1 **Baseball Film Exhibit at National Baseball Hall of Fame; Photo by Author (April, 2012).**

INTRODUCTION: RHETORICAL FOUNDATIONS

One might argue that America is built on narratives. Whether it is the story of the self-made man in Frederick Jackson Turner's rendition of the West[1] or the trials of Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op[2], narratives have been used by many in an attempt to understand, expose and grasp the characterizing qualities that define America. Furthermore, narratives, most notably cinematic ones created by Hollywoood, are often a person's first introduction as to what America purports to be all about. As such, it may be at the movies that spectators may come to recognize the privileged position baseball holds in the hearts of many Americans. But as values and shared

[1] Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York: 1921).
[2] Dashiell Hammet, Red Harvest (New York: 1992).
[3] According to Bob Carroll & Rob Edelman, "Reel Baseball", Total Baseball 6th Edition, ed. John Thorn & Pete Palmer (New York: 1999), 598-609 28 baseball-related films were produced between 1988-1994.
[4] Will Lingo, "Who Says There Aren't any Great Baseball Movies", Baseball America, 6-19 Sept. 1999, 13.

concerns fluctuate within the nation's narrative, so they also do in the narrative of baseball. The fact that the sport has been commonly referred to as the national pastime closely links the sport's nature to the country's character. In order to understand the ideological relationship between baseball and America, as well as to attempt to discover the defining characteristics of that relationship, whether created or inherent, we will closely look at a short period of late 20th century American cinema in which a significant amount of baseball films, many of them now considered classics of the genre, were produced[3]. Indeed, on a list of the ten best baseball films compiled by *Baseball America* in 1999, seven of them were produced during the 1980s and early 1990s[4]. If we consider the argument that "baseball and cinema are both microcosms of American culture", what were these films saying about the nation[5]? Why was the theme of baseball so prevalent and financially potent, ultimately leading to the genre's best box office receipts to date?[6]

While the inextricable connection between baseball and America had been repeatedly emphasized ever since the end of the 19th century, the 1980s saw the emergence of a voice that romantically re-articulated the sport's ties to the nation. Probably best remembered as the short-lived Major League Baseball Commissioner that banished Pete Rose from baseball for life, A. Bartlett Giamatti had a deep passion for the game and has expressed perhaps better than anyone the game's intricate relationship to the nation's identity. In a speech given to the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1985 entitled "Baseball and the American Character", Giamatti sums up the sport's inherently American essence:

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[5] William Simons, "The Family of Baseball", Reel Baseball, eds. Stephen C. Wood & J. David Pincus (Jefferson: 2003), 191.

[6] http://boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=baseball.htm

> Genteel in its American origins, proletarian in its development, egalitarian in its demands and appeal, effortless in its adaptation to nature, raucous, hard-nosed, and glamorous as a profession, expanding with the country like fingers unfolding from a fist, image of a lost past, evergreen reminder of America's promises, baseball fits America. Above all, it fits so well because it embodies the antithetical, complementary interplay of individual and group that we so love, and because it conserves our longing for the rule of law while licensing our resentment of law givers.[7]

Based on the success of baseball cinema at the end of what some have called the Age of Reagan[8], this baseball rhetoric resonated strongly with the American people of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The rise in baseball film popularity incidentally coincides with the end of Ronald Reagan's presidency, whose rhetoric can be seen to closely resemble that of baseball. Like baseball, Reagan evoked nostalgia for an imagined past. Like baseball, and particular cinema, Reagan used storytelling to spread his charismatic appeal, improvising "a narrative about the present and the future rooted in America's mythic past"[9]. Furthermore, Reagan's adopted narrative shares a symbolic focus that is also at the heart of baseball: the home.[10] Upon leaving office, Reagan observed that the positive side of stepping down was that he would be going back home to his ranch in California[11], a place he cherished over all others as he spent almost a full year of his presidency at this location, often making important decisions from its premise[12]. The resurgence of baseball films near the end and shortly after Reagan's presidency can be seen as a response to the legacy of the Reagan years. Seeing as his presidency was strongly rooted in symbolic images, when his second term ended in 1988, it was as if "for the past eight years the country had been staring up in some kind of trance at pictures in the sky.

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[7] A. Bartlett Giamatti, "Baseball and American Character", A Great and Glorious Game (Chapel Hill: 1998), 57.
[8] Simons, Reel Baseball, 191.
[9] Gil Troy, Morning in America (Princeton: 2005), 8.
[10] For a detailed description of the concept of Home in baseball, see A. Bartlett Giamatti, "Baseball as Narrative", A Great and Glorious Game, ed. Kenneth S. Robson (Chapel Hill: 1998), 87-116.
[11] See Reagan's Farewell Address: January 11, 1989.
[12] Lou Cannon, President Reagan (New York: 1991), 528.

Now Reagan would be gone and people were left with the memory of how he had made them feel better. His departure was like the end of a fireworks display...leaving nothing but a dark sky"[13]. The baseball films of the late 80s and early 90s all reflect on the myth of the 80s that was prevalently believed in when the President left office:

> The myth of the eighties was that the United States of America, the greatest power the world has known, economically and militarily, a society favored with material riches beyond measure and a political system whose freedom made it the envy of every nation on earth, had fallen into a state of disintegration and with Ronald Reagan recaptured what it had lost: optimism; strength; enterprise; inventiveness. Most of all America wanted to believe it had recaptured a sense of success. Success for the nation, success of the individual; in the public mind, the two were indivisible.[14]

However, in Reagan's rhetoric as much as baseball's, discrepancies exist between ideology and reality. Giamatti observes that baseball, "in a fashion typically American...carried a lore at variance with its behavior; it promoted its self-image as a green game while it became a business. That gap in baseball between first promise and eventual execution is with us to this day, as it is with us in so many other ways"[15]. The gap between rhetoric and reality that Giamatti observes concerning baseball is also true of the still debated legacy of the Reagan presidency.

While Reagan preached the need for a harmonious home based on conservative values[16], some of the biggest concerns to arise during his time in office were foreign rather than domestic. Reagan's role in the cessation of the Cold War was considered one of his most celebrated accomplishments[17]. His domestic achievements, however, have been the cause for much debate seeing as many of the progress Reagan claimed to have produced was just an illusion. Reagan

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[13] Haynes Johnson, Sleepwalking Through History (New York: 1991), 447.
[14] Ibid, 13.
[15] Giamatti, Great and Glorious Game, 47.
[16] See Robert Dallek, Ronald Reagan (Cambridge: 1984), 3-29.
[17] See Martin Revolution (Stanford: 1990), xxvii.

and his supporters hailed the economic boom and boost in job production that occurred during the decade[18]. In reality, the 1980s saw the United States transform itself from the world's biggest creditor into its biggest debtor as decreases in welfare expenses were dwarfed by increasing ones in the Defense Department[19]. Furthermore, while Reagan did indeed enact the federal tax cuts he promised so diligently during his first presidential campaign, the ensuing deficit burden was passed on to the shoulders of the State governments, which in turn had to hike their own tax rates which resulted in taxes remaining relatively stable for the average American during the decade[20]. The optimism that Reagan is said to have inspired was also selectively limited. Family income of the poorest brackets of the population dropped as those for the wealthiest rose so that "by 1989, the wealthiest two-fifths of American families received 67.8% of national income, while the bottom two-fifths earned a mere 15.4% - a larger spread than at any time since 1945"[21]. In other words, the rich became richer as the poor became poorer with feelings of optimism reserved for those on the winning side of the fiscal line. Also in 1989, "the poverty rate, running at 14 percent of the population and embracing some thirty-three million people, was one of the highest in the industrialized world".[22] While these domestic oversights have been seen as being caused by ignorance of the issues by Reagan's administration rather than a purposefully antagonistic agenda, their effects were felt nonetheless. Reagan's attitude regarding the poor, in other words those that do not fit within his vision of a successful America, can best be illustrated by a comment he gave concerning homelessness, in which he explained their plight as a result of them being "retarded"[23]. After spending the 1980s worrying about the conclusion of the cold war

[18] See Reagan's Farewell Address: January 11, 1989.
[19] Kenneth Franklin Kurz, The Reagan Years A to Z (Los Angeles: 1997), 89.
[20] Michael Schaller, Reckoning with Reagan (New York: 1992), 71.
[21] Schaller, Reckoning with Reagan, 77.
[22] Johnson, Sleepwalking Through History, 451.
[23] Cannon, President Reagan, 24.

abroad and following the departure of the provider of illusions in the White House, the American people were left with the realities of Reagan's fantasies. While the President may have celebrated his legacy as one that brought peace back to America, "under the surface calm of the 1980s and early 1990s, Americans remained deeply uncertain about the recent past, the current state of affairs, and future direction of their society"[24]. This has lead some to conclude that "America's greatest test in the nineties lies not beyond its border, as two generations of Americans were taught during the cold war era, but within"[25].

As a symbol of national identity, baseball was the perfect vehicle in the late 1980s to reflect on the country's internal state. For many American's, "baseball conjured up a moral image of America at its best – a nation of strivers moved not so much by greed and crass self-interest as by a larger vision of excellence, one obtained only by arduous effort, social cooperation, and an abiding sense of fair play"[26]. Furthermore, as baseball is often considered a conservative sport, seeing as it places "value in established institutions...subjugating individual freedom to order, rank, security, and the good of the community [while] promoting individualism", it offered ample opportunity to observe exactly what values are deemed traditionally American[27]. The treatment of baseball in the films produced at the end of the 1980s and early 90s reflects the popular sentiment regarding the ambiguities related to the lasting repercussions of the Reagan administration's economic policies. While baseball's rhetoric holds many similarities to Reagan's, some of the former's characteristics can be seen as missing in the latter. One such

[24] Michael Schaller, Right Turn (New York: 2007), vii.
[25] Johnson, Sleepwalking Through History, 464.
[26] William J. Morgan, "Baseball and the Search for an American Moral Identity", Baseball and Philosophy, ed. Eric Bronson (Chicago: 2004), 157.
[27] Katherine Barber, ed, Canadian Oxford Dictionary (Don Mills: 2004), 324.

example is the concept of sacrifice, which "in baseball... is central to teamwork"[28]. However, "sacrifice was out of fashion during the Reagan years" as people were encouraged to dream big and individual self-interest continued to be hailed as the American Holy Grail[29]. Therefore baseball's rhetoric closely resembles Reagan's in essence as they both allude to mythical pasts and overlook the discrepancies their professed identities possess regarding the democratic spirit they are seen to embody. Baseball's transcendent historical and political nature mark it as the perfect national symbol for reflection on American society. In dealing with the national pastime, these films address the "rhetorical overkill"[30] to which the people were subjected to both in government and baseball, including themes within their baseball narratives that reflect social concerns at the time. We will begin by detailing how the baseball films produced at the end of the Reagan era thematically and formally differ from previous titles in the genre, these differences strongly responsible for their eventual success. Then we will discuss how these films criticize or celebrate Reagan's rhetorical achievements through their treatment of baseball. For this, the choice has been made to focus on three of Reagan's prized values: capitalism, family and its gender constituents, and religion[31]. I will show how these themes are treated through sporadic close analysis of this selection of baseball films: : *Eight Men Out* (John Sayles, 1988), *Bull Durham* (Ron Shelton, 1988), *Field of Dreams* (Phil Alden Robinson, 1989), *Major League*

[28] Willie Young, "Taking one for the team", Baseball and Philosophy, ed. Eric Bronson (Chicago: 2004), 57.
[29] Cannon, President Reagan, 22.
[30] Jules Tygiel, Pastime (New York: 2000), 220.
[31] It is important to note here of the additional racial theme that is somewhat present in these films due to its relevance with the outcome of Reagan's policies in contrast to his projected rhetoric. In addition to the previously mentioned consequences of Reagan's domestic agenda, his cuts in social spending made it so that "by 1989 the government reported that *half* of America's black children lived in poverty"(Johnson, Sleepwalking Through History, 451). The issues of child poverty are addressed in *Angels in the Outfield*, while those of racial acceptance can be seen reflected in the increasingly harmonious, racially diverse Cleveland Indians team in *Major League*. On the other hand, keeping in line with Reagan's own attitude towards the subject, some of these films, most notably *Field of Dreams*, decide to ignore this obstacle to the rhetoric's accuracy. Due to the limited scope of this paper and the broad nature of the subject at hand, which on its own would be an interesting one for an analysis, it proved preferable not to tackle its full implications here.

(David S. Ward, 1989), *A League of Their Own* (Penny Marshall, 1992), *The Sandlot* (David M. Evans, 1993), *Rookie of the Year* (Daniel Stern, 1993) and *Little Big League* (Andrew Scheinman, 1994) and *Angels in the Outfield* (William Dear, 1994). As these words are written with the assumption that the reader has seen the films that will be discussed, the analyses of some of the sequences forego plot explanation. For this reason, and for those who have not had the chance to see all of the relevant titles, an Annex has been included at the end of the paper containing brief synopses of the films discussed.

CAPTURING BASEBALL AUTHENTICITY

Before the dawn of what Bob Carroll and Rob Edelman, in their survey of baseball cinema, call the 'Golden Age' of baseball film[32], pictures in the genre were notoriously known as presenting the sport in carelessly negligent ways, rarely giving "much of an effort at giving a realistic portrayal of the game"[33]. Producer Samuel Goldwyn went so far as to proclaim baseball movies "box office poison" when hearing about plans to film 1942's *Pride of the Yankees*[34]. The difficulty associated with making the game appealing on screen can be linked to its unique nature, making it "hard to film modulations, and baseball is made of modulations"[35]. While some believe that the success of the Golden Era pictures, which is said to have started with *Bang the Drum Slowly* (John D. Hancock, 1973) and ending in the early-to-mid 1990s with the return of the baseball biographies such as *The Babe* (Arthur Hiller, 1992) and *Cobb* (Ron Shelton, 1994), can be attributed to the films being "focused on character", that doesn't explain the possible shunning of classic baseball titles like *Pride of the Yankees* (Sam Wood, 1942) or *Fear Strikes Out* (Robert Mulligan, 1957), both of which are indubitably about their main protagonists' plight rather than the sport itself[36]. Furthermore, it could be argued that any film genre is more successful when it is character driven, making baseball films no different than any other kind. What, then, made the baseball pictures near the end of the genre's golden era more appealing to both the viewers and the baseball community? I would argue that the baseball films produced between 1988 and 1994 struck a chord because they presented the national game in the spotlight

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[32] Carroll & Edelman, Total Baseball, 603.
[33] Lingo, Baseball America, 13.
[34] Bosley Crowther, "The Pride of the Yankees", The New York Times, 16 July 1942, n.p. http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E0DEFD71E31E53BBC4E52DFB1668389659EDE
[35] Wilfred Sheed, "Why Can't the Movies Play Ball", New York Times, 14 May 1989, n.p. http://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/14/movies/why-can-t-the-movies-play-ball.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm
[36] Joe Pollack, "Poles Apart", The Sporting News, 26 Sept. 1988, 12.

rather than on the sidelines. Baseball became what the whole film was about, focusing on characters who were all about baseball themselves. Whether the game reflected is framed in myth or reality, however, is what distinguishes one film from the other. While some, like *Field of Dreams*, further propagated the mythical, pastoral illusion associated with the sport's beginnings, others, like *Bull Durham*, *Eight Men Out* and *A League of their Own* turned away from idealized representations of the game in order to offer a more genuine treatment of its inherent realities.

One of these realities is the acknowledgement of baseball's true urban origins as opposed to its pastoral rhetorical counterpart. The two baseball films most notable to deal with the issue were released in 1988: *Bull Durham* and *Eight Men Out*. While *Eight Men Out* never brings baseball out of the city of Chicago (except near the end when Joe Jackson is playing under an alias, his name having taken the status of myth, most like baseball's green fields on which he is now playing), *Bull Durham* is more ambiguous in its treatment of the baseball duality between the urban and the pastoral. While Durham could be said to be a small country town, therefore implying that the film cherishes the association of baseball with the rural, the discrepancy between baseball's perceived identity and that of its true origins is addressed in the film's very first shot. Contrary to *The Natural* (Barry Levinson, 1984) and *Field of Dreams*, which position the 'cradle of baseball'[37] within a pastoral setting, *Durham* opens with a still photograph of early 20th century children playing disorganized ball in a big-city alley (an image that will be seen again in *Eight Men Out*) and is followed by other stills of classic (Jackie Robinson stealing home) and not-so classic baseball moments (Team photo a women's baseball team). This introduction to baseball through static and, most importantly, old photographs immediately positions baseball's appeal as mainly being nostalgic, built of unshakable moments of glory

[37] John Thorn, Baseball in the Garden of Eden (New York: 2011), 55.

forever frozen in time and memory. This presentation of baseball lore is representative of what connects these titles together. What they all shared in common is their ability to project the "innermost being of baseball; not its existential reality, but its pure essence"[38].

2 Urban roots – Left: Bull Durham (Ron Shelton, 1988) Right: Eight Men Out (John Sayles, 1988)

While it may be true, speaking from the viewpoint of the film industry, that "if *The Natural* bombed at the box office you were not to have *Bull Durham* and *Field of Dreams*", it is ironic that the ensuing success of its descendents (except *Field*) in great part involves a critical response to the *The Natural*'s portrayal of the game[39]. The great turning point in baseball films from the late 80s was in the way they captured baseball authenticity. The sentiment regarding the treatment of baseball in Barry Levinson's film adaptation of Bernard Malamud's novel of the same name can best be understood by a comment made by John Sayles, director of *Eight Men Out*, in response to Levinson's film. What he wanted to do was "get right into the game. In *The Natural*, [Robert] Redford never did anything but strike out or hit a home run. He never popped up or hit a single"[40]. The emphasis on big baseball moments in your typical film inspired latter filmmakers to give the game a closer look, attempting to highlight the game's

[38] George Grella, "Baseball Mystery, Cinema Magic", Reel Baseball, eds. Stephen C. Wood & J. David Pincus (Jefferson: 2003), 66.

unheralded intricacies that are the real fan's true appeal. In baseball, it is the small things that have most charm.

Baseball authenticity in baseball films can be understood in two ways: situational accuracy and formal representation of the sport itself. In other words, a film's level of authenticity is evaluated either by the credibility of the baseball-related events that arise on and off the field or its visual framing of the game play itself. When it comes to the former, *Bull Durham* is highly regarded by many to be the best of the best[41]. This is attributable to the fact that the film "displays a satisfying knowledge of the game and refreshingly features some people who actually look, talk, behave, and above all, play the game like real ballplayers"[42]. Indeed, the majority of the films released in the late 80s and early 90s had their actors trained by professional baseball coaches, including *Field of Dreams, Eight Men Out* and *A League of Their Own*[43]. Authenticity was one of *Bull Durham*'s original goals as director Ron Shelton made the picture in response to his dissatisfaction with previous baseball pictures and sports films in general:

> My problem with most baseball movies was my problem with most movies about sports in general: they were always about the 'Big Game'. Anyone who plays games for a living can tell you there's never a big game[44].

In addition to getting rid of the typical big-game climactic ending, Shelton's film sets itself apart from other baseball films of the era by taking place in the minor leagues rather than

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[39] Ron Edelman, "Baseball Movie Author Speaks at Hall of Fame Film Festival", The Freeman's Journal, 4 Dec. 1997, n.p.
[40] Kathy Huffhines, "Director John Sayles Makes Films with Conviction", John Sayles, ed. Diane Carson (Jackson: 1999), 102.
[41] See Lingo, Baseball America, 13; George F. Will, Bunts (New York: 1998), 100-102.
[42] Grella, Reel Baseball, 72.
[43] Sheed, New York Times, n.p.
[44] Allen Barra, "'Bull Durham' Director Focuses on the Minor Players in Sports", New York Time, 4 May 2003, n.p. http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/04/sports/backtalk-bull-durham-director-focuses-on-the-minor-players-in-sports.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm

the majors. While this is perhaps attributable to Shelton having worked in the minors himself for 5 years and therefore being able to offer a more realistic representation of that daily life, it could be argued that the minor leagues setting also serves to deglamorize the game of baseball as perceived at the time and remind the people of the game's true essence, which is personified through the character of Crash Davis (Kevin Costner). *Bull Durham* puts hard work back in baseball as the life of a ballplayer is seen more as a day to day struggle than a luxurious walk in the park. Best exemplified by the long and cramped bus rides, the film offers a baseball world that is far from enviable, reflecting some ballplayers' contention that "Double-A is a tough league to survive in. No one wants to spend time there"[45] . A particular moment in *Bull Durham* that stands out as offering an inside glimpse into the unseen side of baseball is the inner monologue Crash has at the plate, when the catcher is trying to guess what pitch will be coming at him next. In no other film is the mental guess-work inherent with being at-bat so accurately conveyed.

Disillusionment of one`s past is also a prevalent theme related to baseball authenticity in the films of the era. However, drastically different box office receptions demonstrate a shifting willingness on the part of the audience to face a past based on fact rather than myth. Initially, it might seem that *Eight Men Out* would be the ideal material for a public that, through the images projected by its President, sees its identity rooted in the past. Taking place in 1919, the film directly transports the viewer back to a time when baseball was considered the glue holding the country together. The national sport "served as a common focal point for many Americans, particularly in 1919. America was a 'melting-pot' of many cultures, with many apparent differences. Many of these ethnic Americans sought something 'American' that they could hold

[45] Bob Klapisch, "To most Mets, Durham's more Truth than Bull", Daily Sports News, 28 Aug. 1988, C37.

in common; baseball provided this 'identification' for many"[46]. If one considers that *Eight Men Out* was the only one of the four baseball films released in 1988-89 to lose money (even though it was the less costly to produce), one can easily deduce that the American people did not want to adhere to the identity proscribed by the film [47]. While the picture's slim profits may be attributed to the film being "an insider's movie, a baseball expert's film that is hard for the untutored to follow", it may have more to do with its defiance of the optimism that pervaded the decade and its baseball films[48]. Director John Sayles, in choosing to deal with the Black Sox scandal (arguably the sport's most devastating moment in which eight players of the 1919 Chicago White Sox accepted money from gamblers in exchange for throwing the World Series), dared viewers to remember the bad times as well as the good ones. In shattering the illusion of an ideal and untainted past that was evoked throughout Ronald Reagan's presidency, *Eight Men Out*, using baseball as a stand-in for the nation, is critical of the blind adherence to mythical realities. While the film was greatly received by critics, prompting *USA Today* to proclaim it the "best baseball movie ever"[49], the film did not meet the predictions of producer Sarah Pillsbury who was "convinced that the film's theme of corruption and scandal is a subject the American audiences will care about"[50]. At a time when hope was a strong defining characteristic for Americans, the film's hopeless, inevitably unhappy ending may not have seemed appealing to most viewers who wanted to keep the illusion of a perfect past (and present) alive.

Situational accuracy, rather than flat-out historical exactness, is also a main concern for director Penny Marshall in *A League of Their Own* (1992). Released four years after *Eight Men*

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[46] Kurth Billmeyer, "The Myth and Rebirth of Joe Jackson in *Eight Men Out* and *Field of Dreams*", Reel Baseball, eds. Stephen C. Wood & J. David Pincus (Jefferson: 2003), 91.
[47] See http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=eightmenout.htm
[48] Roger Ebert, "Eight Men Out", Chicago Sun-Times, 2 Sept. 1988, n.p.
[49] See USA Today: *Eight Men Out* DVD cover, 2001 MGM Home Entertainment.
[50] Dan Smith, "Filmmaker Puts Message Before Money", John Sayles (Jackson: 1999), 108.

Out, *A League of Their Own* also looks to the past. The film's unparalleled success (being the most profitable baseball movie at the box-office), however, seems to suggest that viewers were now interested in discovering the forgotten chapters of the national sport rather than revisiting the mythical illusions of its nostalgic appeal[51]. Some critics have chastised the film's limited focus and sporadically inaccurate portrayal, as "12 seasons rolled into one leaves the impression these women were moonlighting" and belittles "the problems of women told to play like men and act like debutantes[52]. However, most women still alive to recall their playing days in the All American Girls Professional Baseball League thought the picture to be rather accurate in its treatment of the subject[53].While some initially expressed doubts upon first hearing about plans for the project, for example refusing to go see the picture if Madonna was in it because of how her image would make them look, most fears were appeased once the movie was released as it had supposedly genuinely captured the freedoms and persecutions present in the life of women ballplayers[54].

As baseball films of the late 1980s and early 90s partly focused on uncovering elements of the sport's forgotten past, the general success of the genre at the time can also be attributed to the "improvements in the technique of televising baseball that have given the game a face lift and make it worth telling stories about"[55]. Consequently, the majority of baseball pictures take their cues from television, seemingly intent on capturing a recognizable visualisation of the game. It has been observed that:

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[51] See http://boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=baseball.htm
[52] Diana Helmer, "'League' Sacrifices too Many Facts", Baseball America, 25 July 1992, 47.
[53] Arthur Olson, "Local Ex-Pros", Press-Enterprise, 8 July 1992, 1; Dennis Shook, "Baseball Movie Scores with Three Former Players", Kenosha News, 27 June 1992, n.p.
[54] Peter Jackal, "Move Plans Concern Team", Journal Times, 4 Aug. 1991, 1B.
[55] Sheed, New York Times, 1.

> most baseball movies, in the bluntest cinematic terms, appear to employ the close-up instead of the long shot, the narrow over the wide focus, the stationary over the mobile camera, a moment of action over the process of the game, which means, in effect, that they consciously choose the visual methods of television over those of the cinema, the small over the large screen[56].

While this may have some merit, such criticism ignores the fact that cinematic techniques are often meant to reflect character subjectivity rather than situational objectivity. A good example of a close-up that reflects authentic subjectivity at the cost of a realistic visualisation of the game can be seen in *Major League* (David S. Ward, 1989). During the film's final duel between Rick "Wild Thing" Vaughn (Charlie Sheen) and Haywood (Peter Vuckovich), the extremely shallow focus surrounding Vaughn is indicative of the player's psychological state, in which everything else is blocked out as his concentration on the next pitch is complete and undivided (see illustration 3).

3 Major League (David S. Ward, 1989)

This example is one amongst few, however, as the games in these films, including *League*, are usually filmed with narrative drive in mind, often accelerating the pace of the game through

[56] Grella, Reel Baseball, 65.

repetitive montage sequences. *A League of Their Own,* for example, has three such sequences. However, it is one of the few movies to include shots exhibiting the panorama from behind 1st base, which is often considered "the primal scene most fans first fall in love with" and that so "few movies use"[57]. Panoramic shots of the baseball field can also be seen in *Eight Men Out*, which is arguably the film whose rendition of baseball action comes closest to conveying the true textures of the game. In addition to its prominent use of ground-level shots that deflect dirt from runners sliding into bases, *Eight Men Out* contains the use of one type of shot that is indeed rarely used in baseball films at all: the sequence shot (or the long take). During the film's opening sequence, a shot from home plate frames Joe Jackson in a medium shot. When Jackson hits the ball, the shot stays on him as he runs down the first base line, the camera tracking down the third base line as it follows Jackson running the bases, ending up behind third base to catch Jackson sliding into the frame for a triple. This perspective, possibly mirroring the view a bat boy may have had of such a play, captures the intensity of the game without resorting to quick cuts or slow-motion to manipulate its pace. Shots like these, and situations such as Crash's aforementioned at-bat ruminations in *Bull Durham*, are what distinguish these films from their predecessors in their attempt to project a more authentic vision of the national pastime.

[57] Sheed, The New York Times, 1.

CAPITALISM AND COMMUNITY: AN INDIVIDUAL MISUNDERSTANDING

One of the main values President Reagan's rhetoric cherishes is the pursuit of a free market. A central component of his 1980 presidential platform was the lowering of federal taxes and the deregulation of corporations, awarding them less constraints and therefore more freedom to operate. These actions were implemented and deemed successful as "Reagan and his supporters continued to claim deregulation a triumph long after Reagan left office"[58], the President himself declaring the economy one of the two biggest successes of his presidency, citing the creation of 19 million jobs as proof to his claim[59]. The benefits of an increasingly free market, however, were not felt by everyone. Reagan's critics point out that the economic policies aimed at giving corporations more freedom consequently deprived sections of the population of theirs, widening the income gap between the rich and the poor. This uneven distribution of capitalism's fruition is addressed in the baseball films produced during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Seeing as baseball had also been affected by the rising profits of the 80s' less-restricted capitalism, personified by the big-spending practices of owners like George Steinbrenner and Ted Turner, and reflected by the sudden hike of a player's average salary that jumped "from $45,000 in 1975 to $144,000 in 1980 and 891,000 in 1991"[60], the national sport is used by these filmmakers as a microcosm for looking at how the increased worship of the almighty dollar had been responsible for tarnishing the nation's essence of individuality it purported to conserve.

One of the inherited beliefs associated with capitalism that the films attempt to challenge is its connection to individualism. Ronald Reagan was a strong advocate of the myth of the self-made man, which celebrates the American conviction that one can go from rags to riches if one works

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[58] Kurz, The Reagan Years, 96.
[59] See Reagan's Farewell Address: January 11th, 1989.
[60] Tygiel, Pastime, 202-203.

hard enough for it. By using the game of baseball, these films address the contradictions that exist between capitalism and conservatism's emphasis on the achievements of the individual that is reflective of this self-made myth. In his classic Regan biography *Reagan's America*, Garry Wills describes this contradiction as he sees it:

> Conservatism, in a minimal definition, wants to conserve; but capitalism is an instrument for change, for expansion, driven toward ever new resources, products, markets. It reorders life drastically. Even at the paradigmatic simplest model, it changes people from providers of self-sufficiency to specialists...whose reward for this odd imposition of uniformity and regularity in their lives is the hope of a richer return from ever more distant parts of an expanding market...There is nothing less conservative than capitalism, so itchy for the new. It expends, in order to expand; it razes, to rebuild; it destroys , to employ. Whatever merits it may have, conservatism is not among them.[61]

Because of baseball's nature as a sport that promotes individual responsibility done for the good of the collective, it becomes the perfect background to critique capitalism's negligence of the working man's contribution to the profits of those that reside at the top of the financial chain, ultimately implying that self-made success is never totally achieved by oneself. These baseball films are generally concerned with those that capitalism left out. Their critique of capitalism can be divided in two ways. One focuses on the players being taken for granted by owners, attempting to valorize the unseen men's contribution as well as demonstrate the limits to individualism brought forth by capitalism. The other addresses the effects of capitalism on community ties, showing how individual drive for revenue was partly responsible for an increasing sense of social isolation that baseball has previously been known to overcome[62]. For most of these films, the treatment of capitalism is uneven as its consequences are sporadically seen to be as beneficial as they are detrimental, sometimes even within the same picture. No such ambiguity exists in *Eight Men Out*, the one film that makes capitalism one of its principal

[61] Garry Wills, Reagan's America (New York: 2000), 452-453.
[62] Richard C. Crepeau, Baseball (Lincoln: 2000), 25.

overarching themes. The film's unrestrained attack on the vices of capitalism can be attributed to director John Sayles' penchant for, and interest in, leftist politics, as exemplified by his previous film *Matewan* (1987) which dealt with labor unions within the mining community.

In *Eight Men Out*, baseball is seen as being a victim of the greed of gamblers and team owners. As agents operating within the system of capitalism, their selfish manipulation of its ties to the myth of the self-made man demonstrates the system's possible corruption. Therefore, "as part of a corrupt system, the national pastime could not remain undefiled; it could be tampered with"[63]. While Sayles may have gone through "great effort to place the baseball of 1919 apart from the baseball of today", his indictment of the exploitative nature of capitalism could be seen as a contemporary comment on the impact of Reagan's capitalism-fueled America, in which the poor got poorer while the rich got richer[64]. If Ronald Reagan has often been identified as America's father figure during the 80s, then "Sayles is the dissenter...who refuses to honor the father whom he sees as corrupt....For Sayles, Reagan is not the heroic...but the corrupt father who controls 'the game' in as many ways as possible but denies his culpability"[65]. In *Eight Men Out*, the corrupt father is Charles Comiskey (Clifton James), the owner of the White Sox, who is presented as "the light of greed and capitalism" for whom "the players are nothing but pawns for economic wealth and power"[66]. Probably the film's best example of Comiskey's heartless disregard for his players and of his manipulation of the game comes during the meeting between himself and pitcher Eddie Cicotte (David Strathairn). Having been promised a $10,000 bonus if he won 30 games, Cicotte argues that he would have reached that number if Comiskey had not

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[63] Frank Ardonlino, "Ceremonies of Innocence and Experience in *Bull Durham*, *Field of Dreams* and *Eight Men Out*", Journal of Popular Film & Televsion 18, no. 2 (1990) Proquest, 50.
[64] Billmeyer, Reel Baseball, 93.
[65] Ardolino, Journal of Popular Film & Television, 45.
[66] Billmeyer, Reel Baseball, 93.

asked coach Kid Gleason (John Mahoney) to bench him for five games in August. Refusing to give in and pay the bonus Cicotte would have rightly deserved, Comiskey is only interested in keeping his $10,000, ignoring the fact that his players are the ones the fans pay to see and are therefore ultimately responsible for his accumulated profits. The impact of this meeting on the eventual fruition of the plan to fix the 1919 World Series is made apparent by the two scenes that bookend it. Right before the meeting, Chick Gandil (Michael Rooker) is harassing Cicotte and trying to get him in on the scheme, which the latter promptly refuses. Following the meeting, Cicotte tracks down Gandil and agrees to accept $10,000 (his bonus amount) in exchange for throwing games in the upcoming 1919 World Series. The meeting between Cicotte and Comiskey could be seen as the pivotal point in the Black Sox saga. As the movie repeatedly makes clear, Cicotte is the key to the whole fix. This is established early in the film as gamblers 'Sleepy' Bill Burns (Christopher Lloyd) and Billy Maharg (Richard Edson) discuss the possibility of buying the Series and explicitly mention that Cicotte needs to be in the bag or else it can't be done. Cicotte's central cruciality in the evolution of the fix is further established when he becomes the reason Claude 'Lefty' Williams (James Read) decides to jump on board: "If Eddie's in, I'm in". Incidentally, Williams being part of the scheme is what convinces Joe Jackson (D.B. Sweeney) to go along with it as well. In the film, these snowballing repercussions can all be traced back to Comiskey's decision to bench Cicotte to save himself the 10,000$ bonus. Corporate greed bred by capitalism, and the windows of opportunity it opens to gamblers' machinations, is shown to be the source of the sport's fallibility.

The film is quick to show, however, that the perceived purity of the sport, and by extension the country's, was also an illusion. In fact, gambling and hustling is shown to be already well established within baseball, practiced by both society's young and old, whether they be fans or

not. In the film's opening sequence, as two young boys climb up the stands, two adults are heard betting on the next pitch: "5 he does", "Five he don't". Later, the two same kids pull a con job on an adult spectator as one child starts crying while the other tells the adult that he dropped the crying boy's Cracker Jacks. This gets them a nickel. Through this juxtaposition of faceless gambling and tainted youth, Sayles presents gambling and deceit as an already-established institution that has existed for quite some time rather than "a latter-day pestilence brought upon a pure and innocent game"[67]. It is the greed of unchecked capitalism that Sayles blames for enabling the gamblers to shift their sphere of influence from the stands to the dugout.

Eight Men Out also addresses the unwillingness of those at the top of the capitalist food chain to face the corruptive consequences caused by their greedy manipulations, opting instead to ignore the problem, an attitude reminiscent of Reagan's own dismissive behavior when faced with those affected by the detrimental results of his capitalist-driven policies that did not fit with his intended image of America. Reagan's rationalization for such inequalities included the beliefs that "deficits did not exist, were someone else's fault, or did not matter; the poor caused their own plight or were impoverished because they received too much money from the government; the wealthy, on the other hand, had been abused by not permitting to keep more of their income"[68]. These self-serving, self-generated truths permit those in charge to ignore the actual consequences of their capitalist machinations and therefore to pursue their unobstructed quest for profits. The uncontained nature of capitalist corruption, as symbolized by the 1919 Black Sox fix, is best conveyed through Chicago White Sox head coach Kid Gleason's (John Mahoney) inability to stop the fix in the face of stubborn corporate denial, which can best be seen through his futile efforts during the hotel hallway sequence. Not only is this one of the

[67]Thorn, Baseball in the Garden of Eden, xv.
[68] Schaller, Reckoning with Reagan, 181.

film's most aesthetically interesting sequences, but it conveniently and concisely establishes the non-isolated nature of the fix. The camera shows Kid Gleason walking in the hotel hallway. He crosses one of the gamblers involved in the fix, the latter proceeding to enter a room behind Gleason's back. The camera tracks back as Gleason continues down the hallway, stopping to knock at a door. Comiskey's head pops out and Gleason enters just as Swede Risberg (Don Harvey) walks by him and into the frame. The camera now follows Risberg as he knocks on a door and is let in a room by Chick Gandil. As the door closes, Comiskey and Gleason enter the frame from the right and continue down the hallway, the camera tracking behind them as they cross Billy Maharg and Bill Burns. The camera stays with Burns and Maharg, showing them entering Abe Attell's (Michael Mantell) room. We then cut to inside that room to witness Attell reneging on his word, refusing to pay the rest of the payoff money to the players. The camera resumes its run through the hallways after Maharg and Burns' leave, rejoining Comiskey and Gleason on their way to Ban Johnson's (Director of the American League) room. When Comiskey walks out, he barely addresses Gleason (who was waiting outside Johnson's door) and slams the door in his face. Gleason is left alone with every avenue of communication closed to him, his suspicions of the fix left unanswered. By juxtaposing gamblers, players and management within two sequence shots that establish a connection between all three, the scene implies that the fix was known on several levels and was nonetheless allowed to continue. Despite Kid Gleason's efforts to clean up his house, as exemplified through this recent failed interaction with team owner Charles Comiskey, the management's denial and fear of "frightening ramifications" to the team's (and its owner) reputation stopped the exposure dead in its tracks[69]. Like Buck Weaver tells his girlfriend later in the film, everyone was just wishing the boys would pull themselves back together, hoping the situation would disappear on its own.

[69] Eliot Asinof, Eight Men Out (New York: 1987), 161.

Beyond *Eight Men Out*, capitalism's tendency to ignore the role of the unseen men and women that produce the profits enjoyed by the few at the top is repeatedly addressed in the baseball films of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In *Bull Durham*, capitalism's increasingly misguidance in regards to self-made success is mostly attributed to a generational gap that has shifted the way individualism is perceived. The film's main concern with establishing reconciliation between differing perspectives of the national pastime (and the nation by extension) can best be viewed through the film's main conflict between Crash Davis (Kevin Costner) and Nuke Laloosh (Tim Robbins). Emblematic of the generational gap baseball is often said to bridge, their relationship is indicative of the unifying power baseball is seen to possess for many Americans. Crash could be said to personify the nostalgic baseball perspective, one that is typified by a simple love of the game, where one's success is rooted in hard and perseverance. Nuke, on the other hand, is representative of the increasingly capitalist dynamic that has transformed baseball[70], and America, during the 1980s. As a talented, small-town young man who is in line for a profitable Major League career, Nuke might be seen to embody the rags-to-riches narrative implicitly proscribed by capitalism. Therefore, his self-centered attitude may be seen to imply that the progressive distortion of individualism within the economic system of the 1980s has eclipsed the good of the community its advocates claimed it protected. However, while Crash and Nuke may initially appear to be worlds apart, the film seems to suggest that there exists a potential connection between them, a prospective redemption that can be achieved when the younger generation learns from the older. This is visually reinforced when Crash sees Nuke for the first time. After the meeting with the Bulls' manager (Trey Wilson) that leaves Crash in charge of the rookie's development, we cut to a close-up of Nuke talking to reporters about his first career win, a feat Nuke deftly describes as "far out". The camera then tilts up and

[70] Tygiel, Pastime, 202-203.

travels right to reveal Crash looking down at Nuke with a contemptuous look on his face. In choosing to present both poles of baseball personification within the same moving shot instead of cutting from one to the other, Shelton establishes a connection between both individuals and the attitudes they embody. While Nuke represents the success Crash should have had, the latter represents the player Nuke can become. In presenting the possibility that a Crash may exist within Nuke, Shelton seems to confirm that baseball, in its untainted form (personified by Crash), can reconcile the age difference through an exchange between experience and innocence, the former regaining some of the latter as much as the other way around[71]. However, the 1980s' prioritization of profits over human recognition, as reflected in *Bull Durham*, makes it hard for one to remain innocent about baseball for long, a notion Crash is reminded of when he is released from the team once Nuke has finally shaped up and is called up to the Durham Bulls' Major League affiliate. This unappreciative gesture towards Crash is reflective of capitalism's emphasis on new attractions, disregarding the integral role of the past in shaping its success. The system's focus on the 'new', as embodied by star-to-be Nuke, eclipses its past roots in another instance of capitalism's contradictory rhetorical association with tradition. As we see in *Bull Durham*, it is often the work of the unseen and unheralded men (and arguably women in Annie's case, as she is largely responsible for Crash's renewal of his passion for the game and his pursuit of the minor league home run record) that leads to the success of those in the spotlight.

The exploitative and corruptive nature of the free market can also be seen in later films of the era. In *Rookie of the Year* (Daniel Stern, 1993), child-turned-pitcher Henry Rowengartner (Thomas Ian Nicholas) is unknowingly being manipulated by the Chicago Cubs' General Manager Larry Fisher (Dan Hedaya) and his step-father/manager (Bruce Altman). Acting behind

[71] Ardolino, Journal of Popular Film & Television, 44.

Rowengartner's back, management is plotting to sell him to the New York Yankees in return for a hefty profit. This is indicative of some capitalist leaders' lack of concern for those who are instrumental in making them profits, this generalized greed related to corporate ownership being another myth often used in baseball films, as we have seen with *Eight Men Out*. Furthermore, Rowangartner's life is seen to have been changed for the worse by his newfound wealth. This is best exemplified when he gets into an argument with his best friend Clark (Robert Gorman) following the taping of a Pepsi commercial that went over schedule. When Henry arrives late at the river bank to work on their boat, Clark lashes out at him and ends up picking a fight with him. The loss of innocence associated with one's immersion into a profit-driven industry is shown to be harmful to one's social ties as well, as it transforms the benefits of individualism into the detriments of selfishness.

Another side of capitalist machination is observed in *Major League* (David S. Ward, 1989). Initially, the lack of confidence in the players by new team owner Rachel Phelps (Margaret Whitton) is unbeknownst to the new members of the Cleveland Indians. They are unaware that the only reason that they were hired was for the team to finish dead last so that Phelps may be able to relocate to Miami and into a brand-new stadium. When her plan is divulged, the notion of having their expected mediocrity (which is established through monetary terms as most of the players are being paid the 'league minimum') being taken for granted motivates the team to start winning. While the film initially portrays capitalism as abusive of the people on whose shoulders the profits are made, it ultimately presents it as a motivational incentive that can mobilize individuals to work together.

Another element of American life capitalism is shown to have affected is that of community adhesiveness. Baseball films of the era use the industrial changes that have taken place in

baseball throughout the 80s to comment on the nation's similar corporate make-over, using the shifting communal ties between fans and players to illustrate the individual's increasing estrangement to his community brought upon by the widening income gap that is characteristic of Reagan's decade. In *Bull Durham*, Shelton uses the minor league setting to show how baseball should be used to hold communities together, a task which has been hindered by the capitalist growth of the sport that has resulted in fans growing "increasingly frustrated by the constant labor-management warfare [in Baseball] and alarmed by the escalating player incomes"[72]. The minor leagues, the film shows us, has a fan/player dynamic that is much more conducive to the true essence of baseball as a community adhesive. The close connection that exists between player and fan in the minors is explicitly illustrated when Crash strikes out for the first time in the film. Again using a single moving shot to establish the existence of a unified bond, Shelton shows us just how close the fans are to their heroes in minor league baseball. Sitting in the stands with Millie (Jenny Robertson), the team owner's daughter, Annie (Susan Sarandon) hands a note over to a young boy. The camera then tracks the boy's shoes as he walks atop the dugout to hand the note to Crash. The shot continues as Crash writes a response and hands it over to the boy for him to return to Annie. The shot is then reversed as the boy walks back to Annie's seat. This simple little shot demonstrates a communal sense of familiarity present in minor league ball that is lacking in the business-minded establishment of the major leagues, represented here by the different conditions of the baseball stadium, whose smaller minor-league size is much more fan-friendly than your typical big league ballpark. The fan is literally closer to the player and therefore much more a part of the game. It is this closeness and easy accessibility that Shelton implies is perhaps lacking in today's ball game, a lapse that can partly be attributed to the impersonal nature of capitalism.

[72] Tygiel, Pastime, 203.

In *Eight Men Out*, another way in which Sayles differentiates the game of 1919 from its contemporary counterpart is through the player's closeness to the community. The communal nature of baseball is shown to be much more intimate than in today's game and the impact of the fix, caused by capitalist greed, seems to have put a strain on the relationship between fan and player. The previous nature of said relationship is best illustrated by two scenes involving Buck Weaver (John Cusack) and some young fans. Walking home one night, Weaver accepts to throw ground balls with a couple of kids, insisting that they call him by his first name. This unpretentious appreciation for the importance of the fan in baseball sets Weaver apart from the rest of the players and solidifies his position as being against the fix. The next scene with kids comes after the World Series has started and rumours of the White Sox' lack of dedication have been widely circulating. When two boys start arguing about the Sox' integrity in front of Weaver, the ball player tells them that one should stick up for one's friends. This blind dedication to friendship in the film is what will ultimately lead to Weaver's banishment from baseball for life, seeing as his only real crime (besides being in the wrong place at the wrong time) was not telling anyone about it and thus not being a 'squealer'. For some, "the message of the film is unambiguous. For this lack of community, for their pursuit of selfish ambitions at the expense of their team and the game itself, all the 'Black Sox' pay baseball's ultimate price – banishment from the game forever"[73]. However, the film would further seem to imply that the community most affected by the fix is not the team itself but that of the fans, who took the game's innocence for granted. By cinematically re-creating the Black Sox scandal, Sayles, through baseball, forces those who saw the film in the late 80s to confront the nation's inequalities supported by illusory rhetoric, making them live through an incident that "sparked

[73] Marshall Most & Robert Rudd, "Returning to the America that was Meant to Be", Reel Baseball, ed. Stephen C. Wood & J. David Pincus (Jefferson: 2003), 39.

changes in...the character of the game itself, in the history of baseball's links to American society at large, and in mythology, by dispelling forever the cardinal legend of innocence. Innocence is precious, but truth is better"[74]. In this sense, *Eight Men Out* is not "an attempt to right an old wrong" but rather an introspective venture into how that wrong was able to strive in the first place[75]. While most writings about the film tend to read it as a redemptive vehicle for 'Shoeless' Joe Jackson seeing as it portrays him as an unknowing victim taken advantage of by corrupt agents of capitalism, one could argue that the film does not try to proclaim his innocence but rather forces the viewer to accept the fact that, because of the selfish atmosphere fostered by capitalism, he did indeed participate, no matter how half-heartedly. If anything, the film's true sympathies lie with Buck Weaver, who holds a greater part in the film and is unambiguously shown to have been dead-set against the fix from the very beginning, his association with the scandal resulting from others' (Chick Gandall; Swede Risberg) assumptions that his participation was a given.

A more balanced treatment of capitalism and community can be seen in *Field of Dreams*, the Reaganite baseball film par-excellence released in 1989, the year Reagan left office. One can see Reagan's blind adherence to the Laffer curve[76] reflected in Ray Kinsella's (Kevin Costner) unshakable faith in the eventual successful fruition of his home-made baseball field built with the hopes of attracting dead ballplayers. Initially, the film seems to be critical of farming conditions left in the wake of the Reagan administration as "farm income, after increasing in the early Reagan years, had been cut in nearly a third by decade's midpoint and was actually lower than it

[74] Asinof, Eight Men Out, xviii.
[75] Billmeyer, Reel Baseball, 92.
[76] The Laffer Curve is the name given to the economic concept conceived by economist Arthur Laffer and adopted by Ronadl Reagan to support his economic policies. "Laffer's principle held that tax revenue would increase as taxation decreased from 100 percent, as people would have incentive to earn more income and therefore would pay more taxes, rather than searching for loopholes to avoid excessive taxation" (Kurz, The Reagan Years, 153).

had been in 1970. Not only were farmers earning less than before the boom, but they were now burdened with immense debt"[77]. While Ray's debt is caused by the transformation of his corn crops into a divinely prophesied baseball field, the film shows that the solution to his calamity is the field itself and therefore the same as its source. Like Reagan's tax cuts for the rich in the spirit of the free market, which initially brought the country into recession before initiating one of the nation's biggest economic booms, Ray's faith in the conviction of his ideals (embodied by the baseball field) led to the successful fruition of his dreams[78]. Ray's brother-in-law Mark (Timothy Busfield), as an outsider trying to tell Ray how to run his business (and therefore his own destiny), can be compared to Federal business-intervention that Reagan was strongly set against, representing an intrusive entity that undermines one's vision in favor of rules and regulations. In this sense, instead of being critical of the unfavorable farming conditions resulting from Reagan's governmental policies, the film seems to denounce the fact that "by 1986 and 1987 government payment to the Farmbelt had reached record levels", ignoring the fact that these interventions "were largely responsible for bolstering the farm economy"[79]. Instead, *Field of Dreams* proposes that redemption lies within the individual's faith in the grandeur of his dreams. While this may seem contradictory, so is 'free market' economics; a fact often brought to light within the baseball pictures of the era. At the film's end, the baseball field stands like Reagan's often-referred 'City on a Hill'[80], serving as a guiding beacon for everyone else to follow, a shining symbol of the sport's (and the nation's) unique superiority that draws in cars (and profits) by the thousands .

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[77] Johnson, Sleepwalking Through History, 427.
[78] Kurz, The Reagan Years, 247-249.
[79] Johnson, Sleepwalking Through History, 427.
[80] See Reagan's Farewell Speech: January 11th, 1989. Reference to John Winthrop's 1630 "A Model of Christian Charity": http://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html

The appeal of baseball films in the late 80s and early 90s has been seen as indicative of a cultural shift "in American values" that veered "away from the materialism and consumerism of the 1980s"[81]. Capitalism in baseball movies is often seen (*Field of Dreams* being a notable exception) as somewhat detrimental to both the game and the community it holds together, its distorted association with individualism partly responsible for the weakening of communal ties in the country. While some films like *Field of Dreams* further promote and propagate the sole power of the individual's dreams as being sufficient for success, the majority of these films portray capitalist intrusion as detrimental to the cooperative dynamic that is at heart of the nation and its pastime.

[81] Most, Reel Baseball, 43.

THE BASEBALL TEAM: SURROGATE AMERICAN FAMILY

The preservation of family values was an important tenet of Reagan's rhetoric. However, like most of the values he cherished, the family praised by the President's was one seeped in the past. In a 1986 radio broadcast aired around Christmas time, President Reagan informed the nation that "it's more important than ever for our families to affirm an older and more lasting set of values"[82]. This longing for older values is reflective of his tendency to valorize the past. In this instance, the family alluded to is one headed by the father, which in turn serves to re-establish the proper values of masculinity. Following the rise of feminism in the 1970s, "in the face of changed economic and social conditions, normative versions of masculinity were problematic in the present, and threatened in the future. The 'new' social and political conservatism of the late seventies/early eighties reflected a hope that allegiance to old doctrines might somehow restore 'masculinity'"[83]. One way of doing this was in promoting the qualities of the nuclear family, in which the father figure is commonly held to possess most authority. However, Reagan ignored "the fact that for many Americans the nuclear family was not attainable even when desired. (He also ignored the reality of his own dysfunctional family)"[84]. During his presidency, "family structures were further sundered. Demographics projected that at least half of recently married couples would end in divorce...[and] one in five American children lived with a single parent, and that parent was likely to work, leaving children even less supervised than in the past"[85]. The disparities in family structure that existed at the end of the decade, in regards to whose authority, male or female, ruled the household, are treated in different ways in the baseball films of the late 80s/early 90s. While some attempt to re-affirm the

[82] See Reagan's Christmas Time Radio Address, December 20th, 1986.
[83] Marjorie D. Kibby, "Nostalgia for the Masculine", Canadian Journal of Film Studies 7, no.1 (1998) Proquest, 20.
[84] Tanya Melich, The Republican War Against Women (New York: 1998), 165-166.
[85] Johnson, Sleepwalking Through History, 451.

importance of the family man, most use the baseball team to address the shifting conditions of the family unit and gender roles that took place during the decade.

While most baseball films of the era deal with Reagan's advocated values in more implicit ways, *Field of Dreams* celebrates them quite explicitly. Released the year Reagan left office, *Field of Dreams* more than any other baseball film at the time embodies the President`s rhetoric. It has been argued that the film is "in many ways a typical product of the Reagan... era as described in some key critical studies: it is an escapist fantasy; it sentimentalizes the nuclear patriarchal family; it bears features of the father-son melodrama; and – more generally – its values are highly conservative"[86]. The film seems to want to fill the rhetorical gap that was left when Reagan left office, using the institution of baseball as a stand-in for the nation as it is intent on continuing to spread Reagan's belief that "we have every right to dream heroic dreams"[87]. As one critic pointed out, "you gotta believe to enjoy *Field of Dreams*", just as you had to believe in Reagan's optimistic promises to vote for his leadership[88].

The film's adherence to Reaganite conservative values, however, has been questioned because of its seemingly sympathetic view of the 1960s counterculture mentality. The main element singled out as evidence to this is the decision to change the identity of an important character from the film's original source, W.P. Kinsella's novel *Shoeless Joe*:

> *Field of Dreams* transformed Kinsellas' incarnation of J.D. Salinger into fictional Terrence Mann, a former radical and sixties icon...Disillusioned, Mann had become embittered and dropped from sight. None of these characters [including *Bull Durham's* Annie Savoy (Susan Sarandon)], real or fictional, completely surrender their social ideals or spirit of rebellion, but they discover

[86] Caroline M. Cooper, "Field of Dreams", Literature/Film Quarterly 23, no. 3 (1995) Proquest, 164.
[87] See Reagan's First Inaugural Address: January 20th, 1981.
[88] Mike Littwin , "You gotta Believe to Enjoy *Field of Dreams*", Los Angeles Times, 14 May 1989, n.p.

> a form of re-entry into the American mainstream through the healing power of baseball[89].

When looked at more closely, the 60s, rather than being celebrated and re-integrated within the mainstream culture, is shown to be the cause of many of the problems associated with Ray's life (and by extension, the 80s.) First of all, the film's opening sequence tells us that Ray's rebellious youth during the 60s was partly to blame for him defying his father and refusing to play catch with him, which we quickly learn is his life's biggest regret. In this sense, the 60s are seen has having put a strain on the sanctity and unity of the father-son relationship, a rectification of which has often been prioritized and personified by Reagan's patriarchal persona . Like "many contemporary Hollywood films", *Field of Dreams* is "an unabashed apology for patriarchy, demonstrating a concern with the status and function of the father and their inheritance by the son"[90]. The son's inheritance of the father's values is seen to have been hindered by the countercultural nature of the 60s.

Another evocation of the 60s can be seen in the PTA meeting sequence, during which Annie (Amy Madigan), Ray's wife, invokes the Constitution and the Bill of Rights to justify her opposition to banning books that are deemed too controversial to teach in class. While at this point the film seems to praise the liberal ethos of the 60s through Annie's upheaval, it quickly turns around to scorn its legacy as the film's contention that the decade's issues are outdated is illustrated by Ray's indifference and total ignorance of the social debate taking place around him at the meeting. The film's lasting feelings concerning the 60s can best be understood through the tumultuous initial introduction between Ray Kinsella and Terrence Mann:

> Annie's defense of Mann's work through her invocation of peace and love is also ridiculed when Mann, shoving Ray out the door, yells that he too

[89] Tygiel, Pastime, 219.
[90] Cooper, Literature/Film Quarterly, 165.

> remembers the sixties man; his face filled with scorn, he shouts, "peace, love, DOPE", leaving for last the word which most evokes the conservative view of the era and subtly blames it (rather than the social policies of the 1980s) for today's need to have a "war" on drugs[91]

The indictment of the 60s as being responsible for the social conditions of the 80s, which in turn has affected the stability of the family structure and its expectations of gender roles, can also be seen in *Bull Durham* through the character of Annie Savoy (Susan Sarandon). Her superficial portrayal of a take-charge woman using her independence to guide a rookie to baseball maturity[92] is typically seen as an embodiment of "the free-spirited, sexually liberated truth seekers of the 1960s, who dabbled in religions seeking fulfilment", which is in itself a remnant of "1960s countercultural thinking" that is supposed to run through many of the baseball films of the genre's Golden Age[93]. This oversimplification of Annie's character overlooks the film's conclusive statements regarding her proper place in society. The 60s sexual liberation associated with Annie, which she uses on Nuke Laloosh (Tim Robins) to shape him into a better ballplayer, is shown to fail. In fact, it is when Nuke stops having sex with her that he starts winning consistently. While this is part of baseball's superstition of believing in whatever it takes to help you win (Crash explains as such when Annie confronts him for telling Nuke not to have sex with her if he wants to keep his streak alive), the detrimental effect associated with liberated sex (a token of the 60s) might be seen as commentary on its distracting nature when it comes to masculine success.

In his essay "The Family of Baseball: Perception of the American Family in Baseball Films", William Simons identifies five major family-related themes that stand out in baseball movies:

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[91] Mary K. Kirtz, "Canadian Book, American Film", Literature/Film Quarterly 23, no.1 (1995), 30.
[92] See Annex p.61.
[93] Tygiel, Pastime, 219.

> First, baseball films mirror the conflict, instability, anxiety and dysfunction that beset many American families. A second major theme depicts the national pastime as a place for a fatherless boy to acquire a male role model. A third motif arises in the familial genesis through baseball, either by the team evolving into a surrogate family and/or by the game bringing together individuals who discover mutual affection. Fourth, the changing role of women means that females no longer appear solely as fans, daughters, mothers, girlfriends, and wives in baseball films; they are also cast as players, owners, agents, and priestesses. Finally, a fifth theme depicts baseball as a vehicle through which family reconciliation takes place.[94]

Save for the issue of women's roles, *Field of Dreams* could be said to touch, although unevenly, on all of these themes, baseball being the cause of, and solution to, all of the family's problems. The film centralizes baseball as Ray's only possible vehicle for patriarchal redemption when it visually positions him in a state similar to 'Shoeless' Joe Jackson (Ray Liotta) when we first meet the latter. As Jackson delivers his nostalgic monologue about the unique textures of the game, he and Kinsella are standing on the same side of the backstop fence that obstructs the camera's view. The chained fence emphasizes the locked-out status of Jackson from baseball following his banishment from the game for life by baseball commissioner Kennesaw 'Mountain' Landis following the 1919 Black Sox scandal, which is mirrored by Kinsella being locked out of his own baseball memories because of the alienation from his father. The film offers both male individuals a second chance at recapturing their innocence, which incidentally can only be achieved through baseball.

Field of Dreams aside, the baseball films produced in 1988-89 seem to leave out the family unit altogether. Discounting Eddie Cicotte's wife and two daughters in *Eight Men Out*, the players embodied in these films seem to be lacking any family outside of baseball. Therefore, Simon's theme of family dysfunction is usually juxtaposed to the baseball team as a surrogate

[94] Simons, Reel Baseball, 191-192.

family. In *Eight Men Out*, if Charles Comiskey is taken to represent the governing patriarchal establishment, head coach Kid Gleason can be seen as the impotent everyday father, powerless to do anything for his boys because of corporate dominance. In this sense, the corrupting nature of capitalism is shown to hinder the unity of the American family, which puts *Eight Men Out* in line with the baseball films of the era that "generally portray the American family as troubled"[95]. The dysfunctional nature of the 1919 White Sox is best revealed when catcher Ray Schalk (Gordon Clapp) attacks Lefty Williams after the latter just lost them the game. The altercation is followed by Gleason challenging smart aleck Chick Gandil in the locker room. Gandil's arrogant indifference to the qualms of his team prompts Gleason to rush him, creating a riot as players attempt to break them apart. The fix is shown to instill distrust and animosity within the baseball family, leading to the creation of an individuality that is no longer part of the team.

A League of Their Own perhaps more directly than any other baseball film juxtaposes the baseball family to the biological family, showing how the harmony of one affects the other. While the character of Dottie Hinson (Geena Davis) is indeed married, the World War II context of the film places her husband (Bill Pullman) away from the home and turns her baseball team into Dottie's second family. In fact, Jimmy Dugan (Tom Hanks), the manager of the Rockford Peaches, and Dottie could be seen as the father and mother of the surrogate baseball family. Dugan instills discipline and lessons (such as reminding players that there is no crying in baseball) while Dottie looks out for the well-being of the team members (such as when she gets everybody out of the bar). Meanwhile, Dottie has to deal with her biological sister who feels overshadowed by her success. The impact one family has over the other is clearly established when Dugan wants to take Kit out of a game near the end of the film. When the latter tries to

[95] Simons, Reel Baseball, 192.

convince him that she can finish the game, Jimmy asks Dottie what she thinks. Dottie sides with Jimmy and tells him her sister's through as she's "pitching grapefruits out there". In that instant, Kit feels betrayed by both families at once. While the immediate repercussions seem to affect primarily her already strained relationship with Dottie, the rising sibling rivalry is seen in turn to impact the team's morale and sense of togetherness; in other words, the (baseball) family's unity. Kit's rejection from the game by her sister makes her bitter and causes her to get into a fight with a teasing Doris (Rosie O'Donnell). The result is a fit of disharmony within the team as players argue with each other over who was to blame. The baseball feud is then again replaced by the family conflict as Kit and Dottie finally have it out in the locker room. In placing the climactic conflict resolution between both sisters in the locker room, the hub and home of the surrogate baseball family, the film explicitly ties in both family dynamics together and by extension their inextricable reliance on one another. Only when Kit is traded, the biological family therefore separated and its rivalry for the moment neutralized, can the surrogate baseball family be harmonious again. The result of the film's climactic ball game, in which Kit literally runs Dottie down at the plate to win the championship, has been read as an example of baseball restoring the family ties it had initially severed. "By allowing Kit to transcend her jealous, younger sibling persona, this baseball epiphany makes possible a new relationship between sisters based on mutual respect"[96]. However, Kit's transcendence is unclear in the film as she obviously has spite in her heart as she ignores the third base coach's signal to stop and charges unapologetically into Dottie. One might even say that is was her jealousy that made her strong, not her transcendence of it. Furthermore, the sisters' relationship is not seen to be reconciled until years later during the Hall of Fame ceremony, as we never see them together again in the past after the big game. In this case, while the memory of baseball may have brought the sisters together, its practical reality

[96] Simons, Reel Baseball, 204.

(as experienced by Dottie and Kit) pulled them apart, making it clear that when it comes to family, the only one that counts is baseball. The previously stated dysfunction of the American family near the end of the 1980s is transposed to the baseball diamond. Through the film's treatment of family through its surrogate baseball counterpart, *A League of their Own* uses one national institution (baseball) to comment on another (the family).

Women within the American Family

In addition to addressing issues concerning the American family, some of these films are also concerned with the roles women play in the world of baseball, which by extension are reflective of the roles they play in American society. The establishment of the various roles women play in these films can be seen to be summarized in the opening of *Bull Durham*. At the end of the film's opening camera movement covering Annie's baseball shrine (a collection of photographs and baseball paraphernalia set up as a place of worship), we come to a halt at the latter's vanity bureau as she is pampering herself in front of two visible mirrors. The result is a triple sight of Annie, her physical body seen in profile as her face is viewed from two different angles created by the mirrors' reflections. This introduction of Annie's character through reflective representation, her true self partially hidden from us, is indicative of the unfixed female identities assigned to her within the film. One could see both reflections as the identities we are exposed to during the bulk of the film. Her true identity, the one that will dominate by the end of the film, remains for the moment partly unseen. The two identities represented through the mirrored reflections are that of a 'baseball Annie' (a real-life common name for a hardcore female baseball fan) and a sexually liberated, self-sustaining woman who, as she so instructs Millie (Jenny Robertson), the ballplayer groupie, "takes responsibility for her own actions". While this may initially seem to diverge from the typical hostile attitude expressed towards the

strong-minded, man-free woman in many films of the 80s [97], Annie's ultimate reality check, as opposed to baseball, seems to come in the form of gender myth confirmation rather than deconstruction. By the end of the picture, the identity that was partially hidden from us in the opening shot is revealed. Annie's true position is one that stands by her man, accepting Crash's mid-night departure as an honorable trait of the ballplayer who just wants to finish the season. From then on, her liberation has been turned into domestication, placing her within the stereotypical feminine confines of the home. While her liberal nature is portrayed throughout most of the film as colorful and eccentric, Crash's conservative approach to both life and baseball serves to undermine the usefulness of such frivolity in recapturing the essence of the game, and by extension that of American society. In this sense, the film seems to say that both sport and country need to return to its traditional values, a sentiment reflective of the Reagan rhetoric.

A more drastic shift in perceived women's roles is presented in *A League of Their Own*. Imbued with a feminist sensitivity that arguably comes from its female director Penny Marshall, the film is interested in making people discover part of baseball's (and America's) forgotten history. In tackling a specific, little known moment in the history of baseball, director Penny Marshall opens up the sport's scope and uses it as a vehicle to address issues concerning women's roles in society. The integration of women within a masculine domain offered itself as a subject ripe to examine society's attitudes concerning female equality. Through Dottie Hinson (Geena Davis) the film might be seen to take a critical perspective reflective of Third Wave Feminism. If "the task of Third World Feminism is...not so much to advance a successor [feminist] theory as to apply a thoroughgoing but always unfinished critique that holds open the

[97] See Susan Faludi, Backlash (New York: 1991), 113.

spaces of possibility", *League* offers various possibilities of womanhood through the members of its Rockford Peaches seeing as none is more of a woman than the next as their differences are set aside for, and reconciled by, their common love of baseball[98]. In establishing characters that get to live their dream while simultaneously being reminded of their outsider status, *League* follows one of Third Wave feminism's emphases on "recognizing privilege and oppression simultaneously"[99] as valuable to one's identity. Furthermore, the film seems to present an inner-conflict present within the ballplayers of the AAGPBL that has them torn between living their own baseball life and being there for their husbands who are, for the majority, off fighting World War II. The conflicting mindset experienced by these woman ballplayers is best reflected during the scene when Doris (Rosie O'Donnell) talks about her husband that ridiculed her for wanting to play ball. While she feels a certain sense of duty towards her husband, her experience in the AAGPBL as showed her that his objections were unfounded and that her love for one doesn't negate her devotion to the other.

The inner-turmoil associated with choosing between either the domestic sphere of the home and the public one of baseball is established from the very beginning when an older Dottie (Lynn Carwright) is hesitant to leave for the AAGPBL reunion/induction at the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. Like *Bull Durham*'s Annie Savoy, Dottie is initially introduced while she's looking at herself in the mirror. Once again, this double image of Dottie (the physical woman and the reflection) addresses the existence of multiple representational possibilities for women in general and in the film specifically. Through the use of the mirror, the picture foreshadows Dottie's two diverging personalities she will have to struggle with during the movie. The

[98] Margrit Shildrick, "Introduction: Sex and Gender", Third Wave Feminism (New York: 2004), 67.
[99] Ednie Kaeh Garrison, "Contests for the Meaning of Third Wave Feminism", Third Wave Feminism (New York: 2004), 32.

wedding of the public and domestic is visually emphasized soon after when we see an insert of her baseball glove getting dropped over her folded clothes in her suitcase, literally invading its contents and forcing her to re-visit a past that puts into question the stability of the woman she presently identifies with.

One of the film's major concerns in dealing with the AAGPBL is to address how "even when female players are seen to be skilled, their femininity is highlighted at the expense of their abilities"[100], a reality faced by actual members of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. This is most obvious in the physically revealing uniforms the players are forced to wear, as well as the charm school sessions the women have to go through (which in actuality were required for all applicants, not just the signed players)[101]. The emphasis on the league's members having to maintain a degree of femininity is reflective of how the game had become such a prevalent symbol of masculinity for many Americans. In his study "Baseball and the Reconstitution of American Masculinity, 1880-1920" Michael Kimmel observes how "baseball became one of the central mechanisms by which masculinity was reconstituted at the turn of the century"[102]. Furthermore, the masculinity that developed through baseball was one that "reinforced the unequal distribution of power based on class, race, and gender. In that sense, also, baseball was truly an American game"[103]. The sport's segregation of women from men is addressed in the film through the short inclusion of softball. Near the beginning of the film's flashback, we see Dottie and Kit (Lori Petty) playing ball. Not hard but soft. The initial positioning of the two sisters within a softball setting is significant because it establishes the

[100] Dayna B. Daniels, "You Throw Like a Girl", Film & History 35, no.1 (2005) International Index to Performing Arts, 34.
[101] Helmer, Baseball America, 47.
[102] Michael S. Kimmel, "Baseball and the Reconstitution of American Masculinity, 1880-1920", Sport, Men, and the Gender Order, eds. Michael A. Messner & Don F. Fabo (Champaign: 1990), 59.
[103] Kimmel, Sport, Men, and the Gender Order, 65.

place in which women were expected to exercise their athletic urges. It embodies society's belief that "baseball, as a professional sport, is work. Baseball is part of the public world and therefore not proper for women to play. Women should be happy playing softball and other leisure"[104]. Women in *A League of Their Own* don't play softball for long. While Penny Marshall dispels this masculine myth of women's incapability to play baseball immediately, one finds that the imperative of femininity is harder to shake off. As Dottie gets an offer to try out for the professional league, her disbelief is attenuated when she learns that "they're looking for dolls too". Now she understands. The fact that her talent (confirmed by the walk off hit we've just witnessed) would be irrelevant without her beautiful face is confirmed soon after when we are introduced to Marla Hooch (Megan Cavanagh). While she can switch-hit bombs out of a gymnasium, she does not fit the physical mold the league is looking for. In other words, she is too masculine, a fact that is attributed to her not having had a mother to raise her, perhaps a commentary on the possible consequences that can result from the excessive patriarchal manipulation that was emphasized in the 1980s.

The shifting masculine attitudes regarding female athletic recognition in contrast to prioritized femininity are embodied by Rockford Peaches coach Jimmy Dugan (Tom Hanks), whose character development evolves from antagonistic to cooperative in the face of women taking over baseball. When Ira Lowenstein (David Strathairn) confronts Jimmy after the Peaches' first game, the latter complains that what he has are not ballplayers but girls[105], and "girls are what you sleep with after the game, not what you coach during the game". This opinion is reflective of the masculine insecurity which the film shows was inherent in the initial

[104] Leslie Heaphy, "Women Playing Hardball", Baseball and Philosophy, ed. Eric Bronson (Chicago: 2004), 247.
[105] The fact that women are referred to as 'girls' even within the League's name is indicative of the masculine insecurity associated with having women take over the sport.

process of including women in professional baseball. Little by little, Dugan discovers that his team actually can play ball and soon decides to involve himself in the team's success. However, the leader role has already been filled by Dottie, whose initiative and knowledge of the game, the film tells us, is as worthy as any man's, including a former big leaguer. The initial confrontation with Dottie that arises when Dugan decides to take back the helms of the team grows into a mutual respect that eventually erases gender lines. The full acceptance of Dottie by Jimmy is brought to full fruition during a break in one of the film's final baseball montage sequences when Jimmy acknowledges that Dottie did a good job of spitting out a mouthful of tobacco. This typically masculine act performed by Dottie validates, in Jimmy's eyes, her belonging in baseball and overshadows her feminine requirements to finally make her a complete ballplayer without gender limitations. This may be seen as Marshall's nod to the possibility for women from the late 80s and early 90s to be accepted within the public sphere without sacrificing their feminine qualities. When Jimmy starts seeing her as an equal, the patriarchal authority in charge of the team gets toned down and is counterbalanced by Dottie's presence, establishing a give-and-take cooperative relationship suggestive of shared parental responsibilities.

The perception of a woman occupying a place within the public domain in the late 80s takes an interesting turn in *Major League*, the discrepancy between the film's intended original ending and its ultimate conclusion demonstrative of the general audience's continuing wariness concerning women occupying positions of power. Initially, the filmmakers seem to have wanted to flip around the backlash-induced belief that powerful women are a threat to masculine success[106]. In the original ending, Rachel Phelps' (Margaret Whitton) plan to have her team finish dead last turns out to be reverse-psychology scheme that was intent on creating an

[106] Faludi, Backlash, 137-138.

unifying drive for success among the team's ballplayers. In this sense, the film's underlying assumption concerning women in power seems to be that rather than being detrimental to the development of familial cooperation, they're actions are ultimately beneficial to family/group unity. However, the fact that her well-intended actions needed to take the guise of selfish corporate machinations is reflective of the filmmaker's awareness of the backlash feelings against successful women occupying a typically masculine position. It seems that if she would have been supportive from the beginning, her credibility would have been jeopardized for both the team/family members of the Cleveland Indians and the film's audience. The latter's inability to accept positive repercussions linked to the actions of an authoritative woman is clear from the ending that ended up on the big screen, in which Phelps is shown to be morally crushed rather than pleased by her team's newfound success. According to director David S. Ward, test screenings revealed that the majority of viewers did not buy the ultimate character reversal exposing the owner's true well-intentioned colors[107]. While this audience wariness may be attributable to the simple notion that most people may frown upon last-minute turnarounds that change the film's entire meaning, I would argue that their reluctance stems from the remnants of the backlash against successful women that was prevalent in many movies of the 1980s.

In the early 1990s, as the country was being managed by a new President (George Bush), one that was intent on creating "a kinder and gentler America"[108], baseball films continued to address the woman's question in America mostly in the form of the family film. While *A League of Their Own* stands out as being explicitly about women's direct involvement in the male domain of baseball, the majority of baseball titles produced in the next two years (1993-94) relegates

[107] See Director's Introduction to Alternate Ending on *Major League: Wild Thing Edition* DVD, Paramount Entertainment (2007)
[108] Schaller, Right Turn, 61.

women to traditional roles of wife and mother. However, in a possible attempt to acknowledge those that had been ignored by Reagan's domestic policies and indict the shortcomings of the 80s' prophesied need for patriarchal figures, many of these films include the character of the single mother. The presence of the single mother has mostly been found significant as an indicator of the prevalent theme of absent fathers in baseball films. This may be reflective of the void created for a strong patriarchal figure in the wake of Reagan's departure from the White House. *The Sandlot* (David M. Evans, 1993), *Rookie of the Year* (1993), *Little Big League* (Andrew Scheinman, 1994) and *Angels in the Outfield* (William Dear, 1994) all include protagonists who have lost their fathers. However, their attitudes concerning the father's absence is divided between a desire for the return of the father and an acknowledgement that the need for a father is not as crucial when a strong mother figure is present.

In *Angels in the Outfield*, the success of a baseball team is directly linked to the reunion of a boy and his father; or so Roger Bonman (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) is led to believe. Bonman's father promised that he would take him back and out of foster care when the California Angels, a team the film is quick to establish as beyond hopeless, win the pennant. His prayers are literally answered and the team pulls through. However, Bonman's father doesn't make good on his promise as Bonman is instead adopted by the Angels' head coach George Knox (Danny Glover). When Bonman inquires as to what will happen to his foster mother (Brenda Fricker), the latter replies that her job here is done. Furthermore, Bonman and his fellow adoptee (Milton Davis Jr.) repeatedly exclaim that they'll finally be a family, even though there is no prospective mother in sight seeing as Knox is unmarried. This suggests that the film acknowledges the possible failure of father figures to live up to their expected duty and stresses the need to find alternative fitting figures in order to restore patriarchal order, a restoration possible in the film by one's faith in

baseball. Furthermore, the strong role of the foster mother in taking care of the two boys (future fathers) is undermined by the fact that she is just there until the right solitary man comes along to take over. This reluctance to award women a contribution that goes beyond training for proper patriarchal preparation is symbolic of the continuing impact the Reagan rhetoric had after he left office. While willing to acknowledge the importance of women's influence within society, the film seems to limit the worth of said influence to the extent that it can restore the righteousness of its masculine counterpart.

In *Little Big League*, the mother's (Ashley Crow) only task is to prepare the patriarchal heir for his future position as head of the table. Furthermore, in this case being a single mother does not signify independence. Although she has lost her husband, her own father (Jason Robards), a millionaire and owner of the Minnesota Twins baseball team, has been taking care of her and her son Billy (Luke Edwards) ever since. She is not shown to have a job and when her father dies (in this case the absent father figure takes the form of the grand-father, the implication of the loss of an even older patriarchal entity perhaps a reference to Reagan, the ultimate father figure and oldest president) she is only there to shelter and guide her son as he takes his grand-father's place in the public domain as head of the Twins. Again, as in *Angels in the Outfield*, the mother figure, although acting alone, is of importance merely as formative agent in the continual re-affirmation of patriarchal conformity, there to guide fatherless children until one is found. While these two films acknowledge the worth of female responsibility that was partly ignored through Reagan's cuts in social spending, its value is shown to be useful only until a worthy father figure becomes available.

In *The Sandlot* and *Rookie of the Year*, the mother figure is shown to possess more authority and her presence is still considered invaluable even though a new father figure can be found. In

The Sandlot, the single mother is freshly re-married but still possesses the upper hand in the household. While baseball is used again here to create a bond between Scotty Smalls (Tom Guiry) and his new step father (Dennis Leary), it is at the insistence of the former's mother (Karen Allen) that this bond starts to be developed. When this shows to be detrimental, as Smalls gets a black eye by catching a pitch from his step father, she forces him to go out there and "get into trouble". The mother's insistence that her son find his own way is reflective of a more liberal approach to the game. This is also reinforced through the setting of the film in 1962, a time just before the recognition of minorities, including women's rights, began to occupy American minds. Unlike the earlier baseball films that ended up indicting the 60s for many of the problems of the 80s, *The Sandlot* celebrates its openness to alternative possibilities almost as much as it does the game's true essence as a game that kids play.

Mary Rowengartner (Amy Morton) in *Rookie of the Year* is arguably the most interesting single mother character within this string of family baseball films. Like in *The Sandlot*, she is authoritative yet permissive. Furthermore, she has no problem ridding herself of a man if he is found inadequate, which she does near the film's ending when she finds out her boyfriend was planning to sell her son to the Yankees. However, what distinguishes her from other mother figures is her relationship to baseball. During the entire movie, Henry and the audience is led to believe that his deceased father was a big time ballplayer in whose footsteps the former wishes to walk into. At the end of the film, we learn that it was in fact his mother that was the professional ballplayer, the inspirational source that drives Henry shifting from the father to the mother. While the truth needed to be hidden because of the patriarchal state of mind that demands a man be held heroic within a masculine domain like baseball, Henry's maturation, helped in large part by his mother's guidance, has made him ready to accept that women can have as much lasting

influence on man's upbringing than a man can. The film recalls *A League of their Own* in its insistence that domesticity doesn't negate possible success within the public sphere. Like Dottie Hinson, Mary Rowengartner has found belonging and satisfaction within both spheres, both being equally beneficial to the nation's children, and therefore its future.

RELIGIOUS PERSUASION, SPIRITUAL APPEAL

While Reagan "had no use of organized religion"[109], he tapped into the psyche of many who did by rallying "disaffected Christians" to the Republican cause[110]. Using the influence of groups like the Moral Majority[111] and televangelists to tie in religious conviction to his rhetoric, Reagan repeatedly invoked religion to justify the nation's destiny and optimism to the American public. "He described the bible as containing answers to 'all the world's complex and horrendous problems", an approach which is reflective of the President's penchant for stories[112]. Incidentally, baseball films also rely on faith for success as the sport's appeal is often compared to a religious following. The connection of baseball to religion has been explained in terms of ritual:

> The transcendent quality of baseball may derive from its origins in ancient ritual; its close adherence to the growing season suggests the primitive religion that lies somewhere in its distant past. As historians and anthropologists have instructed us, baseball, like all ball games, begins in ancient fertility rites, sharing roots with religion and drama.[113]

Baseball films made near the end of the decade reflect the religious connotations of baseball in different ways. The film most concerned with baseball as a religious foundation comparable to Christianity is *Field of Dreams*. The film greatly relies on faith to make its magic work. While the film has been read as parable of Easter faith, in which "death, in all its forms – alienation from loved ones, disgrace and failure – has been overcome"[114], the real religion explored within the film is that of baseball:

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[109] Cannon, President Reagan, 34.
[110] Schaller, Right Turn, 158.
[111] Kurz, Reagan Years, 64.
[112] Schaller, Right Turn, 158.
[113] Grella, Reel Baseball, 69.
[114] Edward McNulty, Praying the Movies (Louisville: 2001), 94.

> The entire movie...depends, in just about every detail, on the acceptance of baseball as a form of worship; it simply demands that the audience comply with such concepts such as divine being, the immortality of the soul, the existence of ghosts, and a sport that expresses the design of an essentially benevolent universe.[115]

The mysterious voice (of God?) that prompts Ray to build the field, the forgiving attitude bestowed upon the Black Sox' eight banished players and the recurring comparison of Iowa to Heaven all give the film a supernatural aura that links the sport to a religious faith capable of overcoming anything, even the regrets of the past. In this sense baseball can be seen as the Reagan-praised "American spirit which knows no ethnic, religious, social, political, regional, or economic boundaries", a spirit that can be returned to its initial innocence by reinventing history's damaging events[116]. As Ray Kinsella observes in *Shoeless Joe*, the source novel for the film, "a ballpark at night is more like a church than a church"[117], a notion that *Field of Dreams* takes to heart as it presents its ballpark as a place where miracles happen and redemption of past sins is possible. However, as the film looks back towards an ideal past, it ignores the contradictions that were inherent within it. By dealing with the perceived injustice of the 1919 Black Sox scandal and attempting to erase its damaging impact, the film "wishes aloud that America could return to the innocent days of white baseball[118]. When there were no stains on American honor, no scandal, not dirty tricks, no surprises...When the sox stayed white"[119]. *Field of Dreams* uses baseball's spiritual dimensions to absolve the nation of its rhetorical inconsistencies and return it to its purified state, no matter how inaccurate it might be.

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[115] Grella, Reel Baseball, 71.
[116] See Reagan's 1980 Republican Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speech: July 17th, 1980.
[117] W.P. Kinsella, Shoeless Joe (New York: 1982), 135.
[118] Issues of race always big part of rhetorical discrepancies in regards to both Reagan and Baseball
[119] Harlan Jacobson, "Shot in the Dark", Film Comment 25, no.3 (1989) Proquest, 78-79.

A more direct relationship between Christianity and baseball is presented in *Angels in the Outfield*, as the whole basis of the film revolves around the acceptance of Christian faith (symbolized by the angels) as a means to an end, its manifestation conveyed through baseball success. In tying the faith of one to the other, *Angels* follows Reagan's tendency to justify one's belief in the nation's (baseball) exclusivity through its ties with religious destiny.

While the films previously described pursue the Reagan practice of invoking religion to build up a reverent following, others express a sense of having had enough of Christian justification, instead taking baseball as the only true religion that is still worth believing in. In *Bull Durham*, the film's opening emphasizes the spiritual dynamic with which the sport is popularly perceived. The initial association of baseball with religion is hardly subtle (the film opening with the line "I believe in the Church of baseball") as the juxtaposition of Annie Savoy's (Susan Sarandon) opening speech with a tracking shot over her baseball shrine highlights the spiritual nature baseball is seen to embody for many Americans, prompting many to proclaim the sport America's 'secular religion'[120]. Furthermore, the film repeatedly ridicules and belittles Christian faith. When Larry (William O'Leary) proposes to hold a prayer before a game, he is mocked and laughed at by his teammates. Later, exasperation is felt by Annie when she gently but firmly denies Nuke's father's (George Buck) proposal that they all say a prayer in celebration of Nuke being called up to the big leagues. Further shunning of Christian beliefs occur when one of the Bulls' player rejects the cross while he is going through a slump, opting instead to share some Voodoo spells that one of his Latin American teammates is applying to his bat. A reference to

[120] Steven A. Riess, Touchin Base (Urbana: 1999), 155.

Voodoo can also be seen in *Major League* in the person of Pedro Cerrano (Dennis Haysbert)[121]. His religious denomination puts him at odds with one of the team's veteran pitchers Eddie Harris (Chelcie Ross) who, like in *Durham*, is ridiculed for wanting to say a prayer before the first game. The eradication of Christianity by Voodoo is made complete when Cerrano fires up his ceremonial gun powder and causes the emergency sprinklers to go off, stopping Harris' prayer dead in its tracks. In both these films, Christianity is seen as having lost its credibility, an attitude perhaps reflective of the moral scandals that had befallen various televangelists during the decade[122], making the adherence to their advocated beliefs seemingly foolish, hypocritical and unproductive.

[121] The inclusion of Voodoo in *Bull Durham* and *Major League* may be a reference to Reagan's economic policy that was labeled as "Voodoo Economics" by George Bush during a debate for the Republican Presidential Nominee. Whether they do so in tribute or in criticism is ambiguous.

[122] Schaller, Right Turn, 159.

CONCLUSION

When a young Ronald Reagan was broadcasting the games of the Chicago Cubs in Des Moines, Iowa, he was directly responsible for transmitting the narrative of baseball to thousands of people. It is a job he did well and perhaps one that enabled him to discover and believe in "the power of stories, sincerely told"[123]. In this sense, it becomes natural that film, perhaps the most accessible form of storytelling in modern days, can be seen to appropriately capture Reagan's narrative essence while also offering the opportunity to discuss its merits to accuracy. Furthermore, films dealing with the theme of baseball are operating with a narrative core that is similar to Ronald Reagan's projected image, seeing as both allude to the nation's fruition in terms of cherishing traditional values that were established in the past. By transposing these values to the present, baseball films use the symbolic connotations of the sport to comment not only on the state of the national pastime but also that of the country in which it evolved. We have seen that both baseball and Reagan's rhetoric encompass an advocacy for the self-made man, a notion that has been distorted by government deregulation and the emphasis on free market. The administration's focus on free-reigning business practices led to cuts in social spending, which in turn affected the stability of the American family, as well as the expectations of its pertinent gender roles. Furthermore, the strength of religious adherence was also a strong component in making Reagan's projected narrative believable to many Americans. As these factors are also deeply imbedded within the general baseball narrative, the end of Reagan's presidency saw a rise in production of films dealing with the sport, many of which became staples of the genre. The flaws in baseball's rhetoric incidentally became fertile ground to observe and criticize those found in the similar narrative professed by the nation's departing president.

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[123] Cannon, President Reagan, 38.

ANNEX: **FILM SYNOPSES**

A League of Their Own. Dir. Penny Marshall. Perf. Geena Davis, Tom Hanks, Lori Petty. 1992.

As she is getting ready to attend a National Baseball Hall of Fame tribute to the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL), former catcher Dottie Hinson (Lynn Cartwright/Geena Davis) reminisces about her experience during the league's inaugural year, taking the audience back to the early 1940s when many American men were away at war and the national pastime was in danger of being canceled. The memories start at home where Hinson plays softball with her pitcher-sister Kit Keller (Lori Petty), the latter shown to be overshadowed by the former's looks and talents. When a scout (Jon Lovitz) for the newly formed AAGPBL invites Hinson to try out for the league, the latter's acceptance is conditional to her sister being brought along too. The siblings are eventually selected for the same Rockford Peaches team, Hinson quickly becoming the acknowledged team leader in the face of manager Jimmy Dugan's (Tom Hanks) lack of faith in women playing professional baseball. As the season progresses and the 'girls' show that they can play ball, Dugan gradually gains interest for his team and eventually clashes heads with Hinson for control of the team. They soon discover, however, that cooperation is much more effective than conflict as their relationship evolves to one of friendship and mutual respect. Meanwhile, the sibling rivalry between Hinson and Keller grows out of proportion, leading to the latter being traded to the Racine Bells. The animosity between both sisters comes to a climactic resolution during a final playoff game between Rockford and Racine, a forced collision at the plate resulting in Racine winning it all and Keller getting the recognition she was looking for. Her husband having returned from war, Hinson decides to quit the league after only one season and resumes her domestic position. Back in the present day, the exhibit for the AAGPBL opens at the Hall of Fame where fans and former players look at old pictures and artifacts. It is there that Hinson and Keller reunite after all these years.

Angels in the Outfield. Dir. William Dear. Perf. Danny Glover, Brenda Fricker, Tony Danza. 1994.

Foster child Roger Bomman (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) is still waiting for his dad (Dermot Mulroney) to take him back home. When the latter tells him sarcastically that their reunion will

occur when the California Angels win the pennant, Bomman prays for the struggling baseball team's quick improvement. He soon sees his prayers answered when he attends an Angels game with J.P. (Milton Davis Jr.), a younger boy who presently shares his foster home, during which he witnesses angels of the divine kind appear on the field to assist members of the California Angels in making impossible plays. Realizing that he is the only one that can see the interfering angels, Bomman approaches the Angels' head coach George Knox (Danny Glover) to tell him of his unique insight into the game. While the latter is initially dubious of Bomman's assertions, visual proof as to the accuracy of the kid's visions convinces him to keep him around, a decision that proves rewarding as the Angels' have a great second half of the season on their way to winning the pennant. Victory on the field, however, does not translate into victory for Bomman. Reneging on his word, Bomman's father refuses custody of his son and relinquishes him to the state. Making good on Bomman's prayers, the angels eventually find a family for him through George Knox, who ends up adopting both Bomman and J.P.

Bull Durham. Dir. Ron Shelton. Perf. Kevin Costner, Susan Sarandon, Tim Robbins. 1988.

At the start of a new season, veteran minor league catcher Crash Davis (Kevin Costner) gets assigned by the Durham Bulls to mentor their hottest pitching prospect, hard-throwing Ebby Calvin "Nuke" LaLoosh (Tim Robbins), a hotheaded youth who needs help with both his attitude and his location. Meanwhile, religiously hard-core fan Annie Savoy (Susan Sarandon) is pondering who to pick as her annual baseball fling. When she chooses Nuke, Crash is peeved and continuously attempts to thwart their relationship by giving Nuke baseball advice that keeps them apart (such as the no sex rule during a hot streak). As the relationship between Crash and Nuke grows from animosity to cooperation, the attraction between Crash and Annie intensifies and ends up bringing them together once Nuke has been called up to the 'show'. As Crash faces the cold nature of the sport when he quickly gets released from the Bulls once Nuke has been properly trained, Annie convinces him to continue playing until he at least breaks the minor league home run record he is silently chasing. When he indeed does break it, he returns home to Annie, seemingly ready to settle down.

Eight Men Out. Dir. John Sayles. Perf. John Cusack, David Strathairn, Charlie Sheen. 1988.

Adapted from Eliot Asinof's book of the same name, *Eight Men Out* is a cinematic account of the infamous Black Sox scandal of 1919 which involved eight players of the Chicago White Sox conspiring with a group of gamblers to deliberately lose the World Series for money. While the film focuses mainly on the fates of 'Shoeless' Joe Jackson (D.B. Sweeney) and Buck Weaver (John Cusack), both of whom are shown to have been innocent victims of others' machinations, it focuses more specifically on the role greed had to play in the eventual fruition of the fix. Considered to be the best team in baseball at the time, the 1919 White Sox were underpaid and taken for granted by Sox owner Charles Comiskey (Clifton James). The resentment felt by the players towards their boss was well known by gamblers who used their discontent to convince enough players to make the fix possible. All eight players are eventually banned from baseball for life, the scandal being directly responsible for the advent of the first Baseball Commissioner, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis (John Anderson), who made it his duty to clean up baseball's perceived image and reputation.

Field of Dreams. Dir. Phil Alden Robinson. Perf. Kevin Costner, Jame Earl Jones, Amy Madigan. 1989.

An adaptation of W.P. Kinsella's novel *Shoeless Joe*, *Field of Dreams* tells the story of Ray Kinsella (Kevin Costner), an Iowa farmer who puts everything he has on the line in pursuit of his dreams. Burdened with regrets concerning missed opportunities with his deceased father, for whom baseball was a big part of life, Kinsella suddenly starts hearing voices out in his cornfield saying: "If you build it, he will come". Seeing as the voice is accompanied by a vision of a baseball field, Kinsella concludes that he must build a diamond for that person to arrive. Defying all pleas for reason and supported only by his wife (Amy Madigan) and daughter (Gaby Hoffman), Kinsella transforms a big part of his crops into a baseball field. Soon, apparitions of dead ball players, including 'Shoeless' Joe Jackson (Ray Liotta), start to walk out of the peripheral corn fields and begin to play pickup baseball, only visible to Kinsella and his family. The transformation of his land has put Kinsella into great debt, however, and his brother-in-law Mark (Timothy Busfield) is aggressively intent on having his corporation buy out the mortgage.

Months later, during a PTA meeting at his daughter's school, Kinsella gets another epiphany that tells him to seek out recluse revolutionary writer Terence Mann (James Earl Jones) and help him "soothe his pain", which is also related to baseball nostalgia. While Kinsella is initially met with hostility by Mann, the latter soon starts to share the former's visions as they set off for Chisholm, Minnesota in search of some unknown ball player from the 1920s named Archibald "Moonlight" Graham , whose name and career stats magically appeared for them on the scoreboard at Fenway Park. In Chisholm, Kinsella magically gets transported back to 1972 and runs into an aged Graham (Burt Lancaster) who ends up divulging his own baggage of baseball regrets. Having shared his encounter with Mann, Kinsella decides to head back to Iowa and show the home-made field to the writer. On the road, they pick up a young wandering ball player who turns out to be a young "Moonlight" Graham (Frank Whaley). Upon his arrival home, Kinsella finds his brother-in-law even more adamant to buy up his mortgage while Mann is awed by the field and its long-dead occupants. Graham is recruited by Jackson and the others, finally getting an at-bat with big leaguers. During an argument between Mark and Kinsella regarding the value of his land, Mann delivers a speech detailing the role of baseball in American cohesion and its appeal to the masses, claiming that people will come and pay for the privilege to witness these ball games form the past. When Kinsella's daughter falls off the bleachers due to the increasing heat of the argument, "Moonlight" Graham steps off the field and transforms into his 1972 self to save the child. The incident shakes Mark up and makes him see the players that were invisible to him until then. All is well when all can see the baseball apparitions. This is confirmed by the film's closure as we see miles of cares lined up outside of Kinsella's farm, waiting to catch a glimpse of the field of dreams.

Little Big League. Dir. Andrew Scheinman. Perf. Luke Edwards, Timothy Busfield, John Ashton. 1994.

Billy Heywood (Luke Edwards) is a 12 year-old hardcore baseball fan who happens to be the grand-son of Thomas Heywood (Jason Robards), the owner of the Minnesota Twins professional baseball team. When the latter passes away, his will stipulates that Billy gets control of the team. While Billy is very knowledgeable about the game, the idea of working for a kid does not appeal to the team manager George O'Farrell (Dennis Farina), whose antagonistic attitude ultimately

gets him fired. Taking the manager position himself, Heywood initially turns the team's losing streak around. Things start to go sour when a romance starts to develop between Heywood's widowed mother (Ashley Crow) and the Twins' first baseman Lou Collins (Timothy Busfield), much to Heywood's discontent. Furthermore, Heywood's focus on winning is starting to affect his relationship with his friends. His loss of innocence about the game has pushed his friends away and affected the team's morale, which in turn has caused their surge in the standings to come to a standstill. It is only when Heywood accepts his own limitations and treats baseball as a game to have fun with that the team comes together again, coming up only one game short of winning the wild card race. After the season, Heywood steps down as manager and accepts Collins as his new step-father.

Major League. Dir. David S. Ward. Perf. Tom Berenger, Charlie Sheen, Corbin Bernsen. 1989.

Former Las Vegas showgirl Rachel Phelps (Margaret Whitton) has just inherited the Cleveland Indians. Her first order of business: assemble the worst possible group of players so that the team can finish dead last in the standings, permitting her to break her lease with the city and move the team to Miami. Her spring training invitation list includes veteran catcher Jake Taylor (Tom Berenger), jailbird pitcher Rick Vaughn (Charlie Sheen) and voodoo faithful Pedro Cerano (Dennis Haysbert). Although not formally invited to spring training, fast-running Willie Mays Hayes (Wesley Snipes) ultimately makes it on the team because of his speed. While potential exists for success in the form of talent, lack of training, motivation and discipline results in the team struggling to win, fitting perfectly in line with Phelps' plans. When the team starts to get a little better, Phelps attempts to thwart morale any way she can to make them keep losing. At this point, General Manager Charlie Donovan (Charles Cyphers) divulges the owner's plans to the team's head coach Lou Brown (James Gammon). The latter then informs his team of the details, prompting them to want to win out of pure spite. As the team works hard to win, Jake Taylor is also attempting to rekindle his relationship with ex-Olympic-athlete-turned-librarian Lynn Wells (Rene Russo). While some animosity develops between Vaughn and the team's only highly paid player Roger Dorn (Corbin Bernsen), the team's success ultimately takes precedence over personal squabbles as the Indians go on to win the pennant.

Rookie of the Year. Dir. Daniel Stern. Perf. Thomas Ian Nicholas, Gary Busey, Albert Hall. 1993.

While Henry Rowengartner (Thomas Ian Nicholas) may love baseball, he is not very good at it. When he breaks his arm while running down a fly ball, he has to wear a cast for the remainder of the summer. The day the casts comes off, his single mother Mary (Amy Morton) buys him and his two best friends, Clark (Robert Gorman) and George (Patrick Labrecque), tickets to a Chicago Cubs game at Wrigley field. When the boys catch a home run ball, Rowengartner throws it back and attracts attention when his pitch reaches home plate, realizing that his arm has become a powerful canon because of his earlier accident. The Cubs, struggling to win and desperate for attendance, soon sign Rowengartner to a contract, leading his mother's new boyfriend Jack Bradfield (Bruce Altman) to step in as the kid's agent. Rowengartner attempts to connect with his teammates, especially veteran pitcher Chet Steadman (Gary Busey), at first to no avail. Meanwhile, Bradfield is making deals with the Cubs' General Manager Larry Fisher (Dan Hedaya) behind Rowengartner's back, planning to sell him to the New York Yankees. As Rowengartner's baseball career begins to take off, travel and endorsement obligations negatively impact his relationship with his friends. His team, on the other hand, is warming up to him and begin to value his place on the team. Furthermore, Steadman and Mary are getting closer and begin a relationship when the latter becomes single after discovering that Bradfield was exploiting her son behind everyone's back. In the film's final game, Rowengartner once again falls on his arm, returning it to its former mediocrity. When the team ends up winning anyway in a display of brains over brawn, Rowengartner decides to retire from baseball, preferring instead to enjoy his childhood.

The Sandlot. Dir. David M. Evans. Perf. Tom Guiry, Mike Vitar, Patrick Renna. 1993.

In the summer of 1962, straight-A student Scotty Smalls (Tom Guiry) has just moved into a new town with his mother (Karen Allen) and new step father (Dennis Leary). In an attempt to make some friends, he approaches a group of kids that get together at a sandlot everyday to play pickup baseball. His life's focus on science over athletics has rendered him completely

inefficient on a baseball diamond, his lack of skills initially resulting in him being laughed off the field. The next day, Benny Rodriguez (Mike Vitar), the informal leader of the group, invites him back to the sandlot and convinces the others to give him a chance. Smalls eventually becomes one of the gang and plays baseball every day. During a sleepover, Michael 'Squints' Palledorous (Chauncey Leopardi) informs Smalls of a legend surrounding the sandlot, which involves the presence of a starved dog named "The Beast" living in the backyard over the fence in center field, ready to eat any children that dares to venture over. Consequently, every time a ball is hit over that fence, the ball is considered lost forever. When Smalls 'borrows' a ball signed by Babe Ruth from his step father's mantle so that the boys can continue playing one day, he hits it over the center field fence, right into Beast territory. When Smalls' friends discover whose signature was on the ball, they hatch up a series of schemes to try and get it back. Finally, having received a visit by Babe Ruth in his dream, Rodriguez decides to get it on his own, jumping over the fence and ending up getting chased by the dog all over town. The chase comes full circle back to the sandlot as Rodriguez jumps over the center field fence, making it topple over and fall on The Beast. When the boys realize that it is just a normal dog, they save its life. They are soon confronted by the dog's owner, Mr. Mertle (James Earl Jones), who turns out to be a former professional baseball player himself. Seeing as the Babe Ruth ball is now destroyed, Mertle gives Smalls a ball signed by the New York Yankees' Murderer's Row team from the late 1920s, which he in turn gives to his step father to replace the one he lost. Years later, Smalls has become a press box baseball announcer while Rodriguez is now a big star in Major League Baseball.

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Baseball Cinema in the Shadow of Ronald Reagan

By

Guillaume Desbiens

Supervisor: Alison Meek

University of Western Ontario

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