

THE NATIONAL PASTIME AND HISTORY: BASEBALL  
AND AMERICAN SOCIETY'S CONNECTION  
DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS

A THESIS

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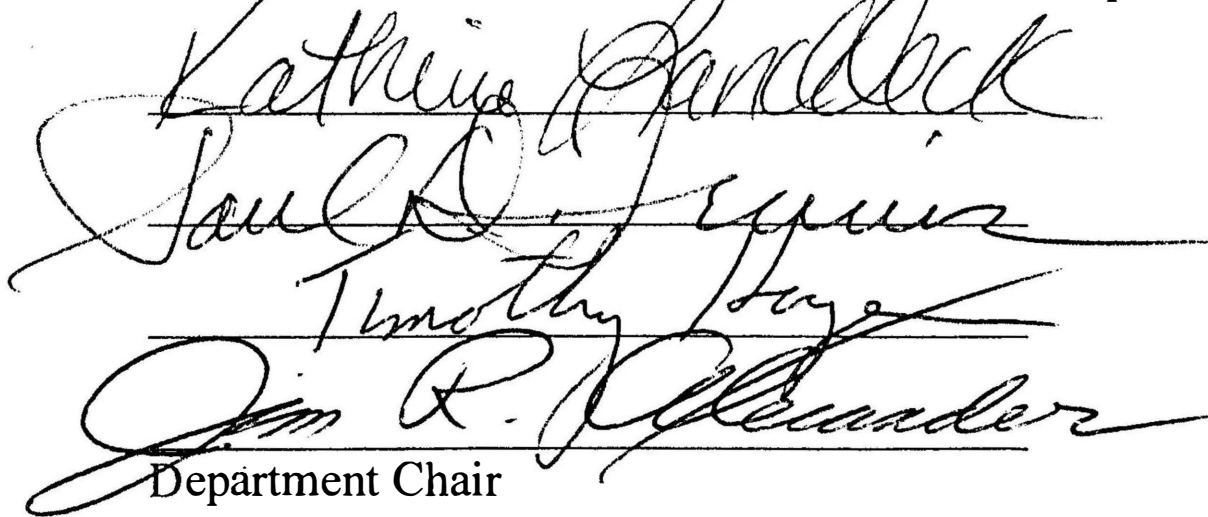
To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Kristina Birch entitled "The National Pastime and History: Baseball and American Society's Connection During the Interwar Years." I have examined this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in History.



Katherine Landdeck, Ph.D., Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:



Department Chair

Accepted:



Dean of the Graduate School

## ABSTRACT

KRISTINA BIRCH

### THE NATIONAL PASTIME AND HISTORY: BASEBALL AND AMERICAN SOCIETY'S CONNECTION DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS

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“The National Pastime and History: Baseball and American Society’s Connection During the Interwar Years” examines specific connections between Major League Baseball and society during the 1920s and 1930s. The economics of Baseball and America, the role of entertainment, and the segregation practiced by both are discussed in detail to demonstrate how Major League Baseball and society influenced each other. There is a brief look at both America and Baseball prior to and during World War I to provide an understanding of America and Major League Baseball at the dawn of the 1920s. Economics, the role of entertainment, and segregation are examined separately from both America’s and Baseball’s prospective. The direct influences they have on one another and the importance of their connection is then discussed at length.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Walt Whitman said of baseball, “well- it’s our game; that’s the chief fact in connection with it: America’s game; it has the snap, go, fling of the American atmosphere; it belongs as much to our institutions, fits into them as significantly as our Constitution’s laws; is just as important in the sum total of our historic life.”<sup>1</sup> Baseball’s historic value is its ability to reflect the atmosphere of a given era. The thesis of this work is that during the turbulent decades of the 1920s and the 1930s American society influenced and paralleled Major League Baseball while at the same time Baseball influenced and paralleled American society. Examining the game’s beginnings, America and baseball in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as segregation based on race and gender exhibits how baseball echoes American society during this time.

The saying goes that if something is considered to be “American” than it is as “American” as apple pie and baseball. Why baseball? America is not the only nation to play baseball. Japan and China are but two of the many countries rapidly developing professional baseball leagues similar to American baseball. Latin and South America contribute hundreds of players to major league rosters every year. Professional football and basketball are just as popular in America as baseball is. So, why is baseball so “American”? The answer, despite other sports’ growth in popularity over the years, is

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<sup>1</sup> *Baseball Quotations* (New York: Exley, 1997), 1. Whitman’s original quote is from a conversation he had with fellow writer Horace Traubel on April 7, 1889.

that Baseball is America's pastime. No other source of entertainment and leisure reflects the nation more than Baseball. The two grew into power and supremacy at the same time. Baseball aided the nation in overcoming the Depression and started it on the road to integration. Baseball, unlike any other sport or form of entertainment, is a mirror of America and American society.

As with anything, in order to understand baseball better one must first explore how the game began. Popular myth is that Abner Doubleday invented the game in Cooperstown, New York in 1839; "it's a nice story, but it simply isn't true."<sup>2</sup> The British schoolyard game of rounders, which was made up of a pitcher, batter, and four bases, is actually baseball's birth place. Considering that it was the early nineteenth century, less than seventy-five years since America freed herself from Britain and mere decades since the War of 1812, it is of little surprise that British origins would be less than satisfactory for "America's" game.

No matter where the game originated it spread rapidly across the United States. The Knickerbockers Base Ball Club of New York, formed in 1845, was the first organized baseball club. The game caught on and in 1856, despite primarily being played in the New York area various New York papers called it, "the 'national game' and the *New York Mercury* coined the phrase 'The National Pastime'..."<sup>3</sup> However, this claim was not without its opponents arguing that there was no proof that baseball was "so

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Wallace, *The Baseball Anthology: 125 Years of Stories, Poems, Articles, Photographs, Drawings, Interviews, Cartoons, and Other Memorabilia* (New York: Henry N. Adams Inc., 1994), 49.

<sup>3</sup> National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, *Baseball as America: Seeing Ourselves Through Our National Game* (Washington D.C.: National Geographic, 2002), 27.

generally practiced by our people as to be fairly called a popular American game.”<sup>4</sup>

Many of these opponents were sports writers who argued that the popularity of other sports belied baseball’s claim as national pastime. By the mid to late 1860s the creation of clubs in New England, the Midwest, and California began lending support to the idea of a nationally played game.

The first professional league, The National Association of Professional Base Ball Players formed in 1871, consisted of fifty teams and attempted to establish uniform rules and regulations. Corruption and lack of leadership led to a split in the league in 1876 when William Hulbert, owner of the Chicago Base Ball Club, removed his and three other teams from the Association and formed the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs (N.L.). In 1899 Ban Johnson, president of the minor Western League, created the American League (A.L.). He then moved his teams into N.L. cities and offered players higher salaries with more flexible contracts, infuriating the N.L. owners. In 1903 the two leagues agreed to honor the other’s contracts and created the World Series. In 1903 the Boston Red Sox defeated the Pittsburg Pirates five games to three in the first World Series.

Following the creation of the World Series the A.L and N.L united and became Major League Baseball (MLB).<sup>5</sup> Team owners in both leagues agreed to work together as one unified professional organization rather than continue competing as individual leagues. This decision created monetary gains for team owners and strengthened

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Major League Baseball is considered to be the epitome of professional baseball, and thus is often referred to as simply baseball. In accordance with this tradition throughout the remainder of this work I will be using the terms MLB and Baseball interchangeably and to identify the same entity.

Baseball's position as America's pastime. Baseball's popularity was booming and so was attendance, until 1909. The creation of another rival league, the Federal League, cost MLB as attendance began to split between the three leagues. Even after the Federal League folded, attendance remained low and finally all but collapsed in 1914. World War I played a large role in the drop in attendance especially after America entered the conflict in 1917. The 1918 season was cut short due to the call for all able bodied men to join the military, including baseball players.<sup>6</sup>

As Baseball grew from infancy into the nation's pastime, the United States itself grew and changed. The twentieth century dawned on a nation rapidly morphing into an industrial and world power. Massive immigration and industrialization that began the previous century and a social awakening combined to alter the country both physically and economically.

The Industrial Revolution that began in Europe in the mid 1800s finally reached America as did millions of immigrants seeking a new life. By the start of the twentieth century the U. S. was quickly catching and surpassing the European competition in terms of production and growth of industry. While the revolution was led by the barons of industry like John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and J. P. Morgan, its backbone was the millions of immigrants that arrived every year. These same immigrants also served to bolster the economy and expand the size of the nation's cities. The nation's pastime also benefited from the massive immigration. Baseball was run by powerful men like Hubert and Johnson, Baseball's robber barons, but it needed more than money and power to

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<sup>6</sup> John Rossi, *The National Game: Baseball and American Culture* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 91-94.

become the nation's pastime. Baseball needed fans and lots of them. Immigrants desperately trying to assimilate and learn English found that attending a baseball game was a way to do both and soon became a large part of Baseball's fan base.

Tremendous immigration and the prosperity that it provided, however, was not without its consequences. Overpopulation and sanitation problems arose in the burgeoning cities. Meanwhile, worker exploitation and unsafe working conditions practically became the norm in the many industries that employed the often illiterate and non-English speaking immigrants. These problems led to the social awakening of the nation. The Progressive Movement began in the late 1890s and gained momentum with the birth of the twentieth century. The movement was spearheaded by the young middle class and originally sought to better the lives of immigrants and poor Americans. Improving the lives of women was also a priority of the Progressives, as many women were among the leaders of the movement. As the movement grew so did the number of supporters it garnered. Many of the new progressives were politicians and members of the upper class. The rapidly increasing movement even spawned its own political party and ran Theodore Roosevelt as their 1912 presidential candidate; he was defeated by Democrat Woodrow Wilson, who was in fact a Progressive himself. The Constitutional Amendments that led the prohibition of alcohol, the eighteenth amendment, and to women's suffrage, the nineteenth amendment, were products of the Progressive movement.<sup>7</sup> Other local and national legislation was passed due to the work of the

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<sup>7</sup> Though both amendments were ratified in 1920 the movements and legislation behind them date back to the 1800s and were revived by the progressives.

Progressives. The New York Tenement House Law, the Meat Inspection Act, and the Pure Food and Drug Act are a few examples of their success. Unfortunately all the success and progress did not last; instead it was interrupted and ultimately killed by the start of World War I.

In August 1914 Europe erupted in war brought on by a tangled web of secret alliances. As the Central Powers battled the Allies the war dragged and stalled, due in large part to the prevalent fighting tactic known as trench warfare. Each side was in need of additional supplies and goods and the neutral United States was willing to supply them with what they needed. President Wilson asked that the American people stay, “neutral in fact as well as in name, impartial in thought as well as in action.”<sup>8</sup> However, the nation’s role as neutral was compromised by its trade with belligerent nations and was eventually lured into war in April of 1917. As the war continued into a fourth year, both sides suffered tremendous loss and destruction and finally laid down their arms on November 11, 1918. The official peace talks began in January of 1919 at Versailles and lasted six months as the victors demanded satisfaction and retribution.

Following the United States’ and Allies’ victory in World War I, the nation found itself encountering numerous problems. President Wilson was pushing for the country to enter the League of Nations and to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. After spending an unprecedented six months in France working on the peace, the President could not bear to see Congress deny ratification. Not only was it a point of personal pride for Wilson, he also saw the League of Nations as a deterrent against future wars. The American people

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<sup>8</sup> Kendrick Clements, *Woodrow Wilson: World Statesmen*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 152.

were elated over the nation's triumph in war but harbored many fears. The growth of communist and anarchist ideas around the world and in the US led to the Red Scare; widespread paranoia of foreigners and immigrants, especially those from Eastern Europe. The passage of the Espionage Act in 1917 and the Sedition Act a year later, though originally passed to curb antiwar sentiments, added fuel to the flames of the Red Scare.

Major League Baseball faced only one issue following its return from war, but it was a considerable one: attendance. Though Baseball's owners had shortened the 1919 season to 140 games, it saw a rebound in attendance. The American League averaged 456,780 fans during the 1919 season, which was much closer to the pre-war 1916 season total of 431,486 and a far cry from the 1918 draw of a mere 213,500. The National League drew 359,775 during 1919, coming very close to their record of 381,454 set in 1916 and leaving the very disappointing 171,516 of 1918 behind.<sup>9</sup> The 1919 season boasted exciting pennant races in both the American and National Leagues as well. As the season grew closer to ending, rumors began to spread that the World Series was going to be fixed, but rumors like these were nothing new and had been an element of the game since the 1870s.<sup>10</sup>

When the 1919 season ended, the World Series match-up was the N.L. Cincinnati Reds and A.L. Chicago White Sox. Prior to the series two White Sox players, Chick Gandil and Eddie Cicotte arranged an agreement with a group of gamblers to throw the series for \$100,000. The White Sox lost to the Reds five games to three. Following the

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<sup>9</sup> Attendance statistics from Statmaster available from <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/statmaster.php>; accessed on 15 July 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Rossi, *The National Game*, 101.



series it was discovered that a total of eight White Sox were party to the conspiracy and were labeled the Chicago “Black Sox.” Two years later the eight men were put on trial for conspiracy but “hopelessly crippled by lack of evidence, and confronted by a jury friendly to the players, the trial turned into a comic carnival.”<sup>11</sup> On August 2, 1921 the men were found not guilty, but only in the eyes of the law. All eight were banned from baseball for life and forever remained the “Black Sox.” It was not the throwing of the World Series that caused the outrage and disbelief of sports writers and fans alike; it was that the scandal tainted baseball. One fan was quoted as saying that following the scandal, “my interest in the baseball changed after this. For years I had no favorite team. I was growing up, and this marked the end of my days of hero worshipping baseball players.”<sup>12</sup> Other fans especially those in Chicago simply refused to believe that the players were guilty. The popular phrase, “say it ain’t so Joe,” was born from fans disbelief that Joe Jackson could or would do something as heinous as gamble his career away.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of whether the initial reaction was anger, hurt, or disbelief, almost every baseball fan felt as though the game had changed. The game of America and its youth was corrupted. The October 7, 1920 issue of the *The Sporting News* ran with a picture of the eight accused and the headline, “Fix These Faces in Your Memory, Eight Men Charged with Selling Out Baseball.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> David Voigt, *America Through Baseball* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976), 71.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Crepeau, *Baseball: America’s Diamond Mind 1914-1941* (Orlando: University Press of Central Florida, 1980) 16.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> “Selling Out Baseball,” *The Sporting News* 7 October 1920, 3-4.



Post war America was plagued with feelings of uncertainty; people, “began to question old ideas that had never been questioned before. Hardly anyone seemed sure of anything.”<sup>15</sup> Even baseball had succumbed to corruption. In the 1920s the country rode an emotional rollercoaster taking the American people from fear and isolationism to the jazz age and finally into a crash that would lead to the Great Depression of the 1930s. The nation’s pastime experienced the same fluctuating ride.

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<sup>15</sup> Joy Hakim, *War, Peace, and All That Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 16.

## CHAPTER II

### PLAYING WITH FULL AND EMPTY POCKETS

The 1920s opened with a longing for simpler times and a booming economy. While the nation and Baseball both had hurdles to overcome on their road to recovering their pre-war grandeur, by mid-decade both were experiencing a prosperity that was unprecedented. The nation's gain was the result of a return to laissez faire government, the growth in consumerism, and the people's desire to move from the darkness of the war to enjoying and embracing life. Baseball owed its success to a new commissioner and the era of the long-ball.

Warren G. Harding, the 1920 Republican candidate for president, "caught the spirit of the country in urging a return to 'not heroism, but healing, not nostrums but normalcy.'"<sup>16</sup> Harding won the presidency and became one of the most popular presidents of the time. The popularity he enjoyed was not based on his abilities as a politician but on his appearance and who he was not. Historian William Leuchtenburg explains that the American people had tired of Wilson's push for the League of Nations and his Progressive ideals. The people sought a return to a concrete reality not the rhetoric of Wilson. Harding won the 1920 election, despite being ill-suited for the job, simply because he looked like what a president should look like and he was not Wilson.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> William Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity: 1914-32* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 89.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

These two attributes carried him into the White House. Unfortunately, he passed away two and half years into his presidency and Vice President Calvin Coolidge took over. The American people wept for the loss of their beloved president but accepted Coolidge because America had returned to a comfortable way of life and was prospering. Coolidge also continued the tradition that Harding had began, a return to a pro big business government. Many Americans were tired of the self-righteous attitudes of the Progressives that had reigned before the war. Coolidge, however, took favoring big business to a new level by converting, “his administration into a businessman’s government,” and seeing that, “the government interfered with industry as little as possible.”<sup>18</sup>

The return of laissez faire government and big business provided the country with a surge in goods available for consumption. And consume the people did; they purchased everything from a new home, car, and radio, to a new wardrobe. Suddenly the nation found itself with new and exciting products that promised to be the latest and greatest. While many of these products were innovative, the methods used to create them were not. The mass production of the 1920s was courtesy of the lessons learned during the Industrial Revolution, garnering the period the label of the Second Industrial Revolution. Among the products that had the biggest influence on society and the economy, as well as the game of baseball, were the automobile and radio.

The automobile grew from a luxury item of the wealthy to something the average American could afford. Henry Ford was instrumental in making the automobile more

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 96 and 97.

affordable. He utilized the principals of scientific management to create his infamous assembly line.<sup>19</sup> By decreasing the amount of time it took to complete one auto, he was able to increase production and drop prices. As the number of auto owners increased everyday life began to change. Reliance on public transportation decreased and the need for paved roads increased. The auto also affected family and social life. Instead of a quiet evening or Sunday at home the family could now take a drive. As various nighttime entertainments became more and more prevalent, the car served as means to go somewhere new and try something different.

The radio also offered something new and different. Prior to the mid-1920s there were a very limited number of homes across the United States that had a radio. But thanks to the mass production and consumerism of the decade, radios became a multi-million dollar a year industry. In 1922 the sales of radios equaled \$60 million and by 1929 \$852 million.<sup>20</sup> As the number of radios grew so did the variety that they offered. In 1926 the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) was created, followed a year later by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS). The reliable programming that these two stations and their substations provided made owning a radio even more appealing. NBC and CBS created nationally broadcasted programs that helped to homogenize the nation. A family in a small Kansas town could hear the same programs and advertisements as a family who lived in New York. These stations and their local partners offered a wide

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<sup>19</sup> Frederick Taylor's theory of scientific management, which became a cornerstone of the Industrial Revolution, involved breaking production down into small individual tasks. This method simplified and increased production. Alan Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People Volume II* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 462.

<sup>20</sup> Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 196.

variety of programming that included: children's shows, half-hour comedies, variety shows, soap operas, national and local news, and sports. College football and horse racing were the first sports to embrace the power of radio, followed closely by boxing. Major League Baseball continued to abstain for fear that airing games on the radio would have a negative affect on ticket sales.

The image of free spending Americans is synonymous with the 1920s, but few were actually in the financial position to spend freely. In *The Modern Temper*, historian Lynn Dumenil argues that the working class, or "blue collar class," was unable to partake in the, "hedonistic spending spree." While the working class was the backbone of the consumer goods boom, they were relegated to consuming more moderately priced versions. Entertainment was one of the few areas that the blue collar class was willing to splurge, as were the middle and upper classes.<sup>21</sup>

As the country attempted to rebound from the devastating effects of World War I many retreated inward and returned to "traditional" values, while others sought to create new rules and values. Part of these new values was the belief in enjoying life.<sup>22</sup> For many this meant spending leisure-time in diverting ways. In pursuance of diversions, American's spent millions of dollars on entertainment. Movie houses were appearing in cities across the nation and offered an inexpensive way to have fun. Those that sought nighttime amusement had a plethora of new night clubs to choose from, many of which

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<sup>21</sup> Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 76-97.

<sup>22</sup> More information on the rise of entertainment during the 1920s can be found in Joy Hakim, *War, Peace, and All That Jazz*; Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*; J. Fred MacDonald, *Don't Touch That Dial! Radio Programming in American Life from 1920 to 1960* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982).

also offered illegal alcohol. Men, boys, and families often found entertainment in attending sporting events that were within close proximity. Among the most popular of these sports was baseball, which like the nation was experiencing a new found prosperity.

Baseball began the decade with the need to move beyond the “Black Sox” scandal. The nation’s game, similar to the nation itself, found its redemption in new leaders and the people’s pocketbooks. Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis and Babe Ruth were the game’s new commanders. Baseball scholar David Voigt argues, “Each in his own style grabbed headlines, and epitomized the baseball revolution that produced the new golden age.”<sup>23</sup>

Landis assumed the role of sole commissioner of Major League Baseball in 1920. Prior to Landis, Baseball was governed by a body of owners and owner appointed league presidents. While this system ensured that those in charge of making decisions were intimately connected to Major League Baseball, it also opened the door for corruption and stagnation. In the wake of the “Black Sox” scandal, Baseball needed no further corruption and desperately needed to move forward not remain the same. Before Landis accepted the job he demanded absolute control over baseball matters for seven years. He felt that his most important job was to end corruption and cheating within MLB. Second to the gambling issue was the discipline of the players and owners alike. Landis favored harsh punishment and fines for those that acted unbecoming of a baseball player because

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<sup>23</sup> David Voigt, *American Baseball: From the Commissioners to Continental Expansion* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), 140.

he believed, “nothing is good enough for baseball that is not good enough for America.”<sup>24</sup>

Unbecoming behavior was determined by Landis and included gambling of any kind; Landis argued that if the players were not allowed to bet on Baseball they should not be allowed to bet on any sport at any time. His rules also prohibited fraternizing with fans; autographs and handshakes were acceptable but beyond that the players were expected to maintain their distance. Voigt explains in *American Baseball*, that Landis created this rule after seeing a picture of Gabby Hartnett with Al Capone in the newspaper.<sup>25</sup> Public drinking, lending money to rival players or umpires, and playing baseball beyond one’s contract were all minor offenses punishable by fines, while fraternization could bring a suspension and gambling brought expulsion from Baseball.

While Landis’ interactive governing style differed from both Harding’s and Coolidge’s hands-off approach, his stalwart beliefs made him the right man to lead Baseball into a new era. He ran Baseball the way that he ran his court room, with a heavy hand and a dose of drama. As the, “molder of public opinion, he posed as ‘fearless, impartial, and intolerant of crookedness.’”<sup>26</sup> He and his advisory committee, created to check Landis’s power, were not afraid to hand down tough fines or suspensions. Landis also believed in being a mobile commissioner, often traveling throughout the season in order to keep tabs on the teams and players.

Despite his demanding rule, Landis was a very popular commissioner and garnered the label “the people’s” and “the ballplayers’ commissioner.” The people loved

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 143.

him because they saw him as the man who cleaned up baseball after the disgrace of the “Black Sox” scandal. In many ways he was the personification of a cantankerous but well meaning grandfather. He had shaggy white hair that was rarely combed, wore wrinkled suits, carried a large cane and yelled a lot but still only wanted what was best for Baseball because that was his job. The players liked him because unlike the previous governing body, that of the owner’s and their friends, Landis actually cared about what happened to the players. He was tough in his punishments of the players but he was generous with his praise and determined to restore baseball players to the role of hero. As popular as Landis was, his fame is marginal compared to that of Babe Ruth. Landis was the man behind Baseball and Ruth became Baseball. Historian David Voigt explains that Ruth was such an unlikely hero because of his background and lack of social graces that his success was all the more publicized and romanticized. Conversely Landis was brought in to clean-up baseball, therefore his success was expected.<sup>27</sup>

George Herman “Babe” Ruth, later known by countless nicknames including the “Sultan of Swat”; “the Great Bambino”; “the King of Slam”; or simply “the Babe”, began his baseball career in 1914 with the struggling Baltimore Orioles but was sold to the Boston Red Sox within five months.<sup>28</sup> He quickly became one of the greatest left-handed pitchers in the American League and in 1918 helped lead the Red Sox to their last World Series title, until 2004. One year later the Red Sox owner, Harry Frazee, in desperate need of money, sold Ruth to the New York Yankees for \$125,000. The year 1920 was

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<sup>27</sup> Voigt, *American Baseball*, 140 and 153-5.

<sup>28</sup> List of Ruth’s nicknames from Richard Crepeau, *Baseball: America’s Diamond Mind 1914-1941* (Orlando: University Press of Central Florida, 1980), 73.



Ruth's first season with New York and one of the greatest seasons in baseball history. The baseball community was nervous about how the season would go following the "Black Sox" scandal but Ruth eased their minds and "changed baseball almost single-handedly and overnight."<sup>29</sup> That year his manager, Miller Huggins claimed Ruth was, "the greatest drawing card of all time..." and he was; that season's total attendance was nine million surpassing its previous record of seven million set in 1909.<sup>30</sup> His ability to bring spectators to the park came from both his personality and his ability to crush the baseball. Fellow players described Ruth as a big kid and having "a heart as big as a watermelon, and made out of pure gold."<sup>31</sup>

Ruth's personality and skill made him a fan favorite but his batting average made him the enemy of pitchers throughout baseball. As his nicknames suggest Ruth was known for his ability to hit home runs, but he was not alone. In fact, statistics across both leagues began to change. Home runs, runs scored per game, and individual batting averages increased as the number of stolen bases decreased. The rapidly swelling batting averages and home run totals led to the "live ball controversy." The controversy sprang to life in newspapers' sports sections across the nation and centered on the effect that the home run, or live ball, had on the game of baseball in general and Major League Baseball in particular.<sup>32</sup> Ruth hit sixty home runs in 1927, breaking his previous record of fifty-

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<sup>29</sup> Rossi, *The National Game*, 104.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>31</sup> Jimmy Austin, baseball player from 1909-1922, interviewed by Lawrence Ritter, *The Glory of Their Times: The Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told by the Men Who Played It* (New York: Quill, 1984), 90.

<sup>32</sup> Crepeau, *Baseball: America's Diamond Mind*, 103.

nine and igniting a new spark in the controversy.<sup>33</sup> If Baseball became fixated with home runs it was feared that the purity of the game would be compromised; as it would no longer be about the battle between pitcher and batter but instead a battle to see who could hit the longest home run. However, the increase in the number of long balls, or home runs, was only a controversy to sports writers and baseball purists. The fans, those that paid to come see the games, loved seeing the ball jump off the bat and land in the seats, or better yet out of the park. Season ticket sales continued to climb across the league throughout the 1920s.<sup>34</sup>

Increase in turnstile revenue meant that the clubs were able to offer both the fans and the players more. The fans received new high priced talent via trades or, in the case of Yankee fans, a new ballpark. The new ballpark opened in 1923 and was funded almost entirely from increased ticket sales.<sup>35</sup> A new ballpark, while certainly special by itself, had to be the latest and greatest in size and style if Baseball's greatest hero was going to play there and it was going to reflect the American consumer's trend, and the Yankees did not disappoint. Yankee Stadium, or "the house that Ruth built," cost \$2.5 million dollars to build, and was the most expensive park of its time. Forbes Field in Pittsburg, built in 1909, was previously the most expensive at \$2 million. The only other

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<sup>33</sup> Ruth's 1927 record was not surpassed until 1961 when Roger Maris hit sixty-one home runs while playing with the Yankees. Maris's record was not broken until 1998 when St. Louis Cardinals' first-baseman Mark McGwire hit seventy home runs. San Francisco Giants' outfielder Barry Bonds became the record holder when he hit seventy-one home runs during the 2001 season. Jules Tygiel, *Past Time: Baseball as History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 190 and Baseball Almanac On-Line, "Home Run Records in a Single Season", Baseball Almanac On-Line, [http://www.baseball-almanac.com/recbooks/rb\\_hr2.shtml](http://www.baseball-almanac.com/recbooks/rb_hr2.shtml); accessed on 15 July 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>35</sup> Hakim, *War, Peace, and All That Jazz*, 48.

park built within ten years of Yankee Stadium was Wrigley Field in Chicago, which opened in 1916 and cost only \$250,000.<sup>36</sup> In order to make hitting a home run more of a feat but still thrill the fans, the distance to and height of the outfield fences were altered from the Yankee's old home, the Polo Grounds. The distance of the outfield fences at the Polo Grounds, which ranged from 258 to 500 feet away from home plate, were extended to a minimum of 280 and maximum of 550 feet at the new Yankee Stadium. The height of the fences also grew; the four feet to eight feet of the Polo Grounds became twelve to seventeen feet in the new park.<sup>37</sup> The Yankees' decision to alter the field dimensions made them more in line with ballparks across the country; Feneway Park in Boston ranged from 314 to 488 feet from home, Tiger Stadium in Detroit spanned 345 to 467 feet, and Wrigley Field in Chicago measured from 321 to 440 feet. The Yankees' desire to be on a more equal field may have been due to their desire to further the mystique that surrounded Ruth and his home run prowess.

While the fans gained more exciting games and new parks, the players received higher salaries. As players became more popular, primarily through increasing their home run or innings pitched totals, their worth went up and so did their salaries.<sup>38</sup> Ruth earned \$20,000 for his 1920 season with the Yankees. That same season Ray Fisher, a starting pitcher for the Cincinnati Reds, earned \$5,500. By 1927, Ruth's fame and

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<sup>36</sup> Josh Leventhal, *Take Me Out to the Ballpark*, (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, 2000), 1, 130.

<sup>37</sup> Yankee Stadium and Polo Grounds dimension courtesy of Josh Leventhal, *Take Me Out to the Ballpark*, 25, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Voigt, *American Baseball*, 202-3.

prowess earned him \$70,000 a season playing right field for the Yankees. Across town Edd Roush earned less than \$25,000 as the New York Giants' center fielder.<sup>39</sup>

America's pastime was not the only sport to increase wages and spending. In Professional Football, Red Grange commanded a salary of \$25,000 a season while playing for the Chicago Bears. Golf's purses increased from hundreds of dollars in the late teens to thousands of dollars by the mid-twenties. Sir Walter Hagen and Bobby Jones, golf's premier stars, earned over \$30,000 annually from tournaments, tours and endorsements. Boxing also had inflated earnings during the 1920s. However, unlike the other major sports, a boxer's pay relied entirely upon the fans; the more fans that attended or listened to the fight the bigger the boxer's pay day was. On September 23, 1926 Jack Dempsey fought Gene Tunney in front of 120,757 fans and lost; his earnings for that fight were \$711,268. A new \$5 million Madison Square Garden was built in 1926 courtesy of the old Garden's fight receipts.<sup>40</sup> The sporting world, like the average American, continued to spend money on salaries, new luxury items, and investments in the stock market.

As both the nation and Baseball continued to combine imagined wealth with shortsighted business moves, the economies of both were headed into a dangerous place; one with which some were already familiar. Farmers in post-war America were initially

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<sup>39</sup> Roush while lesser known today had a career worthy of his 1962 induction in to the Baseball Hall of Fame. In 1927 he had a batting average of .304 and hit seven home runs. His statistical numbers and salary are more representative of outfielders during the 1920s and 1930s than Ruth's were. However, his 1927 salary was still considered to be in the top tier. Information regarding salaries and statistical numbers provided by Baseball Almanac on-line. Baseball Almanac On-Line, "Year-by-Year Baseball History," Baseball Almanac On-Line, <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/yearmenu.shtml>; accessed on 15 July 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Salaries and earnings for football, golf, and boxing found in Benjamin Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 140, 198, 147-149.

blessed with not one but two demanding markets. As European countries attempted to rebuild themselves many called on American farmers to supply the goods that they needed to survive. However, as the nations repaired themselves their dependence on American farmers lessened and eventually ended. The lack of overseas markets combined with droughts and foreclosures to force many farmers into bankruptcy. Minorities, like farmers, were accustomed to suffering. Widespread discrimination against African-Americans and immigrants pushed these groups onto the lowest socio-economical rungs. Meanwhile, thanks to the backlash against Progressivism, many social programs that aided the underemployed and the unemployed disappeared. As much as these groups were suffering it was nothing compared to what awaited the entire Nation.

The stock market has a history of peaks and valleys therefore when in September of 1929 the booming Bull Market began to dip and then rise again there was no panic. Some panic began on October 29, 1929 when on “Black Tuesday” the market had one of its worst days on record and stock prices plummeted. However, despite concerns from investors, this drop was seen as a market correction and recovery was predicted by the following June.<sup>41</sup> As December came and went the real panic began to set in. Banks were besieged with scared investors who in light of the crash felt safer with their money in their possession. The unprecedented demand for money that was not available and the overextension of credit caused many banks to close. The bubble of prosperity that had created the “Roaring Twenties” had burst and left in its stead a “cycle of decline” and a

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<sup>41</sup> David Kennedy, *American People in the Great Depression: Freedom from Fear Part I* (Oxford: University Press, 1999), 40.

depression that was soon so overwhelming it became known as the Great Depression.

America and Baseball were forced to adjust in order to survive.

The Great Depression of the 1930s did not begin as a result of the stock market crash of 1929 but it certainly played a role. Another contributing factor was the false prosperity that so many enjoyed in the 1920s. Industries were sick and short sighted, continuing to heavily produce the current bestseller. Since the end of World War I the agricultural community in America was in a depression; it simply took the rest of the country a little longer to catch up.<sup>42</sup>

By the end of 1929 three million were out of work due to business cut backs and failures; three years later twenty million were unemployed. The various social programs that were created during the Progressive Movement to aid the unemployed and poor were severely gutted when the government returned to a laissez faire style. Privately funded organizations and charities were able to withstand the governmental cuts but not the ever growing number of unemployed. As the number of Americans seeking help swelled the organizations were forced to turn people away to fend for themselves.

In the plains areas of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Colorado poor farming techniques conspired with drought to create the Dust Bowl. Victims of the Dust Bowl packed what little they had left and headed West in the hopes of finding any work they could; often working as seasonal pickers in California, displacing migrant workers who traditionally held those jobs. The migration of so called, "Okies," was so great that

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 17.

California closed its borders to anyone who did not already have work promised to them.<sup>43</sup>

Even World War I veterans were subjected to the harsh realities of a desperate nation. Following World War I a bitter debate raged between Congress, the White House, and Veterans groups about compensation for veterans. Finally in 1924 Congress enacted the World War Veterans Act. The act provided \$1 a day for each day served at home and \$1.25 for each day abroad for any veteran who had served in the military between April 5, 1917 and July 1, 1919. However, if the sum due a given vet exceeded \$50 he was issued a certificate of redemption that could be collected in 1945; those that were owed \$50 or less were paid immediately. In all over three million veterans were issued certificates that when averaged out equaled roughly \$1000 per man. As the Depression continued to worsen, many veterans felt that they should be able to collect what was due them now, when they so desperately needed it, rather than waiting until 1945. A group calling themselves the Bonus Expeditionary Force, or Bonus Army, set out for Washington, D.C. in 1932 to demand that Congress vote to release the payment early. From March to July the Bonus Army marched and demonstrated while Congress debated. In the end the marchers lost and Congress vetoed the early release of the money. The Bonus Army was ordered to disperse and go home, but many of the demonstrators had only the one they had made in the shantytown of Anacostia. Under orders from Army Chief of Staff Douglass MacArthur the United States Regular Army moved in to disperse the veterans. Violence broke out between the two armies and the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 195.



shantytown was burned to the ground; destroying the homes of thousands of veterans and their families.<sup>44</sup>

As the Depression wore on and more and more Americans became unemployed and homeless, President Herbert Hoover became the man that most Americans blamed for their hardships. The Bonus Army incident in 1932 only fueled the people's frustration with Hoover. To show their feelings for Hoover, Americans began referring to shantytowns as Hoovervilles and newspaper blankets as Hoover Blankets. While President Hoover was not to blame for the causes of the Depression, he did not take effective steps in curbing the Depression. As historian T. H. Watkins argues in *The Great Depression: America in the 1930s*, Hoover, throughout his term, held the position that, "direct aid to the individual was not the business of the federal government – unless there was no other course, in which case he made it clear he would act."<sup>45</sup> So rather than offering aid to the unemployed, Hoover called on private organizations and the American people to provide aid. In addition he made only token attempts to create government spending that could have stimulated the economy. Watkins explains that it was not apathy or ignorance that caused Hoover to take this approach but rather a genuine fear of further damaging the nation's economy and "crippling the national character."<sup>46</sup> By 1932 the people were so angry with Hoover that Franklin D. Roosevelt was all but assured the win in the presidential election.

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Dickson and Thomas Allen, *The Bonus Army: An American Epic*, (New York: Walker and Company, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> T.H. Watkins, *The Great Depression: America in the 1930s* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 62.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



Following Roosevelt's election the nation began to have hope. FDR was inaugurated on March 4, 1933 and in his first one hundred days he began to create various social programs that would help to ease the nation's suffering. His reforms made during this time became known as the New Deal and included such acts and programs as the Emergency Banking Act of 1933, the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, the Federal Emergency Relief Agency, the Civil Works Administration, and the Civilian Conservation Corps. These early reforms were focused on relief and recovery. Later in his administration he created the Second New Deal, that focused on recovery and reform, which included the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Works Project Administration, and the Social Security Act of 1935. FDR's New Deal not only offered solutions it also offered hope, hope that things would get better.

Like the country, Baseball had to adjust to life in the Depression. Unlike America, it did not feel the Depression's effects immediately or as strongly. The first full year of the Depression, 1930, was difficult for the nation, with growing unemployment and uncertainty. Baseball was in good financial shape initially, but those days of financial stability ended.<sup>47</sup> While 1932 was the low point of the American Great Depression, 1933 was Baseball's worst year due to various teams' financial troubles and the lack of attendance at numerous ballparks in both leagues. In *Breaking the Slump: Baseball in the Depression Era*, baseball historian Charles Alexander notes that while the

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<sup>47</sup> Charles Alexander, *Breaking the Slump: Baseball in the Depression Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 16-17.

New York Yankees were able to turn a profit during the first years of the Depression, the other seven teams in the American League and all of the National League teams suffered losses that ranged from \$15,000 to \$50,000 per team per year.<sup>48</sup> In 1930 the National League average attendance for the year was 680,817; by 1933 it had dropped to 395,353, with per game averages falling from 4,421 to 2,653. The American League watched its own average attendance fall from 585,716 to 365,776, while the average AL game totals dropped from 3,803 to 2,455. Individual team losses varied. The Chicago Cubs declined from a season total of 1,463,624 in 1930 to a mere 594,112 in 1933. The very small Philadelphia Athletics (A's) were only able to draw 297,138 fans during the entire 1933 season. The sport needed cut backs and innovative ways to maintain attendance. As Baseball rose to the challenge a new side of the game was born, as was hope for its future.

When attendance began to dwindle and owners suffered financial losses due to the economy, the owners began to limit the number of long term high-priced contracts offered. By not committing a large amount of money to one player, the team was then able to use the money to seek ways to create additional revenue. Players like Ruth and Rogers Hornsby were safe from salary cut-backs having signed lucrative contracts in the late 1920s. However, new players and even established veterans who required new contracts witnessed their value according to the owners drop considerably. The average player's contract during the 1920s ranged from \$5,000 to \$15,000 per season depending on his position and team. By 1933 the average had already plummeted to between

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 62.

\$1,000 and \$8,000. Also, shorter contracts were given as a way of keeping salaries lower. Owners no longer felt comfortable giving multi-year contracts and instead made one to three year contracts the standard.<sup>49</sup> Baseball and its players discovered themselves sharing the same fate as numerous business and workers across the nation; in order to maintain a position, hours and wages had to be cut. The season was also shortened from 154 games to 149 in order to both stunt the salaries and keep the teams from having to pay for games that would have paltry attendance at best.<sup>50</sup>

Commissioner Landis and team owners were faced with the task of not only controlling how much money was being paid out, but also in finding ways to keep money coming in. Lowering ticket prices was the first logical step. In 1931 teams began lowering ticket prices from the previous season, in the hopes that reducing the price by a few dollars would draw spectators. However when by 1933 and 1934 attendance numbers continued to remain low and in some cases show no improvement despite the changes, several teams went to the extreme and actually added seats or designated whole bleacher sections as “cheapseats.” These seats were usually sold as walk-up tickets and averaged around fifty cents a seat. Prior to the Depression the “cheapseats” were merely grandstand or outfield seats and usually started at a dollar or more a seat. Many teams and owners balked at cutting these ticket prices in half but others saw it as a way to boost attendance which could in turn boost concession sales, thus recouping some of their

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<sup>49</sup> Average figures for salaries and contract lengths available from <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/yearmenu.shtml>; accessed on 15 July 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Crepeau, *Baseball: America's Diamond Mind* and Voigt, *American Baseball*.

losses.<sup>51</sup> The Chicago Cubs were the pioneers of the “cheapseats” but others soon followed. Teams with older, smaller ballparks were limited in what they could do to add seats and usually roped off sections of outfield seats. The Yankees with their relatively spacious park were able to offer the most “cheapseats” at roughly 20,000 seats per game.<sup>52</sup> For the Cubs and the Yankees the logic was a spectator that paid half price to see the game earned the team more money than the spectator who stayed home because he or she could not afford a full-price ticket.

Many Americans during the 1920s were guilty of skipping work and sitting in the hot summer sun at a ballgame, cheering their team on. But with work scarce, fans could no longer afford to miss work to catch a game. This meant that teams were still going to lose money no matter how low they made the price of admission. The only way for Baseball to recoup those losses was to bring the game to the workers. Fan loyalty is paramount in Baseball and if fans were expected to spend what little extra they had on an occasional game, then Baseball was going to have to offer a way for those fans to follow their teams. Baseball finally needed to embrace the power and potential revenue of the radio.

The radio had been a means of entertainment and news for Americans since the 1920s but it was not until the first All-Star game in 1933 that Baseball really utilized it. Prior to 1933, playoff and World Series games were occasionally broadcast in large market areas beginning in the mid-1920s. This was done to allow all Baseball fans to

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<sup>51</sup> James R. McGovern, *And A Time for Hope: Americans in the Great Depression*, (Westport: Praeger, 2000), 254.

<sup>52</sup> Alexander, *Breaking the Slump*, 4.

experience the playoffs and World Series and because attendance at those games would remain high regardless. Fear of a negative influence on attendance was the number one reason for the team owners' resistance in allowing regular-season games to be broadcast. However, following the 1933 All-Star game's broadcast, Baseball officials and team owners saw that there was not a negative effect on the game's attendance, and began to rethink their decade-long stance on broadcasting games. Eventually rights for broadcasting the games were sold to different companies including Ford Motor Company, Gillette Safety Razor Company, and other male oriented product manufacturers.<sup>53</sup> The companies paid heavily for the right to air the games but also received brand loyalty from listeners. Teams further profited when they sold the rights to road games to local stations. The Cincinnati Reds sold their away game rights to two local stations and received \$2000 from each station.<sup>54</sup> While the broadcasting of games made the teams money, it made it easier for fans to follow the game when they could not afford to go to the park. The radio also allowed everyone across the country to hear games and have a chance to experience the All-Star game and the World Series. Nationally broadcast games allowed fans who were forced to move in order to find work a chance to keep with their favorite teams.

Next, Baseball realized that if they played games that started after the typical work day ended then fans would not have to wait until their day off to enjoy a game in person. The Negro Leagues, which will be discussed in detail below, had been playing

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<sup>53</sup> Rossi, *The National Game*, 139.

<sup>54</sup> Alexander, *Breaking the Slump*, 75

night baseball for years. Often forced to share fields with white semi-professional and minor league teams, Negro League teams were made to wait until after the white teams had finished using the field; this usually meant early evening and at night. Major League Baseball decided that if the Negro League teams could play by illumination, at times provided only by their team bus headlights, then so could MLB. The first ever MLB night game was on May 24, 1935 at Crosley Field in Cincinnati. Night baseball meant a wider range of fans attending games; this in turn meant increased ticket sales.<sup>55</sup>

As the nation moved from the depths of the Depression to a more stable economy, courtesy of the New Deal; Baseball also moved from unprecedented economic troubles to a new frontier with Baseball on the radio and in the parks after dark. Both experienced the highs of economic success in the 1920s only to suffer the lows of failure in the mid-1930s. However, society and Major League Baseball are not only linked by economics; they are also united through entertainment, something that the nation sought and Baseball readily provided.

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<sup>55</sup> Mark Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1995) and Tygiel, *Past Time*.

## CHAPTER III

### PLAYING FOR ENTERTAINMENT AND ESCAPE

Economic highs and lows were but one side of the link that Major League Baseball and society shared during the 1920s and 1930s. Following the shock of World War I and the “Black Sox” Scandal of 1919 the nation and Baseball were in unfamiliar territory and in need of diversions. The demand for diversion and jocularity became paramount during the Depression, as Americans craved a means of escaping the harshness of reality. Amusement and escape became the second side of the shared link between society and Baseball.

After the destruction and devastation of World War I the nation sought solace by turning inward. Europe’s ruin and rebuilding only concerned America economically. Foreigners were eyed with caution and a new zeal for religion was born. The nation’s youth, the “lost generation,” became bitter about the war and the injustices of the xenophobia gripping the nation, and the “Black Sox” scandal served as proof of yet another failure of the old standards of life. America and Baseball were in need of some alterations. Society needed a new attitude and baseball needed to emerge from the shadow of the scandal and become a source of entertainment again. As the 1920s opened both society and Baseball were on the path to transformation.

For many Americans, especially the younger generations, the moral obligations and scrutiny of a society devoted to patriotism, religion, and propriety were too much to

deal with. Economic comfort and readily accessible goods created a sense of progress that belied Victorian ideals. However, fear of the unknown and change were still rampant causing many to become zealous in their attempts to “save” America. The final push toward a revolution in attitude came as a direct response to the fanaticism of the Red Scare, nativism, and religious fundamentalism.

The Red Scare was caused by the spread of communist and anarchist ideas across the world. As the communist party began to recruit members in the United States fears escalated to an unprecedented high. The average American believed that the American communist parties, usually made up of foreign born immigrants, were plotting to overthrow the government. This wrong assumption gained steam following a series of bombings that targeted various political leaders. In reality the bombings were the work of anarchists not communists, but the nation’s media and U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer placed the blame on the shoulders of the communists. The national government, led by Palmer, responded by arresting suspected communists and even in extreme cases deporting immigrants. These raids on suspected communists became known as the Palmer Raids and began on New Year’s Day 1920.<sup>56</sup> While extremist factions of the communist parties were envisioning a governmental coup, the majority of the parties were seeking to gain rights for workers and immigrants that had been neglected since the Progressive spirit was killed by World War I. However, because the majority of the party’s members were immigrants and foreign born, fear of all “non-Americans” grew and spread during the first half of the decade. The fear was more

<sup>56</sup> Hakim. *War, Peace, and All That Jazz*, 35.



rampant in areas that boasted large numbers of immigrants; which during the 1920s meant every major city in the nation.

This fear of outsiders led to an increase in nativism. Anything that was not uniquely American or adopted to be American was viewed as a threat and thus was considered to be taboo. A rise in patriotism and nationalism occurred, especially among those that ran the risk of being labeled “non-American” or foreign. Foods, music, and dress that were common to the U.S. were favored and frequently patriotic parades were held across the nation. Even political candidates had to appear “American” in order win.<sup>57</sup> If a candidate had a surname that sounded a little too ethnic or foreign he was encouraged to adopt a more “Anglo-American sounding name.” Many considered Catholicism to be the religion of the immigrant and an “alien institution,” which meant that any politicians who were Catholics were unacceptable as political leaders at the national level.<sup>58</sup> Catholic politicians, as well as Jewish politicians, experienced great success on the local level, when the voting constituency was of the same faith. As nativism became more prevalent the nation saw the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The KKK, which originally targeted freed slaves, now targeted anyone who did not seem or act “American.” Groups of special interest were Catholics, the Jewish, and of course immigrants.<sup>59</sup>

While Catholics and Jews were being targeted for their faith, other faiths were being revived. As the nation sought to move past the death and destruction of World War

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<sup>57</sup> Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, 239.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>59</sup> Hakim, *War, Peace, and All That Jazz*, 36.

I, many turned to religion for guidance and answers. Some used religion for political gain, jumping on the bandwagon of anti-evolutionists. Across the nation's rural heartland cities and towns began passing laws that prohibited the teaching of evolution in schools. The debate became a national headline when John T. Scopes was put on trial for breaking the anti-evolution law in his Tennessee classroom. That the "Monkey Trial," as the case was dubbed, was in Tennessee showed the dichotomy of the religious fervor. In his classic *Perils of Prosperity*, William Leuchtenburg argues, "Rural areas still dependent on nature for their livelihood put their trust in divine intervention and depreciated human capacity."<sup>60</sup> While in urban centers technological advances had created a belief in science over religion.<sup>61</sup> However, for the younger generations it was the rigidity of religion that made it unappealing.

The carefree "Roaring Twenties," that were a response to the scrutiny and morality, appealed to the younger generations in a way that nationalism and religion could not. New music, new dress, and new cultures combined with the products available for mass consumption and a burgeoning entertainment industry offered a sense of excitement. Pleasure, fun, and a sense of living for the now were refreshing following the destruction of World War I and oppression of retrenchment. In the years following World War I the nation's turn inward, push for morality, and growing fear of foreigners and immigrants became known as retrenchment. The nation was attempting to limit the changes that were affecting the country by regaining a sense of balance.

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<sup>60</sup> Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, 222.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

The “Roaring Twenties,” labeled the “Jazz Age,” presented a new style of music that was unique, a new form of dress for women, and an introduction to a culture that white America had never experienced. Jazz music, which began in the bordellos of New Orleans, slowly seeped into main stream culture and soon was the music of choice. The music had good lyrics that could either be profound or simply entertaining and great beats to which people could dance. The Charleston became the dance of choice and anywhere that had a jazz band was the place to be. With the music and the fun came a change in the attitudes and dress of young, urban women; married, rural, and older women did not partake in the feminine revolution. Women began smoking, drinking, driving, doing all the things men did and more. They also began to wear more revealing clothes. As the decade wore on skirts got shorter, dress straps became narrower, and the overall style became more provocative. These changes became synonymous with the flapper and with the youth. The pursuit of jazz took many young men and women into Harlem and other predominately African-American communities to dance and often drink, despite prohibition, at some of the best night clubs in the country. This crossing of the color line scared many more traditionally-minded Americans, but for the youth it was a new and exciting experience. It also paved the way for African-American artists to enter white America’s main stream culture and conscience and opened the door for the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>62</sup>

The massive consumerism of the decade was also influenced by the Jazz Age. As the youth continued to rebel against the old ways and standards, their desire to own the

<sup>62</sup> Hakim, *War, Peace, and All That Jazz*, 41-43.

latest and greatest increased. Disposable income and readily available goods made purchasing new cars, radios, and clothes easy. Also readily available was entertainment of all kinds. Movies grew to enormous popularity following the first “talkie” in 1927, *The Jazz Singer*, starring Al Jolson. Their popularity continued to rise as movie houses began appearing across the nation. Music was also immensely popular, both the live and the recorded varieties. Despite the Eighteenth Amendment, the 1920s were an era with large amounts of drinking and even larger amounts of law breaking. The disregard for the law by young men and women across the nation created great conflict throughout the 1920s. Debates all over the nation pitted the young against the old, the “wets” against the “drys,” and even the urban against the rural. However, equally popular to movies, music, and illegal drinking was sports. Both spectator and participatory sports were experiencing all time highs, with professional baseball leading the pack.<sup>63</sup>

As the country struggled with conflicting beliefs and attitudes, Baseball worked to create reform for the game. Following the “Black Sox” scandal of 1919 Baseball needed to change its image. With Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis serving as a new tough commissioner and Babe Ruth emerging as the game’s biggest star, Baseball quickly altered not only its image but the game as well. Tougher restrictions on the conduct of players helped to banish the behavior of the “Black Sox,” though nothing was able to completely erase the memory of the incident. Ruth’s status as the star of baseball also helped to change the image of the game. With his larger than life personality and talent even those that hated the Yankees loved Ruth.

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<sup>63</sup> Crepeau, *Baseball: America’s Diamond Mind*, 106.

As the “King of Slam”, Ruth simultaneously increased his popularity and changed the game. Season after season Ruth crushed home runs and single season home run records. While the 1920s are often referred to as the Golden Age of the game, at the time it was nicknamed the “era of Ruth.”<sup>64</sup> He defined the long ball hitter and a baseball superstar.<sup>65</sup> He lived life with zest and loved to share his wealth, often treating whole orphanages to games at Yankee Stadium.<sup>66</sup> While his character increased his popularity, it was his ability to hit home runs that really made him a star. Though Ruth was the greatest, he was not the only player who was hitting numerous home runs. In 1932 Jimmy Foxx ended the season just two home runs shy of breaking Ruth’s 1927 record of sixty home runs in a single season. Across Baseball, team averages were rising. The New York Yankees’ team batting average jumped from .275 to .307 between 1925 and 1927. Both Chicago teams, the White Sox and Cubs, saw more than a five point increase in offense, while the St. Louis Cardinals’ batting average climbed from .286 to .299.<sup>67</sup> The growth in numbers was the result of better player development. The fan excitement that surrounded the game also contributed to the increased numbers. The players, like any performers, responded to the support and enthusiasm of the fans. As offensive numbers continued to improve so did attendance at the ballparks. Few things equal the excitement of a high scoring or well-pitched game on a hot summer afternoon and

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>65</sup> Long ball is baseball terminology for a home run.

<sup>66</sup> Austin, *The Glory of Their Time*, (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 90.

<sup>67</sup> Team averages from Statmaster available from <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/teamstats/statmaster.php>; accessed on 15 July 2006.

everyone wanted to be at the park to experience it.<sup>68</sup> The article “Big League Baseball” in *Fortune Magazine* summed up the atmosphere perfectly

Dangerous steam is worked off in terms of innocuous sweat, and metaphorically your fan sweats as hard as your ballplayer—because he *is* your ballplayer. In no other game does a spectator engage in such intense vicarious participation, being now the player, now the manager, now the coach, now the umpire; hence in no other game is there so much rage when things go wrong, so much jubilation when things go right.... Grandstand and bleachers tirelessly pump the new cynicism, endlessly mint new wisecracks, showering all their affection on the man of the moment, all their contempt on the man of a moment ago.<sup>69</sup>

The home run and the era of Ruth allowed teams to make improvements in order to keep fans in the seats. The addition of big name players, especially those that were gifted with a “sweet swing” increased fan excitement. However, those players did not come without a high price tag. The average player earned around \$8,000 per season, depending on his position and what team he played for. The big names of the 1920s earned much more; Rogers Hornsby, Edd Roush, and Grover Alexander all made over \$25,000 per season during the mid to late 1920s. Of course Ruth was king with a contract that earned him \$70,000 for the 1927 season.<sup>70</sup> These large contracts mirrored the jazz age’s willingness to spend to have fun. The Yankees took spending to create entertainment to a new level in 1923 with the construction of Yankee Stadium. The gamble of building the new stadium paid off; the park garnered the top spot for total season attendance for the remainder of the decade.<sup>71</sup>

Not only were individual teams setting attendance records, Major League Baseball was as well. Many sports writers predicted that the growth in popularity of

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<sup>68</sup> Crepeau, *Baseball: America’s Diamond Mind*, 104.

<sup>69</sup> “Big League Baseball,” *Fortune Magazine*, August 1937, 36.

<sup>70</sup> Player’s salaries and contract lengths available from <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/yearmenu.shtml>; accessed on 15 July 2006.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

college football, boxing, and golf would spell the end of Baseball. College football offered fans countless home teams to root for with stadiums that held fifty-thousand plus cheering fans.<sup>72</sup> With more teams and more seats, many baseball writers, officials, and owners feared that football could usurp Baseball's position as favored sport. Boxing also became a threat when a 1920 fight between Gene Tunney and Jack Dempsey brought in over one million dollars in ticket sales. The fear increased as both Tunney and Dempsey had several other fights that had million dollar plus "gates" during the first half of the decade.<sup>73</sup> Golf at first was not seen as a threat; it was a gentleman's game that appealed to the country club set. However, as Bobby Jones made his mark on the game, golf began to threaten Baseball's supremacy. At one hole of the 1927 British Open 20,000 fans gathered to watch Jones secure his championship.<sup>74</sup> The same sports writers also feared that the other sports' willingness to embrace radio would negatively affect the game. Why would baseball fans pay to watch baseball when they could stay home and listen to a football game or boxing match for free? Finally, there was the fear that movies, jazz, and dancing would compromise baseball's position as the nation's pastime.

But all the worry and frenzied writing was put to rest when Baseball surpassed the other sports in paid attendance numbers in 1927. The game also earned more revenue than the other sports that year.<sup>75</sup> As for the threat of movies and music, it appeared that the American people had room for all three. Why would baseball fans pay to watch a

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<sup>72</sup> Allison Danzig and Peter Brandwein, ed., *Sport's Golden Age: A Close-Up of the Fabulous Twenties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>75</sup> Crepeau, *Baseball: America's Diamond Mind*, 107.



game instead of enjoying another sport on the radio for free? Simple: Baseball was still America's pastime, its player's still American heroes, and it still appealed and catered to every class and race. Not all Americans were embraced by society but all Baseball *fans* were embraced by the game. While teams that had hometowns with large working-class populations tended to have more fans from that class, they still appealed to the wealthy and vice versa. Immigrants and native Americans alike rooted for the home team. While some parks segregated African-American fans, they were still accepted as part of the fan base.<sup>76</sup> Whether fans attended a game in suites or dirty work clothes and sat in a suit or the outfield bleachers they were all fans who cheered for the same team, and that made them equal. Finally, like America the game was prospering, changing, and enjoying the "Roaring Twenties."<sup>77</sup>

However, as a new decade dawned the numerous sources of entertainment took on a new meaning. Throughout the Depression Americans turned to various types of entertainment as a means of escaping reality. Radio, movies, and sports were the most commonly used vehicles for escaping. They offered the people the opportunity to forget about the struggles of life for an hour, an afternoon, or an evening.

The millions of dollars that American's spent on radios in the 1920s proved worth it during the Depression era, as the radio became the most common and inexpensive way to escape the reality of life during the Depression. There was programming that appealed to everyone in the family. Among the biggest programs were weekly comedies and

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<sup>76</sup> Information regarding which MLB ballparks and teams segregated the African-American fans by policy is conflicting and scarce.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 107.



dramas, soap operas, and live music broadcasts. Nightly shows of serial comedies and dramas allowed the family to listen and escape together. Soap operas that aired during the evening provided women who were housewives or out of work to escape to a place where everyday problems existed but were usually resolved after a few shows.<sup>78</sup> The love affair between Americans and music that began in the 1920s continued into the Depression era as the radio aired big band music live from various night clubs. The live broadcasts allowed those that could no longer afford to go out to the clubs to still dance and enjoy the music.

The thousands of movie houses that opened across the nation offered another avenue of escape. Adding to the appeal of a movie was the price and the quality of movies that were being produced. Many of the greatest movies of all time were made during the Depression, including the original “Frankenstein”, “The Wizard of Oz”, and “Gone With The Wind.”<sup>79</sup> In addition to these epics, movie studios produced movies that had uplifting messages and battles against adversity. While the studios did not want to remind moviegoers of the hardships they faced, they did want them to leave the film with a sense of hope. As Scarlet O’Hara said, “tomorrow is another day.”<sup>80</sup>

Golf, aviation, college football, boxing, horse racing, and baseball were the sports that Americans most often followed as a way of escaping the daily struggles. All

<sup>78</sup> Muriel Cantor and Suzanne Pingree, *The Soap Opera*, (California: Sage Publications, 1983), 44.

<sup>79</sup> *Frankenstein*, produced by Carl Laemmle Jr. and directed by James Whale (Hollywood: Universal Pictures, 1931); *The Wizard of Oz*, produced by Mervyn LeRoy and directed by Victor Fleming (Hollywood: MGM Pictures, 1939); *Gone With the Wind*, produced by David O. Selznick and directed by Victor Fleming (Hollywood: MGM Pictures, 1939). Lifetime box office gross for *Frankenstein* is \$12 million, *The Wizard of Oz* is \$16 million, and *Gone With the Wind* is \$198 million. Box office gross numbers provided by <http://www.imdb.com/title/>; accessed on 20 July 2006.

<sup>80</sup> David O. Selznick, *Gone With the Wind* (Hollywood: MGM, 1939).

of these were broadcast free of charge to the listeners by the end of the decade. The various sports also provided an opportunity to leave the house and spend the day outdoors or at an arena. Traveling to a live sporting event offered the added bonus of a longer escape.

Baseball offered a reprieve from reality for an average of two hours, longer if attending the game, and provided excitement as well as entertainment. During the Depression some of the greatest players who ever played took the field including Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Joe DiMaggio, Jimmie Foxx, Ted Williams, Hank Greenberg and countless others. Each of these superstars epitomized what a baseball player and American could and should be. They were strong, hard working, and willing to go to any length to win. These heroes of the game not only thrilled fans but inspired them as well.

In order to give fans the chance to see all of their favorite players play in the same game, MLB created the All-Star game. The first ever All-Star game was played at Comiskey Park in Chicago in the summer of 1933. It was also, as previously mentioned, the birth of MLB's decision to allow regular-season radio broadcasting. This decision allowed fans an additional way to follow their team and escape reality.

Despite the broadcast games there were still a couple of reasons to attend a game. First, no matter how good the broadcaster is words can not compare to seeing just how far or how hard a home run is hit. Also, part of the draw of baseball is to see the great players accomplish amazing feats in person, not to mention the secret hope of getting an

autograph.<sup>81</sup> The players were not the only attraction for going to the park though; the growing opportunity to participate in the game was also a powerful lure. As discussed earlier, many of the parks added or increased the number of outfield bleacher seats and dropped the price to less than a dollar. While price alone enticed many, others realized that these seats were ideal for catching a home run ball. “Bleacher bums,” as those that sat in the bleachers became known as, flocked to Yankee Stadium, Wrigley Field, and Comiskey Park in the hopes of catching a Babe Ruth, Jimmy Foxx, or Eddie Collins home run and becoming a part of the game.<sup>82</sup>

The game’s popularity as a mode of escape further increased when on May 24, 1935 the first Major League night game was played. Night baseball was adopted after witnessing the success that the Negro Leagues had in playing at night. The May 24<sup>th</sup> game was given appropriate pomp and circumstance. A telegraph key was set up in the White House so that President Roosevelt could inaugurate the new chapter of baseball. At exactly 8:30 p.m. Roosevelt pressed the button and Crosley Field in Cincinnati was filled with, “a mighty roar...there was light – tremendous, almost blinding light.”<sup>83</sup> Night games became very popular and drew crowds as large as day games.<sup>84</sup> Night games also enabled those fans that worked during the day to still be able to occasionally go to the park and see or hear a game. New challenges to the players were also introduced by night baseball, and thus created a sense of excitement and wonder. What would a home

<sup>81</sup> Tygiel, *Past Time*, 83.

<sup>82</sup> Leventhal, *Take Me Out to the Ballpark*, 25, 76, 80.

<sup>83</sup> Wallace, *The Baseball Anthology*, 176-168; “Speaking of Pictures...This is a Night Baseball Crowd,” *Life*, 2 September 1940, 10-11.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

run look like at night? Would the batters be able to see the pitches as well and if not how would that influence the home run era? Night baseball began as a risk that was taken as a way to increase baseball's accessibility to the fans as an escape, and ended up revolutionizing the game and renewing America's love affair with their pastime.

An additional link between society and Baseball was created through the desire for amusement in the 1920s and the need for a source of diversion from the harsh realities of the Depression. Most Americans found numerous ways of entertaining themselves and of escaping the harsh realities of the Depression. Baseball reigned supreme in the 1920s and was able to weather its financial troubles and not only survive the worst of the Depression but grow stronger due to the radio and night baseball. However, many were unable to find entertainment, relief, escape or equality due to the color of their skin, country of origin, or gender.

## CHAPTER IV

### PLAYING THROUGH ADVERSITY

As the 1930s came to an end, the worst of the Depression was over and the nation and its pastime were regaining their strength. Unfortunately, of all the things that the Depression changed in America and Baseball, prejudices were not among them. Fear and mistrust of immigrants was still prevalent and many first and second generation Americans were treated with the same discrimination as their immigrant parents and grandparents. Discrimination against African-Americans was as old as the country and the game, and did not appear to be ending. And despite their assertiveness in the 1920s, women were still being subjugated and treated unfairly. Both America and Baseball continued to segregate themselves throughout the 1920s and 1930s based on race and gender.

Following the Civil War the United States experienced a wave of immigration that did not temper until the 1920s. Roughly four to five million immigrants per decade arrived in America during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. At the time those numbers were staggering but they were nothing compared to the wave of immigrants that was to come with the new century. During the first two decades of the twentieth century over one million people entered the U.S. each year.<sup>85</sup> The devastation of Europe during World War I increased the number of migrants seeking a new home in

<sup>85</sup> Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 205-206.

America. During the actual fighting of the war immigration was halted but following the armistice and peace treaty the numbers raged out of control. In the first full year following the 1919 treaty close to one million people sought refuge in the United States, with millions more waiting to make the journey.<sup>86</sup> Rising totals caused many to once again call for immigration restrictions.<sup>87</sup> Congress, bowing to pressure caused by the influx of immigrants and the fear of communist infiltration, passed the National Origins Act in 1924. The act reduced the total number of immigrants that would be granted entrance into the United States and divided the world into four regions that received individual quotas; similar legislation was discussed as early as the 1890s but was never passed. Northern and Western Europe received the highest number of allowances followed by Central Europe, Eastern Europe, and finally Africa. Immigration from Asia, the final region, was completely ended. The quotas were based on the 1890 census and how many descendants were in the U.S. from each region. The choice of 1890 was deliberate in that there was not yet an influx in the number of Eastern Europeans, those that were considered dangerous in the 1920s, and Asian immigration was almost non-existent because of the earlier restrictions on that region.<sup>88</sup>

First and second generation Americans also felt the sting of bigotry. While campaigning for the Treaty of Versailles President Wilson declared, “Hyphens are the knives that are being stuck into this document.”<sup>89</sup> Wilson was expressing frustration over nationality loyalties that many Irish-Americans, German-Americans, and Italian-

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 206

<sup>87</sup> Chinese immigration had already been terminated courtesy of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

<sup>88</sup> Hakim, *War, Peace, and All That Jazz*, 34-36 and Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 206.

<sup>89</sup> Clements, *Woodrow Wilson*, 213.

Americans were expressing. Others were much more antagonistic and brutal with their opinions. Numerous books were written detailing the dangers of diluting the Anglo, and thus American, race by allowing immigration, assimilation, and intermarrying.<sup>90</sup> In 1916 “Expert” Madison Grant wrote in *The Passing of the Great Race*, “These immigrants adopt the language of the native American, they wear his clothes, they steal his name and they are beginning to take his women, but they seldom adopt his religion or understand his ideals.”<sup>91</sup> Encouraged by the findings of so-called experts, the KKK began targeting “hyphenates” in addition to immigrants and African-Americans.

The thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments gave all African-Americans freedom, citizenship, and the right to vote. Unfortunately, despite the new laws, years of servitude, subjugation, and even war, African-Americans were still not free to move about in society and live as they saw fit. Segregation based on race was a rule if not law all across America. Legalized segregation, or Jim Crow laws, were varied and carried harsh penalties. Physical violence was metered out for the smallest infractions by the authorities, the KKK, and citizens. Lynching, as a form of punishment and entertainment, became an epidemic across the South. When the United States entered World War I many African-Americans moved north for war job opportunities and to escape the violence of the South. “The Great Migration” provided unprecedented freedom for many. One migrant wrote home to his family in the South, “It’s a great deal of pleasure in knowing that you have got some privilege. My children are going to the

<sup>90</sup> These books and the “experts” who wrote them considered only Western Europeans to be white, Anglo, and/or American. For a list of books written by contemporary racial “experts” consult Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, 205.

<sup>91</sup> The words of Madison Grant reproduced in Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 205.

same school with whites and I don't have to umble to no one."<sup>92</sup> However, after the war many of the migrants lost their jobs to returning white soldiers, as the end of wartime production equaled fewer jobs. Racial tensions also exploded across the nation. In Chicago, where the growth of the African-American population was seven times that of the growth of the white population, thirty-eight lives were lost in a race riot in 1919. More than twenty other cities experienced race riots and seventy-four African-Americans were lynched in 1920 alone.<sup>93</sup> Despite the violence African-Americans began to thrive in Northern cities.

The Great Migration was also responsible for the growth in popularity of jazz music. As New Orleans began to crack down on their red light district and African-Americans from other parts of Louisiana and the South moved North, so did the jazz musicians. Chicago soon boasted numerous jazz night clubs and replaced New Orleans as the home of jazz. From Chicago the music spread east, west, and across the seas and became the music that defined the 1920s.<sup>94</sup>

Jazz music was not the only art form that African-Americans provided society during the 1920s and 1930s. From 1917 to 1935 black artists began to make their voices heard during the Harlem Renaissance, speaking out about their experiences and fears. African-American poets, novelists, playwrights, dancers, and actors began to tell their stories in beautifully frank ways. American society and art benefited from these artists' expressions of their true feelings and thoughts, which could now be done without fear of

<sup>92</sup> The words of a migrant in a letter home as found in Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 37.

<sup>93</sup> Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 37.

<sup>94</sup> Hakim, *War, Peace, and All That Jazz*, 55-60.



losing patronage. Many in white America and within the African-American community saw, “this outburst of literary and artistic expression as a significant step in the direction of a more general acceptance of Negroes by American society.”<sup>95</sup> Sharing one’s pain had a humanizing effect and for portions of white America the artistic productions of the Harlem Renaissance made the artists and other African-Americans seem more equal. Though the Civil Rights Movement is often thought of as beginning in the 1960s, it was actually gathering momentum during the years of the Harlem Renaissance. But like so many other things of the 1920s, the movement was killed by the Great Depression. Historian Gilbert Osofsky argues, “a nation sobered by bread lines no longer searched for a paradise inhabited by people who danced and laughed for an ‘entire lifetime.’” Therefore, “most of the Negro literati, though not all, stopped writing or, if they continued to do so, found a less responsive American audience for their works.”<sup>96</sup>

As the nation became mired in the Great Depression, immigrants and minorities found basic survival difficult. All of the country was forced to deal with unemployment and reduced wages. However, for immigrants and minorities it was much worse. Both groups were passed over for jobs and when they were hired received a fraction of the pay a white man would have received. The situation was even bleaker for African-Americans in the South, many of whom were sharecroppers or tenant farmers. Farmers in general suffered the most during the Great Depression because their suffering began years earlier and only worsened as time went on. The farmers’ plight was so great that one of the first

<sup>95</sup> Gilbert Osofsky, “Symbols of the Jazz Age: The New Negro and Harlem Discovered” *American Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1965): 231, available from JSTOR, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-0678%28196522%2917%3A2%3C229%3ASOTJAT%3E2.O.CO%3B2-N>; accessed 9 February 2006.

<sup>96</sup>

New Deal acts President Roosevelt pushed through Congress was the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) that offered farmers government subsidies. The act however did not include guaranteed protection for sharecroppers and in some instances forced landlords to evict them. The evictions came in lieu of the landlords sharing their AAA payments with their tenants. Norman Thomas, a well known socialist, even referred to the sharecropper's plight as, "potentially the most dangerous situation I have seen in America."<sup>97</sup> The danger he referred to was the economic effect on sharecroppers and their physical well being.

As the South and its inhabitants fell further into the Depression the frequency and brutality of African-American lynchings increased. Between 1930 and 1937 over one hundred lives were claimed by heinous lynchings across the South.<sup>98</sup> The influx and viciousness of the hate crime inspired the Senate to introduce an anti-lynching bill in January 1934. Unfortunately the bill was killed by Southern Senators. The Senators threatened a filibuster should the bill ever come to a vote, knowing that to do so would not only kill the bill but also bring unwanted attention to the issue for the Northern Senators. Creating public attention for the anti-lynching bill could have spark national debates and enabled Northern constituents who would oppose the bill to speak out against it. Therefore with little choice in the matter, the same Senators who introduced the bill

<sup>97</sup> Kennedy, *The American People in the Great Depression*, 210.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 342.

withdrew it just one month later. Without the protection of an anti-lynching law the plight of southern African-Americans continued.<sup>99</sup>

Baseball, like society, excluded foreigners and minorities from play. However, as time wore on and the “new immigrants,” often from Eastern Europe and Asia, began arriving the old immigrants like Germans, Irish, and Italians became Americans rather than immigrants. This made them and the next generations eligible to play professional baseball, and the second and third generations did. Part of what made baseball America’s game was that all across the country in school yards, vacant lots, and even in the streets boys of all ages played the game with whatever materials were at their disposal. Many of the future players, who were the children of immigrants, learned the game as a way to assimilate themselves into society and were as good as their “native” counterparts. By the 1920s over a third of all major leaguers were of German or Irish descent and Italian-Americans were beginning to make their way into the game as well. In 1923 Frederick Lieb, the president of the Baseball Writers Association, wrote, “next to the little red school house, there had been no greater agency in bringing our different races together than our nation’s game, baseball. Baseball is our real melting pot.”<sup>100</sup> Lieb painted a beautiful image but neglected to point out that any one with dark skin was excluded from baseball per an old gentlemen’s agreement.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 210, 342.

<sup>100</sup> Frederick Lieb “Baseball – The Nation’s Melting Pot” *Baseball Magazine* (August 1923): 393.

<sup>101</sup> Robert and David Barney “The American Game” *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* 14, 1 (2005): 155-165, available from Project Muse, <http://ezproxy.twu.edu:2159/journals/nine/v104/14.1barney.html>; accessed on 9 February 2006.

Following the Civil War's end several of the established baseball teams made a gentlemen's agreement, that like the ball; the game of baseball would remain whites only. Tensions between blacks and whites were still high from the war and the owners felt that having the two races on the same teams would create more conflict. They also felt that baseball as the "National Game" could be utilized as a means of bringing the divided nation back together, and allowing African-Americans to play would have endangered this goal.<sup>102</sup> The color barrier was not crossed until 1946 when Jackie Robinson was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers. Like other minorities African-American children played baseball wherever they could and with whatever they could. Baseball was unique in that all one needed to play was somewhere for the pitcher to stand, bases, something for a bat, and a ball. Playing the game was not only "American" and fun but very inexpensive, which made it the perfect pastime for poor immigrants and African-Americans. Yet, those African-Americans who excelled at the game were left with no way to further their play, until a group of African-Americans decided they were not content to wait until the game deemed them worthy of professional play. Instead, shortly after the infamous agreement to keep Baseball limited to whites only, a few wealthy African-Americans gathered enough players for a couple of teams and began touring the country playing anyone who would play them.<sup>103</sup> These teams were dubbed the Negro

<sup>102</sup> Rossi, *The National Game*, 12.

<sup>103</sup> The exact date of the start of the Negro League is heavily debated and ranges from the 1870s to the 1890s.

League but were really nothing but a loosely organized group of teams. The Negro League did not truly become a league until the 1920s.<sup>104</sup>

At the same time that African-American artists were experiencing a surge of recognition with the Harlem Renaissance, so too was Negro League baseball. Its most memorable players and teams were fielded during the 1920s and 1930s. The Kansas City Monarchs, Memphis Red Sox, New York Black Yankees, and the Philadelphia Stars were the most popular teams. James “Cool Papa” Bell, Jackie Robinson, Leroy “Satchel” Paige, Josh Gibson, and Willie Mays were among their best and most well-known players. They were all eventually elected into the Major League Hall of Fame, following the Hall’s admittance of African-Americans in 1962 with Jackie Robinson’s election. Unlike members of the Hall of Fame who only played in the MLB and played no more than 155 regular-season games, African-American Hall of Fame members who first played in the Negro Leagues played over 300 games in a six month season, on rented diamonds, and made a fraction of what the white players earned. Despite not playing in the major leagues, many of these players still gained national notoriety. There were myths regarding these players that fascinated both black and white America. One of the most famous was the story of James Bell’s speed. Satchel Paige claimed that one night when the two roomed together on the road Bell was able to turn off the room’s light and make it into bed before the light went out; that’s just how fast he was. Bell later admitted that he bet Paige he could do it only after learning that the switch was faulty and had a

<sup>104</sup> Donn Rogosin, *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball’s Negro Leagues* (New York: Kodansha, 1983), 5.

few seconds delay.<sup>105</sup> Some of the feats attributed to these players were authentic. Paige did have one of the fastest fast balls and Josh Gibson did hit at least one home run at Yankee Stadium, during a game in which the Negro League rented the stadium, that was further than any Babe Ruth hit there.

The Negro Leagues are responsible for giving Major League Baseball the feet-first slide, shin guards, night baseball, and the batting helmet.<sup>106</sup> Many of these innovations were instituted after white all-stars matched up with the Negro League all-stars in the off season. It was common place for white all-stars, including Babe Ruth, to travel around the country during the off season and play charity type barnstorming games. It was not uncommon for the white all-stars to play against Negro League teams at local fields. The games were never heavily publicized, but were still sell-outs attended by both whites and African-Americans.

The treatment of both the African-American players and fans depended on where the game was being played. Southern towns segregated the fans, usually making the African-Americans stand, and were less than hospitable to the Negro League teams.<sup>107</sup> The popularity these games brought to the African-American teams enabled them to rent bigger and better facilities on which to play. By the late 1920s many of the teams could afford to rent Major League stadiums for Sunday games, which were still outlawed by Major League Baseball at the time. Renting these larger stadiums also increased the number of whites who attended the games. Baseball scholar Phil Dixon argues Yankee

<sup>105</sup> Hakim, *War, Peace, and All That Jazz*, 51.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Hogue, "Glory All Their Own," *The Dallas Morning News*, 24 February 2004, C 1.

<sup>107</sup> Phil Dixon, *The Negro Baseball Leagues* (New York: Amereon House, 1992), 316-318

Stadium made over \$100,000 a year renting the park out to Negro League teams. The reason for this was not only the rental fee but the cut they received from ticket sales.<sup>108</sup>

The almost co-habitation of the stadiums and the interracial games were hugely popular with the fans and with the players. They also provided the game with new tools and techniques. However, these games also invalidated the segregation excuse that blacks and whites would not play together. This same excuse suffered another blow when St. Louis Cardinals' pitcher Dizzy Dean said, "I have played against a Negro all-star team that was so good we didn't think we had even a chance." Lou Gehrig dealt a further crack in the argument when he proclaimed, "there is no room in baseball for discrimination."<sup>109</sup> Having some of the games biggest stars not only playing with African-Americans but speaking out against the segregation began to weaken the League's resolve. It crumbled under Brooklyn General Manager Branch Rickey's determination to sign Robinson to his Dodgers in 1946.<sup>110</sup> He argued that the Negro Leagues were no more than a loose organization of teams that did not offer talented African-Americans the chance to play real professional baseball. Rickey decided that he would sign an African-American player who was not only talented but able to withstand the scrutiny and backlash that such a move would cause; he found that player in the young Robinson. Critics, especially African-American sportswriters, claimed that Rickey's signing of Robinson was nothing more than a publicity stunt meant to make the Dodgers money. Baseball scholar Lee Lowenfish argues while Rickey knew there would

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>109</sup> Hakim, *War, Peace, and All That Jazz*, 54.

<sup>110</sup> Dixon, *The Negro Baseball Leagues*; Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*; Tygiel, *Past Time*.

be monetary gains from his revolutionary move and in fact counted on them to sway the rest of Baseball; he also strongly felt that African-American players deserved to play in the MLB.<sup>111</sup>

Immigrant and African-American males faced constant and overt discrimination both in society and baseball; however their female counterparts suffered an additional burden for being women, a burden that was also shared by white women. White women did not face the same overt discrimination that immigrant and African-American women did. They did not live in almost constant fear due to the threat of violence the way African-Americans did. But white women, like immigrant and African-American women, did feel the sting of prejudice and bigotry. Employers and sports leagues did not allow women to perform the same jobs or play the same sports as males regardless of race. Prior to 1920 and the nineteenth amendment they were not allowed to vote, though immigrant and African-American women were still unable to vote following the amendment's passage due to their race and citizenship status.<sup>112</sup> Women, like male African-Americans and immigrants, were often victims of the "last hired first fired" policy. During the 1920s and 1930s white middle class women began to act in bolder ways and break some of the constraints that society placed on them, thus making the road for less privileged white women and women of color easier.

<sup>111</sup> Lee Lowenfish, "When All Heaven Rejoiced: Branch Rickey and the Origins of the Breaking of the Color Line," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* 11, 1 (2002): 1-15, available from Project Muse, <http://ezporxy.twu.edu:2159/journals/nine/v011/11.1lowenfish.html>; accessed on 9 February 2006.

<sup>112</sup> Prior to the passage of the nineteenth amendment white women were allowed to vote in state and local elections in several Western states but were prohibited from voting in national elections.



Before World War I some women began to break the restraints that had been placed on them by traditional Victorian rules. Many women were working within the Progressive movement to help create change. While working was not acceptable behavior for women according to Victorian society, the jobs that the women were performing did fall under female activities. They were nurses, teachers, and counselors; all jobs that required nurturing, which was a quality that any Victorian lady possessed. It is important to understand that poor white women, immigrant women, and women of color were already part of the workforce and had been for years and that they worked not to press for change, but for survival.

During the war men were needed to fill jobs that were created for the war effort; jobs that were often better paying. This left many jobs vacant and women were often hired to fill these less desirable and low-paying positions. There were even women serving in the military as nurses and office personnel, though only white women were able to serve in the still segregated military. While the number of women who worked and served in the military is marginal compared the numbers of women who worked and served during World War II, it still provided many women the opportunity to find new avenues of work. The jobs during World War I, unlike during the Progressive Era, were not typical female jobs. Many women worked in factories and offices doing traditionally male jobs.

Following the war a number of these women refused to give up their jobs and continued to work. They had found a sense of independence and they were not willing to give it up. Others were forced to relinquish both their jobs and independence when a

returning soldier came back for his job. However, the taste of independence combined with the newly granted right to vote led to a female revolution. As historian Rosalind Rosenberg argues, for white women who were able to vote there was not only a sense of independence from male relatives but also a sense of power over their future and destiny.<sup>113</sup> This feeling of empowerment led many of the young, middle-class white women who called large cities their home to call for a change in their way of life. These women were given the label of “new woman.” The average new woman had a job, lived alone, drove, and maybe even smoked. She wanted to be seen as more than property, have the same freedoms as men, and experience the same economic and political rights. Her fashion also changed. She no longer wore high-necked blouses and ankle length skirts, though not every new woman wore the knee bearing flapper style dresses. The typical new woman enjoyed going out to night clubs and on occasional dates with men. They also tended to have a very frank attitude about sex, marriage, and children; one that included being able to choose one’s path. In short, the new woman was about emancipation for not only herself but all women. It is important to note that the ideals and images of the new woman that are discussed were those of young, middle class white women. Older middle and upper class white women tended to stay within their comfort zones, while poor white women, immigrant women, and African-American women were not afforded the opportunities of stretching social boundaries. The flapper by contrast was more of a party girl. According to F. Scott Fitzgerald the ideal flapper was, “lovely

<sup>113</sup> Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 72.

and expensive and about nineteen.” She deemphasized her femininity in favor a more boyish look with the exception of her face and knees, which would usually have make-up applied and be bared in order to still be recognized as female.<sup>114</sup>

Like so many other characteristics of the “Roaring Twenties” both the new woman and the flapper were casualties of the Great Depression. Historian Susan Ware explains women who worked were not among the casualties, claiming “women continued to increase their participation in paid wage labor outside the home.”<sup>115</sup> While the number of female workers increased, the pay and hours did not. Low wages and irregular or part-time employment was rampant amongst female employees, regardless of race. The scarcity of work kept many from complaining, as roughly two million women were unemployed in January 1931. The number of women without work throughout the Depression fluctuated between two and over four million, more than thirty percent of whom were considered heads of households.<sup>116</sup>

Women who cared for their families during the depression were also faced with many challenges. During the revolution of gender roles of the 1920s many married women became the household accountant, a job that offered a sense of control and excitement. However, that same job during the Depression was difficult at best. Attempting to figure out a household budget on a portion of the family’s previous income was not an enjoyable task. To escape from the harsh reality many women turned to

<sup>114</sup> Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 157-177, Hakim, *War, Peace, and All That Jazz*, 29-33, 41-46, and Rosenberg, *Divided Lives*, 67-68.

<sup>115</sup> Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 21.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

daytime soap operas on the radio. For fifteen minutes a day a housewife could escape to a world that had intrigue and romance and resolutions to life's problems.<sup>117</sup>

Women in the early 1920s who wanted to play sports had few opportunities. One reason was that it was considered unseemly for women to play sports by Victorian standards, especially sports that involved any real physical activity. A 1936 article by sportswriter Paul Gallico, published in both *Vogue* and *Reader's Digest*, argued "of some 25 sports in which ladies of today indulge in publicly with vehemence and passion there are only eight in which they do not manage to look utterly silly."<sup>118</sup> Included in those eight were angling, archery, aviation, figure skating, and swimming. Basketball, baseball, and golf were included on the list of undesirable sports in which the female participants look "utterly silly." Gladys Palmer the 1929 Assistant Professor of Physical Education at Ohio State University and member of the National Committee on Women's Athletics wrote a guide book for women's baseball entitled, *Baseball For Girls and Women*. In it she argues that while there is a need for such a book due to the growing number of females playing baseball, the game was still considered to be unsuited for women because, "the intricate technic of the game is too difficult for the average girl to master. The throwing distances are too great. There is no advantage which cannot be enjoyed through participation in a more simple and well-planned, but less strenuous game."<sup>119</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Gary Dean Best, *The Nickel and Dime Decade: American Popular Culture During the 1930s* (London: Praeger, 1993), 67 and McGovern, *And A Time For Hope*.

<sup>118</sup> Paul Gallico "Women in Sports Should Look Beautiful" *Vogue* 15 June 1936, 12-14 and Ware *Holding Their Own*, 173-174.

<sup>119</sup> Gladys Palmer, *Baseball For Girls and Women* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1929), 6.

If a woman wanted to play baseball during the 1920s she had only one choice: the Bloomer teams. These teams were all female baseball teams that had been around since the late 1800s but were never heavily organized. The Vassar College Resolutes was one of the first female teams playing as early as 1876. The team split in two and played themselves until other Universities created women's baseball teams. The young women on the team were forced to play in full-length skirts; their complete uniform weighed over thirty pounds. As the idea of women playing baseball caught on, teams independent of universities began appearing as early as the 1890s. The teams were created by businessmen, male coaches, and even ex-professional baseball players and were made up of young women athletes looking for a challenge beyond traditional female sports. Many of the women refused to wear the cumbersome uniforms that the school teams were required to wear, opting instead for bloomer pants that resembled a skirt. As the teams began to unanimously adopt the pants as their uniform they became known as the Bloomer teams.<sup>120</sup>

By the 1920s and 1930s the Bloomer teams offered women a chance to play baseball in a professional manner similar to men. Like the Negro Leagues, the Bloomer teams barnstormed across the nation playing any team that was willing. They played at rented parks, local ball fields, and even in open pastures. They faced other female teams and male college, semi-pro, and professional teams, always playing by established, official baseball rules. The number of teams fielded and games played each year varied

<sup>120</sup>National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, *Baseball as America*, 109.

due to lack of organization and funds.<sup>121</sup> It should be noted that the teams, while primarily made up of all women, were not exclusively female. In addition to the nine to twelve women, most teams boasted two male players who were usually a catcher and an outfielder to add strength to those positions. Though the teams were gender integrated, they were not racially integrated; African-American women were not allowed to play. The Philadelphia Bobbies, Chicago All-Star Athletic Girls, American Athletic Girls, and All-Star Ranger Girls were the most popular teams. Edith Houghton and Jackie Mitchell were two of the premier stars. Houghton went on to serve as a scout for the Philadelphia Phillies; she was the first ever female scout in Major League Baseball. Mitchell bore a distinction that not many male pitchers boasted; she once struck out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in the same charity game.<sup>122</sup>

The Bloomer teams enjoyed a fairly large fan base made up of both men and women from all over the nation. As traveling teams, they were just as likely to have fans in Kansas as they were in their hometowns. This also meant that the Bloomer teams had fans that were farmers, both rich and poor, working-class laborers, and upper and middle-class workers. Their games could draw diverse crowds that were on par with all-male barnstorming games, but they could not compete with the growing popularity of softball. The Women's Softball Association offered something the Bloomer teams could not; an organized league. The Bloomer teams were nothing more than a loosely organized group of teams that traveled around and played each other occasionally. Sponsorship of teams

<sup>121</sup> Barbara Gregorich, *Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1993), 12.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

waxed and waned as did the pay of the players; the steadier clubs like the New York Bloomer Girls and the Philadelphia Bobbies offered between \$35 and \$50 dollars a week as long as games could be scheduled.<sup>123</sup> The softball league promised a schedule of games and regular pay. The Women's Softball Association (WSA), unlike the Bloomer League, created a schedule with predetermined opponents, locations, and dates. For many players that was lure enough to leave the Bloomers but others remained stalwart in their loyalty. They felt that softball was not baseball.<sup>124</sup> Softball was rapidly becoming more acceptable as a female sport due to its slow pitch style and less aggressive defense because of the slower ball and smaller fields. The idea of a rigidly organized league also made it more appealing for women to play because it decreased the need for aimless travel until opponents could be found. However, many of the women from the Bloomer teams joined because of the travel and the lack of organization, some having never played organized baseball prior to joining. While others who had come from playing baseball for colleges and universities liked the idea of returning to a structured program like the one that the WSA offered.

Even the holdouts were eventually forced to play softball or not play at all. As the nation entered the Great Depression it became too expensive for the Bloomer teams to exist. Travel was costly and often there were no teams able to play once the team reached their destination. Slowly the teams began to fold and eventually all of the Bloomer teams were gone. The Women's Softball Association flourished with the

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>124</sup> Softball was slow pitch with a larger ball and smaller field dimensions. Gregorich, *Women at Play*, 41.

demise of the Bloomers and its new players. Prior to the Bloomer teams folding, the WSA was made up of primarily young women who had played for different colleges and universities as well as other private softball leagues. With the addition of some of the Bloomer players, the WSA became more diverse in the backgrounds and classes of their players. Women's baseball, however, was resurrected in 1943 as the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) reached a whole new level.<sup>125</sup> The AAGPBL bridged the Bloomer teams and the Women's Softball Association by creating an organized league with a very strict set of rules for both play and conduct, but that played actual baseball rather than softball.

As the hard years of the Depression gave way, African-Americans and women found themselves still the targets of discrimination. All three groups rode the roller coaster of ups and downs with America and Baseball during the 1920s and 1930s. The 1940s loomed with more uncertainty for both America and its national pastime. The two were poised to continue reflecting each other as they had throughout the previous two decades.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Baseball's multiple parallels of American society witnessed throughout the 1920s and 1930s is seen through the examination of the game's roots, the two during the chaotic decades, and the segregation practiced. With the close of the 1930s America and Baseball stood together having weathered the devastation of World War I, the prosperity of the 1920s, and the harshness of the Depression. They both sought to exclude members of society from participating, but found that those individuals who are determined can not be stopped. During this span of twenty years America and Baseball reaffirmed and strengthened the connection established between in 1856 when Baseball was first dubbed America's national pastime.

Following the end of World War I the nation found itself on unstable ground. Society was stunned after the devastation of the war and filled with a mistrust of everything and everyone outside of the United States. Yet at the same time, America, as a world power, was at the forefront of the peace negotiations and the rebuilding of the economically and physically devastated Europe. Historian William Leuchtenburg argues, "Never did a nation accept authority more reluctantly."<sup>126</sup> This new authority helped to bolster the U. S. economy but at the same time increase society's suspicion of foreigners

<sup>126</sup> Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 7.

and immigrants. Economic prosperity and isolationism became the cornerstones of the 1920s.

Baseball, too, faced a considerable problem following World War I, that of a tarnished image. During the 1919 World Series eight Chicago White Sox players took money in exchange for throwing the series and giving the Cincinnati Reds the win. The scandal sent shock waves through Baseball and society. The nation's pastime was now tainted and its players nothing more than gamblers. If the game was going to survive it needed a new leader and a new hero.

America society and Baseball entered the 1920s with a need to bolster their confidence. The economic upswing of the decade aided both. With Warren G. Harding's election in 1920 and Calvin Coolidge's ascension to the office following Harding's death, the U.S. government returned to the hands-off, laissez faire, style. This form of government is particularly friendly toward big business, and as early as 1919 big business was poised to take over. America's consumer market was flooded with goods and lower prices and the standard of living was increasing. Luxury items like automobiles and radios were dramatically cheaper and readily available. The nation embraced the prosperity of the decade, only to find that it was false.

Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis was made commissioner of Major League Baseball the same year Harding became President. Landis was chosen to lead baseball beyond the "Black Sox" scandal and into a new era. He believed in tough rules and even tougher punishment for breaking the rules. He also believed that Baseball could follow America's lead and become economically prosperous. However, his leadership alone

could not remove the taint of the scandal. Babe Ruth aided in resurrecting Baseball's reputation. His larger than life personality and talent made him not only a fan favorite but a hero as well.<sup>127</sup> The renewed fervor that he and other all-stars brought to the game created a new level of economic success for Baseball, and like American consumers officials were willing to spend. Owners handed out lucrative contracts and built new ballparks. While Baseball's prosperity was real, it did not last beyond the decade.

The stock market crash of 1929 combined with the false prosperity of the 1920s sent the nation spiraling into the Great Depression. As the economy weakened jobs and wages were cut in every industry. Programs that had been created to help the poor and homeless became overtaxed and were unable to assist everyone. President Hoover felt that it was the people's place to pull themselves out. His attitude and perceived inability to help the nation led to the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt entered the situation with a plan to help the nation recover. His New Deal aided the nation in surviving the worst of the Depression.

The world of Major League Baseball was not immune to the Depression. In order to recoup financial losses due to lost ticket sales, Baseball was forced to cut the amount and length of contracts offered to players. Owners also began cutting ticket prices to increase ticketed sales. MLB embraced radio as a way to generate both revenue, through advertising sales, and continued interest in the game. Major League Baseball introduced night baseball during the Depression as a way of creating additional opportunities for

<sup>127</sup> Voigt, *American Baseball*, 140-141.

fans to attend games. Baseball tried to offer entertainment and escape; two things that America heavily sought during the 1920s and 1930s.

Following World War I the nation, especially its youth, was looking for stability. Many felt that turning inward and becoming a more moral nation was the answer. From these ideals the Red Scare, isolationism, and the moral revolution were born. However, the youth felt that enjoying life and the new prosperity the nation was experiencing was the answer. The “Roaring Twenties” were the product of this attitude. The American people placed an emphasis on taking pleasure in life and all that it offered. This included embracing jazz music and the consumption of luxury goods. The Harlem Renaissance presented white America with a look at African-American culture, especially jazz music. Americans became obsessed with excitement and entertainment, and Baseball of the 1920s provided both.

Babe Ruth’s emergence as the hero of Baseball ushered in the era of the home run. Games became more exciting as pitchers dueled with batters whose home run totals and batting averages were increasing with every season. Bigger and better ballparks were emerging as were numerous all-stars; and the fans loved it. Major League Baseball set all time attendance records during the 1920s. The exhilaration of home run record chases and high scoring games brought fans to the parks in droves. A nation of thrill-seekers found that their beloved national pastime was willing to accommodate them.

However, as the prosperity of the 1920s faded into the harsh reality of the Depression escape and not thrills became the order of the day for most Americans. Entertainment became about more than just fun, it was about providing a means of

forgetting the struggles of everyday life. The prosperity of the 1920s provided one-third of all homes with at least one radio set. As historian Gary Dean Best argues the radio, “transformed American life to a degree and with a rapidity that was unprecedented except perhaps in the case of the automobile.”<sup>128</sup> Providing free programs that were entertaining and frivolous, the radio played a key role in Americans escaping from the Depression. Movies and sports also offered society with avenues of forgetting their troubles for a few hours.

Baseball counted on its ability to provide a diversion in order to survive the Depression. Teams lowered seat prices so that fans could afford to go to the ballpark to enjoy a game. Owners and officials also finally embraced broadcasting games on the radio, thus providing a free way to experience a game. Games played at night created additional chances to attend a game and escape the day’s hardships. All of these measures were taken by Major League Baseball to help them survive, but ended up helping the nation survive as well.

But not everyone was able to find equality, entertainment, and escape. Immigrants, African-Americans, and women were all discriminated against and segregated by society. The number of immigrants entering the United States soared following World War I, as did society’s fear and mistrust of them. Immigrants were viewed as foreigners who were potentially dangerous and should be kept in their place. African-Americans, despite technically gaining freedom almost fifty years earlier, were

<sup>128</sup> Gary Dean Best, *The Nickel and Dime Decade: American Popular Culture During the 1930s* (London: Praeger, 1993), 62.

still being discriminated against across the nation. Many Americans treated the African-American community as inferior and subjected it to the constant threat of violence.

Women were also treated like second-class citizens. Wealthy white women were able to gain some independence and power with the 1920 passage of suffrage, work force experienced during World War I, and the emergence of the new woman; but poor white women and women of color were unable to experience these feelings. The Depression only magnified the injustices suffered by these three groups.

All three groups also found that the nation's pastime was unwilling to allow them equality. Immigrants that were from Western and Southern Europe were eventually welcomed into Baseball, usually a generation or two removed from their arrival. Children of Italian, German and Irish immigrants learned to play baseball in the streets of the city as a form of assimilation and as they began to excel were able to climb their way to the majors. Regardless of their talent level African-Americans were unable to break into Major League Baseball, courtesy of post-Civil War agreement between the very first owners. Undaunted, a group of African-American businessmen created the Negro Leagues in order to give talented African-American athletes a chance to play baseball at the professional level. Similarly a small group of businessmen created the Bloomer teams to give talented female athletes a chance to play professionally, though only white women were signed. The Bloomer teams of the 1920s gave way to the Women's Softball Association during the 1930s. Despite the advancement of immigrants, African-Americans, and women in the world of Baseball, little changed in society.

The experiences of the 1920s and 1930s confirmed the link between America and baseball. Riding the highs of the 1920s and surviving the lows of the 1930s strengthened the bond that the two shared. The bond was tested during the turmoil that was World War II but ultimately survived and continued grow. Scholar Jacques Barzun summed up this phenomenon in his 1954 *God's Country and Mine* when he wrote, “whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball.”<sup>129</sup>

<sup>129</sup> *Baseball Quotations*, 1.

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