmas wish is just to be able to play baseball, and Alexander storms out of the room. But he does get his wish as the double vision miraculously disappears: Alexander awakens one moonlit night with clear vision. He immediately goes into the backyard, wearing his bathrobe and slippers, and begins throwing baseballs into a peach basket. Aimee hears the racket and gazes out the window to view her husband with an expression of bliss as he tosses one baseball after another into the basket. She realizes that it is now her responsibility to support Alexander in the only career that will make him happy. The next spring they are off to spring training with the Philadelphia Phillies who purchased Alexander's contract. (The film omits Alexander's 1910 season with the Syracuse Chiefs.)

This first segment of the film introduces several themes which are common to the baseball-biographical picture. First is the baseball hero's devotion to the game which assures his cloak of innocence. Much like Ronald Reagan who nostalgically recalled an idyllic boyhood in the Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer tradition, Americans love to perceive themselves as the innocents in a corrupt and decadent world. In sport, this is often associated with the cult of amateurism which placed the pure athlete above monetary concerns and, thus, was unable to be compromised by devious gamblers. In their history of baseball cinema, Marshall G. Most and Robert Rudd proclaim, "The true baseball player is driven by something inside, an essential part of his or her being. From the early days of childhood, the heroes of baseball cinema have wanted to do only one thing — play baseball." Most and Rudd conclude, "The true rewards of the game, at least according to the official ideology

of baseball, are not monetary, but rather the fulfillment of pursuing one's true passion."[16]

Of course, the question arises as to whether passion will pay the bills. The baseball film, however, seems to suggest that if one follows his muse and retains his innocence, then economic security will follow. But this happens only after considerable conflict, indicating some trepidation regarding the contradictions between the myth and reality of the American dream through baseball. For example, baseball heroes such as Grover Cleveland Alexander and Dizzy Dean were farmboy innocents who risked the corrupting influence of the city. This interpretation, of course, tends to ignore the urban origins of baseball in the United States. Nevertheless, baseball in the country provides an image of the democratic agrarian republic envisioned by Thomas Jefferson. With the rise of a new industrial order in the early twentieth century, the country ballplayers had little choice but to seek their fortunes within the dangers of Alexander Hamilton's urbanized America.

The key for the baseball hero was to retain his country virtues. Thus, Howard Good argues that by following his passion, the baseball hero could find "true" success "which they defined as happiness, the joy of living, developing yourself by doing your best with faculties God gave you, leading a self-respecting life, peace of mind, service to others." This true success was to be achieved through the virtues of hard work, but herein lies another contradiction. Both Alexander and Dean appear to rely upon natural talent rather than the work ethic for their baseball mastery. The athletes, however, must learn to place these natural talents within the pursuit of team goals — an end result with which Dean often struggles in *The Pride of St. Louis*. Good concludes that this ambiguity regarding the traditional success epic in post–World War II cinema raises questions as to whether material longings were running ahead of satisfaction in the so-called affluent society. Thus, Good argues that in post–World War II America "the scramble for success no longer seemed synonymous with the pursuit of happiness."[17]

Nevertheless, there is little ambiguity in *The Winning Team* when Alexander joins the Phillies. He demonstrates immediate mastery of National League hitters, and his career with the Phillies from 1911 to 1917 is told through a montage sequence in which Aimee as a loyal wife keeps a scrapbook of her husband's accomplishments. In this segment of the film, Aimee is a traditional spouse who takes great pride in her husband's pursuit of his passion and dreams. She is a loyal helpmate and is certainly the junior partner on this winning team. Cooperative values were also apparent in the relationship between Alexander and his catcher, Bill Killefer (James Millican), who was later traded along with Alexander to the Cubs. Competition is downplayed when St. Louis Cardinals rookie Rogers Hornsby comes to bat. Killefer

approaches Alexander on the mound and points out that Hornsby (Frank Lovejoy) is going to be dispatched to the minor leagues if he does not get a hit. Alexander looks at the scoreboard, noting that the Phillies have a safe lead in the late innings. Alexander tells his catcher to inform Hornsby that the next pitch will be right down the middle of the plate. An incredulous Hornsby takes one strike before lining the next Alexander offering for a double. After sliding into second base, Hornsby grins at the pitcher and acknowledges the favor. A key plot element for the film is that Hornsby will later be able to reciprocate when Alexander is in the twilight of his career. Alexander's actions in "grooving" a pitch for Hornsby reflects the shift in the post–World War II consensus from the values of rugged individualism to the more corporate ideas of cooperation and teamwork. Writing about the emergence of the "organization man" whose allegiance was to the corporation, Peter Biskind observes, "The men who worked in these large organizations, assembling Chevvies on the line or making devices in the executive suites, were less slaves or captains of industry than wheels in machines that put a premium on cooperation, not competition; conformity, not individualism. Popularity with peers replaced creativity or even productivity as a criterion of performance."[18]

However, the experiences of Alexander during and after World War I, which certainly resonated with post–World War II film audiences, indicate considerable unease with the concept that consensus values would necessarily lead to greater international or domestic security. Shortly before he was drafted and deployed to the Western front, Alexander and his battery mate Killefer were traded to the Chicago Cubs. Alexander is concerned with his wife's security, and he informs her that Mr. Wrigley, the chewing-gum magnate who owned the Cubs, had agreed to the financial support of Aimee while her husband was at war. Alexander, gushing about how wonderful the baseball owner was, goes on to explain that should he not return from combat, Mr. Wrigley would arrange for her long-term financial needs. In addition to placing one's faith in big business, this scene suggests a helpless female who was unable to take care of herself. The experience of many families during and after the Second World War indicated that women were quite capable of handling themselves in the workplace, but an ever expanding capitalist economy might not resolve all problems. Alexander's post–World War I difficulties also reflected the insecurities of American masculinity following the Second World War.

The Winning Team briefly shows Alexander commanding an artillery battery. As the constant pounding hurts his ears, the dizziness and double vision which plagued the ballplayer during his early minor league years return. Alexander recovers his balance and assures his comrades that he is alright. We next see Alexander participating in a triumphant ticker-tape parade to wel-

come back the troops. He and Aimee are reunited in a warm embrace, and the assumption is that the loving couple will live happily ever after under the benevolent care of the Mr. Wrigleys of America, who is not referenced again in the film as Alexander's career begins to go downhill. When Alexander resumes his position on the pitching mound, he loses consciousness. Suggesting it was just the heat, Alexander refuses to see the club physician. But remembering the vertigo he suffered as a young ballplayer and during the war, he consults a private physician who informs him that if he continues to pursue his baseball career, the pressure will kill him. The viewing audience realizes that Alexander's condition is serious, but the scriptwriters refuse to reveal that the pitcher suffered from epileptic seizures. A stunned Alexander requests that the doctor inform neither the Cubs nor Aimee regarding the severity of his condition. At this point, Alexander is reverting to rugged individualism and deserting the more corporative values of team and marriage. In many ways this scene is reminiscent of Gary Cooper in *Pride of the Yankees*, when Gehrig asks his doctor whether it is strike three and attempts to spare his wife the finality of the diagnosis.

After leaving the doctor's office, Alexander wanders the streets of Chicago until he encounters a speakeasy. Alexander appears to take the first drink of his life and likes it—evidently both alcoholism and epilepsy were genetic problems for the Alexander family. An inebriated Alexander stumbles into the street and passes out. Alexander continues to drink, and he becomes increasingly unreliable on the mound with the Cubs and in his marriage with Aimee. The result is that the Cubs release Alexander, and Aimee leaves him. A disconsolate Alexander attempts to find jobs with barnstorming teams such as the House of David, but his reputation for drinking and ongoing battles with vertigo leave him unable to maintain a baseball job. He ends up working in a sideshow carnival where patrons purchase tickets to ask the inebriated Alexander questions about his baseball career. Alexander is wallowing in self-pity, although the film suggests some ambiguity as to whether the former ballplayer is suffering primarily from alcoholism or his mysterious vertigo disorder.

Rescue for Alexander comes in the guise of his physician who finally informs Aimee of her husband's true condition. It is interesting to note that in an era where society and film increasingly placed great stock in therapy to make maladjusted individuals well and productive members of the consensus, the doctor in *The Winning Team* appears unable to help Alexander and leaves everything up to Aimee. With the help of Bill Killefer, she is finally able to track down her husband. She is heartbroken as she witnesses one of Alexander's carnival performances, and Aimee resolves that she will take action in order to save her husband. She contacts Hornsby, who is now managing the St.

Louis Cardinals, and pleads with him to give Alexander a chance to pitch for the Cardinals and repay the charity displayed by Alexander when Hornsby was a young player. Hornsby reluctantly concedes to Aimee's arguments, but he asks what assurances there are that Alexander will be able to overcome his problems and regain his pitching form. Aimee insists that she will deliver the Alexander of old. She left him when he needed her, and it will not happen again. The film ends on a positive note as Alexander helps lead the Cardinals to victory over the New York Yankees in the 1926 World Series. But this triumphant return is dependent upon a reversal in gender roles for Alexander who now appears totally reliant upon Aimee.

The Winning Team seems to reflect the post–World War II crisis in masculinity which was exhibited in many of the baseball biographical films of the 1950s. In his work *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity*, Robert J. Corber writes that in the 1950s "a model of masculinity that stressed domesticity and cooperation gradually became hegemonic." Men were encouraged to more openly express their emotions, define themselves as consumers, and take a greater role in the raising of children — all characteristics usually attributed to females in the culture. In addition, destructive competition was discouraged, and men were urged to adopt the cooperative values of the organization man. Corber argues, "Despite the loss of independence it entailed, most men consented in the domestication of masculinity because it enabled them to achieve a higher standard of living than their fathers had enjoyed and to participate in the consumer culture of the postwar period." This domestic model was encouraged by government programs, such as the G.I. Bill and the Federal Housing Administration, fostering suburbanization — at least for white Americans who could secure home loans for the suburbs. Nevertheless, many men resisted the domestication of masculinity, which remained a contested terrain throughout the postwar period."[19]

This degree of ambiguity and paradox regarding postwar gender roles is reflected in *The Winning Team*. By the film's conclusion, Alexander appears completely domesticated, and Aimee has assumed the dominant role in the relationship. Fears and insecurities regarding this crisis in masculinity led to the scapegoating of communists, including such left-wing sympathizers as Edward G. Robinson, and homosexuals who were linked as national security risks within the paranoia of Cold War America. Ronald Reagan attempted to deal with these insecurities by merging politics and acting through taking on the communists, first in Hollywood and later in the "evil empire" of the Soviet Union, and calling upon Americans to return to the traditional values of Tom Sawyer's America, free from racial, gender, and class conflicts.

In the conclusion of *The Winning Team*, Reagan as the domesticated male, Grover Cleveland Alexander could only find comfort in the essential

supporting gaze of his wife. With Aimee taking her reserved seat in the ballpark, Alexander was able to win games two and six of the 1926 World Series for the Cardinals. On the eve of game seven, an exhausted Alexander expresses both his admiration for and dependence upon Aimee. He confesses that he could not have made it through the season without her strength and presence. In response, she gently rubs the head of her man/child, insisting that he just needs some rest. Aimee informs her husband that she will not be attending the final game of the Series as Alexander would not be pitching since he worked the previous day.

With the Cardinals clinging to a narrow one-run lead in the seventh inning of the deciding game, Hornsby called for Alexander to enter the contest and face the Yankees Tony Lazzeri with the bases loaded and two outs. Since he did not expect to pitch, Alexander was asleep in the dugout but ambled out to the mound to face the Yankee slugger. Many accounts assert that Alexander was still suffering from a hangover when he entered the game, but the Alexander of *The Winning Team* is distraught because Aimee is not in attendance. Alexander is not sure whether he can pitch without her support and presence. He suffers vertigo and is almost impotent on the mound as he searches the crowd desperately for Aimee. Somehow Alexander forces himself to face Lazzeri, striking him out after a long foul ball into the seats which, if fair, would have given the Yankees the lead.

Meanwhile, Aimee learns that Alexander has entered the game, and she hails a cab for Yankee Stadium. Aimee is uncertain whether her husband will be able to perform without her nurturing care and guidance. But Alexander musters up some of his old fashioned rugged individualism to make it through the eighth inning. As he takes the mound for the bottom of the ninth with the Cardinals still clinging to a one-run lead, Alexander's sense of vertigo intensifies. He stares repeatedly at Aimee's vacant chair — a symbol employed during the Civil War to signify the strain placed upon families due to the absence of the patriarch during the conflict. But here the gender roles are reversed. Just as Alexander appears ready to collapse on the mound, Aimee makes it to her seat. Her husband is rejuvenated and retires the last batter for a St. Louis victory. The winning team of Aimee and Alexander together conquer the pitcher's fears and insecurities which led to his alcoholism. Symbolically, the American male is able to find a comfort zone within the more domesticated and cooperative values of the postwar consensus. Secure within the nuclear family in the American suburbs, the new male would be able to partake in the consumer culture while the national security state protected the family from enemies both foreign and domestic. But this consensus fabric was threadbare and would be challenged by gays and lesbians, young people, feminists, cultural rebels, and civil rights activists.

Even reviewers such as Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times*, who was usually a strong advocate of consensus values, found Alexander's dependence upon his wife a bit exaggerated and uncomfortable, asserting, "We are told that it was Mrs. Alexander who really supplied the final punch for all those celebrated victories that are credited to Alex's pitching score." *Time* found the basic premise of the film unconvincing, concluding, "*The Winning Team* loses out through sandlot writing and direction and a rookie performance by Ronald Reagan in the leading role." *Newsweek* was somewhat kinder, insisting that Reagan gave "the masculine performance," while Doris Day was "freshly appealing."[20]

But any obituaries for Reagan were certainly premature. The actor's film career was in eclipse as he began making a transition into the political arena. As a politician, Reagan was uncomfortable with the starker reality of a film such as *Big Leaguer*. He preferred a more romanticized past as developed in *The Winning Team*. In fact, as Reagan later wove his vision of "morning in America," he was almost always accompanied by his wife, Nancy, who during the presidential years seemed to offer the nurturing presence and loving gaze provided by Aimee Alexander in *The Winning Team*.

As for the real Alexander, life was more complex than fantasy. He was out of baseball by 1930 and evidently drinking heavily. The barnstorming and carnival stories depicted in the film took place after his retirement from the game. The Alexander marriage dissolved, and the pitcher spent his remaining years financially strapped and battling alcoholism. A more positive baseball biography was available in the story of Dizzy Dean, who learned to tame his individualism in favor of the team, again through the support of a strong woman, becoming one of the nation's most beloved baseball broadcasters.

7

Education Ain't No Stumbling Block to Mobility

Dizzy Dean and *The Pride of St. Louis* (1952)

The traditional formula for success and social mobility in America embraces the values of hard work and thrift articulated by Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Closely associated with the Franklin model for achieving the American Dream is a faith in education as a means of erasing class barriers to mobility. In his 1848 report to the Massachusetts Board of Education, Horace Mann extolled the economic virtues of universal public education, arguing, "Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men — the balance wheel of the social machinery."[1] Yet, the 1952 20th Century–Fox film biography of St. Louis Cardinals great Dizzy Dean, *The Pride of St. Louis*, suggests that the lack of a formal education does not necessarily constitute a stumbling block to progress. In fact, the film even undermines the work ethic celebrated by Franklin and the Horatio Alger mythology of nineteenth-century America. Dean earns his rise in social status through ability rather than hard work.

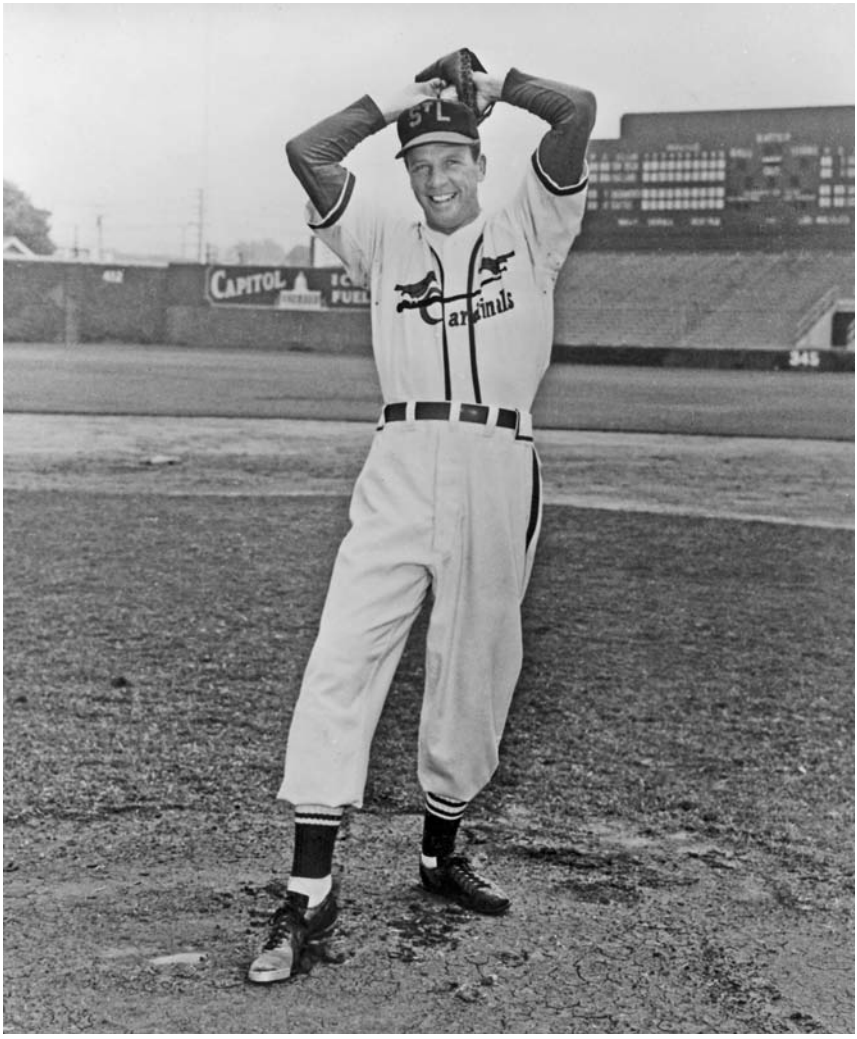
On the surface, *The Pride of St. Louis* is a feel-good story. Coming out of rural poverty in Depression-era Arkansas, Dean becomes an outstanding major league pitcher with the St. Louis Cardinals, but an injury shortens his career. The charismatic Dean then begins a successful vocation in broadcasting; however, the uneducated former athlete draws criticism from educators for his butchering of the English language. In the end, Dean is able to accommodate his critics by following the guidance and example of his beautiful wife. The popular announcer continues to broadcast and challenge narrow-minded grammarians.

A closer reading of the film, however, reveals that Dean's rise from the cotton fields of Arkansas to the baseball stadiums of America's largest cities

and broadcast booths of St. Louis and New York City requires that his rugged individualism and producer capitalism be tamed by his wife, Pat, who appears to better reflect the values of cooperation and consumption which characterize the post–World War II liberal consensus. In *Seeing is Believing*, critic Peter Biskind maintains that post–World War II cinema emphasized the values of corporate liberalism in which pluralism, cooperation, and organization were employed to integrate rugged individualists like Dean into the consensus. Building on the work of sociologist Daniel Bell, who suggested that the 1950s were based upon collectives rather than individuals, Biskind writes, "As individuals, in other words, people were more likely to vote for Henry Wallace, make 'irresponsible' demands on their employers, or support Joe McCarthy. But as Elks, middle-level executives for General Electric, or members of an ILGWU local, they could be expected to vote Democratic/Republican, fight in Korea, and invest in backyard bomb shelters."[2] It was essential for an individualist like Dean to find the vital center.

With the Depression as social background, Dean's story would appear to be a perfect fit for a rags-to-riches epic. *The Pride of St. Louis*, however, elects to downplay the economic despair of the Depression era. Rather than starvation and the possible collapse of an economic system, in *The Pride of St. Louis* the 1930s become a staging ground for character development. This scenario fit well into a consensus faith in capitalism and the shift from producer individualist capitalism to the consumption and cooperative ethics of the postwar economy.

On the other hand, in his history of major league baseball in the 1930s, Charles C. Alexander asserts the centrality of the Depression to an era in which the sport was "a tougher, more demanding, more dangerous, and perhaps more desperate game" than in later times. Alexander concludes, "For ballplayers in the Depression era, the professional game wasn't just how they wanted to make a living; for many of them, it was about the only way they could make a living. The players of those hard times would often look back on the baseball of their day as having been more rugged and generally more demanding than the game they would watch in later decades." Ownership adjusted to declining revenues by cutting costs. Total major league payrolls dropped from $4 million in 1930 to $3 million in 1933, with the average player salary plummeting to only $4,500. This cutthroat approach was also embraced by many players and well articulated by St. Louis Cardinals manager Frankie Frish, who told *The Saturday Evening Post*, "There's no room for sentiment in baseball if you want to win." This was the type of destructive, individualistic competition which would need to be de-emphasized in the more cooperative postwar environment characterized by such baseball cinema as *The Pride of St. Louis*.[3]



Dancer Dan Dailey attempts to emulate the pitching style of Dizzy Dean in *The Pride of St. Louis* (1952).

The low-budget Fox studio film was assigned to former film editor Harmon Jones, who was moving into the direction of feature films. The screenplay was produced by Herman Mankiewicz from a story by Guy Trosper. In relying upon veteran screenwriter Mankiewicz, who was primarily responsible for the Academy Award-winning screenplay of *Citizen Kane* (1941), Fox was hoping to tap the baseball drama and success which the writer achieved with *The Pride of the Yankees* (1942). In fact, all the baseball biographical pictures of

the postwar era may be perceived as efforts by film executives to imitate the box-office appeal of Lou Gehrig's story. On the other hand, Dean's challenge with the English language lacked the drama of Gehrig facing death, and *The Pride of St. Louis*, despite its similar title, failed to match the financial success of *The Pride of the Yankees*. To portray Dean, Fox tapped veteran song and dance performer Dan Dailey, who was nominated as Best Actor in 1948 for his performance in *When My Baby Smiles at Me*. Daily did not look totally comfortable in a baseball uniform, but this was not a huge problem as the film contained little baseball footage. Newcomer Richard Crenna, who later starred in such popular television fare as *The Real McCoys*, portrayed Dean's brother Paul, often referred to as "Daffy." Joanne Dru, perhaps best known for her role in Howard Hawks's *Red River* (1948), played Dean's wife, Pat, and *Time* magazine observed that the former show girl's "curves" were ever bit as impressive as those employed by the pitcher on the baseball diamond.[4]

Despite an attractive cast, the overall production values for *The Pride of St. Louis* were rather lackluster. In *The Baseball Filmography*, Hal Erickson asserts that *The Pride of St. Louis* "has a soulless, assembly-line look, from the unprepossessing camerawork to the rubber-stamp design of the main credit titles. The Fox people knew they could rely on a healthy number of bookings for *St. Louis* due to the drawing power of its star Dan Dailey, and that the film would earn a profit since it hadn't cost much to begin with, but Fox also knew that baseball pictures seldom generated really big business; so why bother to go the extra mile and make the film any better or more memorable than it was?"[5]

The film, however, was a little more lucrative for Dean who was given $50,000 by Fox for the rights to his story. In response to the offer from Fox, the flamboyant former pitcher allegedly remarked, "Jeez, they're gonna give me fifty thousand smackers just for livin'!" Pat Dean, however, provided a more practical business approach, just as her character in the film would have to exercise restraint over her man/child husband. Rather than receiving the money up front, the studio would pay Dean in small installments so that the family's income tax structure would not be impacted.[6]

The Pride of St. Louis begins the story of Dizzy Dean with the familiar sounds of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" along with the graphic, "This is a true story." The filmmakers then proceed to take considerable liberties with the Dean story. The first shot of the film is labeled as taking place in the Ozarks around 1928 and consists of a close-up shot of a bare foot before panning back to reveal Dizzy Dean as a young man pitching without shoes. This opening scene presents Dean as a natural talent who can perform exceedingly well without the accoutrements of a uniform and shoes. The barefoot shot also establishes the historical context of rural poverty on the eve of the Great Depression. But the film does little with these rich images, having the natural

signed by a scout who dispatches the lad to the Houston Buffaloes of the Texas League. *The Pride of St. Louis* is more interested in Dean's adjustment to life in the city than to his rural origins. Thus, the film fits well into film historian Howard Good's contention that baseball biography features were primarily concerned with encouraging the corporate values of the organization man. Good writes, "The virtues the film preaches — conformity, sobriety, humility — belong more to the good employees than to the rugged individualists. If the film inspires viewers to do anything, it isn't to fantasize about having a major league career, but to push on with their own mundane lives."[7]

But in eschewing Dean's Ozark roots, the film is missing a great deal. Born Jay Hanna Dean on 16 January 1910 in Lucas, Arkansas, he was named after the nineteenth-century railroad magnate Jay Gould and William McKinley's Ohio political advisor, Mark Hanna.[8] Dean sometimes confused sportswriters by using the name "Jerome Herman" after a childhood friend who died when Dean was seven. His father, Albert Monroe Dean, was a tenant farmer and sawmill worker who struggled to make a living for his family after the death of his wife, Alma Nelson Dean, from tuberculosis in 1918. Spending much of his youth in the cotton fields rather than school, Dean's education was terminated by the third grade. When he was 16, Dean enlisted in the Army. When he left the military in 1929, he agreed to pitch for a semi-professional team in San Antonio, and the following year he was signed by the Houston club.

The rural poverty in which Dean lived throughout his youth is crucial to understanding the man, yet *The Pride of St. Louis* downplays the Depression era in favor of the more cooperative values needed for accommodating to the affluent society of the 1950s. In his biography of Dean, Robert Gregory emphasizes the poverty and "honest drudgery" suffered by the Dean family. Gregory asserts, "In an area where nobody was too well off, the Deans were considered among the really poor," earning about 38 cents a day during the 1920s when cotton prices were low and farmers were hurting before the Depression descended upon most Americans in 1929. But rather than the virtues of hard work, both Dean brothers often focused upon their natural talents for hurling a baseball. Paul insisted, "Diz and me were naturals. Born athletes, they call it. We had good arms. We could fire that ball." Dizzy echoed the sentiments of his younger brother, proclaiming, "I was built for pitchin' and knew what to do when I got a hold of a ball. You could say I had that there instinct."[9] The idea that the path out of poverty was through luck and the God-given natural talent of throwing a baseball offered little encouragement for those mired in poverty and not blessed with athletic talent. And if one was an African American, even possessing such skills would not be enough to pursue a career in the segregated major leagues.

Rather than extol the traditional value of hard work, *The Pride of St. Louis* takes the Deans' words to heart. The film presents Dean as a child-like natural athlete whose extreme individualism has to be tamed so that he may become a team player in post–World War II America. When Dean reports to Houston, he fails to understand why the team does not immediately sign Paul, and he makes little effort to befriend his teammates for he assumes that he will not be spending much time in the Texas League. Dean, however, does notice that his country-boy attire of a straw hat and suspenders makes him out to be somewhat of a buffoon.

Dean heads to a local clothing store where he purchases several suits and attempts to charge his new wardrobe to the ball club. The brash young man is then conducted to the credit manager of the department store. Dean is rather shocked to find that the credit manager is the attractive Pat Nash (Joanne Dru), although we learn that she is only filling in for the male manager. Nevertheless, in this scene Pat assumes the role that she will continue to play throughout the film. Pat must socialize Dean and help him adjust to the expectations of a larger society. In this regard, Pat represents the strong women who emerged in the World War II era, combining domestic duties with responsibilities in the workplace. While in films such as *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (1949), independent women need to be tamed, in the baseball biographical films the spouse must not only support but rescue the husband. And in the case of Dean, Pat Nash certainly confronted a major challenge in disciplining her man/child.

After explaining to Dean that he would need to have Houston manager Ed Monroe (Leo Clary) approve the clothing purchase, Pat becomes the recipient of Dean's attention. He proceeds to take Pat out for supper, during which he explains his background to this understanding and sympathetic woman. Dean observes that he would make a good husband because he neither smokes nor drinks. On the other hand, Dean acknowledges that he grew up picking cotton and has little formal education. He also informs Pat that he is not comfortable helping the team with publicity functions such as a Houston Chamber of Commerce smoker. Obviously, it is going to take a great deal of effort to make Dean fit into the post–World War II values of the consensus and corporate culture espoused by *The Pride of St. Louis*.

Dean continues his whirlwind courtship of Pat, inviting her to an exhibition game he pitches for Houston against the Chicago White Sox. Dean dominates the major league club, winning the game 3–1. In an effort to rattle the young pitcher, the White Sox players begin to call him "Dizzy." Rather than being embarrassed by the verbal insults of his opponents, Dean embraces his new nickname. Most Dean biographers, however, attribute the moniker "Dizzy" to Dean's military service between 1926 and 1929. A sergeant allegedly

discovered Dean amusing himself by throwing peeled potatoes against garbage can lids, describing the young soldier as a "dizzy-son-of-a-bitch."[10]

Dean uses his performance against the White Sox to gain a tryout for his brother Paul who is in attendance. But he is disturbed that Pat attended the game with another suitor, Mr. Bishop. Going on the offensive, Dizzy obtains a ladder and climbs up to Pat's bedroom window, proposing that they elope the next day. Pat acquiesces, but there are some limits that she will impose upon Dizzy's youthful enthusiasm. She vetoes the idea of a pre-game marriage ceremony at home plate with her groom in baseball uniform.

Indeed, Pat remarks that because her husband spends so much of his time off the ball field fishing that she has married Huckleberry Finn. The literary themes of Mark Twain's classic novel were probably lost upon Dizzy, but they do coincide well with the ideas of the film. Just as Huck is unable to escape the clutches of the shore and civilization, Dizzy will have to grow up and tame his rugged individualism to find his place in society. But rather than the violent Pap or stern Miss Watson, Dean's civilizing agent is a beautiful woman who adores him and wants to help him adjust.[11]

Dean's bravado, however, works for him on the ball field, although in the condensed film chronology, he does spend a full season in Houston before joining the St. Louis Cardinals. Actually, Dean pitched for Houston in 1930 and 1931 before the Cardinals purchased his contract prior to the 1932 season. The Cardinals enjoyed a wide following in the rural South, for until the expansion of the Dodgers and Giants to the West Coast following the 1957 season, St. Louis represented the southern and western borders of major league baseball. While St. Louis featured two franchises until the Browns departed for Baltimore in 1954, it is the Cardinals who attained the greater popularity in Missouri and American South, winning more pennants than any other National League franchise. Describing the role played by the Cardinals in American culture during the Depression years, Robert Creamer asserts, "The Cardinals seemed to represent the era of Depression America. Henry Fonda as the undefeatable Tom Joad in the film version of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* looked like a St. Louis Cardinal: lean, bony, hard; grim tight smile; defiance in adversity; spirit…. Like the Joads, they were resilient. They came back from defeat. They were country tough, with country ways and country humor."[12]

During his 1932 rookie season, Dean won 18 games for the Cardinals and posted an earned run average of 3.30. *The Pride of St. Louis* depicts Dean's initial appearance in a relief role with Pat nervously watching from the stands. A confident Dizzy refuses to take any warm-up tosses, but then misses the strike zone with his first pitch. Noticing Pat's sense of apprehension, Dizzy called time-out and dispatched a batboy to tell her that the first offering

simply "slupt." He then retired the side, and Pat breathed a sigh of relief. In this scene, Pat appears more in the role of a supportive parent, anxious about the performance of her man/child. (It should also be noted that Dizzy lost his mother at an early age.) Although it is largely a passive role, Pat is given the cinematic gift of the gaze, and we see Dean's performance through her eyes. It is a perspective repeated in many of the baseball biographical films as the athletes appear dependent upon the approval of a strong woman who must help her husband properly adjust to the expectations of society.

Along with his brother Paul, Dizzy becomes a pitching star for the Cardinals, winning 20 games in 1933 and leading the Cardinals to a World Series triumph over the Detroit Tigers in 1934 after gaining 30 victories during the regular season. The success of the Dean brothers is captured through a montage featuring Dizzy and Paul pitching, selling tickets, serving as ushers, and leading a band. Meanwhile, Pat maintains a scrapbook recording the exploits of her husband.

The 1934 season, however, was not without controversy for the Dean family. Cardinals general manager Branch Rickey had a well-earned reputation for frugality, and Dizzy was upset that Paul was not adequately compensated by the Cardinals. On August 13, after Dizzy and Paul lost both ends of a double header to the Chicago Cubs, the Deans failed to accompany the club to play an exhibition game against the Tigers. Manager Frankie Frish fined Dean and Paul $100 each. When Frish refused to rescind the fines, Dizzy tore to shreds his Cardinals home and road uniforms, announcing that he and Paul were quitting the team. Rickey and Cardinals owner Sam Breadon backed Frish. Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis also supported management as he could not allow such a degree of player autonomy. Peter Golenbock stresses the radical nature of Dizzy's actions, writing, "For baseball this was a stand as revolutionary as Lenin's. A player who sat out over pay during spring training was called a 'holdout.' This was different. This was a player airing his grievances and threatening disruption of the team and game after signing a contract and during the season. In one stroke, Dizzy Dean was attempting to buck the reserve clause, outmaneuver Branch Rickey, extort Sam Breadon, and shake up the underlying foundations of the Game itself." The impasse between the Cardinals and Dean brothers was broken by Pat Dean, who announced that Dizzy had simply missed the Detroit exhibition because he was "heartbroken" over the double-header loss to the Cubs and needed a vacation. The ever-practical Pat concluded that Paul and Dizzy would return because "the Dean family needs the money."[13]

In *The Pride of St. Louis*, the confrontation with Frish (Stuart Randall) is much more sedate, and the Cardinals manger implores the brothers to "be good soldiers." After Frish leaves their apartment, Dizzy is shocked that the

seemingly ever-supportive Pat is not in favor of the strike. She explains to her husband that he should call off the work stoppage. Pat is afraid that Dizzy will prevail in his struggle with the Cardinals, but such a victory may not be the best outcome for the pitcher. She again equates her husband with a child, insisting that Dizzy must learn that he cannot always have what he wants. Dizzy must learn that there are limits and choices to be made in life.

Like an angry child, Dean storms out of the apartment, arguing that Pat has quit on him. A disconsolate Dean encounters a young man, Johnny Kendall (Richard Hylton), who is struggling to carry several packages while attempting to walk aided by crutches. Dizzy helps Kendall place the packages in the young man's car, and the ballplayer rides around with Kendall for the afternoon, admiring how the disabled man is able to maneuver his automobile with a hand-operated clutch. The message here is that Dizzy should stop feeling sorry for himself and better appreciate his natural gifts and not squander them. Dean then apologizes both to Pat and the Cardinals, stating that he has been behaving like a kid stealing from the cookie jar. It is time for him to grow up, adjust to being a man, and face facts. There are certainly class aspects to the scenario the film's script uses to explain Dean's change of heart. While Kendall is disabled, he is clearly a successful businessman, and his words and actions seem to carry weight with the semi-literate Dean. Also, when Dean was striking in the 1930s, organized labor was challenging the prerogatives of management with formation of the CIO and Congressional passage of the Wagner National Labor Relations Act. When the film was made in the early 1950s, however, organized labor was in retreat with legislation such as the Taft-Hartley Bill enacted by Congress. In an atmosphere where labor unrest was often associated with communist political activity, *The Pride of St. Louis* did not provide a positive rendering of the Dean brothers' 1934 strike.

But Dean had not quite learned his lesson. Dizzy and Paul returned to the Cardinals and led them to the 1934 World Series victory over the Tigers. But during the 1936 season, Paul was hit by a line drive in his pitching arm. Unable to resume his baseball career (in reality, Paul did attempt a comeback with the Cardinals and New York Giants), Paul purchases an interest in a sawmill. His older brother simply does not understand how Paul could give up baseball for a career in business. Dean vows that he will never abandon baseball.

This affirmation was tested in 1937, indicating that Dizzy still represented the untamed values of rugged individualism, while Paul was adjusting to the corporate consensus of the 1950s. During the 1937 All-Star game at Griffith Stadium, Dean was hit in the big toe of his left foot with a line drive off the bat of Earl Averill. Attempting to come back from the broken toe injury too

quickly, Dean hurt his pitching arm, and in 1938 he was sold to the Chicago Cubs. His brother Paul explains to Dizzy he still has good control, and he is a smart pitcher. But Dizzy no longer has a fast ball, and the Cubs are interested in him primarily as a gate attraction. Nevertheless, Dean went 7–1 for the Cubs in 1938, who won the National League pennant. In the World Series, the Yankee bats eventually caught up with Dean, and *The Pride of St. Louis* depicts the pitcher following Yankee shortstop Frankie Crosetti around the bases, proclaiming that Crosetti would never have homered off him in his prime.

Indeed, Dean had little left. He won six games for the Cubs in 1939, and by 1940 the legendary pitcher was back in the minor leagues. The film depicts a brash Dean who does not understand his release by Tulsa when he is unable to retire minor league hitters.

Meanwhile, a sympathetic Pat remains by his side, patiently rubbing his sore pitching arm and listening to his laments about the baseball establishment deserting him. The Deans return to St. Louis, where Dizzy is offered a sales position by his affluent friend Johnny Kendall. Dean appreciates the offer but refuses to accept a job with the Kendall family. The proud athlete still assumes that he can pitch, proclaiming, "I'm still Dizzy Dean." Pat is finally exasperated with her husband's failure to face the reality that his baseball career is finished. Pat tells Dizzy, "You can't spend the rest of your life in high school." While this dialogue is employed to again demonstrate Dean's immaturity, it is ironic that Dean's prospects are limited because he never made it into high school.

Convinced that Pat has joined the conspiracy against him, Dean descends into a darkness of self pity and despair that is a familiar plot device of the postwar baseball biographical picture. First, Dean turns to drink, but, unlike Grover Cleveland Alexander in *The Winning Team* (1952), he simply does not have any tolerance for alcohol. Instead, Dean finds his solace in gambling. In one scene, Dean loses all his money in a poker game. He then expects the other players to loan him money, for, after all, he is the legendary Dizzy Dean. When they refuse to advance him the funds, Dean accuses his fellow card players of cheating. Dean is then knocked to the floor, and the angry gamblers call him "a has-been." This proves to be the final straw for Pat, who informs her husband that she is leaving him and searching for a job. She refers to Dean as a "sweet, generous child," but it is "simply not in the cards to be a child forever." It is time for Huckleberry Finn to grow up and abandon the raft. Pat will no longer encourage Dean's dependency, and her return will be determined by his behavior. It is time that he take responsibility for his actions and adjust to life after baseball.

In *The Pride of St. Louis*, Pat Dean comes across as a beautiful saint. She appears to embody all the values of cooperation and consensus which Peter

Biskind argues characterized post–World War II America, while Dizzy Dean seems to exude the untamed and often destructive capitalism of nineteenth-century America. In reality, Pat Dean had a reputation for combativeness and encouraged Dean's many confrontations with Cardinal management over the right-hander's contracts. For example, when sportswriter Jack Miley wrote an unflattering 1938 column about Pat, Dizzy physically confronted the writer in a Tampa hotel lobby. Joe Williams of the *New York World-Telegram* took exception to this assault upon his fellow journalist and wrote his own piece on the Deans, sarcastically observing, "There's a lady for you, chums. I wouldn't say she is hard-bitten, but Mr. Miley is lucky she wasn't in there swinging. It does not seem ungallant to bring Mrs. Dizzy into discussion of a sports brawl since she is always striding into them on her own. The Deans are pop-offs who can dish it out but can't take it. Mr. Patricia — I mean, Dizzy — has repeatedly called his employers bums and his teammates tramps, but as soon as a sports columnist anoints him with grease his wife blows the whistle and Dizzy comes a-swinging. Up to now Mr. Patricia — there I did it again — has made good most of his boasts, but he isn't getting any younger and he is losing a lot of friends. As for Mrs. Dizzy, it will be something of a relief to get her out of the baseball picture."[14]

In a similar vein, a violent streak in Pat's character was reported in 1939 when Dizzy lost a sizeable sum of money while playing poker. Pat supposedly threw a lamp at Dizzy, opening a five-inch gash on his left arm below the elbow. Dizzy attempted to explain the injury with a number of stories, including bumping into a table while answering the phone, slipping at a counter while ordering cigars, and suffering an altercation with a taxi driver. Dismissing the story that Pat assaulted him, Dizzy told reporters, "Nah, the ol' marriage ain't what you fellas think. If she'd been throwin' to hurt me, it woulda been a beanball, sure. She's got better control than to smack me on the arm."[15]

This characterization of Pat Dean certainly does not represent the values of self control and amity personified in Joanne Dru's portrayal of Mrs. Dean. It seems that both Pat and Dizzy presented an assertiveness and individualism which allowed them to persevere during the tumultuous Depression era. The self-made man, or woman for that matter, needed to be tamed and placed in service of the larger society during the postwar period. Within the ideology presented by *The Pride of St. Louis*, Pat Dean, whether reflective of the real Mrs. Dean or not, becomes representative of the consensus focus upon cooperation and accommodation needed to take one's place within the affluent society of the 1950s. These traits may also be read as a feminization, but not necessarily weakening, of the culture.

In *The Pride of St. Louis*, Pat Dean was better able to get the attention of her husband by withdrawing her unconditional nurturing rather than

throwing a lamp. When Pat departs, Dizzy finally comes to his senses. His decides to accept Johnny Kendall's job offer. After hearing his son and Dean discuss baseball, Johnny's father, however, decides that the famous baseball player would make a wonderful commentator for the games of the St. Louis Browns, sponsored by the family business.

Viewers next see an animated Dean describing a game with his patented butchering of the English language. For example, Dean announces that the Browns pitcher was feeling "very confidential," while runners either "slud" into home or "went back to their respectable bases."[16] The film then cuts to shots of young boys listening adoringly to their hero, while Pat is depicted as beaming with pride that her man/child has accepted a responsible position within society. But Dizzy has to confront one more challenge before he can complete his adjustment to the values of postwar America.

The Sporting News prints an editorial questioning Dean's misapplication of the English language. Parent-teacher organizations begin to petition the Kendall family as well as the FCC to remove Dean. The teachers protesting Dean's presence on the air waves are portrayed as stereotypical snobbish and unattractive "school marms," but Dizzy does not want to do anything that will harm the children. Johnny Kendall tells Dizzy that his family will support any decision the former ballplayer wants to make.

The film then cuts to Dean wrapping up a broadcast with his assistant Tom Weaver (Chet Huntley). Dean announces that this will be his last game because he has been accused of "learning" kids bad English. He explains that he does not speak well because he was not educated, having left school after the third grade in order to chop cotton and help his family survive. Dean is departing the broadcast booth because he is harming the children for whom he is a role model. The former baseball star concludes with a piece of advice for the young people listening, "Every time you're up at bat, give it everything you've got." This last line indicates the transformation of Dean. More is needed to succeed than simply raw talent, especially in the more complicated corporate world of the postwar consensus. Dean has adjusted and matured by recognizing the importance of self-discipline and taming one's individualism in favor of the larger community. In the words of David Riesman, Dean is now outer rather than inner directed.[17]

When Dean returns home, Pat is waiting for him. It is interesting to note here that the Deans are no longer living in an apartment. Instead, they now reside in a comfortable suburban home complete with a white picket fence. Dizzy and Pat are now ready to take their place within suburbia and the consensus. As they embrace and kiss, the phone is constantly ringing. Johnny Kendall calls to inform Dizzy that the business switchboard is swamped with messages in support of Dean. And Dean even receives a call

from the "school marm" heading the East St. Louis Parent-Teacher Committee. On behalf of her committee, she apologizes to Dean, asserting that he is a positive influence upon the youth. She proclaims, "We'll teach 'em English, and you 'learn' 'em baseball." While many in the working class were denied opportunities for education and social mobility during the 1930s, the postwar society must make room for people like Dean in the consensus. There is no place for the upper class snobbery of the "school marms" in the classless society of suburbia. But the film offers little guidance as to how this is to be achieved. How are poor Southern whites, much less African Americans, to achieve the educational opportunities which Horace Mann believed would lead to social mobility? The answer seems to lie in the consensus values of cooperation and teamwork as opposed to rugged individualism and conflict. The continued economic growth of capitalism will provide poor whites and disadvantaged minorities the necessary opportunities without strife and protest. As the example of Dean suggests, talent alone is not enough in the long run. The breakdown of the consensus during the turbulent 1960s, however, makes clear that the promise of sustained economic growth was a mirage for many Americans.

The Pride of St. Louis concludes with Pat and Dizzy being interrupted by a knock at the door of their suburban home. When Pat opens the door, she is greeted by a group of children with balls and bats who want to know if Dizzy can come out and play. Pat smiles, places a baseball cap on Dizzy's head, and sends him out to play with the other children. Then from the safety and security of her suburban home, Pat again enjoys the gift of the gaze as she watches Dizzy and the children choose up sides for a game. All conflict is removed when one embraces the consensus. It is still possible to enjoy life and play within the safe confines of social responsibility required by the cooperative values of the consensus.

Nevertheless, conflict rather than cooperation more adequately described the historical relationship between the Deans and the Cardinals during the 1930s. The St. Louis Gas House Gang of the Depression era battled opponents and management, while fighting amongst themselves. But these were not the memories and values which the city of St. Louis wanted to celebrate with the premiere of *The Pride of St. Louis*. Twentieth Century–Fox announced that the picture would open on 11 April 1952, at the Missouri Theatre in St. Louis. Mayor Joseph M. Durst of St. Louis proclaimed the week of April 11–18 as "Dizzy Dean Week." Scrolls were placed in the city's major theaters so that fans could express their appreciation to Dean. On April 12, a six-mile-long motor parade was featured, extending from the St. Louis downtown area to Sportsman's Park where the Browns played the Cardinals in an exhibition contest. The parade featured Dizzy and Pat Dean; Mayor Durst; Bill Veeck, owner of the Browns, and Browns manager Rogers Hornsby; and film stars

Dan Dailey and Joanne Dru. Dean played tribute to the film by remarking that he was pleased with Dailey's performance. The actor spent weeks studying slow-motion film of Dizzy's pitching form. Then he worked with mirrors to imitate Dean's wind-up and follow-through. A satisfied Dean proclaimed, "He looks just like me when I was foggin' 'em in there. He sure looks more like a pitcher than a good many of these pitchers I've seen out there on the hill in recent years."[18]

The successful film premiere was followed in 1953 with Dean's selection to the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Although he won only 150 games in his injury-shortened major league career, Dean had dominated National League hitters during the 1930s. Dizzy Dean, indeed, was a natural as *The Pride of St. Louis* suggests. Dean became a national baseball icon during the Depression era despite his lack of education, but this reliance upon a rare natural ability failed to offer a model of social mobility for Americans who lacked such talent. Dean's rise to national prominence did not follow the prescriptions of Horace Mann regarding education and Ben Franklin's call for frugality and hard work. Instead, Dean relied upon bravado, ego, combativeness, and rugged individualism. While such characteristics may have been required for survival during the Depression era, adjustment to the post–World War II consensus required adherence to the values of reason, amity, teamwork, and cooperation. These were the values of a mature man and society which Pat Dean labored to instill in her husband. *The Pride of St. Louis* offers the promise of American life to those who suffered during the Depression era if they make the proper adjustments. (Although the film's vision of the American suburban dream certainly appears to be dominated by white faces.) But fears of another depression and the threat of a nuclear holocaust continued to haunt many Americans who believed that supernatural intervention might be the only way to assure security in a tumultuous world. These insecurities were reflected in a series of baseball fantasy films during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

8

Baseball and Supernatural Intervention

It Happens Every Spring (1949), *Angels in the Outfield* (1951), and *Rhubarb* (1951)

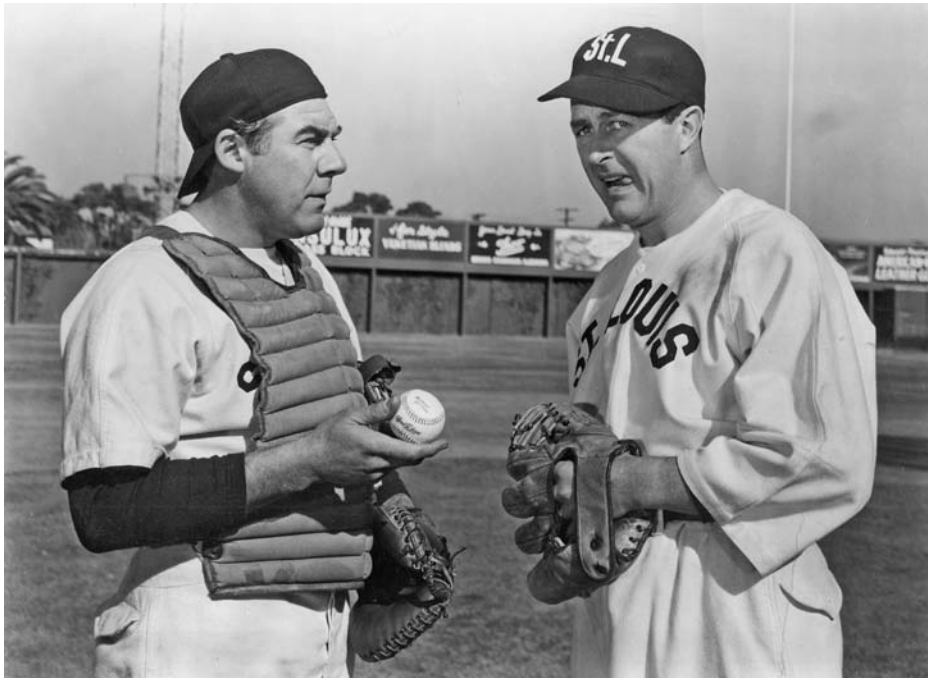
During the late 1940s and early 1950s, three baseball fantasy films opened to mixed reviews and a mediocre box office. *It Happens Every Spring* (1949), *Angels in the Outfield* (1951), and *Rhubarb* (1951) were initially perceived as lightweight cinema in which supernatural intervention of some type was required to rescue the protagonist from the clutches of evil or corrupt forces. However, a closer reading of these films within the historical context of post–World War II America reveals societal insecurities regarding the promise of American life. Film historian Gary Dickerson finds these films enigmatic, suggesting, "Maybe the answers to many questions that Americans had about future wars, technology, communism, and bombs simply could not be supplied. Possibly, these films were a response to that predicament."[1] Interpreting this supernatural baseball cinema within the cultural framework of the early Cold War years may shed some light on the development of American ideology and values during this crucial time period. Examined within historical and cultural context, and when compared to other Hollywood features of the period, perhaps these films are neither light nor atypical productions. They may reflect fundamental insecurities and doubts regarding the postwar world and attaining the American dream. In short, they may be read as indicative of a crisis in confidence in post–World War II America.

Fearing the return of unemployment after the war, many Americans embraced the post–World War II consensus with its twin pillars of anticommunism and sustained economic growth which would supposedly render meaningless the inequities of race, gender, and class. Nevertheless, postwar

confidence was shaky for Americans as the atomic bomb, Cold War, Korean conflict, McCarthyism, emerging civil rights movement, evolving gender roles, conformity of suburbia, deterioration of the inner cities, and a labor movement in decline undermined faith that the consensus would usher in a better world. These doubts were reflected in the darkness and moral ambiguity of film noir and boxing films in which the American dream was destroyed by greed and corruption. And the postwar baseball biographical film genre also reflected ambivalent heroes who were often insecure and dependent upon their spouses as they battled racism, poverty, disabilities, alcoholism, and mental illness in a society in flux. With baseball attendance in decline by 1949 following the initial postwar boom, even the future of such traditional institutions as the national pastime was unclear.

It is within the context of societal and baseball insecurities in the late 1940s and early 1950s that the film productions *It Happens Every Spring*, *Angels in the Outfield*, and *Rhubarb* must be placed. How were Americans and the sport of baseball to extricate themselves from their discontent? In seeking supernatural solutions to the personal problems of their protagonists and the playing-field misfortunes of their teams, the trio of baseball fantasy films found themselves in a situation similar to that confronted by filmmaker Frank Capra. In a series of brilliant films in the 1930s and 1940s, including such works as *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), and *Meet John Doe* (1941), Capra discovered it increasingly difficult for his populist heroes to overcome the sinister forces threatening the American family and way of life. In the classic holiday film *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), Capra was unable to extricate his hero, George Bailey (James Stewart), from the greedy clutches of Mr. Potter (Lionel Barrymore). Bailey and Capra could only find redemption through divine intervention. However, the supernatural solution apparently drained Capra's creative juices, and the director was never again to recapture his earlier commercial and critical acclaim.[2]

A turn to more supernatural answers in postwar America was hardly surprising. Fears of instability in the postwar world, along with a militant crusade against the atheistic principles of communism, led to a resurgence of religion in the United States. By the end of the 1950s, an astonishing 63.6 percent of the population was affiliated with some religious group, while 60 percent of Americans reported that they went to weekly religious services. Within popular culture, films with religious themes, such as *Quo Vadis* (1951), *The Robe* (1953), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), and *Ben Hur* (1959) enjoyed considerable commercial appeal. Norman Vincent Peale celebrated the power of positive thinking. Billy Graham led international religious crusades. Reinhold Neibuhr articulated the theology of neo-orthodoxy. And Martin Luther King, Jr., advocated social activism.[3]



Catcher Monk Lannigan (Paul Douglas) confers with batterymate King Kelly (Ray Milland) about his elusive "doctored pitch" in *It Happens Every Spring* (1949).

While a muscular Christianity was being activated in the war against communism and as a support system in times of instability, *It Happens Every Spring* focused its plot upon that other quasi-religious belief system of the 1950s: science and technology. The production was released in 1949 by 20th Century–Fox, from a screenplay by Valentine Davies, and directed by veteran filmmaker Lloyd Bacon, best known for such Warner Bros. films as *42nd Street* (1933), *Knute Rockne—All American* (1940), and *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943).[4] The film also featured Ray Milland (who earned an Oscar in 1945 for Billy Wilder's *Lost Weekend*), Jean Peters, Paul Douglas, Ed Begley, Ted de Corsia, and Ray Collins. This veteran lineup, however, was granted little respect by film critics, who essentially found the picture's supernatural formula plot to be unrealistic. In a play upon baseball vocabulary favored by many publications, the *New Republic* found *It Happens Every Spring* to have "too many errors even for the bush leagues." Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* described Bacon's uninspired direction "as monotonous as the script," an opinion shared in the *New Yorker* by John McCarten, who concluded the baseball film was comprised of simplistic "variations on one joke."

On the other hand, *Christian Century* termed the baseball fantasy "delightful comedy fare," and *Newsweek* insisted that *It Happens Every Spring* was an "unorthodox comedy that holds good for any season of the year."[5]

Yet, none of these reviews made an effort to place the fantasy film within historical and cultural context, which is certainly not surprising considering that the political climate tended to stifle social criticism and commentary. But in ignoring this larger context, the critics failed to recognize that a mediocre Hollywood feature like *It Happens Every Spring* offered insights into the insecurities plaguing Americans during the early years of the Cold War. In a culture where political discourse was viewed as controversial and job threatening, filmmakers increasingly turned to allegory, exemplified by such films as *High Noon* (1952), *On the Waterfront* (1954), and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), to provide social and political commentary.[6] While not exactly political allegory, *It Happens Every Spring* does, nevertheless, reflect many of the fears confronting Americans in the postwar period and deserves more serious consideration than contemporary critics gave the film.

It Happens Every Spring tells the story of chemistry professor Vernon Simpson (Ray Milland), who teaches at a small Midwestern university.[7] By all accounts, the professor is an outstanding instructor, except every spring when his mind wanders during lectures as he listens to St. Louis baseball games on a concealed radio. (Evidently, the producers failed to secure the authorization of Organized Baseball for the use of team logos. Thus, one is uncertain as to whether Simpson is a fan of the St. Louis Cardinals or Browns.) However, Simpson's major concern is his romance with one of his students, Debbie Greenleaf (Jean Peters), who just happens to be the daughter of the university president (Ray Collins).

But there seems to be no problem with Simpson dating the student. The real issue is whether the professor will be able to financially support Debbie and a family. And Debbie appears more interested in acquiring a husband than learning the periodic table. In fact, her fixation upon marriage and family fits well with the postwar feminine mystique for middle- and upper-class white women described by Betty Friedan.[8] Simpson, a World War II veteran, displays reservations regarding his economic prospects, an apprehension shared by Americans who feared a return to the depression conditions of the 1930s. Simpson, however, looks to the World War II alliance between science and industry for his financial salvation. He brings Debbie to his laboratory where the professor has concocted an insect repellent formula for tree bark. He hopes to sell his discovery to a chemical company and pursue a research career in industry.

As they enthusiastically embrace, evidently contemplating their contributions to the postwar baby boom, their loving moment is shattered by a

baseball which crashes through the window and smashes Simpson's experiment. A despondent Simpson explains that he cannot replicate the formula (evidently, he is a scientist who does not take careful notes), and he sends Debbie away. Their dreams of a family have been destroyed by an outside force over which they no control. Americans who had suffered through the dark days of the Depression and World War II would have little problem identifying with such a perspective. With the end of what Thomas Engelhardt terms America's historical victory culture, due to the advent of the atomic bomb and Cold War, Americans were exposed to a threat of nuclear annihilation over which they exercised little direction.[9]

Following the dismissal of Debbie and what he assumes is the dashing of his hopes for the American dream, Simpson begins to clean up the debris of the laboratory. When he attempts to throw away the baseball which shattered his domestic bliss, the professor discovers that the ball, which was covered by the insect repellent formula, is impervious to wood. In fact, the ball swerves around chunks of timber, such as baseball bats. (This film, of course, was made before the introduction of metal bats into the collegiate game.) This amazing disclosure provides Simpson with an idea, and he retrieves what is left of his formula.

The next morning he tests his hypothesis by tossing batting practices to two dim-witted but athletic chemistry students, who are unable to hit Simpson's pitches as he doctors the baseball from a cloth soaked in the formula and concealed in his baseball glove. His success with the collegiate ballplayers gives Vernon the inspiration to become a self-made man in the Horatio Alger tradition and abandon his position within the university bureaucracy. He marches off to Professor Greenleaf's home and asks the university president for an emergency leave of absence. The president, along with his wife and daughter, assume that Simpson has made a major scientific breakthrough and is off to share his findings with chemical company representatives and assure his position with the consensus business values of cooperation and the organization man.

Instead, Simpson is traveling to St. Louis, seeking a major league tryout. He bursts into the office of St. Louis manager Jimmy Dolan (Ted de Corsia), whose team is languishing in the standings due to a pitching shortage. The young upstart insists that he be given an opportunity to pitch for the St. Louis franchise. As he is being thrown out the office door, Simpson insults the team owner, Mr. Stone (Ed Begley). Demonstrating the superiority of ownership over management, Stone decides to make an example of the impertinent young man, ordering manager Dolan to let Simpson pitch batting practice. To the astonishment of Dolan and Stone, the pitching prospect, aided by the concealed substance in his glove, proves unhittable. Stone immediately

proposes a contract, and Simpson makes it clear that his interest in pursuing a baseball career is based on financial concerns. The unheralded pitcher insists that he be promptly paid a thousand dollars for every victory. In the era before free agency, Simpson drives a tough bargain, motivated by his desire to secure enough money to marry Debbie and attain the American dream.

However, Simpson does not want his fiancée and her family to learn that he is pursuing the dream through baseball rather than science. So he assumes the alias King Kelly. After his first pitching victory, Simpson/Kelly uses his money to purchase a diamond engagement ring for Debbie, who mistakenly believes that her lover has procured his wealth through criminal activity. The rapidity with which Debbie and her family come to this conclusion is illustrative of the culture's uncertainty of postwar financial stability and a reminder of how some Americans had been forced into a life of crime in order to survive during the troubled 1930s.

The club assigns Kelly's catcher Monk Lonigan (Paul Douglas) to room with the rookie phenomenon and keep a close watch on its investment. Although not the most intelligent man in the universe, Lonigan is able to discern Kelly's true identity and informs Debbie, although Kelly/Simpson remains unaware that she is cognizant of his pitching career. As Kelly, Simpson goes on to win 38 games for St. Louis, including a no-hitter which the film carefully documents. Thus, Kelly earns 38 thousand dollars (a rather hefty baseball salary for the late 1940s) and pitches St. Louis into the World Series against New York. (Although one may assume the Yankees' team logos are not employed.)

As many critics suggested, Kelly's rise to baseball prominence included numerous implausible plot devices. For example, Kelly's ball dances all over the plate, and batters are unable to make contact with the doctored baseball. Therefore, the typical viewer might conclude that Kelly pitched a no-hitter every outing, for until the film's final game, no batter is shown making contact with one of Kelly's offerings. Furthermore, no umpire ever checks the hurler's glove to ascertain whether the pitcher is defacing the ball to make the pitches hop. Pitchers, such as Hall of Famer Gaylord Perry, accused of doctoring the ball would have loved to pitch with the umpiring crews officiating Kelly's games. More astute baseball fans will also have trouble with the fact that in his first relief appearance with runners on base, Kelly goes into his patented double pump windup rather than work from the stretch. However, Kelly gets into trouble as he prepares to start the seventh game of the World Series against New York. He cannot locate his last bottle of formula, for Lonigan assumes that the container is hair tonic. Although he is unable to comb his hair with a wooden brush after applying what he considers to be hair-grooming preparation, Lonigan loans the bottle to manager Dolan, who is losing

his hair. When an alarmed Kelly attempts to retrieve the formula, the container is accidentally dropped, and Kelly has to pitch the most important game of the season without the aid of his concoction. The result is that the New York club is able to hit Kelly, but the St. Louis offense keeps him in the game, and the pitcher enters the ninth inning with a one-run lead. With two outs and the bases loaded, Kelly spears a line drive with his bare pitching hand, and St. Louis wins the World Series.

Following the game, a medical examination reveals that the injury to Kelly's hand will end his pitching career. Kelly is barely able to suppress a smile when he hears the news, for the scientist/pitcher realizes that without his secret formula his career is already finished. With the excuse of a broken hand for his retirement, the secret to his success need never be revealed.

Although Kelly/Simpson did gain considerable money from his baseball season, he remains worried about his long-term financial prospects. He returns to his fiancée, assuming that his unexplained disappearance will make it impossible for him to regain his university position. However, Debbie reveals to her parents and the greater community that Kelly is, in actuality, Vernon Simpson. When Simpson arrives at the university, he is met by an enthusiastic crowd who want to congratulate the professor on his World Series triumph.

Also present at the reunion is university president Greenleaf, who informs Vernon that he will not retain his position as a chemistry professor. Instead, Simpson is asked to head the university's new research facility, which is a donation from the St. Louis team owner Stone, who stipulates that his former pitcher must direct the center. Simpson now has the financial means and security to marry Debbie and live happily ever after.

There are several disturbing aspects to this postwar success parable. Like many of the characters in Horatio Alger stories, Vernon Simpson has not achieved the American dream simply through the Benjamin Franklin recipe of hard work and frugality.[10] Instead, Simpson has to rely upon guile and luck to navigate the difficult shoals of the post–World War II economy. While this point was lost upon most reviewers, Philip T. Hartung of *Commonweal* found it troubling that the film's happy ending was established through "quite unethical" means, which never seemed to prompt any soul-searching on the part of the film's protagonist.[11]

Hartung's observation has considerable merit, and one is left with the question of why few other commentators took issue with the means employed by Simpson to secure a foundation for his anticipated family. Some of this moral ambiguity is perhaps reflective of the nation's uncertainty regarding the economic future. Kelly is more reflective of a rugged individualism and entrepreneurial spirit which seemed increasingly out of place in the corporate postwar America. In contrast, Simpson, as a more outer-directed man, seeks safety

Guffy McGovern (Paul Douglas) imagines the possibility of divine intervention to save the lowly Pittsburgh Pirates in *Angels in the Outfield* (1951).

within the consensus views of the organization man and business. He is willing to take his place within a research community beholden to the largesse of big business. The emphasis for Simpson becomes security not independence.

The film also suggests paradoxical attitudes concerning the role of scientists and science in the postwar world, perhaps anticipating the concerns later expressed by President Dwight Eisenhower regarding the military-industrial complex. The development of the atomic bomb was initially hailed as a

great accomplishment which ended World War II, preventing the loss of countless American lives in the anticipated bloody invasion of the Japanese islands. With the advent of the Cold War and Soviet detonation of a nuclear device, however, the atomic bomb's presence was less reassuring to Americans. In *Screams of Reason*, critic David J. Skal suggests, "From its first deployment, the atomic bomb began radiating metaphors about knowledge, sin, and science that gave startling new life to ancient ideas."[12] Skal argues that the promise of nuclear energy was quickly transformed into images of the Frankenstein monster which might devour the nation which created it. Popular manifestations of the ambiguity with which the American public perceived science are evident in the box-office success of the science fiction film genre of the 1950s. In film such as *The Thing From Another World* (1951), *Them* (1954), and *The Amazing Colossal Man* (1957), science research unleashes forces over which the scientists have little control, and nature, like the Frankenstein monster, seeks a harsh revenge.[13] Perhaps these popular attitudes of confusion regarding scientists and the impact of their work explain why viewers and critics were not more alarmed by Vernon Simpson's lack of ethics. The concept of "by any means necessary" was not invented by Malcolm X.

A softer note is struck in the 1951 production of *Angels in the Outfield* in which the fantasy component comes from heaven rather than secular science. Nevertheless, viewers were no more poised to accept the divine intervention of angels than scientific formulas into the realm of baseball. Hollis Alpert of *Saturday Review* described *Angels in the Outfield* as "bogged down in the worst kind of corn, involving nuns, miracles, and a heavenly baseball team." In the *New Yorker*, John McCarten remarked that star Paul Douglas looked uneasy in his role "as well he might, wading around in this sort of treacle." But other reviewers found the film pleasing light fare. Philip T. Hartung of *Commonweal* thought the film "almost sentimentally sticky at times," but the critic concluded it was "so amusing that it should appeal to all moviegoers even if they don't care for movies about baseball players, nuns, and angels." *Christian Century* was not offended by the film's treatment of religion, describing the picture as "fun, performed with zest and good timing for comedy."[14]

Released by MGM in the fall to take advantage of interest in the 1951 World Series, *Angles in the Outfield* was based upon a screenplay by Dorothy Kingsley and George Wills and directed by Clarence Brown, who was nearing the end of a film career which included such outstanding films as *Anna Christie* (1930), *Ah, Wilderness* (1935), and *The Yearling* (1946).[15]

The film stars Paul Douglas as the temperamental Guffy McGovern, manager of the inept Pittsburgh Pirates. Focusing the film on the Pirates brought a note of realism to the fantasy feature, for the Pittsburgh franchise was the doormat of the National League in the early 1950s. The film even

includes a cameo from Bing Crosby, who was one of the team's owners.[16] The losing ways of the Pirates are hardly helped by McGovern's anger and constant cursing, which is intentionally garbled on the film's soundtrack so as not to offend family audiences. Rather than reflecting the optimism often associated with America in the 1950s, McGovern's animosity and insecurity might be more accurately described as the American nightmare of fear and insecurity which haunted many citizens during the era. McGovern, however, mends his ways when he is visited by the Archangel Gabriel and the Heavenly Choir Nine, whom Gabriel informs the manager have a lifetime batting average of .321. The Archangel observes that McGovern's language and negative attitude have drawn the attention of heaven, which is not pleased with the manager. A shaken McGovern begins to control his cursing and temper, offering compliments and encouragement to the players — the corporate and consumer values of teamwork and cooperation. McGovern even attempts to expand his cultural horizons, reading Shakespeare's *The Tempest* during road trips. As McGovern transforms, so do the Pirates, as the team commences to win and move up the National League standings. All seems fine until Sister Edwina (Spring Byington) takes orphan Bridget White (Donna Corcoran) to a Pittsburgh home game. The orphan claims to see angels guiding the actions of the Pirate players, although film viewers never actually observe the heavenly representatives, who remain offscreen. Reporter Jennifer Page (Janet Leigh), who has been assigned to provide a female perspective on the game, writes a newspaper piece on Bridget White and her angels. The story brings unwelcome publicity to the orphanage, and Page apologizes for her lack of sensitivity. However, an unanticipated result of this story is to drive the beleaguered participants — Page, White, and McGovern — together into a family structure as they face the scrutiny of more cynical reporters and outsiders.

When McGovern is hit on the head by a foul ball, he inadvertently informs reporters that he speaks with angels. Disgruntled radio announcer Fred Bayles (Keenan Wynn), who has a personal vendetta against McGovern, proclaims that the manager's pronouncement is a disgrace to the game of baseball. The Commissioner of Baseball vows to investigate, arriving in Pittsburgh on the eve of the season's last game, which the Pirates must win to complete their miracle pennant drive. Bayles seems to represent the forces of cynicism, insecurity, and corruption threatening the American family. A Freudian psychologist (Freud was in vogue during the 1950s) concludes that McGovern is delusional. However, a triumvirate of religious leaders, consisting of a rabbi, a Catholic priest, and a Protestant minister, step forward in support of the Pittsburgh manager and the possibility of miracles in everyday life, although they have to cut their testimony short as the theologians have tickets to that afternoon's game. Then Bayles questions the young orphan, but McGovern,

feeling paternalistic and protective, is unable to control his temper, slugging the inquisitor.

After angel feathers fall on his desk, the commissioner declares McGovern competent, urging everyone to get to the ballpark. The Archangel Gabriel chastises McGovern for not maintaining control over his temper, and the penalty for striking Bayles is that the manager is on his own, the angels will not intervene in the game. Left to his own devices, the Pittsburgh skipper decides to name aging veteran Saul Hellman (Bruce Bennett) as his starting pitcher, for McGovern has learned that the athlete will be joining the Heavenly Choir Nine during the off season. Hellman struggles throughout the game, but he enters the ninth inning with a one-run lead. McGovern tells the veteran that it is his game to finish, and Hellman rewards the manager's confidence by striking out the final batter. Divine intervention has helped Pittsburgh achieve a miracle pennant.

Moving beyond the narrow concerns of baseball, McGovern has been rehabilitated, and, as part of his redemption, he forms a family with Page (although Douglas does seem a little old for Leigh) and White. Nevertheless, the final shot of the film suggests a considerable lack of confidence in the American family's future. In a darkened and deserted stadium, which looms menacingly over the newly constructed family, McGovern embraces Page and White, and invokes the names of baseball deities Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and Christy Mathewson, who will be needed for guidance and protection during the turbulent days ahead. The film's conclusion may certainly be condemned as overly sentimental and corny, but, on the other hand, it hardly evokes an optimistic image for the American family in the postwar era. In addition, the film implies that the heavenly forces have tamed the rugged individualism of McGovern. He has been domesticated and is better prepared to take his place within the corporate consumerist society of the 1950s. Yet, McGovern now seems dependent upon divine intervention to help safeguard his family.[17]

Again seeding to cash in on World Series interest, Paramount released its baseball fantasy *Rhubarb* in the fall of 1951. However, this film about a cat inheriting a major league team failed to capture the box office of *Angels in the Outfield*, and critics were nearly universal in their panning of the picture's production values. Hollis Alpert of the *Saturday Review* found *Rhubarb* "utterly unconvincing," with the quality of the baseball action in the film reaching a new low for Hollywood. The *New York Times*, in sync with most reviews of *Rhubarb*, argued that the film paled in comparison to the satirical novel by H. Allen Smith, upon which the screenplay was based. Nevertheless, *Newsweek* did publish a favorable notice, extolling the comic genius of director Arthur Lubin, who was best known for a series of films featuring Francis the Talking Mule.[18]

Smith's novel *Rhubarb* was published in 1945 and was a wide-ranging satire of American life, but the Dorothy Reid and Francis Cockrell screenplay chose to focus upon the baseball aspects of the story.[19] The film begins with the decision of millionaire Thaddeus J. Banner to bequeath his estate and business enterprises, including the abysmal Brooklyn Loons baseball franchise, to his cat, Rhubarb. Banner's press agent Eric Yeager (Ray Milland) is tapped by the deceased to serve as Rhubarb's manager and guardian. The will's provisions are a shock to Banner's estranged daughter Myra (Elsie Holmes), who immediately seeks court action to challenge Rhubarb's inheritance. Yeager's private life is also disrupted when his girlfriend, Polly Sickles (Jan Sterling), daughter of the Loons manager, begins to sneeze when Rhubarb is in her presence, apparently displaying an allergic reaction to the feline.

On the baseball front, the inept Brooklyn Loons are embarrassed that their new owner is a cat, and the players subject both Rhubarb and Yeager to considerable ridicule. Yet, after inadvertently touching Rhubarb, one of the ballplayers contributes the key hit to a Brooklyn rally, and the Loons break a long losing streak. The athletes then change their tune on Rhubarb, constantly stroking the feline for good luck, and Brooklyn starts to rise in the standings. The team even alters its name to the Brooklyn Rhubarbs.

When the Rhubarbs reach the World Series, the plot thickens. Myra Banner, whose court action to overturn Rhubarb's inheritance was denied, throws in with gambler Pencil Louie (the Damon Runyon influence is obvious here) to fix the Series by kidnapping Rhubarb. The Brooklyn players have grown dependent upon the feline, assuming that they cannot win without their good-luck charm. Again the viewer of these baseball fantasy films is presented with a sense of corruption and instability at the heart of the American dream. Just as with Vernon Simpson and Debbie Greenleaf in *It Happens Every Spring*, the achievement of success is precarious and may be snatched away at any moment by forces over which the individual has no control. And, of course, the image of baseball and gamblers brings to mind allegations of the Chicago White Sox conspiring to "fix" the 1919 World Series with Cincinnati. An investigation into the accusations resulted in Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis banning eight White Sox players, including the legendary Joe Jackson, from baseball for life. Corruption and conspiracy threatened baseball's place in American life, but Babe Ruth's perception of innocence and striking of home runs in the 1920s soon turned public attention away from the dark side of baseball and American life as exemplified by the "Black Sox" scandal.[20]

These baseball fantasy films prefer to flirt with but not give in to the dark side. Therefore, Rhubarb escapes from his captors and heads for the ballpark. He arrives in time to restore the confidence of the players, and the Brooklyn

franchise captures the World Series. However, Rhubarb's interest in escaping and getting to the ball game was more motivated by love for the feline Su-Lin, rather than the sport of baseball.

The film concludes with a brief epilogue in which Eric Yeager and Polly Sickles are strolling through Central Park, accompanied by Rhubarb, Su-Lin, and a litter of kittens. We learn that Polly's sneezing fits are due not to Rhubarb but the vicuna lining of his cage. The American family has been reunited and preserved from the forces of corruption. Yeager and Sickles have achieved the American dream. But their success has little to do with the work ethic and individualism of the self-made man championed by Benjamin Franklin in *Poor Richard's Almanack*.[21] Instead, Yeager was rewarded by Banner for being a loyal organization man.

In conclusion, the baseball fantasy films of the late 1940s and early 1950s, *It Happens Every Spring*, *Angels in the Outfield*, and *Rhubarb*, provide viewers with optimistic Hollywood endings. But in order to attain this outcome, supernatural forces, whether it be a scientist's secret formula (the alchemist's stone), angels, or good luck associated with an animal, are necessary to save the American family from the threat of instability and dissolution. While these films fail to directly confront such issues as the Cold War, nuclear energy, the atomic bomb, mothers working outside the home, juvenile delinquency, consumerism, conformity, and fears of another depression (all of which were perceived as clear and present dangers to the traditional American family), the theme of supernatural intervention does imply strong elements of pessimism and lack of confidence regarding the American dream. It should also be noted that these films create a white universe of baseball and suburbia in which Jackie Robinson, the civil rights movement, and an integrated society seem to have no place. Thus, perhaps another unmentioned fear for white America, indirectly captured in these baseball fantasy films, is the threat posed by the civil rights movement to an already-precarious economic environment.[22] The prosperity of the 1950s was often more apparent in hindsight.

It is also worth observing that supernatural themes in baseball films would once again become popular in the 1980s, a time period of apparent conservatism and economic growth in which, nevertheless, many Americans did not participate. In films such as *The Natural* (1984) and *Field of Dreams* (1989) there appears a yearning for a purer, more innocent America and "to the more mythic American past evoked by that quintessential conservative Ronald Reagan."[23] While Reagan did portray Grover Cleveland Alexander in the 1952 picture *The Winning Team*, these were not exactly the happiest times for the actor, whose film career was languishing. Nostalgia is a powerful but dangerous concept in which the mythology of baseball may be employed in a manipulative fashion. There is often a tendency to view both the 1950s and

1980s through rose-colored glasses, a perception encouraged by the fantasy baseball films of the two periods. But these films require a closer reading; for buried within these film texts lie clues for better understanding the complexities, paradoxes, and ambiguities of American history and culture. *It Happens Every Spring*, *Angels in the Outfield*, and *Rhubarb* may be light fare, but they also provide a glimpse into the darker side of the American dream which we should not allow nostalgia to eclipse. Calls for supernatural intervention in America's past cannot be ignored if we are to successfully grapple with the lack of confidence and opportunities which plagued Vernon Simpson and Debbie Greenleaf, Guffy McGovern and Jennifer Page, and Eric Yeager and Polly Sickles. The post–World War II baseball film genre found it difficult to move beyond the solutions of supernatural intervention and nostalgia in addressing the darker aspects of the American dream. The biographical films which began with celebrating the innocence of Babe Ruth culminated in the madness of Jimmy Piersall in *Fear Strikes Out* (1957). To confront the symbol of corporate dominance established by the New York Yankees in the 1950s, baseball's equivalent of the giant corporation, baseball filmmakers returned to supernatural themes with the musical *Damn Yankees* (1958), in which a pact with the devil seemed the only means through which to assert a degree of individual resistance and autonomy. As the winds of change began to blow across the nation during the early 1960s, the postwar baseball film genre petered out with the juvenile feature *Safe At Home!* (1962), again retreating to nostalgia and romanticism. The baseball film genre attempted to paper over the paradoxes of the postwar period and consensus with nostalgia, biographies of troubled athletes and their spouses, and appeals to supernatural intervention. But the internal contradictions of American society which the consensus attempted to deny would explode in the 1960s with considerations of race, gender, and class beyond the scope of the baseball fantasy film.

9

Baseball Enlists in the Cold War

Strategic Air Command (1955)

The Cold War cast a tremendous shadow across American culture, and Hollywood responded to insecurities regarding the Soviet Union with espionage films and Korean War motion pictures that attempted to resurrect the heroism and self-sacrifice of the Second World War. Major league baseball officials and executives enlisted in the Cold War with rhetoric extolling baseball as a symbol of American democratic values, while denouncing communism as subversive of capitalism and the American way of life. The patriotism of athletes drafted into military service was celebrated by the baseball establishment, and the sport sponsored player morale visits to the troops in Korea. The patriotic image which the sport wanted to present for public consumption during the early Cold War years of the 1950s was well captured in the 1955 Paramount Studio release, *Strategic Air Command*, directed by Anthony Mann and featuring James Stewart.

At first glance the pairing of Mann and Stewart in the flag-waving epic *Strategic Air Command* appears to be out of sync with a series of post–World War II Westerns directed by Mann and starring Stewart. In films such as *Winchester '73* (1950), *The Naked Spur* (1953), and *The Man from Laramie* (1955), the Mann-Stewart collaborations challenged the triumphalism of the American Western with psychological portraits focusing upon postwar insecurities within the American patriarchy. The sense of angst found in these Westerns is missing from *Strategic Air Command*. This Air Force film appears to fit better with the visual historical epics *El Cid* (1961) and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) which Mann made for producer Samuel Bronstein.[1]

While *Strategic Air Command* is somewhat of a departure for the film noir characterizing the early work of Mann, the film seems a natural role for Stewart. During the Second World War, Stewart attained the rank of colonel

in the Army Air Corps, flying combat missions as a B-24 Liberator bomber pilot and twice earning the Distinguished Flying Cross. The actor served in the United States Air Force Reserves during the Cold War, achieving the rank of brigadier general before his retirement from the Air Force in 1968. Stewart was also known for his conservative politics, supporting anticommunism and opposing the Hollywood left.[2]

In *Strategic Air Command*, Stewart's aviation background is far more significant than baseball, and he does not present a reprise of his role in *The Stratton Story*, although his co-star is once again June Allyson. Nor does *Strategic Air Command* question the patriarchy in the same fashion as *The Stratton Story*. This time around Allyson is the weak figure who lacks the will to persevere and sacrifice for the common good, but Stewart asserts his manhood, making the essential and difficult family decisions with little consultation from his spouse who is relegated to more of a "stand by your man" role.

The patriotic flag-waving theme of *Strategic Air Command* is evident in the martial theme music of "The Air Force Takes Command" accompanying the opening credits. The film's introduction repeats the refrain from science-fiction films of the early 1950s that America is watching the skies. But rather than being afraid, Americans should take comfort that the skies of the United States are protected by the Strategic Air Command (SAC), who cooperated with Paramount in the making of the film. A product of the emerging post–World War II conflict with the Soviet Union, SAC was created in 1946. Two years later, Air Force General Curtis Lemay, who was the architect of America's aerial assault upon Tokyo and Japan during the Second World War, assumed command of SAC. Lemay believed that strategic bombing of industrial infrastructure and large cities was decisive in America's World War II victory, and he asserted that the nuclear arsenal only enhanced the possibilities of this military option. SAC was an essential element of the nuclear deterrence strategy pursued by the United States in the Cold War as symbolized by the SAC motto "Peace Is Our Profession." Nevertheless, this "peaceful organization" included over 1,500 bombers — most of them the sleek and powerful B-47s celebrated in *Strategic Air Command*.[3] And the film's "hard sell" of SAC's mission indicates an undercurrent of ambiguity regarding the necessity of this massive military structure that was also apparent in the gap between the baseball establishment's Cold War rhetoric and actions.

Strategic Air Command begins with the St. Louis Cardinals in spring training led by their star third baseman Dutch Holland (Stewart), who is coming off a season in which he drove in 152 runs. To create an atmosphere of sacrifice later in the film, it is emphasized several times that Holland is earning $70,000 a season — a pretty impressive baseball salary for the mid–1950s. Dutch's early season workout is viewed by his bride, Sally (Allyson),

Former Cardinal star Dutch Holland (James Stewart) contemplates his future with the Strategic Air Command while the team's general manager (Jay C. Flippen) consoles Holland's wife (June Allyson) at the ballpark in *Strategic Air Command* (1955).

and Tom Doyle (Jay C. Flippen), who appears to be the general manager of the Cardinals. In terms of casting, both Stewart and Allyson seem to be a little old for newlyweds starting a family. In his late forties, Stewart is not convincing as an athlete at the top of his game.[4]

Fortunately, the only baseball scene in the film was the opening spring training segment. Sally is an enthusiastic baseball fan who seems to have more passion for the game than is displayed by her husband. Dutch, on the other hand, appears to long for a return to military service as he gazes dreamily at a B-29 bomber flying over the ballpark. Indeed, Dutch demonstrates more interest in the large phallic airplanes than his wife. The Freudian sexual implications of *Strategic Air Command* certainly provided fuel for Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) poking fun at the phallic imagery employed in Mann's film.[5]

The domestic bliss of Dutch and Sally is shattered by the arrival of Air Force General Rusty Castle (James Mullican), who informs the ballplayer that as a member of the Air Force Reserves he is being called back to active

duty as a colonel for 21 months active duty. Dutch is reluctant, observing that he has not flown in over six years. Castle, however, reminds Dutch that he was one of the best B-29 commanders during the Second World War. Then in a bit of Cold War propaganda, Castle observes that a strong military defense is the "only thing keeping the peace" and that mature personnel are required if the nation is attacked. Although Dutch argues that he has done his patriotic duty, the bottom line is that the ballplayer has no choice. When Dutch breaks the news to Sally, she is supportive, telling her husband that anything he does is fine with her — just as long as he does not leave her behind. These initial attitudes toward Dutch's military service are reversed during the course of the film.

When Dutch reports to Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth, Texas, the viewer's attention is drawn to the heightened sense of security surrounding the military installation. Because he is dressed as a civilian, Dutch encounters difficulty entering the base until intervention from General Castle. Before Dutch is able to don his uniform, base security is penetrated by a civilian airliner seeking clearance for an emergency landing. The emergency, however, proves to be a hoax, for the landing is a test of base security orchestrated by General Ennis C. Hawkes (Frank Lovejoy). As Hawkes and his troops emerge from the plane, the general observes that the air space of the base should never have been compromised. An enemy force emerging from the ostensibly civilian airliner might have been able to take over the SAC installation in preparation for a strike against the United States. The Cold War fears regarding both domestic and foreign threats from the Soviet Union are well documented in this scene.

The cigar-chomping Hawkes, who is clearly supposed to represent Curtis Lemay, is obsessed with the mission of SAC as imperative for the nation's survival. Initially, Dutch has little use for Hawkes as the general admonishes him for being on the base out of uniform. Over time, however, Hawkes will win over Dutch as the former ballplayer recognizes that the general's harsh demeanor and demands placed upon his personnel are essential to form a well-functioning team that will assure the security of the United States. This characterization is similar to many sport films in which a no-nonsense coach must discipline his players in order to achieve success. The team eventually acknowledges that the leader's "tough love" is for its own good. In fact, this is essentially the same role played by Lovejoy as Rogers Hornsby in *The Winning Team*.[6]

Meanwhile, Sally joins Dutch at the base and tries to make a home in surroundings which are less luxurious than envisioned when Dutch was playing for the Cardinals. Sally also learns that her husband's missions are secretive and that he may be away from home for extended periods of time. After an unanticipated mission to Alaska, Dutch is informed by a somewhat distraught

Sally that they are going to have a baby. She assumes that their family situation will lead to a reduction in the number of missions flown by Dutch — although in the 1950s it was also unlikely that a ballplayer would have received any time off to assist with his wife's pregnancy. Dutch informs Sally that he cannot change his schedule because of the pregnancy for he is part of a team. He observes that there are over 1,500 babies a month born on SAC bases, and national security cannot be compromised every time a baby enters the world. It is made clear that delivery and caring for the baby is primarily Sally's responsibility. The film embraces traditional patriarchal values by limiting the woman's role to the domestic sphere. Although the reality of family life in the 1950s was far more complicated than this endorsement of the patriarchy might indicate, the women of *Strategic Air Command* contribute to the team effort by maintaining the home and children while unquestioningly supporting their men.[7]

The analogy between teamwork and national security is one stressed throughout the film with sport/baseball metaphors often employed to foster patriotism and self-sacrifice in a similar fashion to such World War II films as *Air Force* (1943). Ike Knowland (Alex Nicol) is the navigator for Dutch's crew. He is bitter at being recalled to active duty and forced to abandon a successful small business. Knowland complains that he has done his service for the country and that the international situation is different from World War II. In response to Knowland's refrain that the nation is not at war or under attack, Dutch explains that you never know when "the other guy is going to start something." He tells Knowland that a crew must work together as it "keeps them in there pitching." And Dutch even pilots his bomber while wearing his Cardinals cap, making a symbolic connection between patriotism and America's national pastime. (Although intended as cultural criticism, Stanley Kubrick makes a similar connection between war and iconic national images in *Dr. Strangelove* [1964] when he has pilot Major Kong [Slim Pickens] don a cowboy hat as he prepares for nuclear combat with the "Russkies.")

Dutch's emphasis upon teamwork is reminiscent of St. Louis Cardinals manger Billy Southworth, who asserted during the Second World War, "Cohesive thinking and coordinated movement of an intelligent team will always beat a team of individual stars."[8] Dutch's faith that Knowland's individualism could be harnessed in favor of a team effort was rewarded when the two airmen have to crash land on a mission to Greenland. Despite a broken ankle, Knowland was able to communicate their location, assuring a successful rescue operation. Upon returning to base with an injured shoulder, Dutch learns that Sally has given birth to a baby girl. When Sally asks Dutch to provide a name for the baby, he christens her Hope, indicating that the sacrifices of Dutch and Sally will lead to a better future.

Dutch, however, appears more excited about the new B-47 bombers introduced by General Hawkes. While he strokes the sleek airplane in an almost suggestive manner, Dutch listens to Hawkes extol the virtues of the new aircraft. The general maintains that the destructive potential of the B-47 means increased deterrence and less danger of war. But more testing of the plane is needed, and Hawkes wants Dutch to take a leadership role in the final push for the B-47 to become the premiere weapon for SAC. Hawkes informs the former run-producer for the Cardinals that the B-47 is on third base "waiting for you to bring it home." Enthralled by the Hawkes oratory and the beauty of the plane, Dutch agrees to the new assignment and a transfer to Florida.

Meanwhile, Sally is growing more apprehensive of Dutch's flying. As the deadline approaches for the completion of Dutch's 21 month SAC tenure, Sally is thrilled that Tom Doyle of the Cardinals wants Dutch back and is offering the third baseman a handsome new contract. Sally is shocked when Dutch announces that he has turned down Doyle's offer, accepting re-enlistment with SAC and General Hawkes. Dutch acknowledges that being a SAC wife is difficult for Sally, but in a forceful reassertion of patriarchal authority, he insists that it was a decision he had to make alone. Evidently concluding that Sally's judgment was clouded by emotion, Dutch asserts that a man has responsibilities beyond his family and career. Dutch believes that he can make a crucial contribution to the national security team. A distraught Sally confronts General Hawkes, believing that his superior officer manipulated Dutch. Hawkes explains that Dutch earned his opportunity to serve his country, and in light of the international situation, Dutch really had no choice. Sally stifles her emotions and realizes that she must support her man and country.

By this time, Dutch has departed on a mission to test the endurance of the B-47 and its flight crew — a nonstop flight from Florida to Japan. Weather conditions force the bomber to land in Okinawa, but Dutch struggles with the plane due to the shoulder injury he suffered during his Greenland crash. The attributes of the B-47 were evident on the mission, but General Hawkes orders that Dutch not be allowed to fly again. Unable to accommodate himself to a desk job, Dutch resigns his Air Force commission. Hawkes asserts that Dutch has done his duty in helping the general with his struggles to keep SAC going, defend the nation, and assure better conditions for the citizen-soldiers of America. Due to his injured shoulder, Dutch's baseball career is also over, but Cardinal management, in an obvious example that art does not always imitate life, assures Dutch that he will always have a job with the team. Sally sighs that she does not care which uniform Dutch is wearing because she is so proud of her man. As Hawkes, Sally, and Dutch discuss the future,

a flight of B-47s fly over, and Dutch gazes longingly at the flight formation, while Sally seems reassured. Baseball has done its part to guarantee the nation's security.

Strategic Air Command earned a satisfactory six million dollars in its domestic release, but critics were less kind to the film. Reviewers almost universally found the film's screenplay by Valentine Davies and Beirne Lay, Jr.—ironically the only Academy Award nomination for the film was for Best Story—to be trite and predictable. Stewart and Allyson were also perceived as too old for their roles. But like Dutch Holland, the critics were most impressed with the planes and Paramount's new wide-screen VistaVision. Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* described *Strategic Air Command* as "a picture of flying on a gigantic scale in the huge inter-continental bombers that constitute the retaliatory arm of our Air Force and naturally enough, the giant bombers look great on the giant screen. What is more, the exceptional height afforded by the VistaVision screen permits a reasonable illusion of the proportions of the sky." In agreement with Crowther, but damning the film as a whole, *The Saturday Review* concluded, "The superb skyscapes which Paramount has thrown upon its giant screen almost compensate for the fact that the dramatic portions of the film cannot hit the side of a barn." The politically progressive *Nation* accurately described the film as a recruiting poster for SAC, but Robert Hatch expressed some misgivings with the film's militaristic ideology, insisting, "Everyone in it keeps telling everyone else in it that the stronger and jumpier SAC makes itself, the safer we can all sleep at night. SAC is the unit that will deliver nuclear bombs should that become necessary, and as this picture makes clear, it can deliver them any damn place it wants. Its planes are beautiful and they look invincible; if my memory were shorter my nerves would be quieter."[9] (This review captures the nightmare vision of nuclear catastrophe and SAC which Kubrick developed in *Dr. Strangelove*.)

Contemporary reviewers made few comments on the film's relationship with baseball, and cinema historians of the sport have little to say about *Strategic Air Command*. Hal Erickson bemoans the absence of baseball in the film, but as Rob Edelman asserts, the film is primarily about patriotism. Edelman concludes, "The film's purpose is to inform the public about SAC and urge the support of its mandate, even if it means that a baseball star must sacrifice his career to the service of his government."[10]

And this is certainly the image which major league baseball wanted the American public to associate with the sport. The baseball establishment was patriotic and never placed profits above serving the national interest. The reality of Organized Baseball, however, did not always coincide with the image presented in *Strategic Air Command*.

During the early 1950s, Commissioner Ford Frick proclaimed that Organized Baseball would support the ideological Cold War as well as the shooting war in Korea. Frick insisted that the national pastime would indoctrinate youth in the virtues of democracy and "remain a proud part of our ideal way of life." Staunch anticommunist Senator John W. Bricker of Ohio welcomed baseball's participation in the Cold War struggle against communism. Addressing the second Annual Conference of Minor League Executives, Bricker asserted that baseball was essential to maintaining American values of capitalism and democracy. Bricker proclaimed, "While the marching hordes in China are spreading the doctrine of communism, officials of the national pastime are helping to make democracy work in the country by giving every youth a chance to carve out his own career."[11] Thus, Senator Bricker envisioned baseball as serving an important role in the indoctrination of American youth and combating what the senator perceived as the alien influence of the communist ideology in the United States.

But baseball's militaristic rhetoric often overemphasized the sport's actual contribution to national security. For example, following the Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbor in December 1941, *The Sporting News*, speaking for the baseball establishment, editorialized that the sport would do its part in the war effort, asserting that "in all the history of baseball there never was a conscientious objector or a slacker in the ranks."[12] But the history of Organized Baseball during the First World War provides somewhat of a challenge to the rhetorical flourish of *The Sporting News*.

The United States entered World War I in the spring of 1917, but the conflict did not immediately impact the sport. Lacking the drama of a triggering event such as Pearl Harbor, ballplayers did not flock to the colors. In fact, it is often forgotten that there was considerable opposition to the war and conscription among working-class Americans. Baseball owners attempted to demonstrate their patriotism by raising funds to purchase athletic equipment for servicemen. Any expectation that the game might remain exempt from manpower needs was crushed in May 1918 when the government issued a "work or fight" order establishing July 1 as the deadline by which young men in such non-essential industries as baseball would become eligible for the draft. To complete the season, baseball officials were able to get Secretary of War Newton Baker to extend the deadline until September 1. Major league baseball concluded its 1918 season on Labor Day, followed by the World Series between the Boston Red Sox and Chicago Cubs.

After the season, players either obtained jobs in factories producing war-related products or joined the military. Approximately 225 players entered the armed services. Although the war ended in November 1918, Eddie Grant of the New York Giants was killed in action, and Christy Mathewson was the

victim of a poison-gas accident which may have shortened his life. Albeit somewhat reluctantly, baseball made its contribution to the war effort.[13]

Baseball officials were concerned that World War II might result in the sport's suspension for the duration of the conflict. Club owners, however, were elated when President Franklin Roosevelt informed Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis that while baseball did not provide an essential function that would exempt players from conscription, the game was important to the nation's morale and would continue during the hostilities. Following Pearl Harbor, prominent players such as Bob Feller and Hank Greenberg enlisted in the armed services, and by the war's conclusion, over 90 percent of those on major league rosters in 1941 had experienced military service. Although many athletes spent their military hitch playing ball rather than serving in combat, baseball players fulfilled the expectation of *The Sporting News* that baseball contained no "slackers or conscientious objectors." Major league baseball continued during the war even if club owners had to use one-armed outfielders like Pete Gray of the St. Louis Browns or 15-year-old pitchers like Joe Nuxhall of the Cincinnati Reds. In addition to supplying soldiers and boosting morale, major league baseball contributed to the war effort by raising funds and purchasing baseball equipment for servicemen. For example, a July 1942 contest between American League All-Stars and a service team, consisting of major leaguers, raised $193,000 for the Army and Navy Fund.[14]

Baseball also enlisted in the Cold War with officials arguing that the sport symbolized the values of the United States in contrast with the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, baseball's response to the Korean War sent mixed messages. While prominent players such as Curt Simmons of the Philadelphia Phillies and Ted Williams of the Boston Red Sox were called to service, the conflict in Korea failed to generate many enlistments from baseball's ranks, nor did the draft seriously alter major league rosters. The character of Dutch Holland in *Strategic Air Command* appears to be modeled after the image of Williams as a baseball superstar who was willing to sacrifice his career to serve his nation in two wars. But Williams, a World War II veteran and pilot, was not exactly thrilled to be recalled to active duty during the Korean conflict. Assuming that he was speaking off the record to sportswriter Crozet Duplantier, Williams asserted, "They picked on me because I was a ballplayer and widely known. I was at the height of my earning power. I had already served three years. My career was short enough without having it interrupted twice."[15]

Some owners, however, were more concerned when Baseball Commissioner Happy Chandler initially suggested that the conflict in Korea might result in the shutting down of the sport. These remarks, in addition to some

lingering resentment over Chandler's support for Jackie Robinson and racial integration, prodded the owners to remove Chandler from office. To deflect charges that they were not supportive of the war, club owners launched a boomlet for deposed General Douglas Macarthur for baseball commissioner, before settling upon National League President Ford Frick for the post. To bolster troop morale, the baseball establishment sponsored visitations to the front by such athletes as Joe DiMaggio of the New York Yankees.[16]

During the Vietnam War, baseball ownership displayed a similar ambiguity regarding the impact of military conflict upon their business. The rhetoric of patriotism, nationalism, and militarism was evident in the official endorsement of the war, including numerous tours by players and club executives to Vietnam as well as hospitals treating wounded service personnel. Baseball officials voiced their patriotic support for the soldiers and the nation's political leadership, but the players were certainly not encouraged to volunteer for active duty. Instead, major league players were essentially able to avoid conscription and Vietnam by finding assignments in the National Guard and Reserves. The larger number of players who were able to secure scarce Guard placements suggests that club officials were able to secure preferential treatment for major leaguers and top prospects.[17]

This brief survey of Organized Baseball's engagement with American militarism from World War I through the Vietnam War does not suggest that the sport was unpatriotic. However, this chronicle does indicate that as a capitalist institution the economics of baseball were an important consideration for baseball ownership during both war and peace. While *Strategic Air Command* did not necessarily constitute an accurate portrayal of baseball's service in the Cold War, the film certainly presents the sport the way that the baseball establishment wanted to be perceived: as a cornerstone of the post–World War II liberal consensus based upon anticommunism and the belief that America's problems could be solved through the engine of capitalist economic growth.[18]

The Cold War posed a threat to the promise of consensus, contributing to the insecurity of American society and culture during the 1950s. The fear of subversion and nuclear annihilation underscored the sense of ambiguity and paradox which characterized the postwar era and the baseball cinema of the 1950s. But rather than reflecting crisis in the patriarchy or the hope for supernatural intervention, *Strategic Air Command* attempts to resurrect the victory culture of World War II with strong authoritarian male figures embracing militarism and patriarchal values. The failure of this approach to restore confidence in traditional institutions is evident in Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the women's movement, all of which challenged the postwar 1950s consensus embraced by *Strategic Air*

Command—a film which attempts to keep women in their place and renders minorities invisible. The damage which the patriarchy might inflict upon society was explored in another baseball biographical feature, *Fear Strikes Out* (1957). The Cold War and baseball's place within this ideological struggle was not quite as simplistic as the propaganda of *Strategic Air Command* would have us believe.

10

Jimmy Piersall and Freedom from Want

Fear Strikes Out (1957)

The self-confidence with which many Americans initially approached the post–World War II period was based upon the promise by President Franklin Roosevelt that the New Deal and victory in the Second World War would provide freedom from want. The promise of American life in the postwar era was described by David Halberstam in terms of materialism and consumerism for a population which had sacrificed a great deal during the Depression and war years. In his history of the 1950s, Halberstam writes, "Life in America, it appeared, was in all ways going to get better. A new car could replace an older one, and a large, more modern refrigerator would take the place of one bought three years earlier, just as a new car had replaced an old one."[1] The postwar consensus assumed that an ever-expanding economy would solve all of the nation's inequities, but the specter of communism and the Soviet Union threatened this foundation for prosperity. Accordingly, individuals such as Dutch Holland (Jimmy Stewart) in *Strategic Air Command* (1955) and institutions such as major league baseball enlisted in the Cold War to protect the American way of life.

The nation's confidence in postwar prosperity, however, was fragile, as is reflected in the baseball biographical films of the 1940s and 1950s. Depictions of Babe Ruth, Monty Stratton, Jackie Robinson, Jim Thorpe, Grover Cleveland Alexander, and Dizzy Dean addressed the insecurities of abandonment, poverty, disability, racism, assimilation, alcoholism, and lack of education. Although often wallowing in self-pity, these athletes are supported by sturdy female helpmates who often display greater strength than their more celebrated spouses. This genre of baseball biographies culminated in the story of Boston Red Sox outfielder Jimmy Piersall, whose insecurities resulted in

his mental breakdown during the 1952 season. The cinematic version of Piersall's memoir *Fear Strikes Out* asserts that the ballplayer's problems were the consequence of an overbearing father who attempted to live out his dreams through the athletic career of his son. Thus, Jimmy Piersall suffered a mental collapse due to the pressures placed upon him by his father. The film text suggests that the problems of the Piersall family were individual rather than societal or systematic. Individual rather than societal adjustments are necessary to succeed in the 1950s, and therapy is available through the state or health care professionals to help the maladjusted citizen find his or her place in the community.

Nevertheless, a closer reading of the Piersall memoir upon which the film is based indicates a concern with economic security which contributes to Piersall's mental instability. The so-called affluent society did not assure for all of its citizens the materialism described by Halberstam. Howard Zinn argues that increasing spending upon military priorities in the Cold War led to the neglect of housing, health care, and education. Despite the growth of suburbia and more automobiles, Zinn concludes, "The distribution of income was still so badly distorted that the upper fifth of the population lived on twenty to thirty thousand dollars a year and the bottom fifth tried to get by on two to three thousand dollars a year. At the top of the economic scale was enormous wealth, at the bottom, poverty — and hunger."[2] Zinn's argument is supported by William Chafe in his history of the postwar era. Chafe acknowledges that per capita income in 1960 was 35 percent higher than when the war ended in 1945. Nevertheless, this economic growth was uneven. As the white middle class deserted the cities for the suburbs, the class gap between white and black Americans grew as discrimination by financial institutions limited African American mobility. The expansion of automation also led clerical or white-collar workers to surpass the number of industrial laborers in the country. These clerical workers, many of whom were women supplementing family incomes, failed to earn as much as their industrial counterparts and proved resistant to unionization. In the 15 years between 1945 and 1960, the unionized percentage of the nation's nonagricultural labor force declined by 14 percent. Efforts by labor, women, and civil-rights activists to address these imbalances were often dismissed as representing communist criticism of the American system. Chafe argues, "Ultimately, then, the most damaging effect of the politics of anti-communism was to define as perilous, unsafe, and out of bounds advocacy of substantial social reform."[3]

Thus, many workers, like Jimmy Piersall's father, continued to find the American dream out of reach during the more affluent 1950s, increasing their sense of frustration which culminated in the breakdown of the consensus by the mid–1960s in both the politics of protest and backlash. *Fear Strikes Out*,

accordingly, depicts the dark side or nightmare vision of the American success ethic extolled in the ideology of the self-made man. The price paid by Jimmy Piersall to achieve the major leagues is too great. The constant striving for baseball success provides no time for joy, and the ensuing pressures are too much for the athlete. In his examination of baseball cinema in the 1950s, Howard Good concludes that the genre's culmination in the madness of Piersall reveals a morbid streak. Good asserts, "The portrayal of so much sickness and horror and death suggests that the biopics, for all their glorification of the self-made man, were struggling with doubts that secretly seeped in from the surrounding culture."[4]

While the economic and social contradictions of the postwar era were, indeed, temporarily discounted in the rhetoric of consensus, there was nothing secretive about the public meltdown of Jimmy Piersall. A star athlete at Leavenworth High School in Waterbury, Connecticut, Piersall signed with the Boston Red Sox following his high school graduation in 1948. After four minor league seasons, he joined the Red Sox in 1952, but his erratic behavior led the club to send Piersall back to Birmingham, Alabama, for more seasoning. After his demotion to Birmingham, Piersall suffered a breakdown and was admitted to Westborough State Hospital in Massachusetts, where he was diagnosed as suffering from manic depression. After his hospitalization, Piersall made a successful comeback in the Red Sox outfield during the 1953 season, hitting .272 and playing an outstanding centerfield. Piersall stayed with the Red Sox for five more seasons, earning selection to the American League All-Star squad in 1954 and 1956. Traded to Cleveland after the 1958 season, Piersall enjoyed his best campaign with the Indians in 1961, finishing third in the America League with his batting average of .322. The combative athlete also continued to have altercations with umpires, fans, and opposing players, while management and teammates often expressed exasperation with his antics such as talking with the centerfield monuments at Yankee Stadium. In October 1962, Piersall was traded to the Washington Senators, and the following season he was dispatched to the New York Mets. After running around the bases facing backwards when he hit his 100th career home run on 23 June 1963, Piersall was released by the Mets. He was, however, quickly signed as a free agent by the Los Angeles Angels, for whom he played as a reserve outfielder until his retirement in 1967. In a 17-year career spanning 1,734 games, Piersall, a Golden Glove centerfielder, was a .272 lifetime hitter with 104 home runs and 591 runs batted in. Following his playing days, Piersall teamed with Harry Carey as a popular radio and television broadcasting team for the Chicago White Sox, but the outspoken commentator was dismissed for his criticism of team management.

For an outfielder with a lifetime .272 batting average, Piersall is a well-

known figure, leading the colorful former athlete to quip, "Probably the best thing that ever happened to me was going nuts. It brought people out to the ballpark to get a look at me, and they came to the places where I was invited to speak."[5] Piersall, however, struck a far more serious pose in his 1956 memoir, telling the story of his mental collapse during the 1952 season. In *Fear Strikes Out*, Piersall describes the poverty he experienced growing up during the Great Depression in Waterbury, Connecticut. His father, John, was a house painter who was often unemployed during the 1930s. The Piersall family was often dependent upon handouts of food provided to the unemployed by the city of Waterbury, and Jim remembers times as a child when he cried from sheer hunger. The Piersalls lived in the back apartment of a wooden building in the heart of Waterbury's working-class district. The rooms rented by the Piersalls didn't have running hot water, and Jim's first hot shower was in a school locker room. Describing his home, Piersall concludes, "I knew poverty, unhappiness, fear, even terror there, but there were good times, too, times when I knew real contentment and enjoyed good companionship and was the object of deep affection."[7]

Jim's relationship with his parents was complicated. His mother, Mary, suffered from mental illness, but her institutionalization during Jim's childhood is never directly mentioned in the film adaptation of the book. Jim remembers his mother as "gentle, sweet-faced and quiet," but also often the target of his emotional outbursts. Jim's perspective of his father in the memoir is even more conflicted. Recounting his fear of his father (who sometimes kicked his young son while wearing heavy work shoes) Jim wrote, "There were times when I loved my father and times when whatever emotion I felt for him was anything but love. I respected him, as I do today, but I was afraid of him." This overbearing father is represented in the film version as the cause of Jim's breakdown; however, the movie tends to downplay the economic deprivation experienced by John Piersall. For example, the Paramount Pictures film fails to mention the fact that John's father deserted the family, and his mother died when he was a baby. Brought up in a foster home, the elder Piersall struggled all his life just to survive. He revealed to his son, "I had to fight to live. It was a dog-eat-dog existence. The older I got, the more I realized that if I wanted anything done for myself, I'd have to do it myself or it wouldn't get done. And if I wanted anything, I'd have to demand it—in as loud a voice as possible." Thus, it is not surprising that the father would frame baseball through the lens of economics rather than amusement, asserting, "I don't want you thinking about fun. When you grow up, I want you to become a slugger like Jimmy Foxx. That's where the money is."[8]

Perhaps filmmakers were afraid that audiences in the 1950s did not want to be reminded of the shadow that the Depression continued to cast upon

postwar affluence in which not all Americans were partaking. John Piersall shared many values with Mutt Mantle, father of 1950s baseball icon Mickey Mantle of the New York Yankees. A product of the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma, Mutt Mantle wanted his son to employ his athletic talents toward a baseball career and the American dream which eluded the father. Mantle described his father as a quiet man who "never told me he loved me. But he showed that he did by all the hours he spent with me, all the hopes he invested in me. He saw his role as pushing me, always keeping my mind on getting better. I worked hard at doing that because I wanted to please him." While Mantle achieved the baseball prominence envisioned by his father, the pressures placed upon the basically shy young man did not equip him to handle the transition from rural Oklahoma to the large stage of New York City. The tragedy of Mickey Mantle is the shortening of his career as the ballplayer increasingly sought relief for his insecurities in alcohol and womanizing. Mantle biographer Tony Castro suggests that the Yankee great was ill prepared for New York City by his Depression-era father, asserting, "When he arrived in New York at the age of nineteen, Mantle not only was a country bumpkin but a youth unprepared for the personal challenges and temptations in the world he had been sent to conquer. Just as nothing had prepared him for New York, little had been done to develop in Mickey any sense of personal moral values and social responsibility beyond what was right or wrong in his father's judgment. For Mantle, then, the death of his father in 1952 was also the death, in a sense, of the moral and ethical force holding him in check."[9]

Thus, the stories of Mickey Mantle and Jim Piersall, along with their fathers, chronicles the dark side of the American dream which the postwar consensus sought to deny. The cinematic rendering of *Fear Strikes Out* is, accordingly, more comfortable with the tale of a maladjusted individual in John Piersall along with the efforts of a loving wife and professional therapist to equip Jim with the tools to deal with his father and his own insecurities. Rather than examine the structural problems many Americans encountered with the economic system and achieving the American dream, the film focuses upon a crisis in the patriarchy and the individual adjustments within the family which must be made in order to fit into society. The economic fears of Jim Piersall tend to be shortchanged in the film's examination of his mental distress. In his memoir, Piersall observes that after his father's heart attack any visions he entertained of attending college evaporated. The young athlete needed to care for his parents. The financial uncertainty of young Piersall is well illustrated in the following passage from *Fear Strikes Out:*

> How much would Dad and Mom need if they were both ill? How much if Dad could never work again? How much if Mom had to go back to the hospital? How much to get them out of that heartless, cold-water flat? How much

> could I collect for signing a baseball contract? How much did I want to collect? Would it ruin my career if I were a bonus player? If I weren't I'd have to get another job. And what kind of a job could I hope to get if I intended to tie myself up playing baseball seven months of the year? I needed money — plenty of money. How else could I set up my parents for life?[10]

Rather than worrying about therapy, perhaps Piersall and his family would have benefited more from the extension of New Deal Social Security coverage and the enactment of national health insurance which President Harry Truman proposed in the Fair Deal. But such reforms were too often dismissed as socialism and failed to reflect the optimistic faith of the consensus in corporate capitalism.

Paramount purchased the rights to *Fear Strikes Out* and assigned the project to young producer Alan J. Pakula, who would later direct such acclaimed films as *Klute* (1971), *All the President's Men* (1976), and *Sophie's Choice* (1982). The class issues raised by Piersall's book had little appeal to Pakula, nor was the budding filmmaker much of a baseball fan. Instead, Pakula was drawn to the psychological elements of the Piersall story. The filmmaker described his take on the project in a 1983 interview, noting, "I at one time toyed with the idea of being a psychologist. It would have meant going to that dreaded med school, but I thought seriously about it, and I was very interested in analysis, and when I read the book about Jimmy's breakdown, what fascinated me was that it dealt with a ballplayer … the All-American figure, and at that time, the fifties, there was much of middle America who thought about mental breakdown and emotional illness in terms of neurasthenic, bohemian, artistic, sensitive types rather than recognizing that it is something that can happen to anyone." The script was assigned to writers Ted Berkman and Raphael Blau who made John Piersall the sole factor for his son's illness. This approach certainly appealed to Pakula, who proclaimed that the central theme of the film was "a boy repressing all his ambivalent feelings toward a parent who had taken over his life, a boy who did not have the freedom to finally grow up and become his own man."[11]

Working with a modest budget of only a million dollars, Pakula assumed that he could not afford an established star, casting instead newcomer Anthony Perkins, who was earning rave reviews for his work in William Wyler's *Friendly Persuasion* (1956), in the title role. Perkins proved to be somewhat of a controversial choice as many baseball fans, Piersall included, found the actor unconvincing as a ballplayer. In defense of Perkins, it should be pointed out that he was a natural left-hander attempting to portray a right-handed centerfielder. And baseball veteran Tommy Byrne, who was tapped by the studio to work with the actor, was also left-handed. Less well known to the general public was Perkins's sexual orientation. During an era in which the American

Jimmy Piersall (Tony Perkins) breaks down while trying to please his father in *Fear Strikes Out* (1957).

Psychiatric Association considered homosexuality to be a mental disorder and the FBI perceived gays and lesbians as national security risks, the studio sought to project a heterosexual image for the young performer. Accordingly, Paramount fostered a publicity campaign romance between Perkins and co-star Norma Moore, who portrayed the ballplayer's wife. The studio was also concerned by actor Tab Hunter's frequent visits to the set, causing speculation

about the nature of the relationship between Perkins and Hunter, whose sexuality was questioned in an exposé published by the tabloid *Confidential*. Ironically, the more athletic-looking Hunter had portrayed Piersall in a television production of *Fear Strikes Out* and was later cast in the film version of the baseball musical *Damn Yankees* (1958). With his screen vulnerability, however, Perkins earned positive reviews for his depiction of the troubled Piersall. There are significant parallels between Perkins in *Fear Strikes Out* and his celebrated portrayal of Norman Bates in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). In both films, an ambivalent young man is terrorized and manipulated by a dominant parent. Like his own situation regarding his sexuality, the characters depicted by Perkins are unable to articulate their identities. Discussing the ballpark scene in the film when Piersall disintegrates before his father and a stadium full of fans, climbing the netting behind home plate and battling with his teammates, Perkins's biographer Charles Winecoff writes, "The breakdown scene is remarkable for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the frightening combination of hysterical rage and terror that Tony registers as he runs out of control from base to base in a mad parody of a home run … while screaming 'Was I good enough?' to his father … before being dragged off, kicking and screaming (and foreshadowing Norman Bates's immortal silent scream at the end of *Psycho*) by an army of uniformed jocks. For gay men at the time, the scene, which still impresses and disturbs upon repeated viewings must have been at least a subversive acknowledgement of difference — the ultimate fantasy of gym-class defiance, and heart rendering confession of need."[12]

While sometimes moody on the set, Perkins was pleased that Pakula selected television filmmaker Robert Mulligan, with whom the actor had previously collaborated, to direct the film. In addition to coaxing a fine performance from Perkins, Mulligan worked well with Pakula, who as a producer believed in not interfering with the film's director. The commercial and artistic success of *Fear Strikes Out* induced Pakula and Mulligan to form a production company which produced one of America's most beloved films, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962).

Based upon the script provided by Berkman and Blau, Mulligan's film version of *Fear Strike Out* focuses upon the psychological aspects of the Piersall story, but there is some consideration of the class issues raised by the memoir. The film opens with a shot of the rather dilapidated home so well described by Piersall in his autobiography. John Piersall (Karl Malden) is returning from work in the middle of the day, and his young son is surprised to see his father. We learn that John has lost his blue-collar job as he explains to his wife, Mary (Perry Wilson), that as a union shop steward it was his responsibility to stand up to the bosses. This scene introduces the working-class background of the

Piersall family, but it is interesting to note that the film assumes somewhat of a pro-business perspective, suggesting that John's unemployment is the result of his own intransigence. And after this opening segment, there is no other depiction of John Piersall working, although Jim is portrayed laboring at a service station during his high school years. In fact, John's wardrobe for the remainder of the film is distinctly white collar rather than union label. He wears a tie, sports jacket, and fedora outside the home and at his son's place of business, the ballpark. Although the modest Piersall home is depicted throughout the film, most other working-class concerns are trumped by the father-son relationship. For his powerful portrayal of John Piersall, Karl Malden drew upon his relationship with his own father. The film, thus, becomes a universal story which transcends societal class concerning fathers and sons, critical of fathers attempting to live out their ambitions through their offspring. The class elements of John Piersall's background of poverty and unemployment is overshadowed by the emphasis upon the adjustment individuals need to make in order to find their place within the corporate and consensus values of post–World War II America.[13]

After the opening scene, John plays baseball with his son, instructing the boy on how to make a hook slide. The youth puts his best effort into executing the slide, but his father reminds him that a good low throw would have resulted in an out. Seeking to please his father whom he obviously adores, the boy continues his furious sliding into the base. His mother watches and reminds her husband not to be too hard on the boy. She also reminds John that he was once a pretty fair baseball player. Her husband quickly dismisses the compliment, observing that he had only played with factory teams but, with hard work, Jim could make the major leagues. Here, John Piersall is embracing the traditional values of Ben Franklin's self-made man, but in foisting them upon his son, the film suggests that they are perverted. Also John displays the values of nineteenth-century rugged individualism, while his son would better benefit from the consensus values of teamwork and cooperation.

This first segment of the film ends with young Jim (Peter J. Votrian) playing catch with his father. The literature of baseball is rich with the romanticism of the bonding inherent in a game of catch, but this is no game for John Piersall. He throws the ball as hard as possible in order to toughen his son for the difficult climb to the big leagues. The throws hurt the hands of young Piersall who, not wanting his father to be disappointed, ducks behind a shed to hide his tears and pain. He is unable to share his feelings with his mother who appears too fragile to help the boy. His father reminds Jim that they do not want to trouble her and do anything that would cause her to "have to go away again." This is the film's euphemism for Mary Piersall's mental illness which did result in her being institutionalized when Jim was a boy.[14]

The film then flashes forward to Tony Perkins as Jim Piersall playing the outfield for his high school team. Jim makes a solid throw, nailing the potential tying run at home plate, and his team wins the championship. While the team is celebrating and congratulating Jim, his father enters the locker room and reminds his son that he made some mistakes that were permissible for high school, but unacceptable for anyone aspiring to the major leagues. John has succeeded in removing the joy from his son's face. A serious Jim internalizes his pain and sorrow, takes a handful of aspirin to ease his throbbing head, and climbs into a cold shower while still wearing his uniform. After the game, Jim is unable to attend a party celebrating the victory as he must go to his job at the local service station, but his father does provide his son with some hope and incentive, showing him a letter from the Boston Red Sox expressing their interest in the high school prospect. John tells his son that they are on their way to the major leagues.

Indicative of his obsession, John always discusses Jim's prospects with the collective pronoun "we." John seeks to control every movement of his son, insisting that Jim always come straight home from work and not waste his time socializing with other teens. Shortly before he is to perform before Red Sox scouts, Jim gives into the pleas of a friend that he go ice skating for a few minutes after work. When Jim does not return home following his work shift, John is distraught. He is unable to control his anger when he learns that Jim sprained his ankle while skating, screaming that Jim has squandered everything for which they had worked so hard. The strain leads to the father's heart attack, placing even more pressure as well as guilt on the increasingly lonely and alienated young athlete. But Jim is able to perform for the Red Sox representatives and get "his hit," earning a major league contract and assignment to Scranton, Pennsylvania, in the Eastern League. However, perhaps the real John Piersall was not quite as obsessive as this segment of the film would seem to indicate. It is difficult to imagine Karl Malden's baseball-fixated John Piersall allowing his son to play another sport. Yet, Jim Piersall was an outstanding high school basketball player, leading Leavenworth High School to the 1947 New England championship and scoring 29 points in the final game. His father, however, did draw the line at Jim playing football. The ice skating story from the film probably derives from John's anger when Jim injured his shoulder playing touch football.[15]

An assignment to Scranton, however, did allow Jim to escape from his father's pressure and influence. As he departs on the train, John reminds his son that he must play well, for they only want to spend one season in the minors. John cautions Jim that players who spend several seasons in the minor leagues become buried and forgotten by the parent club. Jim does well at Scranton but is lonely until he meets a young nursing student, Mary Teevan

(Norma Moore). Up to this point in the story, Jim has expressed little interest in members of the opposite sex who might distract him from his baseball goals and fixation upon pleasing his father. Jim falls madly in love with Mary and proposes marriage, asking the young woman to abandon her nursing career and live in his parents' small rented home. For some reason, Mary leaps at this opportunity, and the two are married. (In reality, they were married after Jim's 1949 season in Louisville.)

We next see Mary and Jim in bed at the freezing Piersall home. Mary is pregnant but remains perky and positive. At the breakfast table, John reads a newspaper article reporting that Jim would spend the next season in the American Association with Louisville rather than the Red Sox. Jim whines that he hit well at Scranton, but his father interjects that his performance was not good enough. Unable to hide his disappointment, John discards the newspaper and leaves the breakfast table. Mary is left to console her distraught husband, a motherly role which she plays through the remainder of the film. Although the studio tried to promote an off-screen romance between Perkins and Moore, there is little chemistry between the two, and Moore's character assumes more of a motherly role toward Jim, often cradling his head in her arms and rocking her troubled husband. She has the same first name as Jim's mother, and Mary seemingly accepts the feminine mystique of the 1950s, abandoning her career for marriage and children. But like the wives in other baseball biographical films of the era, Mary proves to be a strong woman who must support and sustain her increasingly insecure husband while beginning a family. The capable and always optimistic Mary demonstrates a depth of resolve far beyond sexist stereotypes of women as mere passive suburban consumers during the 1950s.

After a successful season at Louisville (Jim actually spent two seasons in the Kentucky city), Jim is promoted to the Red Sox, but the team's general manager, Joe Cronin (Bart Burns), wants to shift the young athlete from the outfield to shortstop. In his unstable condition, Jim interprets the move as an effort by the Boston franchise to get rid of the young player who knows little about playing the infield. Jim displays a sense of paranoia and abandonment, telling Mary that he will not report to spring training. Mary cradles her husband and tells him that he does not have to play baseball. On the other hand, John informs his son that he did not raise a quitter and that Jim will simply have to work harder to learn the shortstop position.

Jim reports to spring training and begins the season at shortstop for the Red Sox, although the film omits that Piersall intentionally failed to bring his glove to spring training, hoping that the club would send him home. In fact, Piersall relates in his memoir, "From the moment I walked into the lobby of the Sarasota-Terrace Hotel in Sarasota, Florida, to report to the Red Sox spe-

cial training camp on the morning of January 1, 1952 until the moment I came to my senses in the violent room of the Westborough State Hospital in Massachusetts the following August, my mind is almost an absolute blank."[16] Actually, Jim's erratic behavior led to his demotion to Birmingham and to his eventual breakdown. In the film version, Jim's collapse comes on the major league stage. Goaded by his father's command that he must work harder, Jim's behavior is manic, leading to confrontations with teammates and Boston management. Jim's final breakdown takes place when he hits an inside-the-park home run. After crossing home plate, he climbs the netting screaming at his father, asking if his hit was good enough. The out-of-control athlete is finally subdued by his teammates and hospitalized.

The final section of the film deals with the efforts of his psychiatrist, Dr. Brown (Adam Williams), to rehabilitate Jim, who has retreated inwardly. Not even Mary is able to reach him. Fearing that Jim will become increasingly alienated and withdrawn, Dr. Brown orders that Jim be subjected to shock therapy. The radical treatment improves Jim's condition, but the real breakthrough occurs during a therapy session with the pipe-smoking psychiatrist. Dr. Brown questions Jim about the relationship with his father. The ballplayer grows defensive, eventually exclaiming, "Listen. If it hadn't been for my father standing behind me and pushing me and driving me, I wouldn't be where I am today." Jim is shocked by the irony of the statement, finally recognizing that the pressures inflicted by his father and his own efforts to placate the patriarch have produced his mental breakdown.

The reasonable Dr. Brown attempts to explain the situation to John Piersall, who becomes emotional and attempts to take Jim from the hospital. Jim finally stands up to his father, confronting the patriarch regarding his bullying behavior. Jim hugs his father and tells him to get out. The film concludes on a more positive note as John Piersall seems willing to accept the consensus values extolled by Dr. Brown that all of our problems may be resolved if, in the words of Lyndon Johnson, "We reason together." With their hearts purged of guilt and resentment, John and Jim engage in a leisurely game of catch under the approving gazes of Dr. Brown and Mary. This is the bonding game of catch in which the father and son should have engaged earlier in the film. But it is not too late. Jim says that he is going to attempt a comeback with the Red Sox, but it is possible that he will not be able to resume his baseball career. This time there is no lecture about quitting and working harder, just an understanding and supportive smile from the father. The final scene of the film shows Jim in the Red Sox locker room about to run up a tunnel and enter the sunlight of the playing field. Mary asks him if he is sure about being ready to return. Jim reassures his wife, and she beams as he walks bravely onto the field to assume his place within the consensus.

Audiences and critics alike loved the film which proclaimed that there were no fundamental problems with the American system. There was no need to restructure the capitalist system. The consensus values of reason and individual readjustment would allow malcontents such as John Piersall to find their rightful place within the postwar system, reflecting the faith placed in economic progress and Freudian psychology during the era. In a similar vein, the young juveniles of *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) had no real reason to rebel. Products of an affluent suburbia, Judy (Natalie Wood), Plato (Sal Mineo), and Jim (James Dean) are in trouble with the authorities because of their parents. But the therapeutic state in the guise of Officer Ray (Edward Platt) is able to bring Jim and Judy back into the arms of the consensus, while Plato, whose homosexual tendencies were a threat to the family, was killed. In both films the emphasis is upon the therapeutic and paternalistic state helping the malcontent conform to the system.

Thus, *Time* lauded *Fear Strikes Out* "for rolling Frank Merriwell and Sigmund Freud into a ball and then lining it out for a solid hit." The psychological aspects of the drama were also praised by Bosley Crowther in his review for the *New York Times*. Crowther wrote, "It is a far cry from the sort of ballplayers Ring Lardner used to write about to the sort played by Anthony Perkins in Paramount's *Fear Strikes Out*. Where Mr. Lardner's old-time ballhawks were seldom afflicted with anything more troublesome than corns or maybe a vexing disposition to stagger their mates with alibis, this one, played by Mr. Perkins, is beset by such complexes as would scare an old 'White Sox' into swallowing his tobacco or even baffle the hitting eye of Dr. Freud." The critics were almost universal in their praise for Perkins, although few seemed to sense the dark, neurotic qualities of Perkins which would characterize his later roles such as *Psycho*. For example, *Newsweek* touted Perkins as probably the "hottest" male actor in Hollywood, while Hollis Alpert in the *Saturday Review* described the young performer as "a little bit shy and mixed-up," with enough "charm and boyishness, when his face is magnified on the screen, to loosen a cascade of motherly feelings throughout the nation." And the optimistic ending of *Fear Strikes Out* was satisfactory for John McCarten of the *New Yorker*, who concluded, "I suppose it's no news that the picture has a pleasant ending since Mr. Piersall, having undergone psychiatric treatment — described effectively in the picture — is now one of the mainstays of the Boston team."[17]

The critics had little problem with the film's shortchanging of class issues in favor of consensus. This is not surprising as Peter Biskind in his study of cinema in the 1950s perceives *Fear Strikes Out* as a quintessential example of the corporate liberal film extolling the more feminized values of cooperation over the outdated masculine values of rugged individualism epitomized by

John Piersall. These conflicting ideas were reconciled through the therapeutic intervention of Dr. Brown. Biskind argues, "The use of therapeutic imperialism allowed corporate liberals to translate political issues, encumbered by all those many questions about values and social goals they found so irksome, into the spic-and-span, ostensibly value-free practices of science. It neutralized Marxism by arguing that discontent was a psychological, individual issue, not a social or class issue. If you were unhappy, it was because you were neurotic or psychotic, not because society was unjust."[18] Thus, when the filmmakers consider Jim's fears about purchasing a home for his parents, it is not the monetary concerns developed in the Piersall autobiography, but rather another manifestation of the ballplayer's neurosis. Dismissing class issues, the filmmakers also perceived the consensus as white without a racial or ethnic composition. There is no consideration of the reluctance by Red Sox management to integrate the club. In addition, Jim's real therapist was a psychiatrist from Mexico named Guillermo Brown, not the Anglo Dr. Brown from the film. Evidently, there was no room for Latinos in the consensus, or white audiences could not conceive of a Latino professional.

But the neat, happy ending envisioned by the filmmakers failed also to reflect the reality of Piersall's life, just as the consensus was unable to conceal the racial, gender, and class divides in America which exploded in the 1960s. Jim eventually divorced Mary, and his colorful antics antagonized management. He often feuded with fans and teammates, and some perceived his erratic behavior as a manifestation of his continuing mental illness. On the other hand, some sportswriters such as Bob Dolgan in Cleveland found Piersall to be "a riotous package of fun, trouble and skill. The center fielder battled with pitchers, umpires, sportswriters, scorers and fans. He was also a great guy to interview." Dolgan suspected that many of Piersall's mannerisms and antics were well planned and calculated statements of a nonconformist.[19]

Piersall was not simply the well-adjusted product of consensus and therapy depicted in the cinematic version of *Fear Strikes Out*. The ballplayer believed that the film simplified his mental illness by blaming his breakdown solely on his father. Piersall termed the movie "bullshit," asserting, "They made my father out to be a real bastard, one who was trying to drive me to a mental breakdown. Well, he wasn't. I have never blamed my father for that breakdown. My father and I actually had a good relationship." As for his continuing battles with baseball management after his return to the sport in 1953, Piersall proclaimed, "I am a nonconformist, and individualist. I tell it like I see it, even though it's gotten me into a helluva lot of trouble.... I am not a blind follower of rules and regulations. I tell the truth even if it hurts."[20]

In many ways Piersall was more reflective of the 1960s than the cooperative values of the post–World War II consensus. The ballplayer, as well as

his father, understood the sting of poverty and class division which the Alan Pakula/Robert Mulligan film attempted to discount with psychiatric treatment. With *Fear Strikes Out*, the post–World War II biographical picture reached its zenith or, perhaps more accurately, its nadir. This genre, while focusing upon athletic heroes, nevertheless, well demonstrated the insecurities and contradictions of the post–World War II consensus. With Jimmy Piersall these contradictions marked a descent into madness. Perhaps the only way out of this impasse would be found in supernatural intervention or a pact with the Devil, as formed by Tony Perkins's friend Tab Hunter as Joe Hardy in *Damn Yankees* (1958).

11

The Devil Made Me Do It

Damn Yankees (1958)

By the late 1950s, the post–World War II consensus had somewhat stabilized. The baseball biographical picture reached its crescendo with the mental breakdown of Jimmy Piersall (Tony Perkins) in *Fear Strikes Out* (1957), with his father (Karl Malden) finally recognizing that a new model of masculinity was required for the more cooperative values of the American consensus. Postwar government initiatives such as the G. I. Bill of Rights provided incentives for many working-class Americans to acquire their own homes, yet these advances were more applicable to white rather than black families, exemplifying the degree of paradox within the so-called affluent society. Paradox also characterized other cornerstones of the post–World War II consensus such as the traditional American family and the national pastime of baseball, reflecting a continuing degree of insecurity even though the nation was supposedly protected by the avuncular leadership and conservative values of President Dwight Eisenhower. Accordingly, the commercial success of the stage and screen versions of the musical *Damn Yankees* (1958) provides evidence that the story of baseball domination by the corporate New York Yankees and the threat of unrestricted female sexuality to the American family resonated with audiences during the 1950s. Beneath the façade of the complacent decade were fissures in the society explored within the relative safety of a musical comedy which suggested, much like the baseball fantasy films of the early 1950s, that individuals were overwhelmed by social and economic forces over which they could exercise little control, necessitating divine intervention or a pact with the Devil.

The adjustments and uncertainties in the labor market wrought by expanded female employment during the war, and fears of jobless returning male veterans were supposedly reconciled by the 1950s with the emergence

of what Betty Friedan would later characterize as *The Feminine Mystique*. In her influential work, Friedan described the consensus ideal life of the American woman, asserting, "Millions of women lived their lives in the image of those pretty pictures of the American suburban housewife, kissing their husbands goodbye in front of the picture window, depositing their station wagonful of children at the school, and smiling as they ran the new electric waxer over the spotless kitchen floor." American women expected to find fulfillment and security in the arms of their husbands, rejecting the independent symbol of the Second World War's Rosie the Riveter. Marriage and children were the goals of the American woman who got an early start in achieving her goals in the 1950s. For example, the median age for a first marriage in 1950 was 22.8 years old for men and 20.3 for women, as opposed to the median male and female averages of 26.8 and 25.1 years of age, respectively, in 2000. Encouraged to begin families as soon as possible, the birthrate for teenage women, ages 15 to 19, in 1957 was 96.3 per 1,000, a figure almost double the rate of 48.7 in 2000. Women were encouraged to remain in these early marriages as divorce was socially unacceptable. In 1950, there were 385,000 divorces in the United States in contrast with 1,135,000 dissolved marriages in 1998. To put these figures in some perspective, only 2.6 people out of 1,000 were divorced in 1950, while this number climbed to 4.2 in 1998. With fewer women entering professions and dropping out of college at a 60 percent rate after finding husbands, divorce was threatening to women who had abandoned their independence.[1]

Nevertheless, under the veneer of domestic bliss in the affluence of suburbia, there were dark currents of discontent for women during the supposedly tranquil 1950s. According to Stephanie Coontz, the stereotypical television mother and families of situation comedies, such as *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*, most accurately described "the way we never were." Friedan suggested that women were not content with their lives as extensions of their husbands. Identifying what she termed the Feminine Mystique, Friedan articulated the growing sense of discontent which culminated in the women's movement of the 1960s, proclaiming, "The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the bed, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lays beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—'Is this all?'"[2]

But Friedan and women of her social class were products of educated environments as insurance against a failing marriage, but many working-class

women had no such sense of security and were increasingly vulnerable. A threat to the cult of domesticity was posed by uncontrolled female sexuality. Both the attraction and danger of female sexual aggression to the American family was exhibited in the ambivalence of such Alfred Hitchcock films as *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963). Housewives feared that their marriages might be compromised by female predators in the male enclave of the workplace. In the sport of baseball, this menace was referred to as the "Baseball Annie." In depicting the attraction of these sexually available women to married ballplayers, Jean Hastings Ardell argues, "Part of the attraction between Baseball Annies and ballplayers has to do with their mutual insecurities. Life on the road gets lonely, and a professional baseball player can live in perpetual anxiety about his performance on the field. Subject to daily criticism by the press, the fans, and the field management, he quickly learns that uncritical acceptance is just an embrace away from any number of women, many beset by their own self-doubts."[3] Ardell, while displaying sympathy and understanding for both the Annie and baseball players, chronicles the destruction many of these affairs have wrought in baseball marriages. Many housewives in the 1950s identified with the vulnerability of player spouses who speculated about the fidelity of their mate while he was on road trips. These societal uncertainties of the era were played upon in such baseball films as *The Great American Pastime* (1956) and the better-known *Damn Yankees*.

While *The Great American Pastime* enjoyed only moderate box-office appeal, it, nevertheless, exposed some of the same gender role anxiety tapped by the musical numbers in *Damn Yankees*. But in the case of *The Great American Pastime*, the focus was on the growing suburban phenomenon of Little League Baseball. With increased leisure time, a prosperous and growing middle class, and the new emphasis upon children fostered by the baby boom, Little League was an important, albeit exclusively male, institution in postwar America. Originating in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, in 1939, Little League consisted of 867 teams in 12 states a decade later. Richard O. Davies emphasizes the consensus values middle-class parents hoped that Little League would instill in their young boys, observing, "In an age when fears about disloyalty and communism gripped a society, and when it became increasingly evident that in order to succeed adults had to make their peace with big government and corporate organizations, the values that middle-class parents wanted to instill in their children were those of patriotism, discipline, acceptance of authority, and primacy of the group or organization to which one owed allegiance."[4] Thus, *The Great American Pastime* expresses none of the cynicism toward Little League found in such post Vietnam and Watergate films as *The Bad News Bears* (1976).

Nonetheless, an independent woman poses a sexual threat to the harmony

of middle-class values found in the family and institutions such as Little League. Directed by television writer and filmmaker Henry Hoffman, *The Great American Pastime* relates the story of attorney Bruce Hallerton (Tom Ewell), who agrees to coach his son's Little League team in order to forge a better relationship with his offspring. This bonding, however, is endangered by the presence of attractive widow Doris Patterson (Ann Miller) lobbying for her son to become the team's pitcher. It is interesting to note that the script makes Patterson a widow rather than the socially unacceptable and perhaps more sexually threatening divorcée. Nevertheless, Hallerton's wife, Betty (Anne Francis), interprets Patterson's motive to have sexual overtones. To save her marriage, Betty Hallerton becomes the team's secretary and keeps a close watch on her man. Although innocuous in its screen sexuality, the film does suggest continuing apprehension regarding independent women and the necessity of containing female sexuality. On a lighter note, Hal Erickson in the *Baseball Filmography* found the plot to be rather implausible with two beautiful women, portrayed by Ann Miller and Anne Francis, fighting over the "ploddingly unromantic" Tom Ewell. On the other hand, Marilyn Monroe certainly gave the awkward Ewell plenty of attention in Billy Wilder's classic film *The Seven Year Itch* (1955).[5]

More serious attention to the threat of a vamp to the institution of marriage was, of course, developed in the stage and screen musical *Damn Yankees* based upon the Douglass Wallop novel *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* (1954). The novel, however, resonates more with baseball fans than the musical in which the seductive performance by Gwen Verdon as Lola demonstrates that sex may trump sport. Wallop's novel tells the story of a long-suffering fan of the Washington Senators who sells his soul to the Devil so that his team may seize the American League pennant from the hated New York Yankees. In this baseball version of *Faust*, Joe Boyd, a middle-aged real estate salesman, is transformed into the young phenomenon Joe Hardy, who leads the Senators to their first American League championship since the 1924 season.

Wallop's novel connected with baseball fans who resented the domination of the sport by the Yankee club. The most successful of all sporting franchises, the New York Yankees through the 2009 season have won 27 World Series championships and 40 American League pennants. From the 1920s and Babe Ruth to the modern era of free agency, Yankee ownership has adjusted to changes in the game, maintaining a dominant position. Under the leadership of Casey Stengel, the Yankees attained five consecutive World Series championships (1949–1953). For the decade of the 1950s, the club won six World Series and eight American League flags. The powerful Yankee teams of the era featured Hall of Fame players Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra, and Whitey

Ford, but Stengel was also noted for his masterful platooning of players such as Hank Baur, Norm Sieburn, Gene Woodling, and Gil McDougal. Stengel's platooning strategy seemed to mirror the corporate values of the post–World War II consensus as Yankee reserves were employed as interchangeable parts in the New York machine. These reserves were to place their individual talents in service of larger team or corporate goals.[6]

Nevertheless, many blamed sagging 1950s attendance figures in major league baseball upon the Yankee dominance and lack of competitive balance in the sport. The sense of frustration with the Yankees was paramount in Washington, where the perennial second-division Senators were described as, "First in war, first in peace, and last in the American League." Douglass Wallop was born in Washington, D.C., growing up as a fierce partisan of the Senators. He continued his allegiance to the losing club through college at the University of Maryland and an early career in journalism before making his mark as a novelist. While Wallop published more than a dozen novels, *The Year the Yankees Won the Pennant* remains his best-known work. Selected by both the Book-of-the-Month Club and Reader's Digest Condensed Books, the novel had sold over two and one-half million copies by the time of the author's death in 1985. In a review essay for the *Washington Post*, Jonathan Yardley contrasted *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* with Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* (1952), noting that Malamud perceives baseball through Arthurian rather than Faustian legend. Yardley concludes, "The big difference is that while Malamud's Roy Hobbs fritters away his God-given gift, Wallop's Joe Hardy makes the absolute most of his own satanic blessing."[7]

The Senators win the pennant, but Boyd/Hardy does not go over to the dark side. Joe Hardy remains Joe Boyd on the inside, retaining the fundamental decency of the real-estate agent and his commitment to family and traditional values. Thus, the book appeals to Yankee haters who perceive the New York franchise as a corporate behemoth or evil empire crushing the little guy or the small market team. On the other hand, Wallop's novel offers its own version of the American dream in which the individual is able to triumph over the corporate entity. But the triumph of the common man only comes at the price of making a deal with the Devil, introducing a serious note of ambiguity to this reading of the text. The American dream, of course, also contains a dark side. In his 2003 keynote speech for the Shrine of the Eternals induction sponsored by the Baseball Reliquary, Professor Robert Elias addressed baseball and the American dream. While holding out hope that baseball might be a force for progressive change in the United States, Elias notes the gap between the myth and reality of the American dream, proclaiming, "Many don't experience the U.S. as a land of opportunity. Even if the dream were more widely experienced, some worry about the values it asks

us to live by — materialism, hyper-competition, excessive individualism, and so forth. In the end, the American dream may not be so much the inevitable reality but rather the dream and also its contradiction."[8]

These contradictions were most apparent in the career of New York Yankee superstar Mickey Mantle, whose athletic accomplishments epitomized Yankee dominance during the 1950s. The Yankee centerfielder also appeared, at least on the surface, to embody the American dream, rising from humble circumstances in rural Oklahoma to become the toast of New York City. Yet, this success came with a terrible price as the naturally shy Oklahoman turned to alcohol as a way to deal with the pressures of the New York City limelight, contributing to his estrangement from family and a premature death. In his Mantle biography focusing upon the tragedy of the athlete's life, Tony Castro concludes, "Indeed, Mantle's career and life produce a kind of wistful remorse grounded within a specific historical circumstance, the great American hopes of the 1960s, the immense disillusionment with politics after Watergate and Vietnam. Mickey Mantle serves as memory for many Americans, as a wish-fulfillment not for Mickey himself but what he represented, and for what he reminds them of— a celebration, a rite both of communion and redemption."[9]

As a baseball icon of the 1950s, Mantle, thus, seemed to make his own pact with the Devil, and these demons pursued him for the remainder of his often tragic life. One might argue that, in its support of anticommunist dictators during the Cold War, the United States made its own Faustian bargains which contributed to the "blowback" of the post–9/11 world. But those who adore the screen version of *Damn Yankees* usually do not dwell upon these images of the American dream. Instead, it is the optimism of the story's conclusion as well as the sexual ambiguity which influence modern memory and contemporary perceptions of *Damn Yankees*. In the final analysis, Joe Boyd is able to achieve a pennant for the Senators and his fling with the seductive Lola while still clinging to his marriage. Despite the postwar insecurities of Americans regarding issues of race, gender, and class, along with the looming Soviet threat, it was still possible to achieve the American dream. Only, *Damn Yankees*— similar to the baseball fantasy films such *It Happens Every Spring* (1949), *Angels in the Outfield* (1951), and *Rhubarb* (1951)— relied upon supernatural intervention rather than the Protestant work ethic and the homilies of Benjamin Franklin to attain the dream.

This optimistic reading of *Damn Yankees* in modern memory is evident in a 2002 piece by *Newsweek* editor Mark Starr, commenting upon the astounding performance by 20-year-old Anaheim Angels relief pitcher Francisco Rodriguez against the New York Yankees in the playoffs. Starr equated the accomplishments of Rodriguez with the phenomenal Joe Hardy, suggesting that a screening of *Damn Yankees* continues to hold up "damn good." Starr

asserted, "I suspect that's because it embodies three fantasies that remain near and dear to the heart and other body parts of every red-blooded American male: to be the young stud who comes out of nowhere to become baseball's greatest player; to beat the cursed Yankees, and to win the heart — and the body — of Gwen Verdon."[10] This reading of the film places athletic and sexual prowess at the center of the fantasy, while acknowledging that defeating the monolith of the Yankees and winning the affections of Gwen Verdon are illusions. But such façades are what propped up the post–World War II consensus until these illusions were shattered by the realities of campus and urban unrest, Vietnam, and Watergate during the 1960s and 1970s. And such myths continue to foster beliefs in American exceptionalism in the twenty-first century along with revivals of *Damn Yankees*.

Directed by veteran Broadway figure George Abbott, the musical *Damn Yankees* made its New York City premiere at the 46th Street Theatre on 5 May 1955, before transferring to the Adelphi Theatre in May 1957. The original run of the show included 1,019 performances. A Broadway revival opened at the Marquis Theatre on 3 March 1994 and ran for 718 performances. The music and lyrics were produced by the songwriting team of Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, whose previous credits included the Broadway and Hollywood hit, *The Pajama Game* (1957). The promising musical career of the Adler and Ross team was cut tragically short when Ross, following the Broadway premiere of *Damn Yankees*, died suddenly at age 29 from chronic bronchitis. The Broadway production featured Stephen Douglass as Joe Hardy, Gwen Verdon as Lola, and Ray Walston as the satanic Mr. Applegate. Choreography was provided by Bob Fosse, who married Verdon in 1960. The show earned Tony Awards for Verdon, Walston, and Fosse, in addition to being selected as Best Musical in 1956.[11]

The critical and commercial success of *Damn Yankees* on Broadway convinced Warner Bros. to reprise the musical as a film, which was produced and directed by George Abbott and Stanley Donen. As a noted director of Hollywood musicals, Donen was tapped to help Abbott with transition from stage to screen. Donen, however, was frustrated with Abbott's failure to realize the potential of film. According to Donen, Abbott simply wanted to recreate the Broadway production on celluloid. Although Donen did jazz up the film with some split-screen shots, overall, he considered his film collaborations with Abbott on *Pajama Game* and *Damn Yankees* to be "fun movies but there is not much I could contribute to them, beyond photographing them."[12]

Fosse also served as choreographer for the film, while Walston and Verdon reprised their stage roles. The major controversy of the film production, however, was the casting of teen heartthrob Tab Hunter in the Stephen Douglass role of Joe Hardy. Abbott supposedly wanted Hunter for his box-office appeal,

Lola (Gwen Verdon), performing "Whatever Lola Wants," attempts to seduce Joe Hardy (Tab Hunter) into staying with the Washington Senators in *Damn Yankees* (1958).

but the actor was neither a singer nor a dancer. Hunter constantly feuded with Abbott, who insisted that the actor simply play the Hardy role in the same fashion that Stephen Douglass did on the stage. Efforts by Hunter to improvise scenes were quashed by Abbott. The casting of Hunter opposite the aggressive female sexuality of Verdon also raised some eyebrows because of questions regarding Hunter's sexual orientation. Raised as Arthur Gelien, Hunter received his stage name from agent Henry Willson. After earning

strong reviews for his performance in the World War II picture *Battle Cry* (1955), the popular Hunter was the subject of an exposé in the tabloid magazine *Confidential*, reporting upon the actor's arrest for disorderly conduct and raising questions about his sexuality. Hunter, nevertheless, was able to continue with his career, and in 1957 he even released a best-selling single "Young Love" targeted at a teen female audience. Hunter was, thus, able to garner the male lead in *Damn Yankees*.

In his memoir, Hunter acknowledges the difficulty he encountered working with Abbott, as well as his trepidation about his musical numbers with Verdon. But Hunter credits Bob Fosse with coaching him though his dance steps, and as for Verdon, Hunter writes, "'Whatever Lola Wants,' Gwen's famous seduction of Joe Hardy, was a cinch for me — all I had to do was react to her outrageously sexy routine. Not difficult. I just sat in the middle of her magic." While Hunter was quick to confess his awkwardness on the dance floor, he was reticent to reveal his homosexuality at this point in his career. Although still not fully comfortable discussing his sexual orientation in his 2005 autobiography, Hunter concludes, "Much of the prejudice I once feared, and the secrets I kept, are no longer considered shameful or career-threatening. That doesn't mean it's easy for me to speak freely about what really happened during my life in Hollywood, and beyond. Call me old-school on that score, for which I don't apologize. I'm neither ashamed nor embarrassed."[13]

But the 1950s were another matter. To refute any questions regarding Hunter's sexual orientation, the publicity department at Warner Bros. touted the relationship between Hunter and young starlet Natalie Wood. Nor could the actor reveal his relationship with Tony Perkins, who starred in the last of the postwar biographical films as the troubled Jimmy Piersall. In the postwar era of the American consensus, homosexuality was viewed as a perversion and threat to national security and the family. In addition, the American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a mental disorder until 1973. Accordingly, politicians such as Republican Lewis Miller of Nebraska denounced homosexuality on the floor of the House of Representatives in the spring of 1950, asserting that the nation's capital included six thousand homosexuals, 75 percent of whom worked for the government. Not worried about providing supporting evidence for his allegations, Miller continued in a lurid style, perhaps suggesting a certain sexual titillation, proclaiming, "There are places in Washington where they gather for the purpose of sex orgies, where they worship at the cesspool and flesh pots of iniquity. There is a restaurant downtown where you will find male prostitutes. They solicit business for other male customers. They are pimps and undesirable characters." Noting that homosexuality had its origins among Orientals and was embraced by the Russians, Congressman Miller warned that American homosexuals constituted

national security risks, concluding, "I realize that there is some physical danger to anyone exposing all of the details and nastiness of homosexuality, because some of these people are dangerous. They will go to any limit. These homosexuals have strong emotions. They are not to be trusted and when blackmail threatens they are a dangerous group."[14]

While Hunter as Joe Hardy was resisting the enticing curves of Verdon, he was forced to conceal his true feelings for a sensitive male such as Tony Perkins. Thus, there are layers of ambiguity and insecurity regarding gender roles and the promise of the American dream contained within the fantasy of *Damn Yankees*. The film begins with Joe Boyd (Robert Shafer) watching his beloved Washington Senators lose yet another game on a sweltering summer evening in the nation's capital. In addition to bemoaning the fate his Senators suffer at the hands of the hated Yankees, the middle-aged real-estate agent seems somewhat detached from both his wife and occupation, introducing a weary Willie Loman element into his character. Noting her husband's emotional distance, Meg Boyd (Shannon Bolin) sings the lament of a baseball widow, "Six Months Out of Every Year." Meg leaves her husband with his precious game and retreats to bed. Cursing the Yankee juggernaut under his breath, Joe Boyd goes out to his porch where he encounters a mysterious and well-dressed stranger named Applegate. Suggesting his true identity by lighting a cigarette without benefit of match or lighter, Applegate tenders the disenchanted Boyd the deal of his dreams. In exchange for his soul, Applegate offers to make Boyd a young athlete with the natural ability to lead the Senators to victory over the evil Yankees.[15]

Boyd leaps at this opportunity to achieve fame and fortune while putting his dull and repetitious life behind him. Nevertheless, there is a degree of ambivalence within Boyd, and like a good businessman, he insists upon an escape clause in his contract with Applegate. Boyd will be able to get out from under his contract if he voluntarily leaves the Senators before midnight on September 24, the eve of the regular season's conclusion. The salesman also recognizes that this endeavor to embrace the American dream places more than his soul in jeopardy. Boyd is concerned about what will happen to his wife, and he sings a sorrowful apology, "Goodbye Old Gal" to Meg. But he walks out the door anyway. Pangs of guilt do not prevent Joe from abandoning his family, suggesting the vulnerability of life in suburbia. In *The Unfinished Journey*, William Chafe describes a life of conformity in the suburbs, observing, "For many, the whole complex of suburban institutions represented a devastating blow to individualism, diversity, and faith." But Joe and Meg Boyd fail to fit another stereotype of suburbia. They have no children and are not part of the post–World War II baby boom as America grew by almost 30 million people, approaching the growth rate of India. Perhaps their lack

of children makes the couple more vulnerable and susceptible to manipulation by the Devil.[16]

Meanwhile, the Washington Senators are mired in a slump, but manager Van Buren (Ross Brown) leads the club in what is perhaps the musical's most popular number, "Heart." The optimism of the song is rewarded with the appearance of an athletic Joe Hardy asking for a tryout with the team. Slamming the ball out of the park (with the Wrigley Field home of the Hollywood Stars decked out to resemble Griffith Stadium in Washington), Hardy is assigned a contract with the Senators. Although there is some concern about his origins, Hardy simply informs the club and press that he is from Hannibal, Missouri — the home of Mark Twain and a reference to the author's tall tales. The Twain connection also serves as a bridge to one of the film's major dance numbers, "Shoeless Joe from Hannibal Mo," in which players demonstrate their enthusiasm and athletic skills to the choreography of Bob Fosse. The song will also remind baseball fans of Shoeless Joe Jackson, who apparently made his own pact with the Devil in the guise of gamblers in the 1919 World Series.

And with Joe Hardy in the lineup, the Washington club begins to rise in the standings. The handsome center fielder is driving in runs, hitting home runs, and making fabulous catchers — Mickey Mantle in the uniform of the Washington Senators. Since the fans know nothing about the pact with Applegate, the clean cut and modest Hardy emerges as the perfect baseball hero. In their survey of baseball cinema, Marshall G. Most and Robert Rudd conclude, "This sense of quiet humility characterizes nearly all of baseball's cinematic legends. Despite being the greatest player in the game, Washington Senator Joe Hardy remains extremely polite and reserved; his newfound status as the Senators' savior never gets to his head."[17]

The heroic nature of Hardy is also affirmed as he begins to question his agreement with Applegate and yearns for the companionship of Meg. In fact, Hardy visits the lonely Meg and rents a room in his former home. The young man and Meg form a friendship, much to the consternation of Applegate who fears that his prey may elude him. Hardy wants to reveal his true identity to Meg, but he eventually moves out to protect her from the idle gossip of neighbors — another reference to the conformity of the suburban lifestyle.

To thwart the renewed relationship between Joe and Meg, Applegate employs the untamed sexuality of Lola, whom he terms "the best home wrecker on staff." To further identify Lola with the uninhibited sexual appetite of "the other," Applegate introduces her to Hardy as a sultry South American dancer named "Señorita Lolita Banana." Lola then attempts to seduce the ballplayer with the sexy dance number "Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets." And if film reviewers are any guide, Gwen Verdon as Lola succeeded in igniting the lust

of male film audiences who were ready to abandon their domestic responsibilities and sell their souls for some time with the temptress. In fact, Lola represents the threat that many perceived the independent women of World War II presented for the traditional family, and this independence and sexuality would have to be contained within the feminine mystique and postwar consensus. Joe Hardy, however, is no ordinary man, and, fulfilling the self-sacrificing role of the classical hero, he reluctantly rejects Lola's sexual advances. Of course, the very fact that Joe displays such integrity wins the heart of Lola, so long accustomed to Applegate and the dark side.

When his seduction plans go awry, Applegate shifts tactics and plays upon the curiosity of reporter Gloria Thorpe (Rae Allen), who is attempting to trace Hardy's background and discovers that they have never heard of him in Hannibal, Missouri. Applegate spreads the rumor that Hardy is none other than "Shifty McCoy," who was an outlaw player who jumped to the Mexican League. For baseball fans, this shady background raises the specter of Shoeless Joe Jackson and the 1919 Black Sox scandal as well as the post–World War II efforts of Mexican entrepreneur Jorge Pasquel to raid major league rosters. Commissioner A. B. "Happy" Chandler disqualified these players whom he described as "deserting the flag of Organized Baseball" during the tenuous early years of the Cold War. Accordingly, the commissioner of baseball establishes an emergency hearing for the evening of September 24, on the eve of the season finale between the Senators and Yankees, which will determine the American League pennant, to ascertain Hardy's eligibility.

This is also the midnight deadline for Joe's escape clause which would allow for his transformation from Hardy back to Boyd. Although Joe Hardy is eventually cleared to play, Applegate has succeeded in delaying the proceedings past the escape clause deadline. Joe's soul now belongs to a gloating Applegate. Joe spends the evening with Lola, who explains that she was the ugliest woman in Providence, Rhode Island, during Colonial times before she sold her soul to Applegate. The two dance and exchange a kiss while performing the musical number "Two Lost Souls." There is an emotional bond between Joe and Lola, but the seductress recognizes that Joe is really still in love with Meg. Lola loves Joe enough to help him foil Applegate and find his way back to Meg. She informs Joe that Applegate is secretly working for the Yankees—associating the Devil in this case with baseball's most successful franchise—and he plans to engineer a Yankee victory over the Senators on the last day of the season. Joe pleads with her to prevent Applegate from attending the game. Lola drugs her boss, but he recovers in time to reach the ballpark in the top of the ninth inning with the Senators leading 5–4 behind the stellar play of Joe Hardy. With Yankee runners on base, Mickey Mantle

hits a long fly ball to center field. Hardy races for the ball, and an angry Applegate reneges on his deal by transforming Joe during the play, assuming that Joe Boyd will never be able to catch the ball. Lumbering and stumbling, however, the older man makes the catch and runs out of Griffith Stadium. The Senators have won the pennant, and a frustrated Applegate retreats to Hell with Lola.

Meanwhile, Joe Boyd returns to Meg who unquestioningly welcomes her wandering husband home. The conclusion of the film offers a number of conflicting ideas. It is, indeed, possible for the self-made man to succeed in a corporate economy. After all, it is Joe Boyd who makes the catch and defeats those damned Yankees. But the Senators would not even be close to the Yankees without Joe Hardy and his pact with the Devil. Thus, we return to the argument made by Robert Elias that achieving the American dream may come at a great price. In the final analysis, Joe Boyd backs away from the temptations of Applegate and Lola, finding solace with Meg and the security of a safe suburban environment within the American consensus. The threat of untamed sexuality and the independent woman was resolved in favor of the feminine mystique. But this veneer of consensus exploded in the 1960s with the women's movement.

Few critics noted the musical's commentary upon the American dream, as they were seemingly distracted by Gwen Verdon's legs and themes of sexuality. In fact, the movie poster for *Damn Yankees* features Verdon as Lola and includes no baseball images. Hal Erickson in his *Baseball Filmography* laments, "No one was asking for *Damn Yankees* to eschew its core and become a baseball picture through and through, but moviegoers more fond of ballgames than they were of people suddenly bursting into song were left a little wanting." But most critics found little problem with featuring sexuality over baseball, focusing their commentary upon Verdon's performance as Lola. Bosley Crowther in the *New York Times* asserted, "As the sultry handmaiden of the Devil who is given the critical job of vamping a Cinderella rookie on the Washington Senators into forgetting his old place by the home fire, Miss Verdon is wondrously repeating the role she played on stage — and doing it in a fashion that is rare and refreshing on the screen." *Newsweek* found Walston's performance as a "Madison Avenue Beelzebub" to be interesting, but the news magazine was most impressed with the "seductive routine of his sexy aide-de-camp." Even the *Catholic World* described "the sexy dancing demeanors" of Verdon to be in "a class by themselves." *Time* was not quite so overwhelmed by Verdon to note that baseball was capable of making its own Faustian bargain in Walter O'Malley's abandonment of Brooklyn for the greener pastures of Los Angeles following the 1957 season. In recommending *Damn Yankees*, *Time* observed, "Hollywood's version of Broadway's long-

running marriage of baseball and Beelzebub seems sure to draw more customers than the Los Angeles Dodgers, even though it too requires a screen."[19]

Damn Yankees is light musical fare which, nevertheless, raises some serious questions regarding the American dream, suburbia, and gender roles within the postwar consensus. The film seems to suggest that it is possible to celebrate the triumph of the individual over the corporate monolith, while taming the sexuality of independent women in service of suburbia, the feminine mystique, and the traditional family structure. The sexual ambivalence of Tab Hunter also adds an element of what William Chafe calls the paradox of change during the 1950s. The consensus to which *Damn Yankees* and *The Great American Pastime* cling remains heterosexual and largely white, although the Senators in *Damn Yankees* are presented as an integrated club. But the triumph of the consensus, like the Senators in *Damn Yankees*, proves short lived. Even in the fantasy musical film, the Senators' victory is a one-year phenomenon without Joe Hardy. And in the real world of major league baseball, the Yankees continued their domination of the sport into the early 1960s behind the home run exploits of Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris.

The two Yankee stars were featured in the last of the post–World War II baseball films, *Safe at Home!* (1962). Set in Florida's Yankee spring training camp on the eve of the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Safe at Home!* returns the baseball film to the more juvenile elements of *The Babe Ruth Story* (1948). Retreating to the safety of childhood, *Safe at Home!* seeks to ignore the contradictions and paradox which characterized most of the baseball biographical, musical, and fantasy films of the postwar era. Unable to reconcile these contradictions, the post–World War II consensus disintegrated during the 1960s under the challenge of women, youth, gays and lesbians, and racial minorities all seeking their place within a more diverse America. And even the mighty New York dynasty of those *Damn Yankees* was destined to be dethroned during the turbulent late 1960s.

12

Back to the Future

Safe at Home! (1962) Within the American Consensus

The America of the 1950s and early 1960s — before the assassination of John F. Kennedy, escalation in Vietnam, and an increasingly violent reaction to the civil rights movement — is perceived nostalgically by many as a period of peace and prosperity. Scholars often employ the concept of the postwar liberal consensus to describe this idealistic view of the 1950s. According to the consensus, or what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., termed the vital center, there was no need for racial protest or class conflict in America as an expanding capitalist economy would resolve issues of inequality. Capitalism and anti-communism were, thus, the twin pillars of the consensus. But historians such as William Chafe argue that the 1950s are better viewed as a time of paradox in which poverty existed in the midst of affluence and consumerism; increasing conformity clashed with the economic independence of suburbia; the rebellion of the civil rights movement and the beat generation questioned the complacency of the organization man; the growing number of women working outside the home in order to support a more affluent lifestyle undermined the dynamics of the feminine mystique; and the dangers of an ideological anti-communism which ignored nationalistic aspirations of the third world as well as the clear and present danger of nuclear annihilation were made apparent in the jungles of Vietnam and during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The consensus crumbled as these paradoxes were magnified in the late 1960s by racial, gender, and class conflict.[1]

Yet, nostalgia for the early postwar period persists, especially among middle-aged white males who found their tranquil existence shattered by racial tensions, a war in Southeast Asia, protest in the streets, and dramatic changes in lifestyle and appearance. Youth rebellion grew during the 1960s as simpler

and more traditional pursuits of childhood such as baseball were left behind as many young men embraced the values of the counterculture and challenged the consensus values of their parents' generation. But in the early 1980s there was a resurgence in baseball fueled by these same baby boomer males. As the late Jules Tygiel notes in his perceptive *Past Time: Baseball as History*, "Moving into their thirties and settling down with jobs and families, male baby boomers, many of whom had allowed their baseball allegiance to ebb during the tumultuous sixties, once again appeared at games. With the Vietnam War over in 1975 and the counter-cultural impulse on the wane, many former protesters staged a symbolic homecoming through baseball."[2]

One of the principal icons of this nostalgia for the 1950s was New York Yankee center fielder Mickey Mantle, who anchored the franchise dynasty into the mid–1960s. Yet, Mantle was a tragic hero who battled injuries, alcoholism, and sense of disappointment that he never fulfilled his vast potential. These flaws endeared Mantle even more to men who grew up in the post–World War II period. When Mantle died on 13 August 1995, many middle-aged males openly wept. This outpouring of sympathy and grief for the baseball great was captured in a volume of letters in which men espoused their love and admiration for the Yankee great. For example, Robert Butcher proclaimed, "Your name was on my glove and all my life when I see or hear the number 7 I think of you. I suffered growing up. And as a man. You helped me and didn't know. I'm sure a million kids, some not too young anymore, feel the same way I do."[3]

Such sentiments reflect a sincere appreciation for Mantle as well as a sense of nostalgia for a lost youth and perhaps longing for a simpler time found in the juvenile film *Safe at Home!* (1962), featuring Mantle and his teammate Roger Maris. The film was an effort by Columbia Pictures to commercially exploit the 1961 baseball season in which Mantle and Maris laid siege to Babe Ruth's single-season home-run mark of 60 established in 1927. The Yankee sluggers captured the imagination of the country and endured considerable pressure in their quest which culminated in controversy. Beset by injuries, Mantle missed the final weeks of the season, finishing the 1961 campaign with 54 home runs. Maris did break Ruth's record with 61 home runs, but Baseball Commissioner Ford Frick, who as a reporter during the 1920s formed a friendship with Ruth, ruled that since Ruth's mark was established in 154 games as contrasted with the 162-game schedule played by Maris, an asterisk would be placed next to the Maris home run total.[4] The ambiguity of the Frick ruling was erased by Commissioner Fay Vincent who removed the asterisk in 1993.

But Columbia Pictures did not want to deal with ambiguities and paradox. The controversies of the 1961 baseball season are glossed over in favor

of a juvenile film in which a young boy learns the importance of truth, honesty, and loyalty from Maris and Mantle. *Safe at Home!* marked the end of the post–World War II cycle of baseball genre films. While respectful of baseball's place within American culture, these films also exhibited a degree of uncertainty about the direction of the nation in the postwar era. But no such doubts about the American future are found in *Safe at Home!* as the simplistic advice of Maris and Mantle provides shelter from the gathering storm of protest which engulfed America during the 1960s.

Safe at Home! tells the story of a young boy, Hutch Lawton (Bryan Russell), who helps his widowed father, Ken Lawton (Don Collier), with his Florida fishing business. In fact, the ten-year-old Hutch is closer to a business partner than a dependent child. He assists his father with the family boat while picking up the laundry and preparing meals. Ken Lawton is so busy with his tourist fishing tours and clients that he fails to notice that he is neglecting his son. Although Hutch tries to conceal his disappointment from a somewhat clueless father, he finds it embarrassing in front of his peers when his father is unable to attend Little League games because of his business commitments. Hutch's discomfort, however, is readily apparent to Johanna Price (Patricia Barry), a single woman and boat owner who displays an interest in both Hutch and his father. Unlike Ken Lawton who has little time for his son, Johanna is able to successfully operate her boating enterprise, display some romantic interest in Ken, and play a surrogate mother role by attending Hutch's games and practices. She is similar to the independent women and wives depicted in the postwar baseball biographical films, such as Ethyl Stratton of *The Stratton Story* (1949), who must provide a sense of direction and purpose for the male protagonists.

While Hutch enjoys the support of Johanna, the young man must endure the taunts of his Little League teammates who do notice the absent father. To restore his father's reputation and his own self-esteem, Hutch resorts to a lie. He tells his buddies that his dad is a friend of New York Yankee stars Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle. Somewhat suspicious of Hutch's claims, his teammates suggest that if Mr. Lawton is on such good personal terms with Maris and Mantle, then he should be able to get the Yankee players to speak at the upcoming team banquet. A defensive Hutch finally asserts that, indeed, his father would get his baseball friends to attend the team gathering.

Wanting to protect this false image of his father, Hutch proceeds to hitchhike to the Yankee training camp in Fort Lauderdale. The desperate young man is able to finagle a meeting with Maris and Mantle, to whom he confesses his predicament and seeks to enlist their aid. Maris and Mantle do not respond with the indifference usually attributed to the modern-day athlete. Instead, they perceive Hutch's plight as an opportunity to instruct a young

man in the virtues of honesty. Seeking to explain why they cannot attend the banquet, Mantle observes, "If we showed up — we'd be trying to make your lie good. It'd be like making a foul ball fair by moving the baseline. It just isn't in the rules." Echoing the sentiments of his teammate, Maris adds, "More than that, Hutch — it'd mean we were lying to all your teammates, too. We'd just be making it worse. When a lie starts — it involves everyone." The ballplayers conclude that Hutch must tell his father and his friends the truth. Mantle concludes, "You know, every man has to take the responsibility for what he's done. And if what he's done is wrong, he's got to undo it, Hutch."[5]

Traditionalists, bemoaning the age of steroids and questions of perjury before grand juries and congressional committees in contemporary baseball, might long for the simpler days of Maris and Mantle, but the reality of the "pep" pills in the locker rooms and abuse of alcohol suggests reservations about a golden age of baseball purity in the past. And even after their "tough love" advice to Hutch, Maris and Mantle do make it possible for their young protégé to tell the truth and still become a hero to his teammates. They extend an invitation to Hutch and his Little League friends to visit the Yankee training camp. The film concludes with joyous Little Leaguers running alongside their Yankee idols. The entire episode causes Ken Lawton to review his priorities in life. He vows to make more time for Hutch, and he appears more cognizant of Johanna's romantic intentions. It seems a new family and home is forming within the safe confines of baseball's traditional values.

But the scenario ignores the reality of racial division within American society well reflected in the Yankee clubhouse, the alcohol abuse and sexual promiscuity of many ballplayers, the media pressures which led to Maris's hair falling out during the 1961 home run contest, an America on the verge of radical change as the fissures in the consensus became increasingly evident, and the ever-present Cold War which nearly resulted in nuclear annihilation with the Cuban Missile Crisis, only ninety miles from the Yankee training camp in Florida.

Safe at Home! was simply a fantasy based not upon an adherence to traditional family values as embodied in baseball, but rather upon capitalism and exploiting the 1961 home run chase of Maris and Mantle. The film was the brainchild of television producer Tom Naud, who contacted Frank Scott, the business agent for the ballplayers. After an initial script draft which, assuming that the athletes would be unable to memorize and deliver lines of dialogue, had Maris and Mantle cast as "deaf and dumb" brothers, it was agreed that the ballplayers would portray themselves. As a young professional actor, Bryan Russell portraying Hutch Lawton would enjoy more screen time than the ballplayers. Columbia Pictures assigned the 90-minute black-and-white production to veteran television director Walter Doniger. The *Safe at Home!*

production called for ten days of shooting in Fort Lauderdale, with the full cooperation of the Yankees and guest appearances by club manager Ralph Houk and pitching star, Whitey Ford.

According to Robert Creamer of *Sports Illustrated*, Maris and Mantle remained professional and friendly, despite the long delays in filming some scenes. Working with a group of overly enthusiastic Little Leaguers was a challenge to both the filmmakers and baseball players. Creamer wrote, "Like all Little Leaguers en masse, they were loud, persistent, repetitive and impossible. After each take, when the others — Houk, for example — could relax for a minute or two, the kids stayed glued to Mantle and Maris, stepping on their feet, pulling on their sleeves, firing questions." But the deal made by Scott apparently made the Little League pestering and long periods of inactivity tolerable. Creamer reported that each player was guaranteed $25,000 for their film work plus 25 percent of net profits. However, the percentage of profits was not of major concern for this low-budget juvenile film.[6]

Mantle and Maris expressed few illusions regarding their future on the silver screen. An Arthur Daley piece in the *New York Times* noted that the ballplayers were now eligible for the Academy Awards. Maris responded by quipping, "I hope opening day doesn't interfere. I want to accept my Oscar in person." His fellow thespian, Mantle, concluded, "That'll be the day." Film critics concurred with the tongue-in-cheek assessments of Maris and Mantle. A review in *Time* suggested that the athletes follow the advice they offered Hutch Lawton and face up to what they have done. The *Time* piece asserted, "They sure do try hard, but what they have done is scarcely worthy of two players who studied elocution with Casey Stengel, and who have enjoyed previous dramatic experience as the stars of Vitalis and InfraRub commercials." Film critic Leonard Maltin suggested Maris's wooden performance made the stoic persona of actor Jack Webb as Joe Friday in *Dragnet* seem energetic.[7]

Although Maris and Mantle were better as hucksters than serious actors, it is worth noting that *Safe at Home!* marked the final screen appearance of William "Bud" Frawley, who portrayed fictitious Yankee coach Bill Turner. The 70-year-old veteran performer, who starred in such television shows as *I Love Lucy* and *My Three Sons,* earned the respect of Maris and Mantle for his earthy sense of humor and knowledge of baseball. Acknowledging Frawley's contribution to a degree of professionalism and authenticity for *Safe at Home!*, Robert Creamer observed, "In uniform he was the very pattern of the veteran baseball coach, his ample lines calling to mind the figure of James J. Dykes standing in the third-base coach's box, looking with utter disdain at a base runner just being picked off second."[8]

While enjoying the company of Frawley, Mantle expressed few illusions regarding *Safe at Home!* In his memoir *The Mick*, Mantle dismissed the film

as an easy way to earn $25,000 for just three days of work. He was less nostalgic, however, regarding the 1961 season and home run race which the film celebrated. Mantle lamented how the fans treated Maris during the quest. It was assumed by Yankee rooters that Mantle was the appropriate player to break Ruth's record rather than Maris, who joined the club in 1960. Nevertheless, Mantle remembered that when he was a Yankee rookie in 1950, many of the Yankee faithful were critical of Mantle for attempting to replace New York City favorite Joe DiMaggio. Terming Commissioner Frick's decision to place an asterisk next to the Maris record as "ridiculous," Mantle denounced the "beating" heckling and booing fans showered on Maris. The Yankee centerfielder told Herb Gluck, "Well, maybe if I had beaten him in the Home Run Derby, the fans wouldn't have liked me either. But I always felt that people continued to support me because I was from a small town in Oklahoma, that I had played despite injuries for several years, and I had done pretty well. After Roger set the record, then the ovations came my way. That's when they turned on him and started cheering me. I was human, frail, like them. They could see the cracks in the armor."[9]

While the home run contest actually nurtured a close friendship between Maris and Mantle, Maris was less satisfied with New York Yankee management with whom he was at odds over his 1962 contract. Accordingly, Maris was much more concerned with his protracted negotiations than preparing for the shooting of a film. After his record-shattering 1961 season, Maris expected to double his $37,500 salary. The Yankees responded with an offer of $50,000, and Maris considered a holdout. After arriving unsigned in Florida, Maris and Yankee General Manager Roy Hamey met and finally agreed upon a contract for $72,000, approximately $10,000 less than what Mantle was paid. Maris was the last Yankee signed for the 1962 season, which began with some light moments shooting *Safe at Home!* While the Yankees again won the World Series in 1962, defeating the San Francisco Giants in a tightly contested seven-game series, the season was not a happy one for Maris. The Yankee right fielder hit 33 home runs, but he disappointed the fans and media when he failed to approach his 1961 numbers. Summing up the 1962 campaign, Maris biographer Maury Allen wrote, "The fans had expected so much. Roger Maris had spoiled them with 61 home runs and now, when he didn't hit one, they booed. Not always, not noisily, but enough to be noticed. There would be some fan on most days who felt cheated that he paid $3.50 to see the greatest single-season home run hitter in history, and he hadn't hit a home run that day."[10]

The taciturn Maris suffered under the media spotlight and exaggerated expectations. A private man, Maris lacked the charisma which eventually made his teammate Mantle the toast of New York. Maris was born 10 Sep-

(Left to right) Roger Maris, Bill Turner (William Frawley), and Mickey Mantle provide advice for young Hutch Lawton (Bryan Russell) in *Safe at Home!* (1962).

tember 1934 in Hibbing, Minnesota (also the home town of rock and folk music icon Bob Dylan). The family moved to Fargo, North Dakota, where Maris excelled as a high school athlete. He declined a football scholarship at the University of Oklahoma, deciding that a classroom was not in his future, and signed a baseball contract with the Cleveland Indians in 1957. After he antagonized Cleveland management by refusing to play winter ball in Latin America, the outfielder was traded to the Kansas City Athletics midway through the 1958 season. Although sidelined by an appendectomy, Maris finished the 1959 campaign in Kansas City with 19 home runs, 72 runs batted in, and a batting average of .273. Maris preferred to stay in Kansas City, where he had purchased a home for his young family, but on 11 December 1959 he was traded to the Yankees.

In New York, Maris would find his left-handed pull swing ideal for the short right field fence at Yankee Stadium, but he struggled with the glare of publicity focused upon a private young man. During his first season in a Yan-

kee uniform, Maris slammed 39 home runs and was voted the American League's Most Valuable Player. During his second season in New York, Maris antagonized some Yankee fans with his assault upon the immortal Ruth home-run record. The outfielder grew impatient with questions and criticism from reporters, eventually refusing to speak with the press during his pursuit.

Spring training of 1962 only increased the tension between Maris and the press. Little media attention was bestowed upon Maris's work with Little Leaguers in *Safe at Home!*, but considerable publicity was given to Maris's failure to pose for a picture with New York Mets coach Rogers Hornsby, who belittled the accomplishments of the Yankee outfielder. Oscar Fraley of the United Press championed the combative Hornsby, terming Maris an "ingrate" who failed to appreciate the feats of baseball greats such as Ruth and Hornsby. Maris also drew the wrath of influential columnist Jimmy Cannon, who wrote for the *New York Journal-American*. When the ballplayer missed a spring-training interview scheduled by Yankee publicity director Bob Fishel, Cannon took the slight personally and blasted Maris in his columns.[11]

Although Maris enjoyed a solid 1962 campaign, the remainder of his career in New York failed to measure up to the unrealistic expectations established by his first two years with the club. Maris was often injured, and his home-run production for the Yankees dropped. After hitting 16 home runs for the Yankees in 1966, Maris was traded to the St. Louis Cardinals. But Maris was not done as a player. Although his slugging percentage was down, Maris's leadership and fine defensive play helped the Cardinals win National League pennants in 1967 and 1968. An embittered Maris retired from the game after the 1968 season, operating a beer distributorship in Florida. In his 12 major league seasons, Maris hit .260 with 275 home runs and 851 runs batted in. These numbers were deemed insufficient to win Maris selection by the baseball writers to the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. In 1983, the bitterness with the Yankees was eased when the club retired his uniform number and unveiled a plaque chronicling his achievements in Yankee pinstripes. Maris died of lymphatic cancer on 14 December 1985. The saga of Roger Maris does not quite fit with the simple virtues embraced by *Safe at Home!* The 1960s also proved to be a troubled time for Maris's friend, Mickey Mantle.

Mantle, of course, was the anointed one who was supposedly destined to eclipse the marks established by Ruth. Blessed with a rare combination of power and speed, Mantle, nevertheless, was plagued by injuries and personal insecurities which left his destiny unfulfilled. The fact that Mantle was more open about his problems, such as alcoholism, only made the Yankee great more endearing to his fans. On some levels, Mantle seemed to embody the great expectations of the post–World War II American consensus during the 1950s, which collapsed in the 1960s and 1970s under the weight of its internal

contradictions brought on by the Vietnam War, economic inequality, and racial unrest. In Mantle's doubts and pains, many American males seemed to perceive the ballplayer as reflecting their own insecurities during a troubled era.

The Yankee centerfielder enjoyed his best season in 1956 when he hit .353 with 52 home runs and 130 runs driven in. These spectacular numbers earned Mantle baseball's Triple Crown and American League Most Valuable Player honors. Mantle was 24 years old, and the American consensus appeared to be fashioning a society based on talent and hard work in which young men such as Mantle could reap the benefits of prosperity and consumerism. As described by Phil Pepe in Mantle's memoir *My Favorite Summer*, "It was a time of peace and prosperity, a time of the baby boom and the exodus to the suburbs. It was 1956. America liked Ike, but it loved Lucy. Huntley and Brinkley teamed up and Martin and Lewis broke up. We the people wondered where the yellow went and wrestled with the burning question 'Does she or doesn't she.'"[12]

But the myths of American popular culture and consumerism would be exposed during the tumultuous 1960s just as Mantle's career would never quite recapture the magic of that 1956 summer in New York City. Of course, Mantle was raised in a rural environment far from the spotlight of the Big Apple. Mantle was born 20 October 1931 in Spavinaw, Oklahoma, to Elvin "Mutt" Mantle and Lovell Richardson. The family struggled economically on the meager earnings of Mutt as a lead and zinc miner. The elder Mantle, however, harbored considerable ambition for his son to become a baseball player, grooming young Mickey as a switch hitter. Mantle disappointed his father by playing football at Commerce High School. In 1946, he suffered a football-related leg injury which developed into osteomyelitis and almost cost Mantle his athletic career. But following high school graduation, Yankee scout Tom Greenwade signed Mantle, whom he described as a "damn baseball machine."[13]

In 1950, Mantle was assigned to the Joplin, Missouri, club of the Class C Western Association. Despite his numerous errors at shortstop, his .383 batting average encouraged the Yankees to place the young phenomenon on the parent club roster for the 1951 season. After a fast start, Mantle was moved from the infield to the outfield and assigned to the Yankee AAA farm club in Kansas City for more seasoning. Mantle almost quit the game at this point, but a visit by his father convinced him to stick with baseball. He returned to the Yankees later that season and appeared in the 1951 World Series, where he suffered a serious knee injury after catching his cleats in an uncapped outfield drain.

Mantle recovered and in 1952 replaced Joe DiMaggio as the club's center-

fielder. He hit .311 with 23 home runs, and the Yankees captured their fourth consecutive World Series. The season, however, was marred by the death of Mutt Mantle. Somewhat adrift without the family patriarch and convinced that he would die young from the Hodgkin's disease that claimed the lives of his father and uncles, Mantle developed a reputation for the New York City night life. His escapades with teammates Billy Martin and Whitey Ford often strained his marriage to high school sweetheart Merlyn Johnson.

His extracurricular activities did not prevent Mantle from compiling strong batting numbers during the 1950s, a decade in which the Yankees failed to reach the World Series in only 1954 and 1959. Despite winning Most Valuable Player awards in 1956 and 1957, Mantle was not necessarily a favorite of Yankee manager Casey Stengel, who failed to become a surrogate father figure for him. Stengel perceived his gifted star as an underachiever, lacking the self-discipline for prescribed rehabilitation following his many injuries.[14]

Mantle continued his fine hitting into the early 1960s celebrated in *Safe at Home!* Despite being slowed by injuries, Mantle averaged 35 home runs a year between 1960 and 1964. Mantle's knees, however, gave out during his last four years in Yankee uniform. He switched to first base, retiring after the 1968 season in which he hit .237 with only 18 home runs. His declining skills in Mantle's final seasons lowered his lifetime batting average below .300 to .298, but his career home-run total of 536 earned his selection to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1974.

Overall, Mantle struggled to find a sense of place and purpose following his playing days. He suffered from depression and sought solace in alcohol and women, often ignoring his wife and children. His reputation for the social fast lane also contributed to his failure to attain a major league manager position — a fate similar to that of the legendary Ruth. Mantle also proved to be a poor businessman, and the collapse of a fast-food franchise led the former athlete to declare bankruptcy in 1973. Nevertheless, Mantle retained the allegiance of baseball fans, many of whom continued to perceive the Yankee great as the symbol of the simpler times found in *Safe at Home!* Mantle, accordingly, was able to earn millions from personal appearances and autographed memorabilia.

Although Mantle became more financially secure, he continued to battle with alcohol abuse. He was admitted to the Betty Ford Center in 1994, and the following year he was hospitalized for cirrhosis of the liver — a condition which was complicated by cancer and hepatitis. Mantle received a controversial liver transplant, raising questions about whether he was afforded favorable treatment over other less-famous patients awaiting an available organ. The transplant, however, failed to save Mantle's life, and he expired on 13 August 1995. The outpouring of grief when Mantle's death was announced provided

ample evidence that many Americans viewed the ballplayer as a tragic hero who symbolized a generation's journey from the mythology of *Safe at Home!* to the more complex realities of American life in which women and racial minorities demanded that the American dream be made available to all citizens.

While *Safe at Home!* presented a nostalgic rendering of the American family in which the patriarchy of Ken Lawton was not overthrown but expanded to make room for independent women such as Johanna Price, the household in which Mantle grew up was less than idyllic. Johanna Price worked her charm to make sure that Ken Lawton would find time for his son and not succumb to the allures of labor within an affluent consumer society. But Mutt Mantle was a child of the Depression and believed that he could mold his talented son into an athlete who would escape the vicissitudes of economic uncertainty. Although, as a dutiful son, Mantle always gave credit to his father, Mutt, who placed a considerable amount of pressure on his son. On the other hand, Mickey's wife, Merlyn, portrayed Mutt as a well-intended, but, nevertheless, overbearing patriarch who psychologically traumatized his son. In *A Hero All His Life*, Merlyn observed, "The early pressure on Mickey to play ball and his self-imposed drive to play it better than anyone, caused real emotional problems for him. A lot of the conflicts in him later had their roots in those years. Mick wet his bed until he was 16 years old.... His father had this wonderful but obsessive dream for Mickey, and only for Mickey. He was anointed from the cradle. When his dad would pitch to him for hours, out of a hundred pitches, Mick would be in terror of missing one and looking bad, and having his father frown or criticize."[15]

In his biography of Mantle, Tony Castro painted a portrait of Mantle's early years which echoed the sentiments of Merlyn Mantle. Castro describes Mantle's mother, Lovell, as a cold, emotionless woman who was subservient to her husband's wishes on raising their son. Mutt harbored dreams of becoming a professional ballplayer, but these aspirations were put aside at age ten when his mother died after giving birth to her fourth child. As the eldest, Mutt labored to help his father feed and care for the family. Accordingly, Castro argues, "Mutt fell into a trap that has ensnared fathers throughout history. In raising Mantle the way he did, obsessed from the cradle with the idea of his son becoming a professional baseball player, Mutt imposed upon him the pressure not only of fulfilling his own dashed dreams but also of meeting an expectation of almost immortal achievement." In this scenario, Mutt Mantle well represents the inner-directed patriarchy which David Riesman insists was being replaced by the outer-directed aspirations of the organization man. Except in the postwar baseball films, strong women rather than businessmen were often the sources of this transformation.[16]

In fact, it is difficult to read of Mutt Mantle's obsession without thinking

of John Piersall whose ambition and frustrations with the American dream drove his son to a mental breakdown. Mantle, of course, found his solace in alcohol and women. In his later years, Mantle often lamented his drinking and carousing, advising young people not to follow his example. Mantle told biographer Herb Gluck in 1985, "So, while I'm proud of everything I accomplished in my career, if I had to do it over again I would definitely have cut down on the booze." The Hall of Fame player concluded that he would have accomplished more in his baseball career had he refrained from alcohol abuse. Almost a decade later, Mantle was even more frank with biographer Tony Castro, placing his alcohol use within the historical context of the 1950s patriarchal order which sought to contain independent women and assert unrestrained masculinity. Mantle declared, "I drank because I thought we were having fun. It was part of the camaraderie, the male bonding thing. If you were going to be The Man on the field, you had to be The Man off the field. The choice was mine. That was the era, the culture. Fast-buck promoters moved their deals at you, and women waltzed in and out the revolving door. It was a macho time. If you could drink all night, get a girl, get up the next day, and hit a home run, you passed the test."[17]

So much for the honesty which Maris and Mantle preached to Hutch Lawton. The ideological baseball consensus constructed in *Safe at Home!*, emphasizing the traditional family, equality of opportunity, and honesty, was a sham exposed for all to see in Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* (1970), detailing the former Yankee pitching star's experiences as a knuckle ball pitcher with the expansion franchise Seattle Pilots. Bouton was an intellectual and political liberal who chafed under the conservatism and hypocrisy of the baseball establishment. In his memoir/diary, Bouton observed that while ownership talked about capitalism and free enterprise; in reality, the restrictive reserve clause allowed them to control the labor market and keep player salaries well below the market value. Paying lip service to the war effort in Vietnam by sponsoring player goodwill tours in Southeast Asia, baseball ownership made sure that the sport's most promising talent received the coveted National Guard assignments that would protect them from experiencing combat in Vietnam. Bouton also chastised baseball for the slow progress of racial integration, especially in the sport's managerial and front-office positions. Bouton's sympathies were clearly with the dissenters in the 1960s as he sarcastically wrote, "And the increase in the number of swimming pools in Harlem has nothing to do with the riots, and troop withdrawals have nothing to do with the protest movement and the baseball owners broadened our pension coverage not because of any strike but out of an innate sense of fair play. Yeah, surrre."[18]

Bouton was condemned by owners and players for violating the sanctity of the locker room and exposing that the sport, much like the postwar con-

sensus, often undermined rather than supported the traditional family values espoused in *Safe at Home!* The pitcher-turned-diarist documented the sexism, racism, and gay bashing prevalent among the players. And Bouton was willing to name names as he discussed players cheating on their wives and abusing alcohol, while relying upon "greenies" or pep pills to provide the energy to play after a night on the town. One of the players mentioned prominently in the Bouton book was Mantle, who denounced his former teammate. Of course, all that Bouton really did was display the veracity that Maris and Mantle preached to young Hutch Lawton.

American society and baseball changed after *Ball Four* and the 1960s, shedding much of its false sense of innocence. Mantle would later acknowledge the damage drinking and carousing did to his career, life, and family. The exposé style of *Ball Four* would become a staple of baseball literature and player memoirs. Whitey Ford, who initially joined Mantle in censuring Bouton, produced a 1987 memoir outlining his drinking exploits with Mantle and Billy Martin. But near the end of his book, Ford seems to have some second thoughts as to how his stories might influence young readers. He explains, "I'd like to clarify something here. It looks like all we did was drink. I especially want the young people reading this to understand that this was not true. We did our share of drinking, but not as much as you might think. It just seems that most of the funny things that happened to us happened when we were drinking." The message seems to be that in order to have fun one needs to be drinking. Of course, the reality was that alcohol cut short the lives of Ford drinking buddies, Mantle and Martin.[19]

The dishonesty inherent in *Safe at Home!* was not limited to issues of drugs and sexual escapades. The film, in somewhat of a New York Yankee tradition, completely ignored the issue of race. Hutch Lawton's Little League team is supposedly a model of egalitarianism. The banker's son is on the team, as is Latino Mike Torres (Scott Lane)—perhaps reflecting the Cuban presence in Florida following Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution. But there are no blacks in the Little League club, mirroring the racial segregation which characterized Florida and baseball spring training in the South during the 1950s and 1960s. And the New York Yankees were an unlikely franchise to challenge local segregation ordinances and customs. The Yankees were one of the last major league clubs to integrate with Elston Howard joining the team on 14 April 1955, after spending five years in the minor leagues. Vic Power was supposedly ahead of Howard on the Yankee depth chart, but his habit of dating white women led the New York club to trade him and promote the more socially conservative Howard. Thus, in the Yankee locker room depicted in *Safe at Home!* we see one black player in the background.

In *October 1964*, David Halberstam argues that the reluctance of the

Yankees to scout and sign black players led to the decline of the club in the late 1960s. In the 1964 World Series, the St. Louis Cardinals — with premiere black athletes such as Bob Gibson, Lou Brock, Curt Flood, and Bill White — defeated the predominantly white Yankees, whose black contingent included Howard and pitcher Al Downing, along with Latino Hector Lopez. Halberstam, in *October 1964*, wrote, "Al Downing liked playing for the Yankees, he liked his teammates, but as a young black man, he was aware of the prejudice against blacks that had existed in the organization." Downing believed that older Yankee scouts underestimated the Cardinal speed and were "loathe to give credit to black players to acknowledge that they were changing the nature of the game."[20]

If *Safe at Home!* failed to reflect the reality of America and baseball in 1962, the true story of Maris and Mantle was better told in the film *61** (2001), produced by HBO Pictures and directed by longtime Yankee fan Billy Crystal. The film starred newcomers Barry Pepper and Thomas Jane as Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle, respectively. While the filmmakers were obviously sympathetic to the Yankee sluggers, the production does reveal the chinks in the armor of its heroes. Mantle's drinking and nocturnal prowling are depicted, as are the difficulties Maris encountered with the press. In an extended essay on the film, Hal Erickson concludes, "*61** is a rare example of a baseball film which clicks on all cylinders."[21]

The same, of course, could not be said for *Safe at Home!*, which marked the nadir of the post–World War II baseball film genre. In their history of baseball films, Marshall G. Most and Robert Rudd observe, "It would be easy to blame the miserable *Safe at Home* for the eleven-year drought of baseball films that would follow. Not until 1973 would Hollywood produce another baseball film. One can pose numerous other explanations for this hiatus, from the social upheavals of the 60s and 70s, to overly cautious attitudes bordering on the paranoid about producing certain types of movies, to struggles within Hollywood's power structure, to simple coincidence. Whatever the case, the drought would end with only a trickle of films in the 1970s and would not again reach a steady flow of baseball releases until the 1980s."[22] With *Safe at Home!*, the promising post–World War II baseball genre retreated to the safety of the juvenile film and myth of American innocence found in such forgettable films as *The Kid from Cleveland* (1949) and even to some extent *The Babe Ruth Story* (1948).[23]

During its heyday of the late 1940s and through the 1950s, baseball pictures provided insights into uncertainties plaguing Americans during the postwar era, addressing issues of race, gender, class, assimilation, employment, and the Cold War. The films struggled with how to reconcile the conflicting interests of the nation and incorporate them into an ideological consensus.

Suggesting a sense of duty to nation with Dutch Holland in *Strategic Air Command* (1956), the films overall put forth a rather conservative message that individual rather than societal transformation was required to deal with questions of race, assimilation, poverty, and lack of education, as well as physical and psychological disabilities. In fact, to deal with the dilemmas confronting the films' protagonists, divine intervention or a pact with the Devil often seemed the only solution.

Yet, in their depiction of women these films reflected a degree of ambiguity beyond the feminine mystique into the realm of second wave feminism during the 1960s. Unable to reconcile the paradoxes and uncertainties of the postwar era, by 1962 the baseball film genre sought solace in the idea that American society could ignore these concerns by retreating into a mythical innocent baseball Garden of Eden with the simplistic answers proved by Maris and Mantle to the family and social issues impacting young Hutch Lawton. The American consensus, however, broke down in the 1960s as women, young people, and minorities exposed the fault lines and fissures within this ideological construct. As the cultural and political wars of the 1960s exploded, the baseball film disappeared, only to be resurrected in the 1980s when Ronald Reagan, who portrayed Grover Cleveland Alexander in *The Winning Team* (1952), manipulated a nostalgic longing for the supposedly simpler days of the 1950s before minorities and women assertively contested their status and position in society. But the baseball texts of the 1980s and 1990s, such as *Bull Durham* (1988), *Eight Men Out* (1988), *Field of Dreams* (1989), *A League of Their Own* (1992), and *Cobb* (1994), suggest the complexity of American society and the ambiguity of the dream rather than a simplistic return to a mythical past. As we move into the twenty-first century, cinematic depictions of the national pastime continue to offer valuable insights into American life and culture. To better understand the difficult transitions of American society during the post–World War II period from 1945 to the early 1960s, one might pay closer attention to the rich cinematic texts provided by the post–World War II baseball film genre.

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Chapter 1

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7. Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times," *New York Times*, 11 April 1962, 51; "Baseball-batty," *Time* (20 April 1962), 100; and Hal Erickson, *The Baseball Filmography: 1915 Through 2001* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 394.

8. Creamer, "Mantle and Maris in the Movies," 106–108.

9. Mickey Mantle with Herb Gluck, *The Mick* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 196–197.

10. Maury Allen, *Roger Maris: A Man for all Seasons* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1986), 182.

11. For Maris, see Harvey Rosenfeld, *Still a Legend: The Story of Roger Maris* (Lincoln, NE: Author House, 2002); Tony Kubek and Terry Pluto, *Sixty-One: The Team, the Record, the Men* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989); Tom Clavin and Danny Peary, *Roger Maris: Baseball's Reluctant Hero* (New York: Touchstone, 2010); and Allen, *Roger Maris*.

12. Mickey Mantle and Phil Pepe, *My Favorite Summer, 1956* (New York: Dell, 1991), ix.

13. For a good overview of Mantle's life, see David Falkner, *The Last Hero: The Life of Mickey Mantle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

14. *Ibid.*, 138–142.

15. Merlyn Mantle, *A Hero All His Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 3.

16. Tony Castro, *Mickey Mantle: America's Prodigal Son* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2002), 10; and David Riesman with Nathan Glazer and Reul Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1953).

17. Mantle with Gluck, *The Mick*, 207: and Castro, *Mickey Mantle*, 236.

18. Jim Bouton, *Ball Four* (New York: Wiley, 1970), 194; and Ron Briley, "Baseball and Dissent: The Vietnam Experience," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, 17:1 (2008), 54–69.

19. Whitey Ford with Phil Pepe, *Slick: My Life In and Around Baseball* (New York: William Morrow, 1987), 183–184.

20. Jack E. Davis, "Baseball's Reluctant Challenge: Desegregating Major League Spring Training Sites, 1961–1964," *Journal of Sports History*, 19:2 (1992), 144–162; Michael J. Lomax, "Major League Baseball's Separate and Unequal Doctrine: The African American and Latino Experience in Spring Training, 1946–1961," in Charles K. Ross, ed., *Race and Sport: The Struggle for Equality on and off the Field* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004); Arlene Howard, *Elston and Me: The Story of the First Black Yankee* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001); and David Halberstam, *October 1964* (New York: Villard, 1994), 338.

21. For a discussion of *61** see Erickson, *Baseball Filmography*, 420–421.

22. Marshall G. Most and Robert Rudd, *Stars, Stripes, and Diamonds: American Culture and the Baseball Film* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 41.

23. Rob Edelman, "The Kid from Cleveland: A Celebration of the Postwar Cleveland Indians," in Brad Sullivan, *Batting Four Thousand: Baseball in the Western Reserve* (Cleveland: Society for American Baseball Research, 2008), 22–27.

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