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KEN BURNS' BASEBALL: ARGUMENT IN DOCUMENTARY

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Shannon Rogers
December 2000

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ABSTRACT

Film theory application largely ignores documentary. Bill Nichols is a rare theorist who focuses ideas and asks pertinent questions about the genre. A distinct need exists to interrogate his work as well as general film theory on cinematic text that claims straightforward representation of history.

In fact, such claims prove folly for representations of history reflect the text's point of view and reclaim history according to the argument that text eventually builds. Ken Burns as a filmmaker not only owns a maestro's reputation within the art of documentary, but also presents an interesting challenge to film theory by his use of seemingly undeviating use of historic materials which, in fact, are carefully manipulated into a larger rhetorical voice that slips down the viewer's throat like vanilla malt--smooth, refreshing, unspicy--and, through sheer subtlety, works with powerful effect.

A study into the cinematic techniques Ken Burns uses to build an argument in Baseball provides useful insight into the complex rhetorical system of documentary--a system consisting of orchestration, voice, image and juxtaposition that together form a persuasive mosaic. Such a study would show rhetoric's relevance in recovering history toward the

purposes of specific arguments put forth by the documentary
itself.

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CHAPTER ONE: DOCUMENTARY RHETORIC

Baseball is, in its fullest dimension, a garden in which grow memories and metaphors. (Neilson 62)

Bill Nichols states, "Documentaries direct us toward the world but they also remain texts" (Representing 110). The eighteen plus hour documentary Baseball uses a complex rhetorical language consisting of still photographs, voice-overs, music, interviews, commentary and intertitles to represent an emotional argument for baseball as a microcosm of an American history peopled by heroes and villains, triumph and defeat.

However, as Nichols further states, "At the heart of documentary is less a *story* and its imaginary world than an *argument* about the historical world" (Representing 111). In Baseball, the argumentative text consists of a complex juxtaposition of multiple montage set apart by intertitles. Within each titled montage, Ken Burns uses the powerful rhetorical device of panning still photographs superimposed by voice-overs and music. Via camera movement and unexpected audio, viewers sense the slide of a motionless Jackie Robinson or the swing of a long dead Ty Cobb, or that Babe Ruth speaks directly to them. These techniques defy the stillness and the silence of archival photographs and, for the viewer, bring history to life.

Independently, each montage represents the imagery and dialogue of short stories of the people and places

surrounding the game. Together these montages represent the argument of the documentary, which emphasizes not dead ballplayers, but rather the infinite continuum of baseball. More importantly, they reconstruct American history--a history intermixed with urban and pastoral, individualism and collectivism, labor unions and management, journey and home, racism and equality.

The rhetorical punch behind documentary lies in its appeal to multiple and simultaneous senses because, in the words of Christian Metz, "the cinema is more perceptual, if the phrase is allowable, than many other means of expression; it mobilizes a larger number of the axes of perception" (Imaginary 43). Burns uses historic photographs and letters combined with expert testimony and voice-of-God commentary (a narrative voice of authority that advances an argument as unquestionably factual) as evidence of a larger, implicit meaning. The viewer interacts with the evidence in a more sensual way than if merely reading a form of argument, such as an editorial in a newspaper, because film is "an act of seeing that makes itself seen, an act of hearing that makes itself heard" (Sobchack 3).

The sensuality of film can be used in strange and effective ways to enhance implicit meaning through the use of edits between separate fragments or gaps to create a rhetorical argument that resembles mosaic:

In documentary, two pieces of space are joined together to give the impression of one continuous argument that can draw on disparate elements of the historical world for evidence. (Nichols, Representing 20)

Baseball not only needs gaps in order to attempt to encompass a century of baseball history--of American history--but also uses juxtapositions between dissimilar events and dissimilar ideas to highlight the contrast between the history for White America and the same timespan for Black America. Two separate points in time can be joined within documentary to spotlight, however subtly, a simultaneously Romantic and Realistic view of America's past.

The documentary manipulates the game of baseball to fit the world view of the documentary's voice as in any expository documentary of any historical subject where:

the world as we see it through a documentary window is heightened, telescoped, dramatized, reconstructed, fetishized, miniaturized, or otherwise modified. (Nichols, Representing 113)

Baseball modifies the game to fit a larger vision through orchestration, soundtrack, commentary, voice, interviews, image and juxtaposition. My focus will be on what those film techniques do to the viewer as Nichols writes:

What films have to say about the enduring human condition or about the pressing issues of the day can never be separated from *how* they say it, how this saying moves and

affects us, how we engage with a work, not
with a theory of it. (Representing xiii)

In the following chapters, I will explore how each and all
of the above mentioned techniques work to create a mosaic
representation of baseball as the grand reflection of
America's proud and shameful racial history.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CLEAR GLASS

...a ballpark is a box to contain drama.
(Neilson 34)

Baseball opens with church bells. The church bells chime across the sepia-tinted photograph of Brooklyn. The camera pans across the city toward a distant steeple. Absent are bats and balls, players and fans. Instead, we are left with a quiet reverence evoked by the grave black and white image that moves us above the city--the city of our forefathers--and toward the steeple as if we're going to Sunday school.

Paul Barnes, the supervising film editor of Baseball, was quoted in an interview as saying, "You've got to let the audience feel first, then you can explain anything in the world afterwards" (Barnes 148). The highly orchestrated first crucial moments of the documentary Baseball smartly give the audience the feeling the filmmakers want, not only for serious baseball fans who already revere the game, but for the entire audience; hooking the viewer, however subconsciously, by focusing those first few moments on a peopleless scene where the city belongs to everyone--where America originates, baseball fan or not. The church is not identified as Episcopalian or Catholic or Lutheran--it is any church, any steeple and, baseball fan or not, the viewer has a trained reaction to the sound of church bells, and the response takes the viewer into a place of worship.

At one minute and thirty five seconds into the documentary, we cut to a different image. We still see no bats or balls, players or fans. Instead, we cut to an image of trees and a soothing voice--a voice with a hint of cedar; a hint of roots--a calming voice with a pastoral tone talking about children playing the *new game* and playing it out of doors. Next it cuts to boys playing ball in an empty dirt lot while the voice speaks to us saying, "Let us go forth awhile and get better air in our lungs. Let us leave our close rooms." The camera pans in closer to a young boy, the swing of his bat caught in a still past; the voice continues: "The game of ball is glorious." The word glorious is punctuated by the sound effect of a wooden bat hitting a baseball and the sound of children playing. The sound effects make still photographs seem alive again and the past present. The best usage of sound effects are those that transport the viewer. As Barnes says, "Sound effects are an attempt to evoke reality and bring it to life" (Barnes 138). Then this earthen voice says to us, "Walt Whitman" and the effect is jarring to think that the famous and renowned writer--known for celebrating the self and the body--celebrated the game of baseball. In those first two minutes and fifteen seconds of the documentary, viewers are prepared to go into a place of worship within the documentary, already feeling as if they are being pulled

into the pastoral church of this country's forefathers and of even the most famous of artists and intellectuals, who shaped our ways of thinking and the ways of feeling about ourself, and who talked about the glory of the game of baseball. It is beautiful orchestration according to the definition of orchestration given by Stefan Sharff:

The tying together of units of action...orchestration determines how this will be done by creating transitional shots, deploying optical effects, fades, dissolves, etc., using sound track music or sound effects, or by combining these. (Sharff 168-169)

The first two minutes and fifteen seconds orchestrated a quiet attention on the part of the viewer, yet the viewer still doesn't know the story. The unspoken question being, "Why do I continue to watch this?" At two minutes and fifteen seconds the voice-of-God commentator with his strong, certain, dependable voice--and with the faint music of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" playing in rhythm with his voice--summarizes over the next few moments some of the major points of the game and, therefore, proves to us the epic story of the game of baseball. Tom Haneke offers a standard of cinematic storytelling in his article, "Distilling the Documentary," where "Every film is in search of story to rivet the audience within the first few minutes" (44). The voice-of-God commentator talks about Brooklyn and Ebbets Field and very appropriately the first player given

identity is Jackie Robinson--the player who will, in fact, evolve over the course of the entire documentary into hero. Robinson, in archival motion pictures, steps up out of the dugout while the commentator declares, "Brooklyn witnessed baseball's finest moment when a Black man wearing number forty two trotted out to first base." The introduction of Jackie Robinson previews the primary parallel narratives in Baseball: the distilled stories of Black American's struggle in White America.

More than previewing the central stories to come, "Orchestration's initial responsibility is to present, during a film's first scenes, the basic iconography of the work to acquaint the viewer with its way of speaking" (Sharff 167). The primary way of speaking in Baseball is parallelism, where separate events are retold side by side and given space for comparison and contrast. We are initiated into that technique at four minutes and twenty seconds into the documentary when we cut to the black and white image of a destroyed Ebbets Field with church bells overlaid on the soundtrack and the voice-of-God commentator telling us that when the Dodgers moved away from Brooklyn to Los Angeles, they left an empty soul in the heart of every Brooklyn fan. The church bells fade, the camera cuts to black screen then to an aerial shot across the city of Boston and of Fenway Park in color, live-action film; we

hear on the soundtrack play-by-play of a game at Fenway Park in the past--Ted Williams' last game at Fenway in which he hit a home run. The stadium, first glimpsed from across the city, much like the steeple in our opening shot, moves toward the viewer who sees the stadium lights on for a night game and sees the hint of green. As the camera moves closer, the field comes toward us in vibrant green that contrasts powerfully with the black and white rubble of Ebbets Field. The viewer, struck by the brilliance of color, the brilliance of motion, the brilliance of life, moves in closer yet to the park and the players where the game slowly comes into view as home plate emerges while the crowd cheers on the soundtrack.

This stadium, in this living present, contrasts harshly with the rubble of Ebbets Field while it simultaneously symbolically compares--because it is cinematically treated the same--to the church steeple. Towards both Fenway and the steeple, the camera moves from the city's body towards its heart. In equating cinematically the steeple and Fenway Park, by making them focal points treated reverentially by focus, framing and the amount of time given to linger, the documentary makes the spiritual essence of the game of baseball comparable to religion. This identification of the stage of the game as the stage for religion heightens the intensity and the importance of the subject matter and, in

essence, before telling the story of the game--before recovering the story of the game for its viewers--first argues its merit within the framework of American history.

At six minutes and three seconds the grainy abstraction of a piece of a black and white photo appears and the camera pans up to reveal a hand holding a baseball as if demonstrating how to hold a baseball in order to throw a split-fingered fastball. The gesture becomes, as James Monaco says in his book How to Read a Film, "one of the most communicative facets of film's signification" (Monaco 143). The intense closeness of the image and its graininess give an aged, painted aura. The way the disembodied forearm and fingers angle, reach out, touch the ball with fingertips--and the way the fingers curl around the baseball--evoke Michelangelo's *Creation of Man* ("the most universally recognized and one of the most frequently imitated images of all time" (Wallace 155)) where, "the vital spark flows from the outstretched hand of God into the matter he has shaped, and in response this matter begins to live: to move physically" (Freedberg 201). The forearm, wrist and fingers used to throw are present in the frame, but the arm has been carefully cropped outside the frame and "in cinema the frame is important because it actively defines the image for us" (Bordwell 226). Here the framing, the disembodiment, leaves the viewer with a sense of mystery

surrounding the agent of creation. This allusion to creation and to great art creates a curiosity that engages the viewer in the body of the documentary itself much as individual plot points lead audiences deeper into the grander scheme of epic. In this respect too, Baseball resembles Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling in that they both consist of fragments representing an artist's vision of events that together form an overall world view far too complex--far too grandiose--to fit within single segments:

The rhetoric of the epic is by tradition grandiose, as is indeed the formal rhetoric of the ceiling. Larger than life could ever be, the ceiling is not history, nor even myth, but, like Virgil's *Aeneid*, essentially a celebration of present greatness in the form of prophecy from an imagined past and of future promise in the guise of history (Seymour 85).

Form represents a central and hence essential tool by which artists represent the narratives they wish to impart upon their audience. The scope of epic married to the structure of a mosaic is a tool of convenience for Michelangelo to take vast allegories from the Bible to paint on a ceiling and create a vision of the history of God and humankind. So, too, do mosaic and epic marry within the documentary Baseball. By isolating moments of baseball history into their own contained fragments, Burns can manage an otherwise overwhelming folklore. By placing these fragments beside each other and stringing them together into an epic, Burns

builds a grandiose representation of the game of baseball that transcends its folklore and becomes its own history.

Quite dramatically, we cut at six minutes and twenty eight seconds to a still photograph of Sandy Koufax in the act of pitching. The wrist, fingers and forearm have their body and face--the baseball, its creator. The player has been elevated to the level of myth, baseball to a place of mythic domain and, as Bill Nichols states:

The mythic domain arrests a singular moment, a transfixing glimpse at an otherwise obscure object of desire and renders it indelible. It tries to seize the moment and make it perpetual. (Representing 254)

The documentary cuts to a close-up of Sandy Koufax's face, the determination of the creator in his eyes, yet he could be Roger Clemens or Greg Maddux--any dominant pitcher of today. And he could even be me at a park trying to learn how to create the pitch I want to throw--a fastball, a curveball--or to make the baseball (as the voice-of-God commentator says over the image of Sandy Koufax) "rise, fall, wobble." In the seized moment of that pitch, the viewer does not know whether it was a strike, a ball, or hit for a home run in an unidentified game. We'll never know if Koufax won or lost or got a no decision. The art of throwing a baseball moves beyond his identity as one of the game's all-time great pitchers and becomes instead a mythic act. The viewer can both be in awe of that act--in the same

way seers are awed by the image of creator in Michelangelo's painting--and, to a smaller extent, identify with it because even though the viewer can't pitch a perfect game against major league quality hitters, he or she can play catch, or can become a parent or can write a poem. We are a part of the myth and what mythologizing does:

[the] process of mythologization works in two directions transforming the dead into the eternally remembered and taking from the living something of their historical specificity. (Representing 254)

The treatment of Koufax as myth transforms him from an individual into a simile of the act of creation. The documentary, through myth, makes Koufax immortal.

The next image, as with Sandy Koufax, remains unidentified by the documentary, yet is known to those with a knowledge of baseball. In the image, Honus Wagner squats down in vintage baggy uniform and old style shoes and holds a bat in strong, worker's hands; he looks at the bat with modest grin and, if you didn't know he was one of the greatest hitters in baseball history, he could be everyman. He has the look of an immigrant field worker--rugged and compassionate. The film cuts to a close up of his face while the voice-of-God commentator says, "The batter has only a few thousandths of a second to decide to hit the ball." Cut to the lower body in close up of a young, faceless ball player and the commentator says, "and yet the

men who fail seven times out of ten are considered the game's greatest heroes." The camera pans upwards to reveal that the legs belong to Lou Gehrig (one of the great mythological figures in baseball history) wearing a Columbia University uniform long prior to becoming baseball's ironman. The way these three icons of baseball--the way their images are orchestrated--provides insight into the way the documentary as a whole speaks to the viewer through, again, contrast and comparison. The images are staged and framed to be larger than life, while simultaneously anonymous. The technical treatments suit the implicit meaning that develops over the course of the story of baseball--the implicit suggestion that baseball was built into America's game by heroes with man's fatal flaws.

Moreover, the documentary argues that baseball's history is the history of the viewer. As the film structurally parallels players and fans over the next minute and a half, when the screen goes to black while "The Star Spangled Banner" sounds with confidence, the title Baseball emerges from the blackness. Next it cuts to a black and white photograph of fans in their seats at a stadium, watching a game. The national anthem still plays on the soundtrack. As Roy Prendergast states in Film Music, film music's purpose is to help realize the meaning of a film (213) and, here, the soundtrack realizes the sense of being

at the game. The national anthem playing over images of the crowd, their backs to the viewer, facing forward to the field, places us in the midst of the crowd--the focus of their attention toward the field, while the music reminds the viewer of the American theme. Aaron Copland said:

Music can be used to underline or create psychological refinements the unspoken thoughts of a character are the unseen implications of a situation. (28)

The music implies the setting and subliminally puts America in the forefront of the viewer's mind.

The people in the stadium are of the past, captured in still photography--they speak no dialogue, they have no voice. The music, the national anthem, played always before a ball game (which the viewer hears before seeing the photograph), voices their anticipation. They are about to watch a ballgame with an eagerness salted with patriotism--the pre-Vietnam, pre-Watergate audience--and the music together with the image effectively bridges the distance between a perhaps more cynical present and an arguably more hopeful past, which puts the viewer into a state of mind that much closer to the world view of that former time. The camera, at eight minutes and nineteen seconds into the documentary, pans to where the eye focus of the viewer looks directly into the eyes of a man staring back at us, a man looking directly at the viewer,

illustrating how, as Christian Metz states in The Imaginary Signifier:

Film is like the mirror. But it differs from the primordial mirror in one essential point: although, as in the latter, everything may come to be projected, there is one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator's own body. In a certain emplacement, the mirror suddenly becomes clear glass. (45)

The power of film is that you don't see yourself and therefore can see beyond your own face. The power of film is in being the clear glass in which people both like and unlike us are reflected. At that moment of eye contact with this nameless man in a crowd from the past, at a baseball game years and years ago, the viewer enters the world of the documentary--enters the past--and as the camera pans away from what has become our companion to the view of the field, the viewer joins the crowd at that game. So, when the voice on the soundtrack says, "Play ball," we are in the moment and eager to move forward with the documentary.

CHAPTER THREE: VOICE

[Voice] conveys to us a sense of a text's social point of view, of how it is speaking to us and how it is organizing the materials it is presenting us. In this sense "voice" is not restricted to any one code or feature, such as dialogue or spoken commentary. (Nichols, "Voice" 260)

Few characteristics of humankind, and subsequently its art, are as distinct yet indefinable, indescribable, immutable, dynamic, or ethereal as voice. A child once blessed with both hearing and sight only to lose them both laments more the loss of sound. Yet voice in any art and equally in film cannot simply be restricted to sound. Voice--the uniting concept--is slippery and elusive but the necessary adhesive that, in the most practical terms, functions as the grout work--emphasis on *work*--that unites the tiles that ultimately become the larger image of mosaic. Voice hides in plain sight much like grout. The voice of an artist is consistent--it is there in the beginning, middle, and end. It is the most distinguishing aspect of art but maybe, too, the least noticed. The voice of Baseball is epic and reverential and fundamentally the very way by which it presents itself.

The segment on race in "Inning One" of Baseball titled "My Skin is Against Me" (1:22--1:31) illustrates Bill Nichols' statement that "Documentary relies heavily on the spoken word" (Representing 21). This segment uses the

voices of the voice-of-God commentator, voice actors reading from archival newspapers and letters, and interviews to support the overall voice of the documentary itself--a voice appealing to the viewer through both logic and emotion in order to convince the viewer of the historical certainty of segregation and the implicit judgment that the only righteousness is in the freedom of everyone to play ball; the only heroes, the men who suffered for that cause and who made fairness and equality a reality in the national pastime.

Immediately preceding "My Skin is Against Me," the voice-of-God commentator, over various photographs of Cap Anson (arguably the best ball player of his century) recites the qualities that made him such a great baseball player, including his will to win. And the commentator says directly to the viewer, "Cap Anson was the symbol, one writer said, of all that was good and strong in baseball." The screen then goes black and an intertitle emerges: "My Skin is Against Me." Here we see an example of how "titles serve as another indicator of a textual voice apart from that of the characters represented" (Nichols, "Voice" 271) for, as the screen changes from black to reveal still photographs of Black ball players while all these positive words about baseball--"good and strong"--are fresh in our minds, a new voice begins to speak to us about the exclusion of Blacks

from professional baseball. This new voice talks about the unfairness of it, about how the only concern on the baseball field should be whether a player has the ability to play the game. As this new voice speaks to us, images of nameless players who look young and nice and hopeful pass before our eyes and this man says, "Better make character and personal habits the test." The voice "addresses the viewer openly, trying to move him or her to a new intellectual conviction, to a new emotional attitude" (Bordwell 139). The speaker tries to convince us--tries to make obvious to the viewer--the injustice of segregation. There are stories written across faces, even across faces of the young. Here the voice of the documentary gives us these young, hopeful faces--parades them before us--and we know enough history by this point to realize the hopes within those eyes will be crushed by a society--by a game--unwilling to free their hopes into realities. The voice of the documentary chooses these handsome young faces--for, certainly, there were ugly young men with impossible hopes--with compelling eyes to sway the viewer in sympathy to the fair dream unfulfilled. Overlaid upon these enticing young faces, whom we wish to hug with encouragement and support, the speaker like Messiah moralizes in succinct and articulate words the high moral of equality. And, through voice over, amplifies the hushed ideas of the entombed.

The documentary has undercut those previous positive words, words about the game being strong and good, by taking words from the newspaper of Cap Anson's time to show the contrast of histories in America. As the film cuts to a photograph of Black cotton pickers carrying bundles on their heads--all walking in a seemingly endless line--the voice-of-God commentator who comforts in his consistent presence speaks of the racism Black Americans endured. Spoken dialogue, "Prejudice in the North and Jim Crow laws in the South that separated every aspect of their lives," leads us to a sharp still photograph. Our eyes focus on a long, divisive wall separating two games of baseball going on simultaneously as the commentary continues, "Even games of baseball at an orphanage." This is a striking example of how the voice of a documentary uses different elements--here, the spoken word and image in a combination where separately they might be persuasive but together are compelling--to interact off each other and, in essence, give sentience to the argument. As Bill Nichols comments in Representing Reality, "Expository text takes shape around commentary directed toward the viewer; images serve as illustration or counterpoint" (34). Here the documentary has taken the word, "segregation," whose meaning, through sheer usage over the years, has faded and has given the word greater definition simply through specificity, by

illustrating the point with a photograph showing segregation through the composition of a fence dividing the image, hence giving the idea of segregation impact.

According to Nichols:

Documentary displays attention arising from the attempt to make statements about life which are quite general, while necessarily using sounds and images that bear the inescapable trace of their particular historical origins. These sounds and images come to function as signs; they bear meaning, though the meaning is not really inherent in them but rather conferred upon them by their function within the text as a whole. We may think we hear history or reality speaking to us through a film, but what we actually hear is the voice of the text, even when that voice tries to efface itself. ("Voice" 262).

Simply put, a different filmmaker--who would speak with a different voice--could through commentary use "segregation" in a completely different context; give it completely different meaning. Or, a photograph with a wall dividing two games being played could instead have had as the voice-over commentary dialogue of how the game was so popular that there would be tournaments and games going on simultaneously. This image would mean something entirely different. Here, it is the combination. The words inform the image and the image, in turn, informs the dialogue, informs the spoken words.

Here the sounds and the image function as a sign of segregation--we are given an image of racism. Furthermore,

"In documentary, an event recounted is history reclaimed" (Nichols, Representing 21). Through stories of racism and abuse against the Black baseball player Moses Fleetwood Walker, the documentary--through the commentator--recovers the history of Black ball players who never had the opportunity to compete against Cap Anson, who never had the freedom to prove that maybe they were the greatest ball player of that century. Here, too, the documentary cleverly reclaims history from that writer who once said that "Cap Anson was the symbol of all that was good and strong in baseball." When the event of how Cap Anson threatened to not play against Moses Fleetwood Walker ("That nigger") and only backed down from that threat in order to avoid forfeiting his pay is recounted, this event of the so-called symbol of all that was strong and good in baseball follows directly the emotionally jarring stories of brutal threats against Moses Fleetwood Walker's very life for playing the game of baseball. We learn, additionally, that Moses Fleetwood Walker endured and continued to play despite those threats against his life. The documentary further recovers history by informing us that Cap Anson was a powerful and crucial figure in stopping Black players from entering the league and for forcing, among baseball ownership and management, a "gentleman's agreement" to keep Black players out of professional baseball. The documentary, in

recovering history for its own purposes, must destroy myths in the process of building its own. The documentary uses Cap Anson as the symbol of all that was good and strong in baseball to his contemporaries and uses the demolition of that symbol to represent all that was bad and wrong in baseball and hence American society. The voice of the documentary vilifies this past hero of segregation by segregating him from the game itself, for the voice must contextually contain the ugly for the audience to accept the argument that baseball, and hence American society, is grandly honorable.

Not only is history recovered, it is also informed by the present: "There is a time of the thing told and a time of the telling (the time of signification and the time of the signifier)" (Metz, Film 18). It is a contemporary filmmaker with contemporary sensibilities who chooses a photograph to illustrate the exclusion of Black players by including an out-of-focus white player sitting--his face too blurred from contextually senseless motion--while the camera pans up to a clear and focused (read determined and dignified) Black player, his strength and clarity self-evident, his focus unwavering.

The expositional mode of speech used here is:

inevitably given to objectification (hence the use of the term 'voice of God' to describe the classic 'heavy' commentary) but

recent documentaries have also used subjectivized exposition effectively, including the dispersal of the expositional function across a number of speakers, seen or unseen. (Corner 30)

One of the techniques that textures, intensifies, and personalizes the past in Baseball is the use of actors to voice common letters to subjectivize the story of the game to invoke a more emotional response at key moments. The documentary uses these letters (often the most emotional, most persuasive, and most compelling stories) effectively as the camera moves into a photograph of a team in uniform sitting on the grass, the players all White except one. The camera moves closer and closer to a Black ball player behind the others--his face boxed in by white players; his eyes looking directly into the viewer's eyes--while the voice-over says, "If I had not been quite so black, I might have caught on as a Spaniard or something of that kind. My skin is against me. Bud Fowler" (1:28). As the screen fades to black, the sense of entrapment lingers behind. Then the soft voice of a man comes in and he is speaking of the game, talking about seeing a guy hit a grand slam to win the game. We go into a live action interview with the man who's been speaking to us, who is identified with subtitles as Buck O'Neil of the Kansas City Monarchs, a successful Negro League team. He's talking about how a guy can be the hero today, but the next day he can miss the ball and lose

the game. Mr. O'Neil says, "It can bring you up here, and don't get too damn cocky 'cause tomorrow it can bring you down there. See? But one thing about it, though, you know it always will be a tomorrow. You got me today, but I'm coming back." In Representing Reality, Bill Nichols states: "The voices of others are woven into a textual logic that subsumes and orchestrates them" (37). With the image and words of the Black players of the past who were segregated from what was supposed to be America's game, the documentary gives us a Black man who illustrates, through the metaphor of the game being played, the hope tomorrow gives each of us.

With the idea of hope implanted, the film cuts to a photograph of a baseball game in an open field and a new voice saying, "Baseball is good. An honorable profession; a great challenge. It has blessed me, I have blessed it, and it has blessed our Country. Branch Ricky." The documentary has circled back to positive words in relation to baseball. Baseball is good again, even blessed. This time, however, it is good and blessed by the definition of Branch Ricky, the man who would ultimately integrate the game and the commentary, and who, as Bill Nichols states, "Points us toward the light, the truth" (Representing 4), when our universal voice says over the closeup of Branch Ricky--young and earnest--"And in 1947 he would help make baseball, in

truth, what it had always claimed to be: The National Pastime." And his photograph fades and, for a moment, his skin is neither white nor black. This superimposition of words over images builds a multi-layered text. Barthes states, "Formerly, the image illustrated the text (made it clearer); today, the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination" (26). The loading of images makes the viewer's reading task all the more difficult for all its richness. The loading of a colorless face--a face that emerges as the man who would help baseball break through color barriers--with the text of the implicitly inclusive nature of the word "national" burdens the image by homogenizing skin to illuminate the moral of the inner heart--the moral of shared humanity.

Superimposition creates relationships between word and image--those relationships form a voice. In "My Skin is Against Me", the textual logic builds from one word to the next, from one sentence to the next, and from one image to the next. Each cinematic element builds on the element that precedes it and the viewer's response is built in kind. Within the juxtapositions of racial segregation to baseball's promise of a tomorrow, the documentary's voice emerges--a voice that speaks to us of past hurt and future hope. Buck O'Neil supports that voice. America has struck

out and does strike out when it comes down to racism. But,
"it" will always be a tomorrow.

CHAPTER FOUR: IMAGE

The structure of the photograph is not an isolated structure; it is in communication with at least one other structure, namely the text. (Barthes 16)

Film is, ultimately, about seeing pointedly. It is about the rhetoric of image. The crucial element underlining orchestration and voice is the image itself. An element of truth certainly exists within Vivian Sobchack's statement that "In the still photograph, time and space are abstractions. Although the image has a presence, it neither partakes of nor describes the present" (59), but the highly orchestrated voice of Baseball does reclaim still images for the purpose of its living argument.

In an interview discussing Ken Burns' documentary The Statue of Liberty, Baseball's supervising film editor Paul Barnes spoke about that film which he also edited (which has a very similar style to Baseball): "When we were beginning discussions, Ken [Burns] said, 'We want to make the audience feel as though they're living in the photograph.' And by holding the shots longer or doing gentle moves in and out of the spaces and revealing different details of the photo, often it does seem to come to life" (138). An example of a photo being manipulated into life in order to serve Baseball's point of view is a photograph of Ty Cobb that appears in "Inning 8" (18:00). The image, which we don't

initially recognize as Ty Cobb because it's a close up of feet touching the base, has a contextual language even with the volume muted because, from our initial look at the feet to our last peek at the image after the camera has panned the still photograph, the image works like a sentence. The beginning of that sentence the metal cleats pounding the baseball bag--the spikes wide and dangerous in the way of old fashioned baseball cleats--and there is something crushing, something damaging directed towards the baseball bag with that foot pounding into it that clarifies the way Cobb's racism damaged the game. The camera slowly pans up over unidentified legs, torso and then up to a close-up of Cobb's face and close-ups "can bring out textures and details we might otherwise ignore" (Bordwell 241). The face framed apart from the body, the way the filmmaker draws us up towards a focus on the face and its expression revealed--the clenched lips, the eyes shut hard, the tightened muscles around the jaws and cheekbones--coupled with the prior exposition that Ty Cobb was one of the most racist of ballplayers--reveals hate. Hate not in the mundane, cliché representation of loud, yelling rage, but, rather, in the more realistic style of hatred--a blinded and exhaustingly contained hate; a determined brutality.

The Ty Cobb photograph illustrates how an image can work as shorthand for a filmmaker to present ideas. Images

can also be used to illustrate relationship, as Michael Rabiger states in Directing the Documentary: "...good composition is an organizing force that exists to visually dramatize relationships and to project ideas" (80). As stated earlier, the parallel narratives of Black and White America are the fundamental narratives of the documentary and, furthermore, the relationship between those parallel yet separate narratives creates the necessary tension for the telling of any good story. In "Inning 8," a single image visually captures the tension, the relationship between these parallel narratives that create an overall argument and meaning within the documentary, something Walter Murch defined in his book In the Blink of an Eye as "choosing a representative frame...an image that distills the essence of the thousands of frames that make up the shot in question, what Cartier-Bresson-- referring to still photography--called the 'decisive moment'" (41). At fifty four minutes and twenty six seconds, a close up of legs blocking home plate, the legs ensconced in shin guards, the camera pans up to reveal the frozen moment of a play and further pans up to reveal it is a Black player trying to score at home through a White player. The photograph takes on the weighty symbolism of a Black man breaking through White barriers in an attempt towards the obvious American symbolism of trying to claim home. The photograph captures

what Murch was referring to when he spoke of the decisive moment and the filmmaker; hence the voice of the documentary emphasizes the decisive moment by first focusing on the feet and not revealing the significance of the moment, but gradually working the viewer into it. In this way, the symbolism, the meaning, the very epiphany of the image is revealed to prepared eyes in the way that any epiphany can only come in life--from a preparedness only experience gives.

John Berger says, "Reproduction isolates a detail of a painting from the whole. The detail is transformed" (Ways 25). Baseball transforms singular moments out of many vast moments in the history of a century-old game and transforms them into representations of not only America's history, but also into reflections of people's attitudes towards each other. We see in the symbolic image used in "Inning 8" a Black pitcher on the mound and in mid-motion, obviously in the arena of a major league baseball game (54:39). In the vastness of that arena and framed in the background, behind and over the shoulder of the Black pitcher, are two shadowed figures--ominous and oppressive; murky. The shadows are symbolic in their facelessness and symbolic in how they hide, yet oversee, in an uncomfortably sinister way. Of the transcendence of image, Berger writes:

Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented; it then showed how something or somebody had once looked--and thus by implication how the subject had once been seen by other people.

(Ways 10)

Focusing the viewer on the presence of shadowed men over the Black player not only reveals a metaphor for the establishment's repression of minorities, but it also frames the past by placing the viewer in that pitcher's point of view. The viewer empathizes and, for a flash in time, experiences that man's point of view.

If images can be used as forms of statement, then by sheer logic, strings of images can be used to form texts. "They [images] can be joined together with words or other images into systems of signs, and hence, meaning. They can be framed and organized into a text" (Nichols, Representing 9). To illustrate how single images can be strung together in order to frame and organize a larger text, I will look at a string of images that share Willie Mays as a subject in "Inning 7." The first image is a freeze frame of Willie Mays at the plate, his swing frozen in the follow-through (1:20:00). His right hand is released from the bat; there is a fluidity about the image and we linger ["...the audience will either work fast at interpreting each new image or slowly, depending on how much time they were given" (Rabiger 77)] there before we jump to a more distant shot of the same photograph re-framed, this time from behind the

pitcher. The eye focuses first on the force of Willie Mays' legs, then on the line of his vision over the shoulder of the pitcher as if watching a hit ball take flight. The next image is of Willie Mays in the outfield at the moment of catching a ball, every limb stretched to the limit. The symmetry of line in his body reminiscent of ballet. Then a cut to another image, a photograph of another catch in the outfield--the ball, just in the glove, Willie Mays' arms wide open like the wings of an airplane, his cap just beginning to fall off--like freedom. The sense is of motion and of flight, as if this is a photograph of as close as any human can physically come to flying. Then the viewer is sent to another image of Willie Mays, this time on the bench in a dugout and he's leaning, looking at the viewer. He's relaxed, casual, smooth--he exerts a confidence--and in the succession of these images there is a musicality, even if the soundtrack were muted. Or, as Stefan Sharff states:

...one can perceive a succession of filmic images as a continuum of disclosures. Potentially, each new image brings forth something new. As the viewer matches shots into meaningful 'sentences', he is also looking for cues in each image on the screen to predict the next one, as if reaching out for the latent image beyond the perpendicular limits of the screen. (119)

Without having had the time to articulate a particular expectation of the next image, it doesn't come as any emotional surprise that the last image in the succession of

Willie Mays photographs begins with a swarm of eager White fans and then pans right across these fans reaching across the roof of a dugout to reveal Willie Mays signing autographs for these White fans--for there are no Black fans in the crowd--pressing in against each other to reach out to get his autograph. In the preceding images, there was a fluidity, a ballet, a freedom in the framing that suggested a lightness none of the Negro League images had in their stoic and posed weightedness. In this final image--in this brief montage--a Black player finally garners the focus of a long overdue attention for true baseball greatness and, finally, the White crowd bases its judgments, we are led to believe, solely on performance. In a single image we are transported forward and yet, at the same time, reminded of the past when players were not judged for their play on the field--were not given the opportunity to show their ability to play--and in an image we are circled back to the principle of the documentary itself: That ballplayers and, hence, people, would be better judged by skill, character, and personal habit than by the color of their skin. And that, ultimately, a game so magnificent and symbolic as baseball transcended prejudice because its very nature depends on ability.

In About Looking, John Berger writes on alternative uses of existing photos:

The aim must be to construct a context for a photograph, to construct it with words, to construct it with other photographs, to construct it by its place in an ongoing text of photographs and images. (64)

Baseball aims and, more often than not, hits the mark of constructing a context for photographs not only through words, soundtrack, juxtaposition, orchestration, and voice but also by camera movement and choice of images. Thus, the photographs come alive for the contemporary viewer and, in that life, give the image a context of significance. But what is meant by significance? What makes the content significant? Perhaps the effective documentaries--the documentaries that somehow inform us beyond our expectations by fundamentally changing the way we see the world--understand that human nature permits significance only in the present. The art in Baseball may be in the seamless way it brings the past to the forefront for the viewer. John Berger further says:

If we want to put a photograph back into the context of experience, social experience, social memory, we have to respect the laws of memory. We have to situate the printed photograph so that it acquires something of the surprising conclusiveness of that which *was* and *is*. (About Looking 65)

In Baseball, the images no longer exclusively belong to the past, but to both past and present. Maybe it isn't the conclusiveness that surprises us so much as the irrelevance of time when the past flows into our present conceptions and

understandings. Baseball triumphs by imposing its interpretation of stale photographs onto and within the viewer's evolving social memory.

CHAPTER FIVE: JUXTAPOSITION

The dream and the film are the juxtaposition of images in order to answer a question.
(Mamet 7)

Individual images work like statements. Strings of images can form paragraphs and build narratives within segments. The structure, the relationship between these segments, builds the argument of the text as a whole. As David Mamet writes in On Directing Film, "Documentaries take basically unrelated footage and juxtapose it in order to give the viewer the idea the filmmaker wants to convey" (3). An example of how juxtaposed disparate segments can convince the viewer of a particular way of perceiving parallel, yet separate, histories of Negro League and Major League baseball occurs in "Inning 5" and the relationships between the three segments: "The Midnight Rider," "You Lucky Bum" and "Josh" (25:45-45:30). "The Midnight Rider" segment focuses on the legendary Negro League pitcher Satchel Paige. It opens with a still photograph of him with a voice actor reading a list of Satchel Paige's philosophies of life, including and ending with: "Don't look back. Something might be gainin' on ya." Given the contextual understanding of the difficulties and prejudices Black ball players faced, Paige's warning to not look back echoes within the viewer and establishes Paige as a sort of poet of the Negro

Leagues. The editing leads the viewer to this conclusion by using Paige as evidence to support the documentary's voice:

In classic expository documentary these constraints include evidentiary editing (cutting to bring together the best possible evidence in support of a point), the filmmaker's responsibility to make his or her argument as accurately and convincingly as possible even if requires recontextualizing the points of individual witnesses or experts, and a practice of intervening in what occurs before the camera by means of the interview but without showing the filmmaker or even including the filmmaker's voice. (Nichols, Representing 17-18)

In the segment "The Midnight Rider" Satchel Paige--the pitcher, the character, the preacher, the poet--is himself the best possible evidence in support of one of the film's points: great stars--great heroes--played baseball concurrently, albeit obscurely, with the all White major leagues. To prop up Paige's status as a symbol of all that was glorious, and yet unjust (by the sheer necessity of the Negro League's existence because of segregation in baseball), interviews with ball players who played with and against Satchel Paige are used. Through these interviews, especially with Buck O'Neil, the viewer learns that Satchel Paige was the Negro League's Babe Ruth in terms of his saving the Negro Leagues financially, in the same way Babe Ruth saved Major League baseball by arriving with crowd pleasing home runs after the disillusionment following the Black Sox scandal. The documentary speaks directly to the

viewer in order to make the point that the average viewer probably isn't familiar with the name Satchel Paige, but most certainly has heard of Babe Ruth, and the documentary wants to convince the viewer of the judgment it has already itself made--the judgment that the ignorance of Negro League history and its great ball players is both a loss and wrong.

Still, Baseball isn't a lecture. The interviews also contain anecdotes to humanize and entertain. Through anecdote, we learn that Satchel Paige was also a fast and reckless driver who could make you laugh at his one-liners. Yet, as the documentary understands, a grimace elicits a more profound response immediately following a smile. Such a heightened reaction occurs following the humorous anecdotes about Satchel Paige when Buck O'Neil tells the story of when he and Satchel Paige went to a place where slaves were once auctioned off, where Satchel said, "Seem like I been here before" (35:20). The juxtaposition of the clownish with the poignant makes the poignant all the more jarringly effective because each informs the other. In film:

All shots affect one another and whole scenes depend on and influence the scenes around them. This interdependence is not merely progressive: it often operates in a zigzag fashion, a shot or a scene touching upon both a preceding and a succeeding shot or scene, forming a bridge between units of meaning in both a forward and a backward direction.
(Sharff 167)

In all due respect to Paige's rule of life to never look back, whether the viewer looks backwards or not, what has come before goes with the viewer and transforms the way everything that follows is perceived. The significance of juxtaposition spreads into, around, and after each segment. Juxtaposition is a force structuring a narrative within the individual segment, "The Midnight Rider".

But it also seeps into the proceeding segment titled "You Lucky Bum," which is signaled the same as with all of the numerous segments in Baseball, by an intertitle. Bill Nichols states the use of this device:

...mark off one scene from another to develop a mosaic structure that necessarily admits to its own lack of completeness even as individual facets appear to exhaust a given encounter. This sense of both incompleteness and exhaustion, as well as the radical shift of perceptual space involved in going from apparently three-dimensional images to two-dimensional graphics that comment on or frame the image generates a strong sense of a hierarchical and self-referential ordering. ("Voice" 271)

In Baseball, intertitles signify the end of the previous self-contained vignette and the beginning of a new one.

They also, simultaneously, comment on what came before, what will follow and, most importantly, how the two relate:

"[B]y putting Scene A next to Scene B, you're manipulating, you're leading [the audience] on a journey" (Haneke 45).

"You Lucky Bum" is a brief six minute segment that tells the

story of Babe Ruth's infamous--and much disputed--calling of his shot, when he may or may not have pointed to the outfield wall and subsequently hit a home run on the next pitch. After hitting the home run, Babe Ruth later said, as he was jogging to first base he kept thinking, "You lucky bum, you lucky bum, you lucky bum." The very title "You Lucky Bum," immediately following the story of the site where slaves were sold and the already told story of how Black ballplayers were excluded from Major League baseball, comments on the disparity between White and Black baseball, and the use of the intertitle emphasizes that point just as effectively as a spotlight could have. Furthermore, the juxtaposition, the disparity between the lives of Babe Ruth and Satchel Paige forms a pattern of opposition about which Graeme Turner in Film as Social Practice states, "produces both structure and discourse--the movement of the plot and the specific means of its representation in sound and image" (76). Within the rah-rah tone of the "You Lucky Bum" segment, replete with up-tempo music and roars of cheering fans, the viewer senses, on every perceptual level within a contemporary context, the stark contrast to the somber, slow-toned conclusion of "The Midnight Rider" segment.

In On Directing Film, David Mamet states that virtually the only thing he knows about film directing is Eisenstein's theory of montage, or the succession of images juxtaposed so

that the contrast between these images moves the story forward in the mind of the audience (2). Juxtaposed to the jovial and plump Babe Ruth, who never lacked for food or drink, who was the very essence of conspicuous consumption, are brief images and dialogue describing the Great Depression and the young boys who passed out from hunger trying to make minor league teams. Then comes the segment entitled "Josh," named for the great Negro League catcher Josh Gibson. "Josh" opens with a voice over of a Walter Johnson quote that describes the incredible ability of Josh Gibson as a hitter and a catcher, only to conclude with the phrase: "Too bad this Gibson is a Colored feller" (42:08). The parallelism resumes, and the "visual, geographic leap is bridged by a logic of implication" (Nichols, Representing 19). Here the implication is that the so-called "Black Babe Ruth" was unlucky, an especially weighted allusion when you look at his story right next to the man who many people say should rightfully be called "The White Josh Gibson," namely Babe Ruth. This point is never stated overtly by the voice-of-God commentator, by any of the interviewed, nor directly by the filmmaker. The point is made by structure. By taking three separate stories and situating them side by side, the three stories are joined into parts of a much bigger story. Hence, when the segment closes with a still photograph of Josh Gibson and Satchel Paige standing side by

side, the meaning of the image changes "according to what one sees immediately beside it" (Berger, Ways 29). The image no longer simply represents a posed picture of teammates. The image now pulls together these two players' stories that bookend "You Lucky Bum" and gives a sense of interconnectedness between the separate segments. This image of the two together is a visual signal of how these disparate segments cross over, interconnect, and interrelate. The image signals the joined narrative of Negro League players whose story parallels, yet remains segregated from, the Major Leagues.

CHAPTER SIX: MOSAIC

...baseball sets off the meaning of life precisely because it is pure of meaning. As the ripples in the sand (in the Kyoto garden) organize and formalize the dust which is dust, so the diamonds and rituals of baseball create an elegant, trivial, enchanted grid on which our suffering, shapeless, sinful day leans for the momentary grace of order.
(Hall 207)

Together, segments, their juxtaposition and the relationships they form, are evidence put forth by the voice of the documentary to persuade the viewer to accept the argument of the film itself or, as Berger writes, "In a film the way one image follows another, their succession, constructs an argument which becomes irreversible" (Ways 26). Historical documentary certainly is constrained, to a certain degree, by chronology. However, even within those constraints the choice of what comes first, second, third, and last influences the reading of the documentary. Events contemporary to each other can be skillfully reclaimed by the filmmaker in order to lead the viewer toward what the text passionately believes are the truths of its subject.

The concluding ten minutes contained in the segment "The Best" in "Inning 5" illustrate the power of structure. The segment opens at the disputed, in terms of the year, hundredth anniversary of baseball in 1939 and the first induction of baseball players into the newly invented Hall of Fame. A voice over quotes Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the

then-commissioner of baseball, who describes the game as "the very backbone of America itself." Through these moments of the documentary we see black and white photographs and even motion pictures of great ball players including Walter Johnson, Honus Wagner, Cy Young and the lucky bum himself, Babe Ruth. There is a festive mood, heightened by an up-tempo version of the national anthem on the soundtrack. The viewer is invited in to this revelry, this celebration of baseball. Then, quite dramatically, there is a flash of detail-less white and the sound of a camera click as if a flash bulb just went off, followed by a melancholy image of an anonymous Negro League player. The shift takes a mere instant to occur and, in effect, shames the revelers and elicits a judgment because juxtaposed images bias the audience subliminally (Barnes 146).

There is no question Baseball romanticizes, even mythologizes, the game and its players--its past--with its cinematic soundtrack and larger than life metaphors and voice-of-God commentator stating that baseball is about coming home. But anyone who thinks that is all there is to this documentary has really only seen snippets here and there--maybe a highlight, maybe a preview on PBS--because it is also true that Baseball shows the realistic, gritty, down and dirty, cheating, greedy, unjust, and racist history of baseball. And, as much as the adoring voice of the

documentary smooth-talks the viewer into sharing that adoration, it is simultaneously an honest voice tinged with bitter disappointment and embarrassment for the game that it loves. Bill Nichols wrote in "The Voice of Documentary" that "Organizational strategies establish a preferred reading" (261). Placing the image of the Negro League player directly after the party atmosphere at the first Hall of Fame inductions and flashing the viewer with a shocking white in between practically begs the viewer to remember that the game itself is a beautiful thing, and it has been peopled with heroes, with Lou Gehrigs and Satchel Paiges and Buck O'Neils. But the game also, as Brian Neilson states in The Theater of Sport, is "an autobiographical slice of the larger world we occupy" (9). The biography of ball players and, as a reflection of America, the biography of this country's history cannot simply be viewed as all good or all bad. As this segment closes out with "Shadow Ball," there is an interview with David Okrent in which he talks about the great unknown, the great what-if that surrounds the history of baseball, because we can never say who was the greatest player in the major leagues pre-Jackie Robinson--pre-desegregation--because so many great players were excluded from playing. As the title "The Best" suggests, the significance of how players' numbers match up against other players from the past and in the present

matters. Who has Hall of Fame numbers, has had a Hall of Fame career? Who was the best hitter? Ted Williams, Babe Ruth? Who was the best home run hitter? Babe Ruth, Roger Maris, Mark McGwire? Walter Murch writes, "It is frequently at the edges of things that we learn most about the middle" (1). When "Shadow Ball" ends with a story of Satchel Paige finally pitching against Josh Gibson to see who was the greatest player in the Negro League, the story of Satchel Page striking out Josh Gibson is a story from the edge and the edge is "what if?". The bitter land of could have been where Satchel Paige might have pitched to Babe Ruth, and the meaning we are to glean from that edge: the great cost to all when anyone is excluded not based on ability or character but based on prejudice.

Film, Walter Murch says, is "Made up of many different pieces of film joined together into a mosaic" (5). Baseball consists of nearly nineteen hours of images and words and juxtapositions that together are tiles glued and grouted to form a mosaic. Just as tile mosaics have patterns that repeat, Baseball has the comforting connections between the past and the present, and the familiar image of batters holding bats and pitchers holding baseballs in a motif of uniforms and team photographs. If these so-called tiles covering some hundred years of baseball history weren't ordered and organized--Satchel Paige beside Babe Ruth beside

Josh Gibson--or if they weren't orchestrated, they would be a jumbled mess of interesting tidbits about the game, but with no larger importance. The way Baseball moves across and into photographs, the way it brings them to life, how it punctuates interviews, where it inserts anecdotes, how it frames images, what truths the voice-of-God commentary aims the viewer toward, which segments are juxtaposed against each other, and the titles of each vignette form a much larger text that, when looked at closely, reflects baseball--reflects America. Moreover, the documentary asks the viewer to look through its clear glass into its mosaic to learn, from both human triumph and human failure, the beauty of baseball and the indignity of bias. Burns the filmmaker operates much the same way as Michelangelo the painter of the Sistine Chapel in that they both take familiar myths and place them side by side in an order which recovers stories lost. Both artists revere their subject; beautify them often. However, neither artist worships his subject absent the terror--the fear, the certain ugliness--within the myths they explore as if each artist asks his viewer to appreciate humanity for its very ability to overcome that which is ugly--to overcome sin for Michelangelo and to overcome bigotry for Burns--and that when we lose the truth we wish to suppress in glorifying our

past we, in truth, do the opposite by not celebrating
humanity's ability to change.

CHAPTER SEVEN: LEAVES OF GRASS

The good arms eventually fail but so what
so what if we have to pay for everything
so what if it's harder to be alive than we
think
the sun is the sun making me squint
the green field has been the green field
since before I was born
a fair ball is always a risk that goes one
way or the other
it always will be an easy out or a foot on
the base
aiming for the next base aiming for the next
base aiming for
home plate. (Prado 269)

Film and baseball share drama in common, and documentary keeps score of that drama. Within a baseball scorecard, each box records an at bat, the sum of which tells the story of the game. The documentary mimics a scorecard, which is a form of mosaic, transcribing each at bat so that it stands alone while also recording the sequence of at bats which build upon each other and form the game itself. Baseball uses records of moments from the history of baseball to form a scorecard of America which recovers the shameful errors right along with the glorious achievements in order to expand viewers points of memory and vision to include the whole of the game rather than merely the highlights.

But the success of the documentary isn't the metaphors, allegories, or myths. The beauty of Baseball comes from its strange mixture of pastoral urbanism, heroic everymen, and

clumsied gracefulness. The beauty lies in the humanity--in the images of strong hands, strong forearms, clutching a wooden bat in the ever human hope of beating destiny. Baseball proves the human will can overcome limitations and can, on a good night, even overcome the laws of physics. It can even be the journey forth into dangerous, forbidden turf and making it safely home again. It can be Carlton Fisk waving--willing--a home run fair; Willie Mays catching the uncatchable.

Baseball represents human hope and failure and disappointment and hope again and, as such, makes the perfect subject for documentary. The drama surrounding baseball is the epic of life. The documentary--along with Walt Whitman--celebrates the body, celebrates the self, celebrates America. We are what the artist--the filmmaker--sees within the game and its players. We hate, love, lust, and play across leaves of grass.

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