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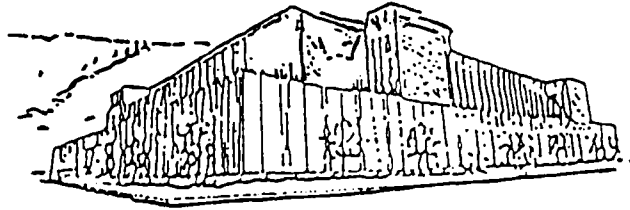
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Our Country, Our Game, Our Film

A Rhetorical Analysis of American Cultural Values in the Institution of Baseball  
as Expressed in the Film *Field of Dreams*

by

Ryan Wade Gill

B.S. Lewis-Clark State College,  
Lewiston, Idaho, 1994

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Montana

1999

Approved by:



Chairperson



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Our Country, Our Game, Our Film: A Rhetorical Analysis of Cultural Values in the Institution of Baseball as Expressed in the Film *Field of Dreams* (134 pp.)

Director: Dr. Sara E. Hayden 

American culture and the game of baseball have a long standing, reciprocal relationship. The means through which this study examines this relationship is that of cultural values. The American value system is characterized by oppositions and it is these oppositions and the tensions inherent within them that contribute to our understanding of American society and baseball. The value oppositions of individualism and community, youth and experience, work and play, spiritual and secular standpoints, and rural and urban livelihoods are identified and explicated as the systems that most accurately represent the cultural institution of baseball. It is claimed that the game reflects and maintains many of these value oppositions as well as the tensions among them by balancing each value in the system.

The film *Field of Dreams*, as the cinematic illustration of baseball, acts as a significant vehicle that perpetuates the relationship between baseball and American culture by balancing the value systems of individualism and community, youth and experience, and work and play. In addition, it is argued that the film suggests a preference for a spiritual over a secular standpoint and a rural over an urban perspective. Thus, by effectively balancing and preferring values, *Field of Dreams* presents a vision of America as a perfect world where baseball allows for its characters the realization of dreams and the righting of wrongs. Furthermore, because film and baseball can be considered forms of myth, *Field of Dreams* reinforces baseball's role in the American Dream and, in doing so, acts in a therapeutic manner to assist those who do not live in the perfect world it creates.

## Acknowledgments

When I first arrived at The University of Montana in the fall of 1997, I was an excited (albeit apprehensive) young man with great expectations for the opportunities that graduate school held for me. Two years and too many late nights later, I have finished graduate school an excited (albeit more confident) old coot who really wants nothing more than a nice, long nap. Nonetheless, I have met some terrific people along the way and many of them deserve recognition for their contributions to this project and my success as a graduate student.

First, I'd like to thank all of my fellow graduate students. They are a complete bunch of freaks but I love 'em and thank them for their support and friendship. In particular, I'd like to thank Tom Cuthbert and Jeff Berry. They are two of the finest chaps I have ever known and I can't imagine graduate school going as well as it did without them. They are true friends and I wish them the best in wherever the world takes them.

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Overall, I feel very privileged to have been part of the Department of Communication Studies at The University of Montana. I have received an outstanding education in my brief time here and I will do my best to put it to good use. Moreover, I've come to know some wonderful people and I thank them for all that they have done for me. I may feel like an old coot, but a happy, well-educated old coot and, in the end, that ain't so bad.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

In 1976, author Michael Novak wrote *The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit*. In that volume, Novak discussed Harvard instructor Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, a European professor driven to America by Hitler's regime. As an educator, Rosenstock-Huussy came to realize that his students were having a much more difficult time relating to his references to European stories, historical or legendary, than did his students in Germany. For years the dedicated professor tried to find a set of illustrations that would provide the students with the understanding he so desperately wanted to convey. He found his answer in the world of sport. Whether his lectures focused on such topics as excellence, failure, community, mysticism, emotion, intelligence, or others, he used sports examples much to the academic success of his students. As he wrote, "The world in which the American student who comes to me at about twenty years of age really has confidence is the world of sport. This world encompasses all his virtues and experiences, affection and interests" (Novak, 1985, p. 362).

This story illustrates not only the ubiquity of sports in American popular culture but also the importance sports play in furthering an understanding of that culture. Like other social institutions - politics, education, religion, marriage, family - sports are integrally coupled with the dominant social structure of American society as well as its values, beliefs, and ideologies (Duncan, 1983). Talamini and Page (1973) emphasize this notion by pointing out that the world of sport, "although clearly distinguishable, is an

inseparable part of the larger society: its cultural characteristics reflect the more inclusive culture and, in turn, help to shape society's standards and style of life" (p. 35).

More than any other sport, baseball is particularly emblematic of America and, therefore, lends itself to the scholarly inquiry it so richly deserves. In fact, the connection between baseball and American culture has been acknowledged by numerous Americans throughout history. From Walt Whitman's "I see great things in baseball. It's our game - the American game" in 1846, to Mark Twain declaring baseball the symbol of America in that it was "the outward and visible expression, of the drive and push and rush and struggle of the raging, tearing, and booming of the nineteenth century" (Clemens, 1923, p. 145), the game has received considerable attention in regard to the symbolic expression it has with the country that has embraced it. Furthermore, Bjarkman (1990) notes that the pop culture industry that currently consumes baseball (film, literature, music, collectibles, and so on) wholeheartedly confirms baseball writer Roger Angell's observation that "baseball seems to have been invented solely for the purpose of explaining all other things in life" (p. 10). Thus, by exploring the ways in which we interpret baseball as an institution, we are exploring the ways in which we interpret our society, our culture, and ourselves. George Grella, in what may be the definitive essay on the celebration of baseball, notes that "The game is as instructive, as beautiful, and as profound as the most significant aspects of American culture. It should be compared not only with other sports, but with our other indigenous arts - our painting, music, dance, and literature. Anyone who does not understand the game cannot hope to understand the country" (1975, p. 550).

Although baseball, as a dominant American cultural icon, is obviously popular and pervasive, we, as a nation, do not collectively define it on some sort of singular societal level. As with any other American institution, baseball is interpreted in a variety of ways inasmuch as baseball means many things to many people. These variations can be structured in some manner in that many of these interpretations are representative of cultural values. The American value system is a “complex cultural matrix consisting of a variety of value clusters and dimensions” (Trujillo & Ekdorn, 1985, p. 262). Scholars such as Williams (1970) and Rokeach (1973) have thoroughly studied societal values and determined that there are certain values that are omnipresent in American culture. Williams (1970), for example, notes fifteen value clusters that have long been conspicuous in American society. These clusters include such values as achievement, work, morality, humanitarianism, efficiency, progress, equality, freedom, democracy, secular rationality, individual personality, group superiority and others. Some of these values are emphasized more than others at various points in time while others are simultaneously held even though they conflict with one another. However, the fact that these values are changing or are incongruous does not mean “that they are not shared by members of society as a whole and by members representing different subcultures of society” (Trujillo & Ekdorn, 1985, p. 263).

Baseball reflects and affirms many of these values as well as the obvious tensions among them. Yet, it can also act as a means by which these tensions are relieved insofar as the opposing value systems exist in cooperation *and* competition through what I will refer to as *dialectical balance*. Through this balance, elements of competing value systems work to affirm and support one another rather than replace one with the other.

The primary value opposition in baseball and contemporary American society is that of individualism and community. Therefore, the consolidation of this value system opens the door for other opposing values to be balanced. The value oppositions (or cultural themes) of work and play, youth and experience, spiritual and secular standpoints, and rural and urban living are able to reside in cooperation while also allowing individualism and community to flourish. By balancing these values, baseball establishes itself as an appropriate metaphor for American society.

Not only do baseball and America have a very reciprocal relationship, but so do baseball and film. That is, many scholars have asserted that “both baseball and the cinema have assisted in enculturating the American people and are, in fact, instructional tools by which Americans have learned and acquired American values and culture” (Dickerson, 1991, p. 3). In fact, the manner in which many sociologists, researchers, and critics have described film sounds strangely similar to the way in which the previously cited scholars described the game of baseball. For example, Marsden, Nachbar and Grogg (1982) state that “to view an American film is to witness the dreams, values, and fears of the American people, to feel the pulse of American culture” (p. 5). Likewise, Bywater and Sobchack (1989) note that “films have been used for various functions, been part of certain social rituals and institutions. Studied and described, they should yield info about, and insights into, the culture of which they are a part” (p. 113). If it is correct, then, to say that both baseball and film reflect and affirm cultural values, then certainly an examination of a baseball film should provide worthy insight into our culture and the values or themes that it encompasses. The film *Field of Dreams* is a particularly deserving choice because not only is it a film about baseball, but it is an extremely popular and prevalent film about

baseball. Therefore, I argue that the film *Field of Dreams* is the symbolic representation of the aforementioned value balance. That is, America, baseball, and the film all represent these perspectives because each is an element of American cultural existence. *Field of Dreams*, then, as the unification of the societal institutions of baseball and film, is representative of this cultural existence and also works to establish itself as a metaphorical icon in its ability to incorporate a variety of American values.

Released in April of 1989, the film immediately touched a societal nerve. It was an Academy Award nominee for best picture and reviewers went so far as to label it the successor to Frank Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life." The film earned over \$62 million at the box office (*Variety*, 1989) and over \$30 million in rentals just one year after its theatrical release (*Variety*, 1990). It was instantly embraced by baseball as its new flagship film and, in fact, continues to be referenced in baseball books and broadcasts today. The deep attachment American audiences have with *Field of Dreams* could be chalked up to the fact that it is a charming, well-written film, with fine acting and a good message. These things are certainly true, but there are countless films that Americans hold dear that could be described in exactly the same way. So, why do we, as a society, so profoundly identify with *Field of Dreams*? The answer lies in the fact that we could ask these very questions of our national pastime.

This motion picture says many things about our society and who we are as Americans and as human beings and we can certainly say this very thing about baseball. In fact, I contend that it is because of this reciprocal relationship that our country, our game, and our film can be analyzed as parallels that reflect and create the cultural themes and value systems inherent in one another. *Field of Dreams* highlights the tensions significant

to American culture in general and the 1980s in particular. Moreover, through the progression of the film, both the characters in the film and the audience members are invited to reach a balance between competing value systems including individualism and community, work and play, youth and experience, spiritual and secular standpoints, and rural and urban livelihoods. As such, *Field of Dreams* is a significant vehicle that perpetuates the link between film, baseball, and American culture.

The purpose, then, of this exposition is to act as an exploration into the institutions of baseball and film as represented by *Field of Dreams*. Hence, in this chapter I first provide an overview of the film; I then offer an historical/contextual analysis of baseball and film leading up to and including *Field of Dreams*; then I outline the theoretical lens through which I will analyze the film; lastly, I discuss the methodology for my analysis and furnish an outline of the remaining chapters. In a nutshell, this exposition looks at the American cultural values reflected in and created by the institution of baseball as expressed in the film *Field of Dreams*.

### Overview of the Film

*Field of Dreams* is based on the 1982 novella, *Shoeless Joe*, by William P. Kinsella. It was written for the screen and directed by Phil Alden Robinson. The film stars Kevin Costner as the lead protagonist, Ray Kinsella, and begins with Ray narrating his family history while we (the audience) see snapshots of him and his family.

Ray tells us that his mother died when he was three and his father raised him the best he knew how. Instead of Mother Goose, Ray was put to bed at night to stories of Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and the great Shoeless Joe Jackson. Ray goes on to explain that

he and his father fought frequently which led Ray to attend college at Berkeley as it was the farthest school from home he could find. It was at the university that he met Annie (Amy Madigan). They fell in love and married the summer of 1974, the year Ray's father died. They had a child and decided to move to Iowa (where Annie is from) and buy a farm. Ray poignantly puts his life in perspective for the audience before the initial scene begins: "I'm thirty-six years old. I love my family. I love baseball. And I'm about to become a farmer. But until I heard 'the voice,' I had never done a crazy thing in my whole life."

While working in his cornfield, Ray repeatedly hears a voice proclaim, "If you build it, he will come." Ray believes the voice to mean that if he builds a baseball diamond in his cornfield, then he, former baseball player Shoeless Joe Jackson, will come and play ball again on his field. Going against all logic and, much to the disgust of his fellow farmers, Ray plows under his spring corn crop to make room for the new ballpark.

He ultimately finishes the field (complete with bleachers and lights) and for an entire year it sits void of voices or visions. Just when financial problems begin to enter the Kinsella's lives, so does Shoeless Joe Jackson (Ray Liotta). Eventually, other players from the 1919 Chicago White Sox emerge from the corn to join Joe on the field.<sup>1</sup> At this point, the 'ghost players' are only visible to Ray, Annie, and their daughter, Karin (Gaby Hoffman) which proves to be quite troublesome for Annie's brother, Mark (Timothy Busfield), who offers to save the Kinsellas from bankruptcy by purchasing the farm.

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<sup>1</sup> The 1919 Chicago White Sox baseball club is often referred to as the "Black" Sox because eight members of the team were accused of throwing the World Series against the Cincinnati Reds. Consequently, those players, including Shoeless Joe Jackson, were banned from baseball by Kennesaw Mountain Landis, the newly elected commissioner of baseball.

Amazed and amused by their unusual circumstances, Ray and Annie opt not to sell the land.

While standing on the ballfield, the voice then returns and instructs Ray to, “Ease his pain.” Ray concludes that the voice is telling him to go to Boston and ease the pain of a 1960s writer named Terence Mann (James Earl Jones). Believing that his pain will be eased by attending a baseball game, Ray travels to Boston and escorts Terence to Fenway Park. At the game, both men hear the voice say, “Go the distance.” They also see the scoreboard display the statistics of Archibald “Moonlight” Graham, a former professional ballplayer. Archie’s entire career amounted to one game with zero at bats. Terence and Ray spend little time contemplating what “go the distance” means, and they set out for Minnesota to find Archie.

Upon arriving in Archie’s hometown of Chisholm, Minnesota, they find that Archie had become a physician and that he died in 1972. Struggling to understand the connections, Ray takes a walk and discovers that both he and the town have been thrust into the past to the very year Archie died. He meets “Doc” Graham (Burt Lancaster) and the two discuss the one major league game that he played in. On their way back to Iowa, Terence and Ray pick up a hitchhiker who, as it turns out, is a much younger reincarnation of Archie (Frank Whaley) and, subsequently, he joins them in their journey.

The trio arrive in Iowa to find that Jackson has invited many great deceased baseball players to play on the field of dreams. However, while Ray was away, Mark has taken the final steps to buy the farm. As Terence and the Kinsellas watch the game, Mark argues with Ray and accidentally knocks Karin off the bleachers. Archie, who is playing in the game, leaves the field and, as he does, turns into old “Doc” Graham and saves Karin’s



life. Mark is now able to see the players and, thus, emphatically tells Ray to not sell the farm.

As *Field of Dreams* concludes, Terence accepts Joe's invitation to enter the mysterious cornfield with him and the other players while Ray, on the other hand, meets his father, John (Dwier Brown), as a young man. As Ray and his father have a catch with one another, we see hundreds of cars filled with people making a pilgrimage to the field in hopes of fulfilling their own dreams.

### Historical/Contextual Analysis

To fully interpret the parallels between American society, baseball, and film, it is pertinent to first understand the origins of the game, its unprecedented rise to popularity, the many ways in which it acts as an American cultural metaphor, and the role of film in this progression. In this section of the paper, then, I provide a brief chronicle of baseball and its relationship with American culture. Additionally, I lace that chronicle with narrative concerning the role of baseball in film leading up to and including *Field of Dreams*.

Although many bat and ball games have been played in various societies throughout history, organized baseball's origins can be linked to early nineteenth century England when boys played a version of the game called "rounders" (*Encyclopedia of World Sport*, 1996, p. 91). However, it is interesting to note that in 1905 sporting goods giant Albert Spalding decided to challenge this theory of baseball's history and created a seven man commission to prove that baseball was indigenous to America. Spalding's committee, which consisted of two U.S. Senators, bypassed all historical documents and

relied on the single testimony of a man who claimed that West Point cadet Abner Doubleday invented baseball in Cooperstown, New York, in 1839. The findings were immediately accepted as truth and despite the fact that modern historians have added research to back the original theory of baseball's origins, Doubleday's effort continues to be accepted as part of the conventional wisdom in America today. Talamini and Page (1973) say it best when they write that "baseball evokes for us a past which may never have been ours, but which we believe was, and certainly that is enough" (p. 105). It should be noted, however, that, although the game is a direct descendent of British versions, organized baseball as we know it is very much American in its rules and structure. From its outset, America identified with baseball. We took it in and raised it as if it were one of our own and it has responded accordingly.

Baseball's popularity continued to grow through the latter half of the nineteenth century by sharing in the nation's thriving prosperity and changing ethnic composition. Leagues were formed and by the early 1900s professional teams had been chartered in almost every major city. With the exception of the National League's self-imposed "color ban" in 1876 excluding African Americans from the established leagues, professional baseball was open to the members of many ethnic minorities including those of Irish, Jewish, German, Italian, and Polish heritage. However, despite the color ban, African Americans fielded both amateur and professional teams of their own during this time and, in fact, a few African Americans did play on racially integrated professional teams in leagues other than the dominant National League.

Unfortunately, as racial segregation became the rule in the United States, sentiment against integration began to grow amongst the players and in the late 1890s white leagues

stopped recruiting African Americans. Furthermore, those black players who did play on predominantly white teams were treated very poorly by their teammates and fans as well. According to an 1889 issue of *The Sporting News*, “race prejudice exists in professional baseball to a marked degree, and the unfortunate son of Africa who makes his living as a member of a team of white professionals has a rocky road to travel” (Peterson, 1970, p. 41). For example, most white players refused to socialize with African American players and tried to force them out of the game. White players would often attempt to spike the black players when sliding into a base and it was typical for white pitchers to throw at black batters (Riess, 1980).

The absence of African American players and other minority groups clearly reflected the dominant American prejudices as even spectators insulted them and threatened their lives. However, despite such horrific conditions, African Americans continued to play ball within their own ‘Negro Leagues’ for the next sixty years. Sadly, most black players were paid considerably less than their white counterparts and, in fact, most profits from black baseball ended up in the hands of the principally white owners (Riess, 1980). Although black ballclubs did occasionally play white clubs, and very competitively at that, the goal of most African Americans was to eventually play in the majors and gain the prestige the white players received. In addition, some African Americans successfully made attempts to pass for light-skinned Cubans and Native Americans as some members of these groups had made it to the big leagues.

The exclusion of minorities from baseball at the professional level was a problem that plagued the game and the nation and continued to do so for many years. Still, the fact that the black players, rather than abandoning the game completely, created their own

teams and leagues is tremendously significant. Although they were excluded from the white baseball community, those characteristics of the game that create community persisted. That is, the African American players could not join whites by law, but they still chose to play the game and create a community of their own. This collective quality of the game has never retreated and continues to be a major contributor to its success.

Notwithstanding, white immigrants who came to America without skills or money did find acceptance in baseball as an alternative to the labor jobs in the cities. Here, the cultural themes of work and play were used to interpret baseball in relation to American society. Baseball was viewed as a profession with hard working players who represented self-sacrifice and teamwork. However, it also acted as a source of play in that it gave hard working men an opportunity to relax and relieve the stress that accompanied the rigors of daily life. Because baseball allowed both values to coincide, the prestige of the game rose to an all time high and with the creation of unions came higher salaries thus attracting an even greater number of men to baseball. Even the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865) could not deter men from the game. In fact, it may have contributed to baseball's continued growth in that the war brought together massive numbers of young men who, when they were not fighting, played baseball. The Union and Confederate veterans then returned home as enthusiasts of the game thus vaulting its popularity (*Encyclopedia of World Sport*, 1996).

Professional baseball spoke directly to some of America's needs and, as Riess notes, "the sport was one of our finest national institutions which had certain latent functions contributing to both the public's and the individual's welfare" (1980, p. 6). The game attracted crowds from all walks of life, was open to those with talent and tenacity and taught children traditional American values such as courage, honesty, and patience.

Here, we begin to see the emphasis on youth in baseball, not only in terms of playing the game, but also in relation to it as an edifying institution. Baseball and other sports continue today to be used by educators and parents to socialize children into American society and assist in teaching them right from wrong. What must be remembered, however, is that someone has to teach the children these values and that teacher (or ballplayer) is representative of experience and knowledge thus expanding the reciprocal relationship youth and experience have with one another.

The late 1800s were also significant in that it was at this time that the first motion pictures were developed. While numerous inventors struggled to gain the title of inventor of the motion picture, it was Thomas Edison who developed the first projection system which he called Kinetoscope (Defleur & Dennis, 1991). In 1905, a handful of entrepreneurs charged attendants five cents to view short films in small theaters called nickelodeons. In 1910, there were 10,000 motion picture houses showing silent pictures in the United States and by 1914 an estimated 40 million patrons attended the movies every week (Defleur & Dennis, 1991). Just as baseball began as a simple child's game and exploded to become the most popular team sport in America during this period, motion pictures also began as crude, serially projected drawings and soon thereafter became the nation's dominant mass entertainment.

The 1920s are typically referred to as baseball's Golden Age. The twenties was a decade of profound growth in many forms including the development of broadcasting, the increase in financial investments, the continued expansion of cities, and the emergence of professional baseball. As urbanization and a progressive attitude enveloped the nation, baseball became more and more an urban recreation and was portrayed as a valuable

source of community integration for those locales that housed a major league team. In fact, according to Riess (1980), “the local franchise was regarded by people as a reliable index to a town’s status” and “a city was not viewed as much of an urban area unless it had a professional team” (p. 19). Nonetheless, the game continued in its rural tradition in that it was played out of doors on green grass and, in doing so, actually contributed to “the national health and the development of the national muscle” (Riess, 1980, p. 25). This connection with nature, health, and the outdoors is one that continues today as baseball acts as a city centered form of entertainment that has its roots in the country.

America was becoming a modern nation and social developments such as an increasingly bureaucratic organizational structure and profound immigration further inflated an already stratified society (Riess, 1980). Because of the profound connection the country had with the game, many Americans looked to professional baseball and the convictions that it held as a model. Riess (1980, p. 25) notes that “baseball was said to be second only to the public schools as a teacher of American mores” in that it instilled civic pride and taught values such as honesty, individualism, physical activity, self-sacrifice, and teamwork. With an ever growing acceptance throughout America, baseball’s popularity exploded. The number of teams and leagues, attendance at the games, and overall media coverage greatly increased. Newspapers contained numerous articles on baseball and radio began to broadcast play-by-play accounts of the games, thus vaulting the star players of the day such as Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig to celebrity status. In fact, Dickerson (1991) notes that during the Jazz Age no one was as popular as Babe Ruth because he “symbolized a nation bent on enjoying life” (p. 17).

The notion of infinite opulence as characterized by the Roaring Twenties and Babe Ruth quickly ended, however, with the stock market crash of 1929. Oddly enough, this was the very time period in which baseball and film began their relationship. The baseball films of this period include *Fast Company* (1929), *They Learned About Women* (1930), *Hot Curves* (1930), *Fireman, Save My Child* (1932), *Elmer the Great* (1933), and *Alibi Ike* (1935). As is the perspective of this paper, Rollins (1983) reminds us that films serve us in a much more engaging way than simply recording reality, “for films register the feelings and attitudes of the period in which they are made” (p. 249) and the period following the Great Depression was certainly no exception. For example, the protagonists in these films are all from small town America and through their exposure to the urban world, they realize the importance and value of their humble, rural beginnings (Dickerson, 1991). The protagonists are also more representative of youth over experience. They are socially naive, child-like, and want to play baseball for the sheer joy of the game. The films provide for the audience a sense of hope by focusing on a united nation through community and cooperation while also expressing the need for strong individuals to assist in such trying times. The films (as films do) also act as a diversion in that the Depression is never overtly mentioned nor is there any acknowledgment of the actual time period in which each of these films takes place. Considering the economic difficulties during this era, one can easily see why ignoring the present for at least an hour or two would be desirable. While individualism, youth, and rural tendencies are more of the norm for the heroes in these films, community, experience, and urban principles are not abandoned. Due to the conflict and anxiety that existed at the time, it would have been impractical to extol the virtues of one value to the exclusion of the other (Dickerson, 1991).

Baseball and American society continued to parallel each other in that World War II also had very adverse affects on each. However, baseball, like America itself, did what it needed to survive. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, numerous American men enlisted or were drafted to battle the Axis powers and, hence, many women joined the labor force to make up for the loss that was created. In an attempt to cure the psychological ills of the nation, President Roosevelt urged baseball to continue despite the fact that many of its best players had been drafted into the military. In response, Chicago Cubs owner, Philip K. Wrigley, created the American Girls Baseball League in 1943 (*Encyclopedia of World Sport*, 1996). The AGBL was short lived and folded in 1954 as a more traditional role of femininity spread across America following the war. However, the success of the AGBL thus bookmarked another chapter in baseball's history as a unifier of people and reaffirmed its role as a steadfast cultural institution.

The baseball films of this era include *It Happened in Flatbush* (1942), *Pride of the Yankees* (1942), *Moonlight in Havana* (1942), and *Ladies Day* (1943). Because of the war, Hollywood had lost foreign markets in Europe and Asia. To make up for the loss in revenue, producers began making films that appealed to Latin American audiences (Dickerson, 1991). *Ladies Day* and *Moonlight in Havana* have Latin American stars and themes and, therefore, reflect the social climate. However, it is *Pride of the Yankees* that stands out as *the* film of the period. The film is a biography of baseball icon Lou Gehrig and was tremendously popular because it was about a man who embodies the moral standards, ethics, and values that Hollywood and, particularly, Roosevelt wanted to convey to America (Dickerson, 1991). *Pride of the Yankees* was also a love story as much as it was a baseball story and, therefore, appealed to many women whose husbands



were fighting over seas. Likewise, just as the films of the thirties emphasized youth over experience, so does *Pride of the Yankees*. Gehrig is portrayed as very innocent and inexperienced in the ways of the world and women. However, this accent on youth is offset by the finality of death insofar as the film is about a man who died before his time which paralleled the many American young men whose bright futures were cut short by the war.

As society continued to become more and more complicated and diverse in the time period following World War II, so did baseball. The war brought increased attention to race relations and civil rights for African Americans. Within Major League Baseball this issue came into play when Branch Rickey, the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, signed African American sports star Jackie Robinson to a minor league contract in 1945. Two years later, Robinson became a full time member of the Dodgers, thus breaking the long held color barrier in Major League Baseball. Of interest here, however, is that many historians have noted that Robinson was not necessarily chosen exclusively for his skill on the diamond. Although those who played against him have attested to his competitive rage, he was chosen because “he fit all the standards of acceptability to whites and would not rock the boat” (Good, 1997, p. 142). Overall, the 1950s were characterized by the Cold War, the Red Scare, and McCarthyism which all contributed to historians labeling it the anti-intellectual decade in that it was typified by conservative politics and business supremacy (Caughy & May, 1964). The threat of communism added to America’s attempt to establish a status quo that reflected capitalism and “business as usual” (Dickerson, 1991). In fact, Kariel (1965) points out that this era rejected pluralism in that our institutions pressed for sameness for the good of society.

The baseball films of this time period not only reflect this disposition, but also represent the most abundant era for the production of baseball films. Between 1948 and 1958, there were seventeen films released that incorporated baseball themes. There are many possible explanations for this, but perhaps the primary reason is that Hollywood made a concerted attempt to profit from the popularity of televised baseball. Another explanation for the abundance of baseball films at this time is that baseball, as an institution of American culture, possessed the ability to reinforce the status quo which led the film industry to produce films that did this as well. The baseball films of this age include *The Babe Ruth Story* (1948), *The Stratton Story* (1949), *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950), *Angels in the Outfield* (1951), *Pride of St. Louis* (1952), *The Winning Team* (1952), *Fear Strikes Out* (1957), and *Damn Yankees* (1958). Many of these films are biographies characterized by ballplayers who had to overcome great odds to succeed. Also, in accordance with the overall time frame, the characters downplayed education and did not question the status quo or authority in any way. A particularly worthy example of this notion is *The Jackie Robinson Story* because it exemplifies the import of playing by the rules in American society. Robinson is portrayed as doing all of the things necessary to succeed in America including working hard, going to college, joining the military, and loving his mother (Dickerson, 1991). When asked to enter the establishment as a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers, he gladly accepts even though the rules of that civilization are unjust. Although he is selected to be a member of the Dodgers based on his individual accomplishments and abilities, he is expected to follow the communal tendencies that were representative of the time. Also in accordance with the notion of playing by the rules, Good (1997) points out that the film is a long way from endorsing black power in that

Rickey, the Dodgers general manager, “just naturally assumes the role of master, Robinson that of servant” (p. 143).

While most people tend to remember the 1960s as a time of great individualism featuring demonstrations and the drug culture, the early sixties were much more characteristic of the affluent fifties. With the election of John F. Kennedy and the New Frontier, the country began a period of great optimism that was cut short in 1963 when Kennedy’s presidency ended with his assassination. Under the leadership of Lyndon Johnson, we increased our role in the Vietnam War and passed the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965. In 1968, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were also assassinated and Richard Nixon, newly elected to the presidency, began decreasing the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam. Such great change and disparity within the nation was also evident in baseball as several franchises relocated and the number of organizations expanded to include such teams as the Los Angeles Angels and the New York Metropolitan in 1961 and 1962 respectively (Ward & Burns, 1994). Baseball attendance increased in the early sixties as well as the nation embraced leisure during what Hamby (1976) referred to as the national athletics boom.

In stark contrast to the previous era, only one baseball film was released during the sixties as the film industry evidently expended its regard for the genre, at least temporarily. In fact, the film, *Safe at Home* (1962), does not even explicitly deal with baseball. The film centers around a young boy and his attempt to meet Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris, but no games ever take place and very little baseball footage is used. Dickerson (1991) contends that the film is easily an attempt to capitalize on the 1961 season in which Mantle hit 54 home runs and Maris hit 61 thus breaking Babe Ruth’s single season record.

Released in 1962, the film can also be seen as more representative of the fifties than how we generally perceive the sixties in that authority and the status quo are not questioned.

The overall unrest of the late 1960s continued on into the 1970s as the Vietnam War came to a close and the Nixon administration fell under the weight of the Watergate scandal. According to Kolko (1976), when Nixon left office, there was an energy crisis, divorce rates were up, inflation was high, voter turnout was low, and unemployment was higher than it had been since the Depression. As cynicism and an overall fatigue gripped the nation, Gerald Ford was sworn in as president of the United States in 1974. Hamby notes that, in light of the previous ten years, Americans were happy to have a leader that they could trust in Ford (1976). Furthermore, with the 1970s came the continued emphasis on freedom, equality, and empowerment that began in the late sixties. In regard to baseball, while team play and team success were certainly the goal of any ballclub, it was at this time that individual feats and particularly individual authority became a major component of the game. In other words, big league baseball was no exception to the “Me” decade as the players fought the owners and were granted such things as salary arbitration in 1972 and the rights of veterans to sign with any franchise (free agency) in 1976. Aided by the vast expansion of new talent in African American and Hispanic players, speed and specialized pitching became a more featured component of the game as well (*Encyclopedia of World Sport*, 1996).

Within the film world, the average weekly attendance was relatively low throughout the seventies despite the fact that the number of films produced was nearly twice that of the sixties (Steinberg, 1980). Also in contrast to the sixties, the baseball film as a genre returned to the screen with six films between 1973 and 1978. These films

include *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1973), *The Bad News Bears* (1976), *The Bad News Bears in Breaking Training* (1977), *The Bad News Bears Go to Japan* (1978), *Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings*, and *Here Come the Tigers* (1978).

Dickerson (1991) observes that these films all contain three common elements: 1) attention devoted to acquiring immediate and future financial stability, 2) a tendency to openly question authority, and 3) an overt concern and sensitivity for the welfare of group members/teammates. In fact, with the exception of *Bang the Drum Slowly*, the films feature an ensemble cast rather than one significant character as illustrated in most of the earlier baseball films. Rather than glorifying the myth of an idealized, individual hero, the films take the team approach thus exposing the realities of the mythic mores associated with the heroes of the game (Dickerson, 1991). With leaders such as Johnson and Nixon who were perceived as ineffective and dishonest in the presidency, these films asserted a stance against leadership and authority. For example, whereas Jackie Robinson did all he was told and questioned little in *The Jackie Robinson Story*, African American ballplayer Bingo Long is a rebel who quits the St. Louis Stars and actually forms his own team. Moreover, four of the six films are about youth baseball with the players portrayed as brash, confident, and honest while the adults are depicted as narrow-minded and dishonest thus furthering the notion of a nation with a cynical attitude toward influence. Again, we see youth as an integral component of the game and the country. However, despite an anti-authority attitude, youth and experience are required to work together if success is to be achieved. For example, Buttermaker, the downtrodden coach of the Bad News Bears, is very experienced in the ways of baseball and life. It is the junction of his experience and

wisdom with the energy and youth of his players that combine to create both a successful team and a successful film.

The seventies was a decade that emphasized reality and truth and, in the process of doing so, “we may have lost some of the spirit of being an American” (Dickerson, 1991, p. 119). Consequently, as America moved into the eighties, “polls of the era showed that many people had trouble finding a public figure they even admired, let alone regarded as heroic” (McBee, 1985, p. 44). However, running on a conservative platform featuring economic growth, a powerful defense, and an emphasis on the American family, Ronald Reagan was elected to the presidency in 1980 and again in 1984. Reagan vowed to pick America up, brush it off, and restore its conservative and traditional values.

Unfortunately, his first term was darkened by an economic recession and high unemployment, particularly for blue-collar workers and minorities. In fact, during the eighties, family values and economic concerns seemed to have an exceptionally arduous relationship. Perhaps the key word that has been used to describe the eighties is “greed.” Money was the mania as “by the end of the decade, wretched excess seemed as dated as Beta cassettes -- time and family became the most valued commodities” (Levine, 1990, p. 113). In other words, as the structure of the American family shifted via single parent families and double income households, family values became more and more difficult to attain.

Although families and finances were dominant affairs, other problems clouded the nation as well. Among them was the epidemic of drug abuse. According to a 1985 estimate, the multi-billion dollar industry was being supported by 20 million American consumers (Thorn & Palmer, 1993). Meanwhile, in an attempt to control the widespread

indignity of the drug culture, Presidents Reagan and Bush declared war on drugs by urging Americans to “Just Say No.” Other harsh realities included the Iran-Contra scandal, the downfalls of televangelists Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggert, the escalation of the AIDS plague, the savings and loan scandal, and the farm crisis that saw the foreclosure of family farms across the nation. However, despite (or, perhaps, because of) the many sobering issues that faced the nation, Americans spent a great deal of money on leisure and recreational activities. In fact, in 1987, Americans spent well over \$50 billion on gambling, sports betting, and physical activities alone (Thorn & Palmer, 1993). The continued infatuation the nation had with sports proved to be successful for baseball as revenues from game attendance and television broadcasts grew at a record-setting pace. Just as baseball has done throughout its history, the game acted as a reward for the long work day or week that many Americans endured. Nonetheless, despite its role as leisure, baseball was certainly representative of work as well.

The 1980s have been referred to as baseball’s embattled decade due in large part to the players’ strike of 1981. According to the *Baseball Encyclopedia* (1990), the strike was the result of the owner’s demands for a ceiling on salaries and compensation for lost free agents. The strike lasted from mid-June to the end of July with the owners winning the compensation claim but losing their salary cap request. Consequently, annual player salaries soared with the average salary rising from \$250,000 in 1982 to \$500,000 in 1989. Players and owners went head to head over the issue of drug abuse as well. Throughout the eighties, several major league ballplayers were suspended from the game, traded, and even served jail terms for drug abuse. Perhaps the most notable dilemma that baseball faced during this time concerned the downfall of one of its brightest stars. Despite holding

the record for hits in Major League Baseball history, Pete Rose, or “Charlie Hustle” as he was known, was banned from baseball in 1989 by the late commissioner of baseball, A. Bartlett Giamatti, for “conduct not in the best interest of baseball” (Leerhsen, 1989). Rose allegedly bet on baseball and his own team, the Cincinnati Reds. The scandal rocked the game and his possible induction into the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame continues to be debated every season. The interdependence of individualism and community are particularly noteworthy here. Most fans and players contend that Pete Rose possessed amazing individual abilities and success. However, it is his exclusion from the baseball community that is most detrimental to him and to the game, even though it was his individual talent that allowed him to be a member of the community in the first place.

Despite drug scandals, strikes, ballooning salaries, gambling problems and the overall recession that marked the time, the prosperity of the game seemed to suffer little effect. For example, following the 1981 strike, attendance dropped but only for the remainder of that season. The next year attendance rebounded to a record 45 million, a record that lasted only until the following year. In fact, by 1989 crowds had exceeded 50 million people. Tickets to the games averaged just \$7 (the lowest in all major sports) and yet baseball grossed over \$1 billion in 1988 (*Baseball Encyclopedia*, 1990). An unparalleled competitive balance and a surge in offensive output helped the eighties to be one of baseball’s most opulent decades despite the aforementioned problems.

With the nation led by a former film actor during much of the decade, it is an interesting coincidence that the 1980s film industry was both successful and vocal in terms of its relationship with American society. As Palmer (1993) posits, Ronald Reagan



mastered the power of visual imagery and understood that Americans are most comfortable in believing and accepting that which they can see. “Film images verify and reveal history, and eighties society was acutely aware of that eye-mind relationship” (Palmer, 1993, p. xii). Furthermore, with political leaders increasingly under scrutiny and athletes under fire for drug abuse and skyrocketing salaries, many people turned to films for their heroes. According to a 1985 poll, 315 young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 were asked to name their heroes or heroines. The results showed that five of the top six individuals were from the film industry (McBee, 1985). Like previous decades, films of the 1980s held a powerfully correlative relationship with the American film going audience and the baseball film was no exception.

Highlighted by the fact that a sports film, *Raging Bull* (1980), was selected as the best film of the decade in an *American Film* magazine critics poll, six baseball films were released during the eighties with considerable success (Dickerson, 1991). These films were *Blue Skies Again* (1983), *The Natural* (1984), *Bull Durham* (1988), *Eight Men Out* (1988), *Major League* (1989), and *Field of Dreams* (1989). Although each of these films present varying perspectives on baseball, there are unifying themes amongst many of them. Take, for example, *The Natural*, *Eight Men Out* and *Field of Dreams*. These three films all take place at either an earlier period in our history or, in the case of *Field of Dreams*, hark back to the past throughout the film. At a tremendously complicated time in our country, these films are “reflective of a nostalgic yearning for a period of our personal histories when issues seemed to be less complex, a period when good and evil, black and white, were clearly distinguishable” (Dickerson, 1991, p. 135). Specifically, many of the elements of *The Natural*, starring Robert Redford, can be traced to the baseball films of

the thirties as it features a small town hero who gets the girl and hits the game winning home run.

A second major feature of *The Natural* and *Field of Dreams*, as the definitive baseball films of this decade, is an emphasis on the American family, particularly the relationship between a father and his son. The most poignant example of this characteristic comes at the conclusion of each film. Roy Hobbs (Redford's character in *The Natural*) is reunited with his son on a Nebraska farm and Ray Kinsella joins his father on the baseball field on his Iowa farm. It is perhaps in these two films, and specifically these two scenes, where we see very powerful examples of youth and experience in cooperation. Similarly, the films were both family oriented in that there is little or no swearing and the protagonists are portrayed as committed to their families and loved ones.

A third feature of the eighties baseball film is one that consumes all of the films of the era. Money and economic concern are of great significance within the films as the importance of financial gain versus playing and loving the game for its own sake. *Eight Men Out*, for example, is certainly about money insofar as the film is an account of the 1919 Chicago White Sox and the accusation that members of that team threw the World Series for financial increase. Likewise, key characters in *Bull Durham* and *Major League* emphasize money as the symbolic representation of success. Although the love of the game is obviously of much greater concern than money in *Field of Dreams*, finances are a central topic in that the Kinsellas are in danger of losing their farm to foreclosure.

Historically, America and baseball have had a long and productive relationship. As one of America's favorite cultural institutions, baseball has and continues to be referred to as our national pastime. Our country and our game have had a catch with one

another for well over one hundred years and, when the element of film is added to the mix, that relationship becomes even more volatile and progressive. It is apparent that the world of baseball and the world of film work well together and this association only advances the notion of each world enculturating the American people and reflecting popular values. By placing baseball in its historical context within American society and explicating this fellowship through an examination of baseball films, we see a rich mosaic of metaphors and images that serve as social commentary for American cultural existence and, in particular, American cultural values. Thus, by investigating specific value clusters in reference to baseball, I hope to provide considerable insight into both the game and its rhetorical artifact in *Field of Dreams*.

### Theoretical Issues

The term “rhetoric” has been defined in a variety of ways throughout history. Colloquially, it is referred to as empty language or speech that is flowery, ornamental, and used to evade an issue. This definition, while perhaps useful in political pandering, is not the perspective of this work and this author.

Rhetoric is “the human effort to induce cooperation through the use of symbols” (Brock, Scott, & Chesebro, 1990, p. 14). These symbols make up our lives in that what we know, how we act, and what we experience are the product of our own symbol use. Symbols are created by human beings and are the products of the human imagination (Foss, 1989, p 4). Likewise, according to Burke, people react symbolically to their environment and, thus, rhetoric is the use of words (or other means) by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents (1950, p. 41). The books we

read, the speeches that influence us, the art work we use to decorate our homes, the music we listen to, and the films we see are just some of the symbols that influence us and those around us every day. Consequently, rhetoric *is* communication because, as Foss (1989) notes, “whenever we project a particular image to someone, attempt to persuade someone to believe what we do, or are influenced by a painting or a film to look at the world in a new way, we are involved in rhetoric or communication” (p. 4). Rhetoric creates a message with verbal and visual symbols that are purposely chosen to influence an audience whose beliefs and behaviors may be changed or reaffirmed as a consequence of experiencing the message (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991). Rhetorical criticism, then, “is the investigating and evaluation of rhetorical acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes” (Foss, 1989, p. 5).

Rhetoric and rhetorical criticism can also be described as culture bound in that each is affected by what exists in the culture from which they emanate. Gronbeck (1983) defines culture as a complex of collectively determined sets of rules, values, ideologies, and habits that constrain rhetors and their acts. Hence, “elements of the parent culture are, logically, a potential source of criteria to use in interpreting and evaluating rhetorical acts in that culture” (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991, p. 131). Our modern society is dominated by the mass-media and, therefore, cultural criticism is primarily concerned with concocting models to evaluate the rhetorical products of mass-mediated communication. In fact, while there are a variety of forms cultural criticism can take, it is always the case that both the message of the rhetorical act and the medium of its transmission are potential objects of criticism. In fact, according to Rybacki and Rybacki (1991), this type of criticism “explains, analyzes, and accounts for the popularity of the products of mass culture, such

as films, songs, television programs, books, and newspapers, because it is through these media that audiences learn or reaffirm cultural rules, values, ideologies, and habits” (p. 131).

As one of the most instrumental products of mass culture, films are not viewed in a void and neither are they created in a void. “Every movie is a cultural artifact and as such reflects the fears, values, myths, and assumptions of the culture that produces it” (Bergman, 1971, p. xii). Film “provides a way of visualizing the past, gaining insight into the present, and speculating about the future” and is, therefore, a form of rhetorical activity (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991, p. 205). What’s more, Palmer (1987) outlines several rhetorical functions of film. These include exposing past and present events, raising future issues, defining social trends, analyzing social issues, and serving as metaphors for our experiences. In addition, the objects, people, places, events, music, dialogue, and special effects that compose any given film are all symbols that the auteur (film studies rhetor) uses for the audience to identify with or use to interpret his or her message. If rhetoric is used to influence thought and action via symbols as noted above, then these functions and elements of film certainly qualify as influential.

According to Rushing and Frenz (1978), the reciprocity between film and society is manifested in three ways. “First, film projects the collective images, fantasies, and values of the culture in which the film is created. Second, film often dramatizes symptoms of particular societal needs of an era. Third, films often symbolize and reinforce societal trends” (pp. 64-65). This reciprocity also manifests itself between baseball and society on nearly the exact same levels.

A cultural approach, therefore, proves itself particularly useful in examining the very prevalent medium of film and its focus on the equally popular cultural institution of baseball and it is for this reason that I take this approach in my criticism of *Field of Dreams*. Because cultural criticism is based on the presumption that rhetorical acts yielded through popular or mass media are the social records of a culture and that those messages are linked with cultural values, a utilization of the social-values model of criticism proves to be quite an effective archetype for this analysis.

Developed by Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas Frenzt, the social-values model begins with the hypothesis that a culture represents the collective consciousness of basic values. This consciousness is composed primarily of “broad clusters of values that take the form of images, dreams, and myths that are self-reflexive” (Rushing & Frenzt, 1978, p. 67). These myths are a society’s collectivity of persistent values, handed down from generation to generation, that help to make the world understandable, support the social order, and educate the society’s young.

The model states that because a number of these values compete with each other for superiority, rhetorical activity usually involves value conflict or the potential for value conflict. The model also acknowledges that culture is dynamic and that social change is a regular and structured occurrence. (Rushing & Frenzt, 1978; Frenzt & Rushing, 1978; Rushing, 1983). In an effort to explain the process, Rushing and Frenzt segmented the model into a number of components. It is their model that I have augmented in my explication of *Field of Dreams*.

### Social-Values Model of Rhetorical Criticism

#### 1) Dialectical Opposition

The initial assertion of the social-values model of criticism is that a society's collective consciousness consists of a variety of value clusters that exist in a state of tension or dialectical opposition. That is, at any given moment in American history, there have been values that the people of the nation have embraced that were not necessarily congruent with one another. Gouldner (1976) notes that any culture's outlook on its own future is manifested in opposing values. Likewise, Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) contend that "Americans rely on value opposition to explain the human condition" (p. 133). As presented earlier, the value clusters that I will examine are individualism and community, work and play, youth and experience, spiritual and secular standpoints, and rural and urban livelihoods. These particular clusters were selected because each is both a cultural theme by which to explain American society as well as a way in which we interpret the game of baseball. Several scholars and writers (Guttman, 1978; Anderson & Stone, 1981; Trujillo & Ekdom, 1985; Dickerson, 1991; Aden, 1995) have used these themes to illustrate baseball and this is why these issues were chosen to anchor this analysis. It is my perspective that none of these value systems is in and of itself the best or most appropriate manner to understand baseball but that they are all valid perspectives and, therefore, must be examined as a unit rather than as competing interpretations. Even though they conflict, baseball embraces each of these values as appropriate methods by which the game both contributes to American society and allows Americans to identify with it as an institution of significant cultural relevance. In other words, for some people, baseball has a very spiritual quality. For others, the game represents individualism and the power of personal

achievement. Still others see baseball as a reminder of their youth and, as such, it acts as a sort of time machine that can take them back to a more innocent time. All of these positions, as well as many others, are pertinent and, therefore, should all be examined on an equal playing field.

## 2) Symbolic Conflict/ Patterns of Change

Secondly, the social-values model states that symbolic conflict, or the conflict within the act that represents the value opposition, is the necessary condition for value reorientation. That is, if societal values exist in delicate tension, then “some sort of value change is inevitable whenever the dominant form of the prevailing myth or value cluster is incapable of solving social problems” (Frentz & Farrell, 1975, p. 42). As Rushing and Frentz (1978) note, communicative conflict is the most common and potent form for enacting change and is frequently reflected in film where the conflict is often expressed as a verbal or physical battle between two opposing individuals or groups.

In addition, Rushing and Frentz’s social-values model states that, while symbolic conflict is the precursor to value reorientation, there are two patterns that such conflict can take. These patterns are referred to as *dialectical transformation* and *dialectical synthesis*. The first pattern, dialectical transformation, occurs when one value standard replaces another. According to Rushing and Frentz (1978), it would be exemplified in a transformation from tragedy to utopia, from moralism to materialism (or vice-versa) and so on. Dialectical transformation is the more common and least complicated of the two patterns because it does not require the creation of a new value structure. This pattern is characterized by competition in that one value is replaced and as such symbolically loses out to the other. Dialectical synthesis, on the other hand, is more complex and more



difficult to enact symbolically. In this pattern, a new value structure is created by cooperatively merging elements of the competing value systems. In other words, the two values are integrated in such a way that the relationship among the participants is reaffirmed.

Although the original model lays forth just two patterns of change in synthesis and transformation, there are, in actuality, many patterns that value change can take. In her examination of the rhetoric of classic and contemporary Westerns, Rushing (1983) applies her original model to incorporate the dialectical opposition within individualism and community. She concludes that values can also take a pattern of *dialectical emphasis*, *dialectical reaffirmation*, and *dialectical pseudosynthesis*.

Rushing and Frenzt's perspective concerning symbolic conflict as demonstrated in the world of film is certainly viable and useful, for conflict and change are clearly qualities of both life and film. This perspective, however, does not accurately account for the ways in which oppositional values function in American culture, baseball, or the film *Field of Dreams*. Indeed, whereas the value clusters of individualism and community, work and play, youth and experience, the spiritual and the secular, and rural and urban outlooks do, at times, function to solve social problems, they do so not through the process of value change or value reorientation, but rather, through the balancing of tensions born out of opposition. In other words, Rushing and Frenzt's model suggests that conflict and social problems are such that a change in value systems is necessary to solve the problems when, in reality, this is not necessarily true. Certainly, as a society, we seek solutions to our problems but rarely are drastic value reorientations the most feasible path to those resolutions. Rather, it is through the balance of tensions inherent in oppositional values

that social problems can be resolved. Moreover, the game of baseball functions to continue the balance of key American values as opposed to disturbing that balance.

*Field of Dreams*, then, is also more representative of value negotiation than reorientation. However, it must be noted that conflict and change are still factors in this film. The primary conflict that exists is represented by the relationship Ray Kinsella has with the voice and, essentially, with himself. And, obviously, there are numerous conflicts throughout the film as the characters attempt to right their wrongs and come to terms with their own lives through the game of baseball and the Iowa field. Furthermore, each character also encounters a great deal of change as a result of their connection with the field. Predominantly, however, the changes that happen to the characters are more in line with a negotiation of values than with a dramatic value overhaul. The characters are able to take advantage of each value in the system and ultimately strike a very effective balance between them. One of the most notable aspects of the film, then, is not the way in which values are reoriented in order to solve social problems, rather, it is the way in which oppositional values are balanced and maintained. Moreover, it is through the balancing of those values that some of the personal and social problems represented in the film are resolved.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, while the dialectical patterns of transformation and synthesis are, in their own right, valuable contributions to the original model and shed considerable light on the portrayal of American cultural values as manifested in film, neither of them accurately

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<sup>2</sup> In effect, unresolvable social and personal problems are not the necessary precursors to the process of symbolic conflict and, what's more, dialectical balancing is not always the manner by which those problems are resolved. Still, there are instances where this dialectical balancing does enable the resolution of individual problems that the characters face. Such a resolution is just one possible outcome of the negotiation of oppositional value pairings.

exemplify the value structure outlined within the game of baseball or within *Field of Dreams*. Indeed, rather than suggesting value change, both baseball and film affirm the dialectical tension specific to the individualism/community, youth/experience, work/play, spiritual/secular, and rural/urban value oppositions.

In the film *Field of Dreams*, at least two patterns capable of affirming the oppositional nature of these values are represented. Within the value systems of spiritual and secular outlooks and rural and urban livelihoods, one value is favored over another but does not outright replace the other. Such a pattern is referred to as *dialectical preference* because the film and, subsequently, the interpretations of the film are such that the spiritual and pastoral elements within it are preferred to its secular and urban characteristics. This preference then sets the stage for the dialectical balancing of the other value systems. As a cultural institution, baseball has received a great deal of attention in regard to its agrarian heritage and its similarities with spiritual elements. By creating a film that favors these qualities, director Phil Alden Robinson accentuates the values that most notably link the game with its grand and glorified past. In doing so, the balancing of the remaining pairs is more likely to occur and, consequently, the facilitation of certain conflicts can be enacted.

The more prevalent pattern displayed, in accordance with the previous discussion of symbolic conflict, is *dialectical balance*. As a cultural institution, baseball reflects and affirms societal values and the tensions among those values. That is, the game allows opposing values to exist in concert while also recognizing the conflict that is inherent in value oppositions. Rather than completely eliminating one value to the favor of another or creating a new value structure altogether, baseball enables the balancing of numerous

value oppositions that hold great significance to American culture. As represented in the film *Field of Dreams*, such a balancing occurs around the values of individualism and community, work and play, and youth and experience.

As noted earlier, an outcome of the negotiation of oppositional value pairings is the resolution of conflict and, therefore, there are cases where a dialectical balancing enables the characters to resolve individual problems. Such a resolution primarily takes place through the flexibility of film in that all sight and sound can be adjusted accordingly. In the perfect world of film, characters, scenes, sets, music, dialogue, lighting and so on can be manipulated and societal structures such as beliefs, ideologies, myths, and values are no exception. Therefore, value oppositions can be totally balanced, synthesized, transformed, or any other pattern depending on the auteur's perspective, intentions, and rationale combined with the cultural perspectives of the day. Opposing values can be integrated so that the elements are balanced -- even to the extent that the inherent conflict is relieved through the events that take place in the film. Such is the privilege of the medium. This is certainly the case with *Field of Dreams* because, as the characters in the film weave in and out of time via the field, much of the unrest that they experience is ultimately resolved. Specifically, the balance between the opposing values of individualism and community and youth and experience reaches a heightened sense of stability.

### 3) Psychological Prerequisites

The model then asserts that, regardless of which pattern the value change takes, a change agent is required to facilitate that pattern. However, the change agents are not completely free to choose the pattern of value change in that each one demands specific

psychological conditions within the agents. Dialectical transformation requires only knowledge of one of the two competing value systems in question. Again, this pattern is the norm because “it is more likely that the change agent has a strong psychological experience with the desirability of one value over its opposite” (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991, p. 136). Dialectical synthesis, on the other hand, commands both knowledge of the value sets and an internal capacity to merge them into a consolidated whole. That is, for an individual or group to dialectically synthesize opposing values, they must first psychologically preview the synthesis process (Rushing & Frenzt, 1978). Although dialectical synthesis differentiates itself from dialectical balance in that it creates a new value structure, the psychological prerequisites are quite similar.

While the original model posits that value change is an integral aspect of solving problems, I have argued that value change is not inevitable and that value negotiation is a more consistent pattern in addressing societal or personal concerns. Hence, rather than incorporating a change agent to conduct extreme value alterations, *Field of Dreams* offers an agent to supervise the balancing of values. The agent is Ray Kinsella because, as the film progresses, he physically and psychologically experiences the process of balancing the opposing values. By combining his past, particularly the relationship he had with his father, with the love affair he has with baseball and the extraordinary events that happen to him, Ray is able to balance the value systems within himself. Likewise, as the primary agent, he also passes his new found psychological experience to the other characters in the film so that, in the end, each of them has the opportunity to stabilize the competing values as well.

#### 4) Audience Role

The final element of the social-values model involves the role of the audience or those for which the symbolic conflict is enacted with the role of the audience varying from “intensified awareness to active participation” (Rushing & Frenzt, 1978). Intensified awareness is characteristic of dialectical transformation because the audience is made to feel discontentment with one value orientation that no longer meets the needs of society. In this pattern, the change agent advocates one value over another while the audience acknowledges the change as a necessity. Dialectical synthesis takes the process one step further by allowing the audience to become active participants in the creation of a new value standard with the change agent acting as the facilitator. According to Rushing and Frenzt, “the audience seems to be most actively involved when the pattern of change is synthetic; for dialectical synthesis is an emergent pattern - a pattern in which the change agents creatively forge a new phenomenon” (1978, p. 71). Because there is a stronger identification by an audience in a change process that is cooperative and integrative, a greater sense of involvement takes place through dialectical synthesis than dialectical transformation (Frenzt & Rushing, 1978).

Again, in this segment of the model, a balance of values is similar to that of a synthesis of values because, by balancing values, the audience is invited to be involved in the process. That is, because the pattern requires knowledge of both values, and the process of balancing is always active and delicate, rather than static and blunt, audiences are similarly invited to participate. Certainly, crowds at baseball games act as highly influential, participative agents and, according to Hill (1992), “depending on our level of suspended disbelief, we all participate [in film] at different levels, but we all participate (p.

20). As with any film, the role of the audience in the success and strength of *Field of Dreams* is paramount. As noted earlier, the audience of the film embraced it upon release and still does today as fans continue to visit the site where *Field of Dreams* was filmed in Dyersville, Iowa. In fact, the field attracts roughly 55,000 tourists a year from around the world in their own attempt to “go the distance” (Evjue, 1998). For example, a couple was married on the field and home plate became the permanent resting place for one man who requested his ashes be buried there. The Ghost Players, a team of players who were cast as extras in the film, entertain crowds throughout the country by putting on baseball clinics and exhibition games. Admission to the field is free and there is no charge for the use of balls, bats, and gloves should tourists decide to have a game. Whereas Ray is the balance agent within the film, the film itself becomes the agent for the audience as they actually contribute to the process. By attending baseball games, watching games on television, teaching baseball to children, and playing baseball in parks and leagues across the country, Americans actively participate in the game and, therefore, the negotiation of values. The film and the field, then, continue this progression in that by frequenting the film site, audience members help to create and further involve themselves in the process. In other words, if we are to say that baseball has the ability to balance certain values, then it must be acknowledged that, by taking part in baseball in whatever capacity, people also have that ability.

#### Outline of Chapters

In this chapter, I have argued that American culture and baseball have a reciprocal and substantial relationship. Likewise, when the highly influential medium of film is

incorporated into this relationship we can gain a tremendous amount of insight into how we, as Americans, interpret each element. These interpretations can be categorized as cultural values insofar as baseball and film reflect and affirm these values and the tensions between them. The film *Field of Dreams*, then, as the unification of the societal institutions of baseball and film, can be examined via these interpretations as well.

Chapter two, then, is the primary chapter of analysis. The original social-values model posits that the symbolic conflict within value systems takes one of two patterns -- dialectical transformation and dialectical synthesis. However, as has been noted, the pattern that exists in our country and our game is dialectical balance in that the value systems under discussion are merged while also recognizing the competition that exists between the two. Therefore, the second chapter is a breakdown of each value pairing in reference to America, baseball, and, lastly, *Field of Dreams* and its characters. I approach the film from each value perspective: individualism/community, work/play, youth/experience, spiritual/secular existence, and rural/urban livelihoods. Each is a manner by which to interpret baseball and, hence, I interpret the film according to each system.

The third and final chapter acts as a conclusion in which I argue the ramifications of the social-values model of criticism. I review this model in terms of its implications on American society, the cultural institution of that society in baseball, and the cinematic illustration of that institution in *Field of Dreams*. Specifically, I discuss how the institutions of baseball and film combine to advance our comprehension of American culture. Likewise, in this chapter I also argue the contributions this composition makes to rhetorical theory and, specifically, to the social-values model of criticism.



As I've noted throughout this exposition thus far, baseball is an integral aspect of American cultural existence and, therefore, deserves the attention of students and scholars. Likewise, film should receive considerable attention as a rhetorical artifact because it is certainly a major factor in contemporary American discourse. Hence, an examination of *Field of Dreams*, as the combination of these two American icons, provides considerable insight into each.

## Chapter Two

### The American Value Structure, Baseball, and *Field of Dreams*

America is an interesting place. It is the land of the free and the home of the brave and, for many, the phrase “American culture” evokes thoughts of mom, apple pie, and, of course, baseball. While mom’s pie is certainly delicious and baseball is a grand and wonderful game, our country is considerably more complicated than this. America is many things to many people and should be recognized as such. However, while America and American culture are undoubtedly vast and arguably vague, to attempt to understand our country, we must examine it through a specific lens so as to not lose ourselves in the plethora of paradoxes and ambiguities that characterize our nation.

The lens through which I have chosen to inspect our nation and its pastime is that of cultural values because, as Heard (1990) notes, “our values are the concepts in life that we appreciate and which we accept and allow to become a part of who we are. They serve as standards for how we understand ourselves and the world around us, and we often use them as a basis for our decisions and actions” (p. 1). Within American culture, various societal values and value systems exist and, in fact, many of these systems are in opposition to one another and, therefore, can conflict. However, despite, or rather, because of the indeterminate nature of American culture, these opposing values are able to exist, while not necessarily in perfect harmony, in a certain state of mutual recognition. That is, the tension and conflict that are created by their opposition is constant but also cooperative such that one value is not replaced by another and neither is an entirely new value system created. Instead, the elements of each value are consolidated. This has been referred to as a dialectical balance.

As I have noted, the primary value system in American culture and, indeed, baseball is that of individualism and community and, thus, the combination of this system allows for a balancing of the value systems of work and play, youth and experience, spiritual and secular existence, and rural and urban living. In other words, within each of these cultural themes, an underlying presence of individualism and community exists and, hence, any tension that is created by their opposition is directly linked to the value conflict within individualism and community. For example, when one is faced with a choice between a rural or an urban way of life, one is inherently faced with a decision between self and society. Likewise, as Americans are constantly trying to balance their time between work and leisure, they are also trying to balance their world between the identities they enact and the communities with which they associate themselves. Essentially, whenever we discuss America in terms of individualism and community, we are including the aforementioned systems as well because, while they are cultural themes in and of themselves, they also act as extensions of America's predominant cultural value structure.

With this section of the paper, then, I provide an analysis of American culture, baseball, and *Field of Dreams* through a social-values perspective. First, I provide an inquiry into American culture via individualism, community, and its extensions to express the pattern of value balance that is characteristic of American society. I present this dialectic through both traditional and contemporary viewpoints. I then discuss the relationship between individualism and community. Lastly, I apply each of the aforementioned systems to baseball and *Field of Dreams* and, in doing so, express the dialectical pattern within the game and the film.

### Individualism in America

The term “individualism” came into the language when Henry Reeve translated the term “individualisme” which was first coined by French historian Alexis de Tocqueville in his 1835 text *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville saw individualism as a “deliberate preference for being on one’s own and for diminishing organic and sustained ties to society” (Ketcham, 1987, p. ix). Likewise, according to Heard (1990), “individualism provides a perspective upon human nature in terms of the way people exist by themselves with only incidental references being made to others. It focuses upon the human condition as it exists apart from others and serves to promote ideas of personal freedom, self-improvement, privacy, achievement, independence, detachment, and self interests” (p. 3). The broad and influential position of individualism has been an integral component of American society throughout history and can be examined via the scholars, politicians, writers, and philosophers who have emphasized its virtues as a significant American value.

Thomas Jefferson emphasized individualism in his discourse, focusing primarily on political individualism which stressed that “political authority should lie in the will and purposes of the individuals in society” (Heard, 1990, p. 4). He proclaimed in the *Declaration of Independence* that liberty along with life and the pursuit of happiness are unalienable rights of each person and that governments are formulated for the purpose of upholding these rights. Similar to political individualism is economic individualism which asserts the value of an economic system based on the rights of private property and individual freedom.

British philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were instrumental in developing the concept of the social contract which was a vital component of both

political and economic individualism. They claimed that “man in his natural state is selfish and greedy and will readily take advantage of others. Consequently, it is in the best interest of each person to enter into a social compact and to establish a political structure” (Heard, 1990, p. 4). Upon initial inspection, this is seemingly a communal constituent but in reality holds a very individualistic influence as well. That is, the government acts as a regulator of societal relationships, and, therefore, provides security for the individual which allows persons to maximize their self-interests as long as the established guidelines are followed. This notion became a valued aspect of American culture because it was thought that as each individual worked harder for economic advancement, the result would be overall societal progress. Hence, we begin to see that the relationship between individualism and community is one based in mutual influence rather than mutual exclusion.

Furthermore, the value of spirituality is linked to individualism and has also marked American society throughout history. According to Heard (1990), our religious thinking has largely been shaped by Protestant Christianity which has predominantly promoted an individualistic approach to God in that “each person relates to God directly and must decide for oneself what kind of relationship this will be” (p. 5). Similarly, Fromm (1941) notes that “the [Catholic] Church was the link between [man] and God, thus on the one hand restricting his individuality, but on the other hand letting him face God as an integral part of a group. Protestantism made the individual face God alone” (p. 108). Although some Protestant groups have noted the importance of others in one’s salvation, most have emphasized religious individualism and even stressed the notion that every person is viewed as being entirely alone before God. Again, however, it is obvious that an

examination of religion must also be, in effect, an examination of individual and communal tendencies and the tensions that exist within that volatile alliance.

An additional aspect of religious individualism concerns the value of work via the Protestant Work Ethic which is a view of life that promotes hard work and self-discipline as a means to material prosperity (Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 1993). It was developed by Calvin and noted that neither society nor anyone else can know about another person's destiny and that only a person's own conscience can provide an answer for this by encountering God. Hence, a person who is aware of being one of the elect will act accordingly. "The person will be grateful and will reveal this gratitude by increasing the production of goods. There will be an effort by the individual to work harder for the glory of God, and in return there will be the reward for material success" (Heard, 1990, p. 6).

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also witnessed several writers eschew the nature of individualism and its association with community. Benjamin Franklin, for example, wrote of the import of the self-made man but also acknowledged the possibility for an individual to attain happiness and simultaneously live a life that advocates what is best for others. However, he pointed out that this can only happen if people restrain their irrationality by developing good habits of self-discipline, frugality, personal initiative, and diligence. In addition, Franklin believed that by following such individualistic practices, one would achieve considerable wealth which would give one a sense of self-respect and increase one's occasion to benefit others and make lasting contributions to society (Heard, 1990).

Another writer who encouraged the idea of the self-made man was Horatio Alger whose name has become synonymous with worldly success achieved by someone who

started near the bottom (Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 1993). In accordance with the values of rural and urban outlooks, Alger wrote during the late nineteenth century as America continued to become an industrialized nation. During this time, numerous people packed up their belongings and moved from the rural confines of the country to the towns and cities in hopes of finding success and wealth. This became the central theme in Alger's books as his characters went from rags to riches primarily due to their hard work and determination.

Although Franklin and Alger stressed self-improvement and the notion of the self-made man, it was Ralph Waldo Emerson who encouraged another facet of individualism in self-reliance. Emerson contended that America needed to break away from European traditions and argued that scholars, specifically, needed to indulge in independent thinking. He expressed a concern for society's threat to the individual. For instance, in his essay *Self-Reliance*, he wrote that "it is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd, keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude" (Emerson, n.d., p. 50).

Independent thinking was also a key concern for Henry David Thoreau. As a strong advocate of individual rights and an opponent of social conformity, Thoreau believed that people needed to be active in deciding the kind of life they wanted to follow. In his best known work, *Walden*, Thoreau wrote, "I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue his own way, and not his father's or mother's, or his neighbor's instead" (1893, p. 79). It is well known that while writing *Walden*, Thoreau engaged in reading, writing, communing with nature, and meditating about life in a cabin on Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts. He came to realize that many of the things we seek

within society are unnecessary and that understanding ourselves and appreciating life for what it is worth is of much greater value. Thoreau felt that most people were slaves to the conventions of society and, thus, lived lives that were based on the expectations of others rather than focusing on themselves and their own happiness.

Contemporary perspectives on individualism continue to be grounded in these and other concepts as we persist in valuing the American as rugged individualist. The self-made man holds just as much merit today as when Franklin, Alger, and Emerson first articulated the notion of self-reliance and accentuated independent thinking. For instance, the notion of making something of oneself is still greatly emphasized in present day American society. Individuals are encouraged to work hard, be competitive, make financial gains, and establish a respectable position so as to become successful yet simultaneously be considered a person who is a worthwhile contributor to the public sphere. For many Americans, this endeavor takes the form of education whereas others join the workforce, each in an attempt to achieve the American Dream of prosperity and happiness through economic and social success. Essentially, the sentiment is that Americans should put forth the effort to become more than what they have been, regardless of the path chosen (Heard, 1990).

Likewise, religious individualism also persists within contemporary society. As Bellah, et al (1985) note, “today religion in America is as private and diverse as New England colonial religion was public and unified” (p. 220). Much of present-day religion is based on the idea that one’s religious experiences are often restricted to a direct relationship with God and this affinity is limited to completely or primarily the individual and God. Thus, “various events and activities are interpreted and evaluated in accordance



with how they are related to the individual's direct experience of God. Furthermore, acts of fellowship and interaction with others may be thought of as enjoyable and uplifting, but they usually are not regarded as possibly being experiences of God or part of the salvation process" (Heard, 1990, p. 14).

Still other contemporary scholars, in an attempt to discern the nature of the individual, have taken a more communicative approach. Carbaugh (1988), for example, has extensively studied American cultural discourse, specifically the spoken system of symbols that Americans use to fabricate themselves as individuals. He has noted that the individual is, in fact, a symbol in and of itself and "it is this *equivocal affirmation* of what is common among all people, everyone is an individual, and what is potentially distinctive to each, each is an individual, that makes it such a powerful cultural symbol" (p. 23). Carbaugh then differentiates the individual from self and social roles. That is, while everyone is an individual, each individual has a "self" which symbolizes the collective representation of a person, a uniquely independent individual. "Self functions at the cultural level to display the ever changing and unique identity of the person" (p. 109). American public discourse is loaded with the notion of self (yourself, myself, herself, self-esteem, self-respect, self-worth, self-help, self-actualization, self-assured etc.) and is often symbolized against traditional social roles and society as a source of identity.

Current individualistic emphases are also prevalent within the world of film and television with the individuals often taking the form of heroes. While heroes have manifested themselves in a variety of ways, one that has had significant influence in American culture is the cowboy. "He is the one who usually either rides alone or has only one companion, but regardless of the odds, he is willing to stand on his own and use his

skills to fight against evil and corruption” (Heard, 1990, p. 15). Likewise, Maynard (1974, p. vi) has noted, “No figure has dominated American romantic folklore like the legendary cowboy. Daring, noble, ethical, romantic, he permeates our popular media to this very day. He personifies our national self-image - the conqueror of wilderness, savagery, and villainy.” Along with other cinematic “heroes” such as the private investigator, soldier, and baseball player, the cowboy is tough, smart, courageous and in many ways worthy of being emulated by the members of the community in which the hero holds influence.

Essentially, whether we examine religion and its individualistic tendencies, the Protestant Work Ethic, Franklin’s self-made man, Emerson’s self-reliance, contemporary notions of self, the ideal heroes of today’s feature films, or any other manner of individualistic customs, we see rich tapestry of achievement based on independence throughout American history.

#### Community in America

While America and American culture have a rich tradition grounded firmly in individualism, the concept of community also holds considerable import on the American position. Even Tocqueville, who coined the term “individualism,” marveled at American cooperativeness and “the penchant for forming voluntary associations struck the French aristocrat as more characteristically American than the quickness to defy all institutions, voluntary or involuntary” (Guttman, 1978, p. 138). Whereas individualism focuses on the manner in which people exist by themselves, community provides a perspective in which people exist within the context of human relationships. “It concentrates on qualities that

people have through their associations with others such as intimacy, benevolence, fellowship, belonging, dependence, social involvement, and the public good. It gives attention to that side of the self that calls for an acknowledgment of others and the part that they play in one's existence" (Heard, 1990, p. 3). The concept of community can also be examined via historical and contemporary scholars, writers, and philosophers who have acknowledged its value within American culture.

Like individualism, community has been greatly influenced by the spiritual, particularly that of Christianity. For example, the Hebrew conception of the covenant in the Old Testament is presented in terms of a collective agreement. One's relationship with God is understood more from the perspective of group belonging and the way the group relates to God rather than as an individual. Likewise, as Heard (1990) notes, the New Testament, while emphasizing a more individualistic portrait of one's relationship with God, also puts forth a very communal tendency through the concept of the church. "The church consists of those persons who have professed faith in Christ and are joined together with shared beliefs and values. These persons not only worship and learn together but also enjoy each other's fellowship and work together to reach goals" (Heard, 1990, p. 9). By including such elements as belonging, cooperation, involvement, and altruism in their teachings, the Old Testament covenant and the New Testament church both set forth the value of community and, in doing so, greatly influenced American society

Similarly, the New England Puritans, an early Christian group, also upheld the notion of community in that they saw themselves as being joined together in a divine mission. They saw America as the new promised land and it was their duty to establish a

perfect society under God. The Puritans viewed their work and responsibilities as a “means of assisting the entire community and not simply as a way of benefiting themselves; they saw themselves as involved in a cooperative endeavor to carry out a common purpose” (Heard, 1990, p. 10). This idea was espoused by John Winthrop, the first leader of the Massachusetts Bay Colony who said: “We must delight in each other, make others’ conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together: always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body (Miller, 1956, p. 83).

Another aspect of America’s community heritage involves that of humanitarian movements and philanthropy. As one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, Benjamin Franklin was a key figure in support of social movements and good will. Although he was a strong advocate of the self-made man, Franklin gave money and services for the advancement of libraries, schools, and hospitals in an attempt to support the common good. Several social reform movements and charitable societies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries continued this benevolent outlook and assisted in abolishing slavery, increasing the rights of women and children, and improving the treatment of the ill. Furthermore, as our nation moved into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, philanthropy became an integral component of American society. Multimillionaires such as Andrew Carnegie and John Rockefeller made contributions of money for scientific research, vocational training, the construction of schools, libraries, and museums all in an attempt to improve the quality of life in America and advance the community spirit of the American past (Heard, 1990).

The concept of community, like that of individualism, is an integral component of modern society as well. However, as America and Americans have continually grown more and more complex, the meanings of community have become increasingly more difficult to discern. Historically, the most common definition of community is one rooted in locality where territorially based social organizations act as the marker for one's community. Nonetheless, as Bender (1978) maintains, "territorially based interaction represents only one pattern of community, a pattern that becomes less and less evident over the course of American history. A preoccupation with territory thus ultimately confuses our understanding of community" (p. 6). Community can also be regarded as a network of social relations which Erikson (1976) refers to as the "human surround" which may or may not be affiliated with an actual region.

To further explicate the meanings of identity and community, we can again turn to Carbaugh and his work on self and the individual. Carbaugh (1996) has studied "cultural scenes" or social settings that are inhabited by people who conduct their own version of communicative life. Such scenes include work, leisure, marriage, and nature and in many ways are similar to the value systems or cultural themes that are discussed in this analysis. Although Carbaugh notes that individuals and selves are frequently valued over social roles, he does acknowledge that who those selves become is contingent on others. He writes that answering the question "Who am I?" is dependent on "where I am, with whom I am, and what I can ably do there, in that scene, with those people, given the (material and symbolic) resources that are available to the people there" (1996, p. 24).

Central to Carbaugh's work on cultural scenes and the dialectic between self and society is the work of Kenneth Burke. Burke's theory of rhetoric is exceedingly complex

and out of the scope of this examination, however, his emphasis on identification is more obviously applicable. This concept is a cardinal component of communication theory and rhetorical strategy and, thus, deserves attention in this critique as well. Burke (1950) asserts that each human being is unique and to overcome the separation that uniqueness creates, we use symbols to represent common interests. As Burke states, “A is not identified with his colleague B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so” (1950, p. 20). Rhetoric, then, is a “symbolic means of creating cooperation” (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991, p. 74). Therefore, such cooperation and symbolic “acting together” can take a variety of forms, many of which are based in the concept of community.

Because human relationships are at the heart of community and identification is a key element, communal qualities are perhaps most prevalent in the form of group participation. That is, there are numerous groups and organizations that act as communities for many Americans. One such group that surely manifests communal tendencies is that of the family. Although the strength of the American family has been depleted in recent years with skyrocketing divorce and separation rates, it still functions as the central avenue through which many Americans satisfy their need for belonging and dependency. Likewise, for many Americans, work has grown to become a part of who they are rather than something that they do. As Morrow notes, work gives people a sense of themselves by providing “a context, a sense of self-worth, a kind of identity” (1993, 40). This can also be said of numerous other affiliations such as cities, countries, political organizations, religious organizations, civic groups, and sports teams as Americans

constantly seek companionship and cooperation via involvement in society through the various communities with which we identify ourselves. Hence, Bender (1978) reminds us that community “can be defined better as an experience than as a place. As simply as possible, community is where community happens” (p. 6).

A final component of contemporary community in America corresponds to that of the individual hero that pervades modern media via film and television. Heard (1990) points out that television, in particular, often emphasizes community in the dramatic serials and situation comedies that comprise a great deal of its programming. This predominantly comes in the form of the American family and the various circumstances that surround this form of community. “The family context allows for feelings of belonging and togetherness, and at times there are expressions of kindness, empathy, and cooperation among family members” (Heard, 1990, p. 17).

In essence, the tradition of community is a real and vital aspect of American history. Through religion and the church, humanitarian movements and philanthropy, the “human surround” of social relations, and even the familial disposition of television and film, our self-image is, in part, based in cooperation and identification with others.

#### The Relationship Between Individualism and Community

Whether it is referred to as self and society, detachment and involvement, independence and dependence, private interests and the public good, or individualism and community, this volatile relationship is a ubiquitous component of the country. Likewise, if our values are the concepts in life that we appreciate and these concepts are thus the standards by which we understand our world, then both community and individualism are

fiercely significant American cultural values. The above presentations of individualism and community as they pertain to American culture through both historical and present perspectives portray an America where each outlook holds a broad and influential position within the culture. However, the two values, as has been noted, are not mutually exclusive of one another. That is, it is nearly impossible to explicate one without factoring in the other. There is a significant relationship between the two and, in fact, it is this relationship that provides a great deal of insight into the vast, vague landscape that is American culture.

The relationship between individualism and community has been continually reaffirmed throughout history and will continue to do so as long as Americans value each as integral components of American life. And because the relationship between individualism and community is linked to the cultural themes of work and play, youth and experience, the spiritual and the secular, and rural and urban outlooks, the same can be said of them. Thus, these values are balanced within their systems because the elements of each value, including the tension, is acknowledged. In fact, the tension between the values is real and an integral component of American cultural existence. The values at hand compete but must also exist in a cooperative state as opposed to the non-zero-sum game that is dialectical transformation. This is such because a transformation from one value to another would ultimately abolish the conflict. In other words, if one value wins out over another, then there simply is no more conflict and, therefore, the value system(s) would cease to play an active role in our society. A balance would indicate that that the two values still exist as part of a system. Therefore, we can say that they rely on each other in many ways. For example, play, while a valued aspect of human existence, certainly would



not hold as much significance if it were not for work and the tension that arises between the two. Similarly, if we were to dialectically transform to solely an urban livelihood to the extinction of a rural perspective, our urban lifestyle would suffer for there would no longer be an alternative to city life. It is the tension that fuels the system. This competitive/cooperative state exists within each of the value structures in that, even though they oppose one another and, therefore, tension exists, they also feed off of each other.

Consequently, if we are to say that these value systems are balanced such that they are able to exist in a symbiotic state where tension and conflict are real, then we must also acknowledge the difficulties that undoubtedly accompany such an enterprise. Dialectical balance does not imply that the conflict is glossed over or ignored which would be, according to Rushing (1983), a dialectical *pseudosynthesis* of values. In other words, by bringing both values together effortlessly, the contradictory nature of their relationship is obscured which is by no means the position of this analysis of American cultural values. Regardless of whether one argues for balance, synthesis, pseudosynthesis, transformation, or any other pattern, the values are still opposites and need to be recognized as such. Nonetheless, it is because of the inherently contradictory nature of value oppositions that a value balance can be difficult to enact.

We can again turn to Tocqueville to illustrate the obstacles that come with two values attempting to co-exist. Tocqueville saw individualism as “a perspective which grows out of the democratic system in American society and as being the principal characteristic of the philosophical method common to Americans” (Heard, 1990, p. 18). He felt that the individualistic nature of a democratic society as having the potential for

destruction because it could possibly lead to extreme selfishness and alienation from others. This has certainly been the case throughout American society as such exclusionary impediments as segregation, racism, sexism, religious zealotry, and all manners of prejudice continue to plague our nation by obstructing the development of both individualism and community. Native Americans, African Americans, women, and all other minorities are denied access to the communities they so desperately long to join and, in doing so, are withheld the success and achievement that typically accompany individuality.

Baseball then, as a microcosm or institution of America, can also be examined through this perspective. Values are able to coincide but the difficulties of a balance are also apparent. In other words, while values can exist at the same time, they do not necessarily always get along. Here, then, I move into the discussions of each system as they pertain to the game of baseball. I also discuss each system in terms of the film and its characters in an attempt to explain the pattern each system takes in *Field of Dreams*. Recall, that the patterns significant to the film are dialectical preference and dialectical balance. I first discuss the value pairings of the spiritual and the secular and rural and urban outlooks. These systems are representative of a pattern of preference and are examined first because, by favoring the spiritual and the rural, the film puts itself in the position to allow a clear expression of value negotiation. As such, I then review the value pairings of individualism and community, youth and experience, and work and play.

## The Spiritual and The Secular

### The Game

As the previous section made clear, religion has certainly held its own in terms of American culture for, throughout history, spirituality has been an integral component of both community and individualism. Hence, as an institution of American culture, baseball is not immune to an association with religion and, therefore, an analysis of the two provides a very cerebral identification. Eitzen and Sage (1993) point out that “hard work, training, and unremitting dedication by athletes not only lead to success but are seen as ways of using God-given ability to glorify God” (p. 200). They note that major league pitcher Orel Hershiser echoed this when he said, “I have a responsibility for the talent I’ve been given, and on the days when I don’t give my best, I think God should be upset with me” (p. 200). Whether or not God spends his time contemplating the efficacy of Mr. Hershiser’s curve ball is a matter best left undiscussed. However, his statement makes it rather obvious that baseball and religion have a certain kinship and, therefore, I believe it pertinent to survey these associations in order to further our comprehension of baseball and American culture.

Although there are various definitions of religion, French sociologist Emile Durkheim’s is the one most often utilized. He said that religion is “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (Durkheim, 1965, p. 62). Interestingly enough, Durkheim also pointed out that other belief systems can serve as “functional equivalents” of religion in that these alternative systems can develop solidarity through shared beliefs. For many,

offering baseball as an equivalent to religion is blasphemous and irresponsible.

Nonetheless, even the harshest skeptic would be hard pressed to deny the similarities.

Obviously, for our purposes (as well as baseball's), the operative word in Durkheim's definition is "community." It is this community created by the game that provides the most powerful connection with religion. Eitzen and Sage (1993) note that when cheering for the New York Yankees or the Seattle Mariners, fans become a sort of congregation in the stands. In fact, the fanaticism seen in professional sports has not been seen in such extremes since holy wars were fought against heretics and pagans insofar as opposing teams and even fans often clash in savagery both on and off the field because of their strongly held beliefs. While violence has proven to be an all too familiar quality of both sport and religion, it is a rarity in comparison to the more affluent, fraternal characteristics each maintain.

David Chidester, director of the Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa, explains that baseball, as the "faith of fifty million people," does all that we customarily understand to be done by religion (1996). This includes the creation of a sense of belonging to a "vast, extended American family that attends the same church" (p. 745). Baseball provides for its fans a union of interests via symbols, mutual agreements, and fiery commitment. By articulating the communal tenets of the supernatural and describing past achievements (be they fact or fiction), baseball fans develop into a cohesive unit and feel a stronger connection with their own past as well as their future.

Under the rubric of community are numerous other illustrations that extend the religion metaphor for baseball. One obvious similarity is that all religions have a god or gods that its followers revere. Similarly, sport has its own star athletes that fans worship.

Eitzen and Sage (1993) explain that sports also have saints in the form of loved athletes who have passed on (Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jackie Robinson) and now have shrines built in their honor not only in the baseball hall of fame but in ballparks nationwide. Conversely, the parallels continue for those who have fallen from grace. Pete Rose, for example, was once considered a baseball “god.” However, because he committed the sin of gambling, he has been banished from the baseball temple that is the hall of fame and publicly ridiculed in the process. Be they loved or loathed, the world of the baseball deity (like all deities) is one of great pain and pleasure in that much of their acceptance and, in fact, existence is in the hands of their fans (or followers).

Baseball also has proverbs and language that unify its members. These are primarily passed on by sportscasters and journalists who communicate the “word” of sports to the masses. Such maxims as “Nice guys finish last;” “When the going gets tough the tough get going;” “Lose is a four-letter word;” “Just win, baby” and others are prevalent in the world of sport and are often written in locker rooms as constant reminders to the athletes (Eitzen & Sage, 1993). Novak (1976) reminds us that words such as *sacred*, *devotion*, *faith*, and *sacrifice* also saturate baseball which only heightens our identification with the game as a form of religion.

The relationship continues in that both institutions have important elements of structure and organization. Novak (1976) outlines many of religion’s fundamental customs and it is easy to see why baseball as religion has attracted so much attention. He observes that religion begins with ceremonies where a small number of professionals perform for the masses. In fact, some of these professionals may have performed so often that they may have less religious motivation than the parishioners. This is not to say that

religious leaders or baseball players are disenfranchised by their respective callings and are thus void of faith (although this is undoubtedly true for some). It is realistic, however, to conceive that many fans of baseball or members of a congregation surely have a stronger sense of conviction than those they've come to worship under. In reality, fans are not so much spectators of the ritual as they are participants. After all, we must not forget that the word fan is derived from "fanatic." "Believers in sport do not go to sports to be entertained; dramas and plays, maybe, but not to sports. Sports are far more serious than the dramatic arts, much closer to primal symbols, metaphors, and acts, much more ancient and more frightening" (Novak, 1985, p. 355).

Structural semblances between baseball and religion also exist in the customs that each organization utilizes. Such things as moments of silences, the use of music, discipline, concentration, and even fidelity are all common elements of church and baseball. Perhaps most obvious is the use of formalized conduct. The best illustration of this is the undulating rise and fall of the crowd as parishioners and patrons constantly stand and sit at the appropriate times during song, prayer, and overall reverent jubilation. Boswell (1994) indicates that his mother enjoyed attending games because "it was a place where she could by sharing a fabric of beliefs, symbols, and mutual agreements with those around her - feel calm and whole" (p. 189). He continues by noting that both baseball and his mother's church feature organs, encourage hand clapping to their hymns, have peculiar robes and vestments, and in both everyone is equal before God. As W.P. Kinsella notes in the book, *Shoeless Joe*, "a ballpark at night is more like a church than a church" (1982). Perhaps Annie Savoy, the female lead in the 1988 film *Bull Durham*, stated it best when she said in the prologue:

I believe in the church of baseball. I've tried all the major religions and most of the minor ones. I gave Jesus a chance, but it just didn't work out between us. The Lord laid too much guilt on me. There's no guilt in baseball, and it's never boring. The only church that truly feeds the soul, day in and day out, is the church of baseball (Lester, 1988).

Nonetheless, while it is certainly appropriate to examine the cultural significance of baseball and its spiritual qualities, it must be noted that this interpretation is just that - an interpretation. In other words, it is imperative that we remember that the theme of spirituality acts to posit baseball *as* religion but in no way indicates that baseball *is* religion thus reminding us of the secular value of the game. Baseball is not Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, or any other religion. Neither is it the civil religion of the United States, Japan, or any other nation (Novak, 1976). Furthermore, Guttman (1988) notes that modern sports are, indeed, secular and that, perhaps in an intensely ritualized form such as the Olympic Games, sports could be thought of as a "secular religion." "No matter how important they seem to their players and spectators, modern sports do not provide encounters with what theologians refer to as 'the numinous'" (Guttman, 1988, p. 14). As Giamatti (1989a) specifies, "sport cares not at all for religion's moral structures or political power or endless promises. Sport cares not for religion's *consequences*. It cares for itself, in [a] uniquely free, ceremonial, and subversive way" (p. 37).

As the aforementioned similarities show, baseball is certainly a spiritual event for many, thus, it should be treated accordingly. However, in light of the fact that baseball is not truly a religion, we must acknowledge the balance of the two such that both perspectives exist in American society and in the game itself.

## The Film

The values of a spiritual or a secular perspective on life are featured aspects of American cultural history from both an individual and communal standpoint and, consequently, this feature is also a vital component of America's institutions. Therefore, as a film about America and one of her institutions in baseball, *Field of Dreams* can also be examined via its spiritual and secular qualities.

First, it is obvious to anyone who has seen *Field of Dreams* that spirituality is a key factor in the film. In fact, several writers and film critics have explored this element of the film in their reviews. In the May, 1989 issue of *Film Comment*, for example, Jacobson writes, "We meet ourselves in the past to take a spiritual shower with the boys: *Field of Dreams* is for the fundamentalist batboy in all of us." In addition, O'Brien (1989) notes in *Commonweal*, "The real theme of the film isn't baseball, or America, but sunny summer days spent with loved ones at some ideal house, a pathetic but oh-so-human imagination of heaven." Novak (1989), of *People* magazine, continues: "Welcome to the First Church of the Hanging Curveball and Game-Ending Double Play. Ultimately, in fact, this movie is a lot more about religion than it is about baseball." The links between the film and religion, as is the case with the game and religion, are difficult to deny. Hence, to explore this relationship, let us examine *Field of Dreams* in terms of two common constituents of religion and the spiritual: sacrifice and heaven.

Sacrifice is a primary piece of both Protestantism and baseball and, therefore, plays a role in the film as each character sacrifices for others and, in doing so, renews their belief in the spiritual (Aden, 1994). Ray Kinsella, the lead player and primary agent of value balance, is the first character to sacrifice as, upon initially hearing the voice, Ray sacrifices



his own sanity. He is not sure why he hears the voice and is even more uncertain as to what it means. We hear the Willie Nelson song, "Crazy," and the John Sebastian song, "Daydream," played in the background as Ray struggles to comprehend his predicament. Eventually, he thinks he understands his purpose and builds the field. Furthermore, in plowing under his corn, he sacrifices the respect of his fellow farmers and risks losing his farm and alienating his wife, Annie, and his daughter, Karin, in the process -- all so that Shoeless Joe Jackson can return to play ball again. Annie also sacrifices her status in the community by standing up for Ray, particularly at the PTA meeting where Ray is referred to as "the biggest horses ass in three counties." Archibald "Moonlight/Doc" Graham and Terence, the 1960s counterculture figure, both certainly know about sacrifice as well. In fact, Archie sacrifices playing professional baseball twice in the film so as he can practice medicine and the once solitary Terence sacrifices his privacy and safety to accompany Ray to the Red Sox game and then to the Iowa farm.

Aden (1994) points out that the characters "make sacrifice only after they choose to believe in the possibility of the spiritual. Initial doubts about the existence of the voice surface in each of the characters, yet each is allowed to see what the voice controls after believing in its possibility" (p. 310). Ray, acting as prophet and convert, persuades the others to believe him after he is allowed to see an image of the field and Shoeless Joe playing on it. Thus, when Ray convinces a character to follow him on his divine mission, he or she demonstrates their belief through self-sacrifice which leads to spiritual rejuvenation. Consequently, this rejuvenation works to rejoice each believer as he or she reaps the benefits of sacrifice. Ray and his family get to meet Ray's father; Archie is able to play baseball and practice medicine by saving Karin's life at the field; and Terence is

awarded the opportunity to join the other players in the cornfield where he will presumably get to fulfill his dream of playing with Jackie Robinson and the Brooklyn Dodgers. Even Annie's brother, Mark, eventually comes around and sees the ghost players after a sudden surge of faith when Karin falls off of the bleachers. "When did these ballplayers get here?" he asks. Essentially, by choosing to believe in the spiritual and self-sacrificing as an expression of that belief, the characters are guaranteed access to the field (Aden, 1994).

Another spiritual quality of the film concerns heaven, a religious element that is expressed quite literally in the film. In their first meeting, Joe asks Ray if the field is heaven. Ray replies, "No, it's Iowa." At this point in his mission, Ray is still unaware of the spiritual strength of the field for he is yet to experience it himself. Unsure of what just took place, and as far as he is concerned, it is simply Iowa. However, after his mission is complete, his long deceased father returns and says to Ray, "It's so beautiful here. For me, well, for me it's like a dream come true. Can I ask you something? Is - Is this heaven?" Ray responds the same as he did when Joe asked him the same question. His father, John, replies, "I could have sworn it was heaven." Ray then asks, "Is there a heaven?" John answers, "Oh, yeah. It's the place where dreams come true." Ray, reflecting on all of the dreams that have come true on the field, states, "Maybe this is heaven." In his exploration of the film, Hill (1992) writes, "Ultimately, when all is dreamt and seen, when dreams and visions reach their apex, the human spirit sees heaven, the place where dreams come true."

Similarly, Aden (1994) has posited the field of dreams as a Garden of Eden. He notes that the predominant belief in the first one-hundred years of American culture was of

the nation as an earth-bound Eden. “The governing literary image of American space [during this time] revolved around the understanding of America as a sacred garden; it was a garden because America was the land that God created and challenged with a special purpose; America was sacred because the New World was the meeting place of God and human beings” (Ostwalt, 1990, p. 26). In America’s transformation from this perspective to one of industry and consumption, we were left spiritually vacant. Aden argues that the same conversion from industry to technology will have similar repercussions and that the field of dreams is a contemporary Eden which can re-energize the spirits of individuals who feel de-spiritualized by technology. “The film’s field allows the dead to return, the old to be young, and the confused to be directed by a disembodied voice. All of the major characters, troubled by some event in their past, use the field to atone for their actions and to find a heaven on earth” (Aden, 1994, p. 308).

It is not difficult to see why so many critics and fans find a spiritual connection with *Field of Dreams*. The prominent religious themes surely stand out: the disembodied voice; the field as heaven; Ray as Noah building his ark/field (Sanders, 1989); the importance and reward of sacrifice; and the pilgrimage of people to the field in the film’s final shot, to name a few. However, the correlation between theology and the game of baseball is similar to the relationship here in that baseball can be perceived as a religion but, in reality, is not truly a religion. The film, while certainly containing religious metaphors and issues, is also not an exclusively religious film. Like the game, the film can be and is interpreted in a variety of ways and many of those interpretations have very little to do with religion. For many, the film is about the tragedy of lost dreams while others place emphasis on the father/son relationship as the film’s central message. Because the

film only suggests itself as spiritual (recall that the field is never directly referred to as heaven), and because there are so many secular components to the film as well, we cannot say that dialectical transformation has occurred. That is, despite a number of religious ideas, spirituality does not “win out” to the exclusion of a secular stand. However, because *Field of Dreams* does have a strong theme of theology, neither can we say that the film achieves balance. Rather, I posit that the value system of the spiritual and the secular is characteristic of *dialectical preference* in that one value is favored over another, but does not entirely replace the other. Hocker Rushing (1983) first used a similar pattern of change in her analysis of American westerns in what she termed dialectical *emphasis*. She asserted that in early westerns, individuality was favored “to the virtual exclusion” of community. I do not believe secularization to be all but excluded in this film. Rather, I assert that spirituality is simply preferred in the interpretations of *Field of Dreams* over the secular thus taking the pattern of dialectical preference. In demonstrating a very spiritual quality in the film, Phil Alden Robinson opens the film up to any number of possibilities including the balance between other values which, in turn, can act to ease the unrest of certain conflicts within the film.

### Rural and Urban Outlooks

#### The Game

In general, Americans are faced with the conflict between country and city, between traditionalism and modernism, between a nostalgic rural past and a progressive urban future. Baseball understands this conflict. This value system has a profound effect on baseball and, hence, our interpretation of it concerns where we play the game. As

Aden and Reynolds (1993) argue, “we can gain a more fundamental understanding of the relationship between sport and American culture by identifying the grounds on which sports are metaphorically played” (p. 2).

First, from a rural perspective and in light of a spiritual preference, the grounds on which baseball is typically played have been called America’s Elysian Fields referring to the mythological place where souls of the good went after death: a peaceful and beautiful region, full of meadows, groves, sunlight, and fresh air (Hirsch, et al., 1993). Giamatti (1989a) reminds us that all play aspires to the condition of paradise and whether we envision paradise as a garden, mountaintop, or island, paradise is always an enclosed, green place. Essentially, the field reconnects individuals with nature. A baseball field is an isolated territory where technological intrusions are lamented because, metaphorically, the field is a pastoral idyll filled with sun, sky, wind, rain, and grass. It is a place where athletes and spectators alike can escape the turmoil of urbanization if only for an afternoon. The game also contains seasonal and daily cycles as symbolized by the four bases. “The fluctuating pace and repetitive cycles of the long summer season are the very essence of our daily human existence” (Bjarkman, 1990, p. 17). Furthermore, Grella (1975) posits that the baseball season, like life, begins in the spring bringing with it both rain and sunshine and when it ends, “we must prepare for the long nights of winter darkness, the death of the year, the maimed and maiming rites of football, the death-centered game” (p. 552). Guttman puts it well when he says that he is “convinced that the pastoral traits are important to the game and that modern man is not totally untouched by the annual revitalization of the earth (Gelber, 1983, p. 6).

In accordance with a more pastoral, nature-oriented interpretation of baseball are the spatial and time components of the game. Just as the place where baseball is played reconnects individuals with nature, the time it consumes is representative of real life in that baseball is the only sport not governed by a time clock. The innings are measured by outs rather than time. In fact, each game is supposed to last nine innings, but theoretically could be played forever. Unlike basketball, football, hockey and other sports, both baseball and life do not exist in specific time frames with designated ending periods. Spatially, baseball has been referred to as “controlled openness” in that everything fans out from home plate creating a constant, calm whole (Ross, 1973). Ross also points out that every motion in the game is one of return “a ball hit outside is a home run, a full circle. Home - familiar, peaceful, secure - it is the beginning and end” (p. 104) This element of the game is indicative of its spiritual qualities as well because baseball is certainly a religion of place. That is, “by producing such a ritualized space within the world, baseball domesticates the sacred and gives it a home” (Chidester, 1996, p. 746).

While it has been argued that the game was forged in the country as a folk-ritual, baseball has an obvious connection with a distinctively urban environment as well. Although Giamatti (1989a) links the game with a green paradise, he also acknowledges that baseball flourishes in and is deeply allied with the city. He notes that sports in general share a deep conventionality with cities in that each is a “stage from elevated boards, a treaty from pieces of paper, a set of social manners, a system of law - by common consent. [Each] is a design of our making rather than by the seeming randomness of Nature’s” (p. 54). In addition, many baseball historians have reviewed the game’s transition from “eccentric behavior to national craze” and noted that its success

paralleled and was assisted by urbanization in that railroads, telegraphs, newspapers, and other technological modifications helped spread baseball's popularity (Gelber, 1983).

Baseball's link with the city is also apparent in the collective representations we have of teams and the cities they represent. According to Anderson and Stone (1981), modern cities provide their residents with special institutions or places which foster identification and sentimentality. Fixtures such as the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, the French Quarter in New Orleans, or the Space Needle in Seattle work to symbolically incorporate residents into the social and cultural systems of the city. Because baseball teams hold a very strong connection with the cities in which they reside, we can surely say that teams create a symbolic characterization of their city as well. Yes, New York and Chicago will always be the homes of the Empire State Building and Sears Tower, but for many Americans Yankee Stadium and Wrigley Field provide a greater sense of pride and a more sincere form of identification.

Fundamentally, both a rural and an urban perspective can be taken when examining baseball and, in fact, many historians and students of the game disagree on which is the more accurate. Some claim that the game was conceived in nostalgia and is a reminder of America's rural past, "a relic of pre-mechanized countrysides, lazy pastoral picnics, a surfeit of rustic piece" (Altherr, 1990, p. 97). For others, however, baseball came of age with the cities and will be forever united with industrialization and the urbane. As with the other value systems in this examination, a rural versus urban position is more characteristic of balance than synthesis or transformation because each perspective is able to flourish. In fact, another viewpoint that more clearly reflects this balance concerns a combination of the two. Rather than understanding baseball to be either rural *or* urban, we can instead

interpret it as rural *within* urban. That is, the ballpark, with its lush, green grass and pastoral associations, can be seen as a green oasis in the gray city (Altherr, 1990). Such parks act as illusionary ideals of our agrarian heritage and yet frequently exist as the center pieces of major municipalities.

### The Film

Americans have made a concerted attempt to urbanize and modernize our country while maintaining a rural perspective in the process, evidence of which is the fact that ours is a nation of thriving cities and suburbs and also vast regions of open wilderness. Each is valued in our culture and baseball acts as a manner by which we can strive to have both. Thus, *Field of Dreams*, as a symbolic merger of baseball and American culture, can be examined via these values as well.

If, as Aden and Reynolds (1993) note, we can gain a better understanding of the relationship between sport and American culture by identifying where sports are played, then we should be able to even more clearly understand this relationship if we examine where a sports film takes place. Considering, therefore, the fact that the majority of the story takes place on a farm in Iowa, we can surely say that there is a definite agrarian perspective in *Field of Dreams*.

After Ray's opening monologue where we see a montage of pictures of him and his family, the film shifts to present day where we see the farm for the first time. Director, Phil Alden Robinson gives us a long, flowing shot of the Iowa farm and, specifically, the cornfield. The sky is a robin's egg blue and the corn stocks could not be greener if painted. The farm is the perfect embodiment of America's pastoral property. If paradise is a beautiful, green place, as Giamatti (1989a) states, then Ray's farm is arguably paradise



and the addition of the baseball field only strengthens this argument because all play aspires to the condition of paradise. Furthermore, the field itself is representative of rural living in that it is an open air field with real dirt and grass that was grown and cared for by a farmer of all people. Like the corn that was in its place, the field is America at its countrified best.

In addition, as the characters make the trip to the field, they simultaneously, as Aden (1994) puts it, “return to the garden.” Both Annie and Ray, for example, have chosen a very rural way of life. In fact, it is Annie who convinces Ray that they should purchase the farm in the first place as she is originally from Iowa. Throughout the film, it is Annie who is primarily concerned with keeping the farm. She takes care of the finances and ultimately has the most to lose if the bank forecloses on the land because farming has played a major role in her life and she does not want to abandon that lifestyle. Conversely, although Ray is a relatively skilled and hard working farmer, farming does not exactly seem like his cup of tea. However, it is interesting to note that Ray does prefer to live off the land rather than returning to the city to work as his father did.

While much of the film takes place on the Iowa farm, the connection that baseball has with the city is not completely ignored. Ray was educated in California and is originally from New York where he rooted for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Joe and Archie must live in Chicago and New York respectively to play baseball at the professional level for the White Sox and Giants. Terence was a resident of Boston until Ray travels there and “kidnaps” him to the country where his modification becomes complete. Again, because the city is linked to baseball and does have some rewards, a dialectical transformation to exclusively a rural point of view does not take place. Yet neither is this

pattern characteristic of a true balance. It is obvious that the film favors a rural perspective over an urban perspective and, therefore, the pattern, like that of the spiritual and the secular, can also be referred to as dialectical preference. The fact that the field is on a farm in middle America and not in a city or even a suburb is indicative of the rural preference the film takes. Furthermore, Boston, the only major city to appear in the film, is hardly shown at all and the few shots we do see are rather unflattering. Compared to the beautiful, sun drenched field, the city seems dark, dreary, and rain soaked. Even Fenway Park, shown only for brief moment, pales in comparison to Ray's ballpark. Basically, the field of dreams *is* America's Elysian Field insofar as it resists urbanization and takes its visitors on trip back to a more rural past. Again, it is this preference for the pastoral that allows the balance of the other systems to occur. That is, in favoring an agrarian perspective, the film is able to more clearly emphasize the game's heritage and more accurately identify the grounds on which baseball is played. Once this is settled, the characters are free to fulfill their dreams and ease their pain without the difficulties that would accompany an attempted balance between the country and the city.

### Individualism and Community

#### The Game

If we are to say that the relationship between individualism and community within America is reciprocal and influential, then that same relationship within baseball, as one of America's primary institutions, must also be characteristic of significant interdependence. As Guttman reminds us, "Today it is hard to think of the word 'team' apart from sports, for it has been in team sports that Americans have sought a combination of individualism

and cooperation, a form of collective endeavor which nonetheless encourages the development of individuality,” (1978, p. 138). Baseball is certainly no exception as it employs both values and, in fact, does so in a more obligatory manner than any other sport.

First of all, baseball is inherently more individualistic than its counterparts. That is, “despite the fact that teamwork is required, in most game conditions there is still a premium on individual skills and identity” (Warshay, 1982, p. 233). Spatially, the players express individualism in that the defensive players (outfielder, infielder, pitcher, catcher) are spread out on the field so that individual achievements are both obvious and encouraged and, therefore, every player is potentially responsible for victory or defeat. “Just as his triumphs are visible to all, so are his mistakes. He cannot hide an error in a mass of struggling bodies or commit it in some obscure corner of the field, for it is there in the open for everyone to see” (Grella, 1975, p. 557). Similarly, the action on the field has been likened to dialogue and the players have been associated with characters in a narrative. Because the defensive positions have carefully scripted roles insofar as they are distinctly spread out across the field, Bjarkman (1990) refers to them as *dramatis personae*. Like so many fictional characters in novels and film, each baseball player has the potential to be the villain or the hero and only the playing of the game will decide his fate.

While individualism and personal achievement are undoubtedly encouraged throughout the world of sports, the communal concept of team is essential to the success of baseball for teamwork is the *sine qua non* of achievement (Guttman, 1978). Yes, players play within themselves to pursue their own paths, but baseball also provides a

place where they can work as parts of an organic unit operating to achieve a simultaneous function. Take, for example, the fact that most baseball players, major league and otherwise, would gladly trade in all individual success for a chance to win the World Series and thus be considered the best team. However, from a more individualistic standpoint, if one's team does not win the championship, a Most Valuable Player Award or to be named the season's batting champion can be a substantial consolation prize. What's more, in their study of cultural values as expressed in the sportswriting about the 1984 Chicago Cubs, Trujillo and Ekdorf (1985) note that sportswriters described nearly every player as a hero so that the Cubs, in effect, became a team of heroes, and, as an extension of their heroic exploits, were also referred to as "team players."

Baseball teams also function to create community and foster identification for their respective locations and afford fans to identify publicly with other community members. As Keyes states, "getting with that big crowd, sharing tension, joy, and tragedy was a real communal experience for a few hours" (1973, p. 104). Each member of the crowd identifies with every other member because of their common interests in the game and, therefore, their shared sense of community. According to the late baseball commissioner, A. Bartlett Giamatti (1989),

Very soon the crowd is no crowd at all but a community, a small town of people sharing neither work nor pain nor deprivation nor anger but the common experience of being released to enjoy the moment, even those moments of intense disappointment or defeat, moments made better, after all, precisely because our fan is part of a large family of those similarly affected, part of a city of grievors (p. 32).

Accordingly, ballparks, stadiums, and even parking lots become centers for social interaction. Explicitly, the event is recreational but the social interaction that takes place often creates enthusiasm and identification with the community (Anderson & Stone,

1981). In fact, Trujillo (1992) has suggested that if baseball is a country, as Hall (1985) posits, then ballparks can be considered its cities and towns. He observes that every ballpark can be considered its own American community such that it is a self-contained environment complete with shelter, food, drink, medical facilities, security forces, clothing, media, and entertainment. However, as many have noted, community typically extends itself beyond that of mere location and Trujillo is no exception. "More importantly," he states, "the ballpark is experienced as community in a symbolic sense, a home where extended families come together to work, to play, and to share in community celebrations" (1992, p. 359).

Essentially, even a cursory review of the game of baseball will show a balance of individualism and community. One cannot deny the evidence both within the game and within the stands that baseball incorporates elements of both values without canceling one out to the exclusion of the other. After all, when it is all said and done, a team (community) is merely the collective actions of players (individuals). According to Giamatti (1989b):

Baseball fulfills the promise America made to itself to cherish the individual while recognizing the overarching claims of the group. It sends its players out [from home plate around the bases] in order to return again, allowing all the freedom to accomplish great things in a dangerous world [of strikeouts, tags, and caught fly balls] The playing of the game is a restatement of the promises that we can all be free, that we can all succeed (pp. 87-88).

Unfortunately, the risk of balancing or valuing two oppositions is that, unfortunately, some runners will be left on base. In other words, just as racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice pervade American society, baseball is not immune to these and other societal misdoings. Sadly, racism has certainly been a major factor in baseball

throughout its history. As noted earlier, from 1898 to 1946, African American men were barred from Major League Baseball and the recognized minor leagues as per a “gentlemen’s agreement” (Peterson, 1970). It was not until 1947, when Jackie Robinson become a full-time player with the Brooklyn Dodgers that the color barrier was broken and it was not until 1959 that every major league team had at least one black player (Good, 1997). Even today, the game is faced with this issue as Major League Baseball seeks to address the surprising lack of minority coaches and owners in the game.

It is important to remember, however, that when baseball desegregated itself in 1947, it was the first American institution to do so voluntarily, in fact, it desegregated before the U.S. Army, Supreme Court, and public schools (Giamatti, 1989). “Baseball changed how blacks and whites felt about themselves and about each other. Late, late as it was, the arrival in the Majors of Jack Roosevelt Robinson was an extraordinary moment in American history” (Giamatti, 1989, p. 64). Consequently, baseball is “a field in which black Americans have suffered the most blatant manifestations of racism, on the one hand, and, on the other - and in some cases - have won wealth and fame” (Talamini & Page, 1973, p. 223). As an American institution, baseball endures the same inequities as the country that claims it. Nevertheless, it has also made a concerted attempt to right its wrongs and include individuals that were once excluded from the baseball community.

### The Film

The value balance of individualism and community is one that is prevalent throughout the world of American film and *Field of Dreams* presents itself as an excellent example of both the system and the balance. Initially, the characters in the film are distinctly individual and independent such that each is personally successful and, in some

manner, is very different from the rest of society and the communities of which they are a part. Yet, it is community and the desire for human relationships that allows the characters to fulfill their dreams. Let us first examine the individualistic nature of the film and its characters.

Ray certainly expresses individualistic tendencies. As a child of the 1960s, Ray has “not lost sight of the value of questioning authority, of abnormal perception, of independent thinking, and of expecting the extraordinary” (Hill, 1992, p. 299). It is very apparent that Ray is different from the other Iowa farmers. Ray was born in Brooklyn, schooled at Berkeley, and seems to be quite younger than those around him. Moreover, it is his decision to heed the voice that sets him apart and firmly grounds him as an individual. After the voice informs Ray, “If you build it, he will come,” he comes to the conclusion that he must build a baseball diamond so that “Shoeless Joe Jackson will get to come back and play ball again.” This is, of course, completely absurd, as Ray himself points out, but he chooses to follow the voice and its instructions thus blatantly setting himself apart from the farming community.

Likewise, Annie, is also an individual in that she too is a former 60s radical who, at times, seems quite removed from the conservative, tradition laden world of Iowa farming. The most obvious example concerns the scene at the PTA meeting where town residents are discussing book banning. Contrary to the other community members, Annie takes a strong stance against the banning of books and does not hold back in voicing her opinion. She passionately asks the crowd, “Who’s for the Bill of Rights? Who thinks freedom is a pretty darn good thing? Who thinks that we have to stand up to the kind of censorship that they had under Stalin?” As the townspeople raise their hands in agreement, we realize

that Annie is not afraid to ardently question authority even in a scenario where she must risk alienating herself from the community as her husband has already done.

Of interest here is the fact that the character of Annie as portrayed in the film is a much stronger and independent figure than the same character in the book, *Shoeless Joe*. In the novel, Annie is depicted as never questioning Ray's odd behavior. She refers to Ray as "love" and instead of advancing her education or making something of herself, she "chose [Ray] as her occupation." The film version of Annie attended Berkeley and, while she believes in her husband, she does question his actions throughout the film and at one point even makes a failed attempt to stop his irrational conduct. When Ray decides that he must travel to Massachusetts to find Terence Mann, Annie makes her opinion known. "I'm going to have to nip this one in the bud. We are having moderate to heavy financial difficulties here, and you can't take off for Boston while we're goin' broke in Iowa." Perhaps altering the character in this manner was an attempt by Phil Alden Robinson, the screenwriter and director, to incorporate a stronger female lead in his film so as to offset the lack of capable, independent female characters in certainly baseball and arguably most baseball films.

In addition, Terence, the misanthropic former activist and writer, is also quite individualistic in nature. He is portrayed as a civil rights pioneer who wrote the best books of his generation, made the cover of *Newsweek* as a Pulitzer Prize winner, coined the phrase "Make love, not war," and even "hung out with the Beatles." In the 60s, he was, as Annie describes, "a warm and gentle voice of reason during a time of great madness." A key figure of his time, Terence was a minority voice of protest against majority rule who unequivocally followed his own path in life. Now a disenfranchised



recluse, Mann simply wants his privacy and longs for others to stop looking to him for answers and begin thinking for themselves which only solidifies his character's independent constitution. Even when Ray and the magic of the field enter his life, Terence remains the one character who seems to have some understanding of the events that have engulfed him and the others. He helps Ray to understand the connections and, in effect, becomes a warm and gentle voice of reason in Ray's time of great madness.

Archie is also presented as a proud, successful man with very individualistic disposition. Despite the fact that he died nearly twenty years earlier, Ray is able to transcend time and meet him. He asks Graham to tell him his greatest wish.

I never got to bat in the major leagues. I'd have liked to have that chance - just once to stare down a big league pitcher. To stare him down then just as he goes into his windup - wink - make think you know something he doesn't. That's what I wish for. A chance to squint at a sky so blue that it hurts your eyes just to look at it. To feel the tingle in your arms as you connect with the ball. To run the bases. Stretch a double into a triple and flop face first into third and wrap your arms around the bag. That's my wish, Ray Kinsella. That's my wish (Robinson, 1989).

This passage reinforces the idea of our national pastime as a passion that can consume a person (or a people). With this statement, Archie emphasizes baseball's tangible qualities such that baseball is more than just a game that can be played or viewed, but an entity that we can reach out and touch. Although he longs for inclusion into the baseball community, his dream is ultimately individualistic. That is, his only wish is to bat in the majors rather than complete a more community oriented achievement such as winning the World Series. Such a modest wish also works to set Archie apart from so many others who would easily take advantage of a place where dreams come true.

Furthermore, after his exclusion from baseball after appearing in only one major league game with zero at bats for the 1922 New York Giants, Archie goes back to school and becomes an admired general practitioner in his hometown of Chisholm, Minnesota.

As the publisher of the local newspaper writes:

There were times when children could not afford eyeglasses or milk or clothing. Yet no child was ever denied these essentials because in the background there was always Doctor Graham. Without any fanfare or publicity, the glasses, or the milk, or the ticket to the ballgame found their way into the child's pocket (Robinson, 1989).

In Chisholm, Archie rises above the guise of failed ballplayer to become the centerpiece of the community. In fact, the headline of his obituary reads "The Passing of a Legend."

Like the other characters, he is not afraid to follow his own path or make a decision that is contradictory to the majority.

Joe is perhaps the most individual of them all. Even our first glimpse of him is a shot of him alone on the field as he makes his ghostly entrance to both the film and the Kinsella's lives. As a member of the 1919 Chicago "Black" Sox, Joe, as Ray informs his daughter, was the only player to not participate in conspiring with gamblers to throw the World Series. "I mean if he's supposed to be throwing, how do you explain the fact that he hit .375 for the series and didn't commit one error? Twelve hits including the series' only home run, and they said he's trying to lose?" Even under the pressure of money and gambling, it is Joe who takes the stand against crime thus solidifying his stance of independence. Furthermore, Joe establishes himself as an individual by showcasing his extraordinary talent on the ballfield. As is the case with the game of baseball, players are part of a team but much more than football or basketball, the sport is quite individualistic in nature and Joe uses this quality of the game to rise above the other players. Just as

Archie was the centerpiece of Chisholm, Joe is the centerpiece of the ballplayers both in 1919 and 1989.

While it can easily be argued that each of the central characters is a colorful individual, it is imperative to realize that individuality does not equate selfishness. In other words, each character does pursue his/her own personal destiny, but, like the game itself, the development and prosperity of those characters is deeply connected with the team concepts of community and identification. Each player influences and is influenced by every other player in the film in that their relationships are all founded in a common love of baseball and it is this commonality that contributes to their mutual effect. Indeed, it is their inclusion in the community that is baseball that ultimately allows each of them to fulfill their dreams and right their wrongs.

Take, for instance, the relationship between Ray and his father. We learn early in the film that Ray's mother died when he was three and that his father did the best he could to raise him alone. His father was a minor league ballplayer for a short time who instead of Mother Goose, put his son to bed at night "to stories of Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and the great Shoeless Joe Jackson." Ray tells us that his father lived and died with the Chicago White Sox. "Died a little when they lost the 1919 World Series died a lot the following summer when eight members of the team were accused of throwing that series." Shoeless Joe Jackson and the others were consequently banned from baseball, dashing the hopes and dreams of baseball fans across the nation, including John Kinsella who believed Joe to be the finest player to ever play the game. It is baseball, specifically Joe, that links Ray with his father. In addition, while building the field, Ray tells his daughter the stories of Joe that his father told him as a child thus furthering the communal connections the

characters have with the game and each other. Lying on the field, Ray tells Annie that his father once said that no one could hit like Shoeless Joe. Annie comments, "I think that's the first time I've ever seen you smile when you mentioned your father." The field has (presumably) only been completed for a matter of hours and already the reconciliation between Ray and his father has begun -- reconciliation founded in a shared love of baseball.

The relationship between Ray and Joe is also one indicative of the community created by the game. Following the completion of the field, several months pass with no sign of Joe. Just when hope seems lost, Joe emerges from the cornfield and, without speaking, Ray and Joe begin playing ball. Joe instinctively takes left field as it was his position when he was alive and Ray hits him fly balls, never a word between them. At this point, they have nothing to say and no reason to say it. They are on a baseball field. They know what to do and how to do it. Just as baseball has and will act as a reference point for communication for Ray and his father, it can serve as the actual communication as it does for Ray and Joe. This form of communicating falls in line with several studies that indicate that men create and recognize closeness by sharing in activities. As Wood and Inman (1993) note, "Relying on activities more than words to create closeness is also evident in a masculine orientation toward friendship" (p. 290).

Once Joe and Ray do begin talking, Joe makes his attitude towards the game very clear:

Getting thrown out of baseball was like having a part of me amputated. I've heard that old men wake up and scratch itchy legs that have been dust for over fifty years. That was me. I'd wake up in the night with the smell of the ballpark in my nose, the cool of the grass under my feet. The thrill of the grass. Man, I did love the game. I'd have played for food money. It was the game, the sounds, the smells. Did you ever hold a ball or a glove to your face? It was the crowd rising

to their feet when the ball was hit deep. Shoot, I'd have played for nothing (Robinson, 1989).

Simply stated, baseball is Joe's only dream. It represents all that is good and right with the world. It is clear that not only does Joe love the game, but his banishment from it ultimately alienated him from the greater culture. By equating his expulsion with losing a limb, he expresses the torment one can endure when no longer a part of an organic unit be it baseball or society in general. What's more, Joe's need for inclusion is also demonstrated by his desire to bring others to the field with him. Although an amazing individual ballplayer, Joe tires of practicing with Ray and asks if he can bring his "Black" Sox teammates to the field with him. As he reminds Ray, "There are others you know. There were eight of us. It would really mean a lot to them." In response, Ray nicely sums up the communal purpose of his field: "They're all welcome here." Later Joe brings another team to the field of dreams with him. He needs the companionship and competition that only other ballplayers can give him in his hunger to rejoin the baseball fellowship that he has so desperately missed.

As one of the characters who joins Joe on the field, Archie is yet another example of the unification baseball establishes within the film. As noted earlier, Archie's greatest wish is to bat in the majors, an arguably individualistic inclination. However, here we see very clearly the reciprocal relationship between the two values in that Archie cannot achieve his individual success without first joining the baseball community. Unfortunately, both Archie and Joe ended their baseball careers, albeit for much different reasons, and each longs to resume inclusion in baseball. Despite going on to be a very successful doctor, Archie's pains of exclusion are still apparent and, again, we see the importance

that the concept of community holds for both the characters and the film as a whole.

Again, baseball and the field serve as connectors of elements.

Perhaps no other character demonstrates the interrelated nature of the film more than Terence. After all, he is, as he himself describes, “the East Coast distributor of involved” insofar as there was not a movement during much of the 60s that he did not play a part. Robinson makes an apparent effort to characterize Terence as someone who could have easily been excluded from the baseball community. In other words, as Annie asks for all of us, “What’s Terence Mann got to do with baseball?” After some research, Ray finds that Terence once said that “my earliest recurring dream was to play at Ebbets Field with Jackie Robinson and the Brooklyn Dodgers. Of course it never happened and the Dodgers left Brooklyn and they tore down Ebbets Field but even now, I still dream that dream.” Terence knew everybody, did everything and “in the end it wasn’t enough - what he missed was baseball.” Terence seemingly has little to do with baseball but a lot to do with American culture, or at least a portion of it. After closer inspection, however, we find that he, like the other characters, has a deep association with the sport and uses it to restore his connection with society as a whole.

It is interesting to note that in the novel, *Shoeless Joe*, the character of Terence is actually written as J.D. Salinger. Robinson decided to use a fictional character because he felt that by leaving Salinger in the film, he risked taking the audience out of the movie (*Tales from the Edge*, 1997). Because J.D. Salinger and his writings do have actual implications within our real society, Robinson was in jeopardy of distracting his audience away from his purpose of unification and, therefore, excluded him from this *reel* society. Robinson’s audience is extremely important to him. His tone is one of equality throughout

the film and is also manifested in the fact that we are never given any insight that the characters do not have. If Robinson were to approach us differently (as superiors, inferiors, etc.) his purpose of dramatizing baseball as a community would be discredited.

Robinson further acknowledges his audience by recognizing the diversity of our culture. He makes the character of Terence an African American because, as he himself points out, "It is, after all, a film about America, and absent this character, it was shaping up to be whiter than me in winter" (*Tales from the Edge*, 1997). As with baseball and the long overdue arrival of Jackie Robinson in the majors, Phil Alden Robinson is to be congratulated for casting a black man in James Earl Jones as a key figure in his film. However, just as Jackie Robinson did not need bleaching in *The Jackie Robinson Story*, Terence could more accurately represent his race and, in the process, America. For example, in his criticism of the film, O'Brien chastises Phil Alden Robinson for having his character of a black writer become nothing short of giddy over an all-white fantasy team with not a Negro League star in sight (1989). If Robinson were genuinely interested in making *Field of Dreams* a "film about America," he could have made a more concerted effort to incorporate African Americans and other minorities in both the film and the dream baseball team he assembles. In doing so, the obvious community and identification themes would have been more representative of the vast and vague vista of American civilization.

Communication scholars typically argue that individualism and community are involved in a give and take relationship (Aden, 1995). This is certainly true within American culture and within baseball as each value works to reaffirm the other. However, when the controlled atmosphere of film is added to the blend, the auteur has the power to

alter and adjust that atmosphere so that his/her created environment is quite unlike the all too real worlds of American society and its institutions.

Essentially, then, I suggest that the balance of individualism and community in *Field of Dreams* is such that the individual problems that stem from this relationship reach a heightened form of dialectical balance where the elements are united in such way that the relationship between the two is reaffirmed *and* the tension between them is relieved. In American culture, individualism and community are balanced values and have been for quite some time, but, unfortunately, problems arise. Individuals are denied access to various communities and members of certain communities are unable to achieve individual success because their membership will not allow it. Here, however, all are invited to be a part of the community the field creates and, simultaneously, fulfill any personal achievements they desire.

In his exploration of the film, Aden (1994) submits that “neither individualism nor community predominates; instead, *Field of Dreams* suggests that an individual can freely pursue his or her dream while building community” (p. 314). For instance, Ray finally finds himself and is able to help others find themselves in the process; Terence finds the motivation to write again which will ultimately benefit both him and so many others; Joe is able to play ball again while also easing the pain of his friends and teammates; Archie reconciles his two callings and, in doing so, is able to help many people, and so on. By balancing the oppositions of individualism and community, each character seeks and eventually finds their own personal destiny and, in the end, also create a community based on the identification that they all have with baseball and the field. The community that the field creates is open to all and works in a very altruistic fashion to assist in the righting of



old wrongs. By working through and solving the conflicts that each character is presented with, individualism and community are balanced such that the relationship between the two is even more effective than within the game of baseball.

### Youth and Experience

#### The Game

Just as individualism and community are meaningful themes in American culture, so are youth and experience. In fact, this value opposition is also quite universal in that the two forces and the tension that inherently exists between them crosses a variety of societal institutions such as family, work, education, politics, and so on as Americans constantly attempt to merge the youth of America and new ways of thinking with older members of society and “the way things have always been.” This attempt, successful or not, is also a tremendous factor in the world of baseball.

Obviously, youth is often emphasized in baseball because the American stereotype of youth concentrates on such qualities as strength, agility, attractiveness, eagerness, optimism, and respect for authority, all of which act as ideal qualities that contribute to one’s success in baseball (Trujillo, 1985). This success, in turn, assists in the socialization or cultural transmission of America’s children into the American way of life. That is, if the game does, in fact, reflect and reaffirm cultural values, then childrens’ participation in it should affect their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Accordingly, a number of scholars (Snyder & Purdy, 1982; Coakly, 1983; McPherson, Curtis, & Low, 1989; Eitzen & Sage, 1993) have noted that participation in sports of any kind can have a very positive influence on youth. Hence, in a *U.S News & World Report* survey of 1000 adults, 93% of those

polled believe children learn the value of teamwork from sports and 88% feel sports teach children the value of discipline and hard work (Tharp, 1996). As long as scholars and parents agree on this issue, America's children will continue to play and watch baseball and, in the process, further the connection the game has with the youth of America.

Whereas youth has an obvious link with baseball via socialization, it is also coupled with the game insofar as youth is a vital element of any adult baseball team. In terms of professional baseball, most rookie players come directly to that level from high school or college and it is this infusion of youth that keeps a team fresh and competitive over the years. Clubs are in a constant search for "good young prospects" and a winning club is typically one that has a very deep minor league system with a lot of "young talent." However, as is typical of value oppositions, youth has little impact unless conjoined with experience.

Because optimism, confidence, strength, and agility often accompany youth there is premium on players who have these qualities. Nonetheless, such capabilities have a much greater impact when in the hands of an experienced coach. "Because a ballplayer's athletic life is so short and the game so difficult, he is usually continually under the tutelage of retired ballplayers who learned the subtleties of the game from still older ballplayers in a solid line going back to the past" (Grella, 1975, p. 555). Likewise, in their examination of sportswriting about the 1984 Chicago Cubs, Trujillo and Ekdom (1985) note that "mature and experienced players, when up against the best rookie prospects, have the edge because they know the hitters' strengths and weaknesses" (p. 276). There is certainly something to be said about a player who has been there and done that, despite a possible loss of physical ability.

The integration of youth and experience is particularly emblematic of baseball because the age ranges of players is often quite disparate. Teams can consist of both rookie teenagers and 40-year-old, grizzled veterans. In fact, most coaches and managers prefer a team with a blend of youth and experience as such a combination is typically thought of as an excellent formula for victory. This relationship is characteristic of value balance because both elements are emphasized and equally sought out to achieve, literally, a winning combination. For instance, most teams that are made up of predominantly young players are considered to be in a rebuilding process and are highly unlikely to win a championship. Furthermore, teams that have a considerable number of older players, despite experience and a vast understanding of the game, may not have the physical competence to win the war of attrition that is a professional baseball season.

Again, however, it must be noted that a balance of youth and experience in the game of baseball, as desirable as it may be, is not without its share of difficulties. Take, for example, the fact that numerous older players (often just in their thirties) lose their positions to younger players with stronger arms and bigger bats. Many of these seasoned veterans are forced to change teams or are, in some cases, demoted to the minor leagues which frequently signals the end of a player's major league career and his youth as well. Conversely, it is not unlikely for a talented young ballplayer to ride the bench or toil in the minors while waiting for an older player to step down (or be removed) from his position so that the younger player can get his shot at "the bigs." However, while the union of these values is not an easy procedure by any means, we must remember that youth and experience are both complimentary and contradictory and, therefore, more characteristic of dialectical balance than transformation.

### The Film

The cultural theme of youth and experience has been used to explicate baseball and its successful value balance often works to create a winning baseball team. Similarly, the system combines in *Field of Dreams* as well. Youth and experience are both incorporated as the characters exemplify attributes associated with both elements.

The power of youth is a central subject in the film insofar as each character, in one way or another, is presented with an opportunity to recapture the youth that they once had and held so dear. For example, as Ray maneuvers through his quest and the extraordinary events that happen to him, he seems to revert back to a more youthful version of himself. Such juvenile statements as “That is so cool” and “This is so bitchin’” roll fluently off of Ray’s tongue as the story unfolds. Furthermore, the relationship between Ray and his father, John, is one indicative of youth and experience. As Ray tells Annie after hearing the voice for the first time:

I never forgave him for getting old. By the time he was as old as I am now, he was ancient. I mean he must have had dreams you know, but he never did anything about ‘em. For all I know, he may have even heard voices too, but he sure didn’t listen to them. The man never did one spontaneous thing in all the years I knew him. Annie, I’m afraid of that happening to me. And something tells me this may be my last chance to do something about it. I want to build that field (Robinson, 1989).

Ray never really knew his father. His recollection of him is of a man “worn down by life.” Ray believes that building the field is his opportunity to differentiate himself from his father because becoming a safe, contrived old man is a fate he would rather leave to others who ignore voices and visions when they present themselves. At the end of the quest and the film, Ray is able to relive his youth by having a catch with his father, something he stopped doing at the age of fourteen and obviously regrets. When he meets his father

again at the end of the film, Ray is not sure whether to call his father 'John' or 'Dad.' He is caught in that strange place between adolescence and adulthood where playing baseball with one's father is a meaningful act between parent and child yet simultaneously an act of two old friends just having a catch. By building the field and reconciling his differences with his father, Ray is able to recapture the youth he abandoned when he left home at seventeen after calling Shoeless Joe, his father's hero, a criminal because of Joe's alleged role in throwing the 1919 World Series.

In addition, Ray's field acts as a fountain of youth for his father as well. John's youth was marked by a brief minor league baseball career, "but nothing ever came of it." Before the death of his wife and the relationship with his son became soiled, John was a wide-eyed young man with a prosperous future. The field allows him to return to that time in his youth when he had "his whole life in front of him" and Ray was "not even a glint in his eye."

For John's hero, Shoeless Joe, his youth *is* baseball. More than any other character, baseball is his entire world and the field allows him to not only recapture his youth by playing baseball, but, like John, actually brings him back from the dead to do so. Playing on the field, feeling the grass under his feet, and smelling the smells associated with the game all work to take Joe back to a time when he was young and invincible.

Throughout the course of the film, we also see Terence express youthful qualities. He progresses from grumpy recluse alone in his Boston hideout to gregarious extrovert at the Iowa field. In his youth, he was an activist who fought for various causes and, in doing so, had a passion for life. In the beginning of the film, we see that he has obviously lost the fire that once burned so cleanly within him. He tells Ray after the two of them

attend the Red Sox game in Boston, "I wish I had your passion, Ray. Misdirected though it may be, it is still a passion. I used to feel that way about things but     " This statement expresses that Terence, despite his disillusionment, would like to feel the way he did in the 60s when the freshness of youth and an infatuation with involvement fueled his fire.

However, after he hears the voice and becomes engulfed by the impetus of the field, that passion returns as his energy and enthusiasm for life, writing, and baseball are triumphantly restored. The field, acting as his muse, inspires him to write again -- write about Joe, the Kinsellas, and the mystery of the corn, presumably in an effort to inspire and inform others of the fantastic powers of the field.

With the exception of Joe's resurrection, Archie is able to most accurately recapture his youth as he is actually transformed from old "Doc" Graham to the very green "Moonlight" Graham, his teenage counterpart. In their voyage to find Archie, Ray and Terence travel to Chisholm, Minnesota. There, Archie explains to Ray what it was like to give up baseball after his one major league game:

It was like coming this close to your dreams, and then watch them brush past you like a stranger in a crowd. At the time, you don't think much of it. You know, we just don't recognize the most significant moments of our lives while they're happening. Back then I thought, well, there'll be other days. I didn't realize that that was the only day (Robinson, 1989).

Archie, like Terence, has led a long rich life, yet still counts the one inning he played in the big leagues as a teenager as one of the most momentous occasions of his life. After "Doc" Graham refuses to leave Chisholm, Ray and Terence pick up a hitchhiking "Moonlight" Graham on their way back to Iowa. Archie enters the game and fulfills his wish to hit against a major league pitcher. After his at bat, in which he hits a sacrifice fly to allow a run to score, Archie makes eye contact with Ray and gives him a grinning nod

of approval. His contact with Ray and the field allow him to relive “the only day” and successfully recapture a significant moment of his youth.

Another vehicle through which youth is explored in the film is the character of Karin, Ray’s daughter. Although a secondary character, Karin is an integral component to the flow of the film. Instead of portraying her as simply a cute kid who spouts out fluffy, comic relief lines every twenty minutes as so many filmmakers often do, Robinson gives Karin pivotal lines and presents her as a smart and understanding figure in the film. It is Karin who first sees Joe and asks him the question her parents and the audience both want to know: “Are you a ghost?” Furthermore, it is Karin who first explains to her father why he does not have to sell the farm:

People will come. From all over. They’ll just decide to take a vacation see, and they’ll come to Iowa City, and they’ll think it’s really boring so they’ll drive up and want to pay us - like buying a ticket. [They’ll come] to watch the game. It’ll be just like when they were little kids a long time ago, and they’ll watch the game and remember what it was like (Robinson, 1989).

First of all, in having Karin recite this passage, we see that youth should not automatically be confused for ignorance. Certainly Karin is innocent to the ways of the world, yet it is this very innocence that allows her to see things for what they are worth, including the ghost players who are invisible to Annie’s brother, Mark, and other blatantly ‘adult’ figures who have yet to repossess their youthful spirit. Second, the passage itself reminds us of the rejuvenation that can accompany the spectacle that is baseball. As noted earlier, one of the ways that Americans and the historians, authors, and scholars who study the game have interpreted it, is to link it to its origins when both the country and the game were considerably less complicated. The game in general and the field of dreams in

specific allow people to reunite themselves with their past and a time in which they “were little kids a long time ago.”

Whereas youth is a vital element of American society, baseball, and *Field of Dreams*, it is important to understand that youth lacks a great deal of its luster without the value of experience to balance the system. Predominantly, we can examine all of the central characters and say unequivocally that each has experienced life and it is this knowledge that permits them to help others while in search of their own destinies.

Joe, who is, technically, the oldest character in the film is surely a character indicative of the value of experience. Joe played a number of highly productive years in the majors and still more in “some tenth rate league in California” after his banishment from the game. The time that he spent both on and off the field (alive and dead) as a ballplayer provide him with a tremendous amount of knowledge about the game of baseball and, more importantly, the game of life. For instance, Joe uses his substantial baseball insight to aid Archie. When Archie returns as the rookie “Moonlight” Graham to play ball with the others, it is Joe who guides him through his first major league at bat. Like any level of baseball, the older, experienced player often takes the younger player under his wing and educates him on the subtleties of the game. The combination of Archie’s raw talent and Joe’s weathered wisdom combine for an earned run. Moreover, Joe incorporates this cognition to assist Ray in understanding his strange and wonderful journey. Without explicitly stating so, he is the only character who, in the end, seems to be capable of putting all of the pieces together. When Joe permits Terence to enter the corn, Ray is less than pleased that it is not he who is chosen. Only Joe understands that Ray must stay to complete his journey by reuniting with his father. Joe is a vibrant



character whose youth is restored by playing the game, but his experience in both this life and the afterlife also work to establish him as a coach and leader for the others.

The character of Terence and the uncommon life he has led act as another example of experience in the film, evidence of which is the fact that he is portrayed as a man who knew everybody and did everything. As a highly influential 1960s counterculture figure, Terence was a leader and scholar who taught the value of understanding and critical thinking. As Ray researches Terence's life, we learn that Terence stopped writing books in the early 70s but went on to write poetry and eventually becomes a writer of software for interactive children's videos. The experience and knowledge that Terence acquired as "the finest satirist of his time" is now directed towards children as he writes programs that "teach kids how to resolve their conflicts peacefully." Again, just as inexperienced ballplayers need experienced players and coaches to assist them, Terence has been a teacher and bellwether his entire life. Even as the extraordinary influence of the field sweeps him off his feet, he continues to make use of his experience to aid Ray and the others. He intends on utilizing the experience of his journey to Iowa and ultimately the mysterious cornfield to inspire others and educate them on the field and its magic. Although he is able to recapture the energy of his younger days, he never loses track of the wisdom and experience that allowed him to achieve such great things in the first place.

In addition, Archie embodies experience throughout the film. In particular, his ability to teach and guide others comes via his experience as a doctor. As a baseball player, Archie is skilled but unrefined. His jubilant return to youth when he joins the game as "Moonlight" Graham is a highlight in his life but it is his role as a doctor that provides him with the most satisfaction. For example, it is his medical experience that saves Karin's

life near the end of the film. As Ray and Mark quarrel over finances, Karin, caught in the middle, falls off the bleachers and begins choking. Archie, realizing his medical expertise is needed, crosses the base line and with a swift smack on the back, saves Karin from choking to death. Because he left the magical confines of the field, he cannot return thus ending his dream for a second time. The significance here lies in the fact that he has already fulfilled his youthful dream of batting in the bigs, and now he is able to return to the wise and experienced “Doc” Graham without remorse. Like the game itself, he is able to integrate the two values to the delight of himself, the Kinsellas, and the residents of Chisholm, Minnesota.

Lastly, our protagonist, Ray, acts as an example of experience, particularly as the film and his character evolve. Early in the story, we learn that “officially [Ray’s] major in college was English, but really it was the 60s.” Rather than choosing a profession, Ray marries Annie and becomes a farmer more out of his love for her than any significant desire to cultivate corn. More than any other character, Ray lacks experience. Compared to Terence, Archie, and Joe who are unquestionably no spring chickens, Ray is rather green in the ways of the world. Everything he has done in his life has been in reaction to someone else. For instance, he moved to California because it housed the farthest college from his father that he could find and he moved to Iowa because that is where Annie is from. In taking the risk of building something as completely illogical as the field, he takes a step toward gaining the experience needed to become his own person. For Ray, building the field and the subsequent events that happen to him during the progression of the film provide him with the experience and knowledge needed to help the others in their own progression. Essentially, it is the unification of his youthful tendencies and the wisdom he

accrues through his journey that allow him to satisfy his wish to reconcile his differences with his father.

It is important to realize that neither youth nor experience dominate in *Field of Dreams* as each is given importance. Again, the consolidation of youth and experience in *Field of Dreams* is typical of a heightened sense of value balance. This is such because the conflict that is inherent in this system is resolved for the characters insofar as they are able to recapture their youth while all the while utilizing the experience that they have earned. That is, the statement, "If I knew then what I know now" is one that has crossed the lips of many an American, including numerous aging baseball players. Unlike their existent counterparts, the characters are actually able to transcend time and apply the experiences that they have procured to others and, in doing so, regain their youth. The field, in allowing John and Joe to come back from the dead and Ray, Archie, and Terence to magically move through time, creates a place where the jubilation of youth and the wisdom of experience can both exist. American culture certainly values both, as does the game of baseball. However, whereas the two are rarely able to coincide within any given individual in those realms, this is not a problem in the much more flexible film world of *Field of Dreams*.

### Work and Play

#### The Game

The value cluster of work and play is one which holds considerable influence on our society as Americans perpetually attempt to balance their time between the two. As a nation, we predominantly still adhere to a Work Ethic and believe that hard work,

discipline, and perseverance are the pathways to success. However, we are also consumed by a Leisure Ethic and highly value play and activities which are performed for fun, pleasure, and amusement (Trujillo, 1985). Baseball is no exception as the game includes both elements and can be interpreted from both a work and play perspective.

Perhaps the most efficient way to explain the relationship that baseball has with work is through a further discussion of identity. That is, our identity formation is influenced by our participation in a community -- be it baseball or work -- because both help to provide individuals with a sense of who they are (Aden, 1995). Historically, the working class community in particular has identified with baseball because of its inherent work ethic. Max Weber (1958) defined work ethic as labor “performed as if it were an end in itself, a calling.” Nineteenth century workers who believed in this “spirit of capitalism” found cohorts in those baseball players who “valued the process [of playing the game] more than the reward [of winning the game]” (Gelber, 1983, p. 11). In the early part of the century when professional teams were established and chartered in nearly every major city, players shared many of the same values of working class families while team managers shared many management convictions with industrial managers. Because baseball was recognized as possessing convictions such as teamwork, honesty, and pride, the game offered an avenue for social mobility and, thus, the men involved were seen as hard workers who bolstered community integration and civic pride rather than simply grown men playing a boy’s game.

More recently, the identities of workers and ballplayers have diverged somewhat due to economic and technological changes. Aden (1995) points out that traditional working class jobs are decreasing in numbers, unions are weaker, and many workers are

struggling with downward mobility. On the other hand, Major League Baseball players are easily upper middle class, have a secure union, and currently have a minimum salary of over one and a half million dollars a year. However, despite the fact that the salary of the highest paid New York Yankee has increased 25 times as much as the minimum wage since 1952 (Aden, 1995), the relationship still exists. That is, regardless of salary, endorsements, or social position, Ken Griffey Jr. and Mark McGwire still have to get up every day (almost literally) and work hard to be successful just like Joe Six-Pack and John Q. Worker. While this sounds rather ridiculous in that professional ballplayers are paid astronomically higher salaries than most Americans, the connections are not that far-fetched. For example, baseball players play approximately 164 games in 180 days between April and September and many of the players continue to play in fall and winter leagues as well. Compare this to the 16 games professional football players play in roughly the same time span and it becomes apparent why a working class person may find a greater identification with a baseball player over another athlete. This is perhaps more obvious in the minor leagues where players are forced to earn their jobs in very uncertain work environments. Lamb (1992) notes that attendance at minor league games is increasing as fans seek a form of baseball where the players experience working conditions similar to their own.

While it is entirely appropriate to examine baseball as work, such an examination would be incomplete without addressing the concept of play. Although the two are typically thought of as opposites, they have a profound affect on one another. “Civilization requires work; culture depends on play as well. In America, the spirit of play has been evoked to defy work but also revitalize and humanize it” (Oriard, 1991, p. 48).

Baseball, while primarily a leisure activity, cannot be played well without putting in some work prior to and during the game. In their study, Trujillo and Ekdom (1985) write that the 1984 Cubs were described as a “team that worked hard, put in long hours, made extra efforts, and even played in pain” (p. 274) while always having fun, playing practical jokes, and enjoying their season as the “Cardiac Cubs.”

It is obvious that work and play go hand in hand (or rather, glove in glove) in that play is predominantly a non-work activity but is not unrelated to work. Gelber (1983) acknowledges that most contemporary scholars recognize that work affects leisure but disagree as to what those effects are. The first argument is the *compensatory* hypothesis which posits that play compensates for shortcomings in peoples’ work environment. For example, if a sense of team is lacking in one’s place of work, one may seek to engage in team sports such as baseball in their leisure time. Likewise, many people do not see work as an end unto itself but rather a means to an end and that is to enjoy leisure. The second option is referred to as the *congruence* hypothesis and states that people tend to replicate their work in their leisure time. An active factory worker, for instance, may seek an energetic pastime to engage in that is congruent with his/her work and, most likely, lifestyle.

Which hypothesis is most accurate in determining how work affects leisure or whether that determinant is positive (congruent) or negative (compensatory) is irrelevant here. What is relevant, however, is that work and play have mutual influence as well as oppositional tension with each other and baseball is one of the means by which we transition between the two. Because baseball can be understood in terms of work and play, we gain a greater understanding of the game as a culture as well as a link to our

American culture insofar as we are certainly a nation that works hard *and* plays hard. Simply put, baseball is hard work and a lot of fun. Not surprisingly, these are two of the values America was built on and continues to embrace. Baseball provides us with both and thus has stabilized itself as a “symbolic expression of the values of the larger political and social milieu” (Lipsky, 1978, p. 351).

### The Film

Baseball is undoubtedly hard work, particularly at the major league level. But, despite the blood, sweat, and tears that may accompany victory or defeat on the field, it is still the *game* of baseball. *Field of Dreams* and its characters realize this as both the values of work and play are given weight.

In a film that incorporates baseball and farming, one would expect hard work to be a factor and, with *Field of Dreams*, one would be correct. As a farmer, Ray surely knows the value of labor, especially if his abnormally perfect corn crop is any indication. Consequently, our first sight of Ray is him working in his field evaluating his corn. Although he is portrayed as someone who is very uninclined to become a farmer (UC Berkeley English major), he is obviously successful at it, that is, until he plows under a significant portion of his crop to build his baseball diamond. In fact, building the ballfield itself is obviously hard work as we are treated to a montage of Ray (with a little help from Karin) carefully putting together his meticulously built field. Such a strong work ethic also links Ray to his father who is also portrayed as a man who worked hard all of his life to care for his only son and make ends meet.

A strong work ethic is also present in the character of Joe. As a professional ball player, Joe definitely knows the value of practice. His life-time batting average is .356,

third highest in history, and, as Ray tells Annie, even the great Babe Ruth copied his swing. Joe is presented as an unbelievable player and, while raw ability assuredly plays a factor in his success, hard work, attention to detail -- “when a pitcher gets a sign and starts a pitch a good left fielder knows what pitch is coming” -- and practice have also contributed to Ty Cobb referring to him as “the greatest left fielder of all time.”

The value of work is also characterized by Archie. After his baseball career brushed past him “like a stranger in a crowd,” Archie picked himself up, brushed himself off, and went on to lead a highly productive, even brilliant, career as a doctor. Coming so close to one’s dream, only to have it plucked away “would kill some men” as Ray emphatically states in their first meeting. Archie, however, chooses to propel himself from that defining moment rather than allow the moment to define him. He follows in the footsteps of his father by going back to school and eventually becoming a respected general practitioner in his hometown. Hard work is evidently no stranger to Archie Graham. As he explains to Ray after Ray tells him that coming within five minutes and then missing out on his dream was a tragedy, “Son, if I’d only gotten to be a doctor for five minutes, now that would’ve been a tragedy.” Archie understands his place in the world and that achievement, as a doctor, ballplayer, or any other role, comes with an equal understanding of work and the gratification it can bring.

Likewise, Terence has also worked hard all of his life. The Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Boat Rocker*, “considered by many critics to be the classic novel about the 1960s” and African American activist, Terence has faced numerous challenges throughout his life. He has risen to those challenges to become a predominant, albeit fictional, figure in American culture and undoubtedly worked very hard to achieve such praise and



prosperity. After all, no one said that writing the best books of your generation, leading anti-war movements, writing software for children, and hanging out with the Beatles would be easy. Essentially, Terence, like the other characters, is a smart, proud man who achieved the affluent position he finds himself in because he was not afraid to roll up his sleeves and toil to make positive things happen for himself and others.

As the above paragraphs reveal, the central players in the film are indicative of the work value in American culture insofar as each, in his own way, is a tireless worker with tremendous resolve. However, just as America, as a nation, and baseball, as an institution, both work hard *and* play hard, so do the characters in *Field of Dreams*.

Take, for example, Joe and Ray, who are the first to enjoy the field. When Joe makes his initial appearance, he joyously runs through the grass and handles the bats and balls like a child holds a toy on Christmas morning. He is at long last back in his element and it is the playing of the game that reminds him of how much he missed that world. Later in the film, we see a more playful and less awe struck Joe, particularly as he invites more players to join him on the field. As he tells Ray, "You wouldn't believe how many guys wanted to play here. We had to beat 'em off with a stick. Even Ty Cobb wanted to play, but none of us could stand the son of a bitch when he was alive so we told him to stick it! (laughs out loud)." Joe and the other players are having the times of their lives, or rather, afterlives. They endured the dejection and humiliation that came with being banned from baseball and now, with the past behind them, they are able to enjoy baseball simply for the love of the game. Just as the 1984 Chicago Cubs worked hard yet always had fun, so do the resurrected 1919 Chicago White Sox. Similarly, Ray is allowed to delight in the exultation of play. When Joe appears on the field, Ray takes colossal pleasure in hitting

him pop flies and pitching to one of the finest hitters the game has ever seen. "I am pitching to Shoeless Joe Jackson," he whispers to himself before Joe drives his first toss out of the park with one smooth swing. Ray, like the other characters, loves baseball and, hence, the game, in any form, is his leisure. Whether he is playing the game himself or watching others play the game, he is happy and content.

Terence and Archie, who are both invited to join the ghost players, are also able to balance the values of work with play. Similar to the value system of youth and experience, Terence and Archie rekindle their youth and find the value of play in their rejuvenation. Archie is able to literally play again as he is transformed into "Moonlight" Graham. He joins his heroes in Smoky Joe Wood, Mel Ott, Gil Hodges, and Shoeless Joe Jackson on the field and for one brief moment, he relives the sheer mirth that is the playing of the national pastime. Terence also becomes more and more playful as the film progresses. Play and leisure of any kind seem foreign to him when we are first introduced to his character in his Boston hermitage. When Ray asks if he can have a moment of his time, Terence responds by saying, "Look, I can't tell you the secret of life and I don't have any answers for you. I don't give interviews and I am no longer a public figure. I just want to be left alone, so piss off!" Simply put, Terence is all work and no play. However, as the strange and wonderful story unfolds in front him, he also is transformed. At the end of the film, we see a downright jubilant man happily giggling while starting the wave at the field of dreams.

Like individualism and community and youth and experience in *Field of Dreams*, the negotiation of the value oppositions of work and play is characteristic of dialectical balance. Whereas work and play are balanced in American culture and baseball insofar as

the relationship between the values is illustrative of mutual influence rather than mutual exclusion, that relationship is also the case in the film. However, while the balance between individualism and community and youth and experience work to alleviate tension for the characters in the film, the balance between work and play is more characteristic of the value balance as it is within the game of baseball. Within baseball, particularly at the professional level, the game is often more characteristic of work than play especially as salary, salary arbitration, free agency, and other very business like issues take their toll on the game. However, the playing of the game they love usually alleviates the tension that can accompany these elements for many players thus creating a balance of values. That is, just as baseball can be described as play that requires work, so can the Iowa field. The characters are able to maintain the opposition between each value without eliminating one or the other, but not to the point that any conflict is resolved. Rather, like the game they love, the characters in *Field of Dreams* are able to work hard and gain the achievement that comes with it while also enjoying themselves.

## Chapter Three

### Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this exposition has been to provide insight into the complicated and highly influential relationship between American culture, baseball, and film. Specifically, I have examined the film *Field of Dreams* as a vehicle through which this relationship is articulated. Furthermore, while many avenues could have been (and have been) taken to explicate this complex connection, the thread that I have utilized to link these elements is that of cultural values because they, as Heard (1990) reminds us, serve as “the standards for how we understand ourselves and the world around us” (p. 1). While understanding the world around us is certainly no easy task, this thesis acts as a brief inquiry into a segment of our world and, thus, contributes to the comprehension that we perpetually seek. Hence, with this chapter, I discuss the ramifications that this exploration has on baseball and film and how these two institutions combine to contribute to an understanding of ourselves as Americans. Precisely, I discuss what *Field of Dreams* tells us about the rhetoric of film, the game of baseball, and the culture of America.

#### The Rhetoric of Film

In the book, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, Sonja Foss (1989) defines rhetoric as “the use of symbols to influence thought and action” and notes that “rhetoric is communication; it is simply an old term for what is now commonly called *communication*” (p. 4). Rhetorical criticism, then, is the investigation and evaluation of this communication so as to gain an understanding of rhetorical processes and, ultimately, human processes. With these definitions in mind, Foss and several other critics have, thus, posed the question: What is the purpose of rhetorical criticism? As is typical of scholars

and critics, Foss answers her own question. According to her, we engage in criticism for two reasons: 1) To understand particular symbols and how they function and also to understand the artifact and help others to appreciate it. 2) To make contributions to rhetorical theory or to explain how some aspect of rhetoric operates. This work, therefore, acts as no exception in that the purposes of rhetorical criticism, as outlined by Foss, are also my purposes in examining this motion picture. That is, with this thesis, I have contributed to our appreciation and understanding of film, symbol usage, and rhetorical theory in general and *Field of Dreams* and the social-values model of rhetorical criticism in particular. Here, then, I re-examine this model focusing primarily on the contributions that this criticism makes to it.

The social-values model falls under the rubric of cultural criticism which is concerned with evaluating mass-media and the rhetorical products of that media. The social-values model generalizes about the value systems of a society and recognizes that mass-mediated rhetorical products are the social record of a culture and are, therefore, associated with cultural values. Developed by Rushing and Frenz (1978), the original model states that many values exist in dialectical opposition and symbolic conflict is the necessary condition for value reorientation. This value change takes one of two forms. With dialectical transformation, one value completely replaces another. Conversely, dialectical synthesis suggests that a new value structure is created by merging elements of competing values. Regardless of the direction a value system takes, a change agent is required to facilitate the change and the audience plays a key role in that change.

The initial social-values model, like most models, is applicable to any number of rhetorical acts and artifacts as it stands. However, as Rosenfield (1972) points out, a

model is an “individualized approach,” a prototype that lays out the questions to ask and answer about a rhetorical act and, as such, is subject to modifications. This particular prototype posits that values either flourish or flop and that entirely new value structures are sometimes created as a result. While this is arguably true, the model fails to recognize that there are some systems that remain relatively constant despite the conflict that arises between the competing values. Consequently, in offering dialectical *balance*, I argue that there are values that coexist and, in fact, support one another. The value systems that have anchored this analysis (individualism and community, youth and experience, work and play, the spiritual and the secular, rural and urban outlooks) are such that both values in each system are relatively balanced within American society and within its cultural institutions. As a nation, we desire and affirm each component because each contains qualities that are representative of our cultural existence and our perceptions of that existence. As has been noted throughout this analysis, these value systems are more characteristic of mutual influence than mutual exclusion. Neither does one value in any of the pairings defeat the other, nor are they so integrated that a new value system emerges. Rather, the relationship, including the inherent competition within each value system, has been constantly corroborated throughout American history.

Correspondingly, I also offer as a contribution to this model, the notion of heightened dialectical balance as a form of value equilibrium where the values are united in such a way as to reaffirm the relationship within each value *and* relieve the tension that exists between them as well. Likewise, a pattern of dialectical *preference* is also submitted insofar as certain values may be favored over others, but not to the outright exclusion of those others. Predominantly, these patterns of value change are characteristic

of the film world as opposed to the real world and, hence, hold a great deal of influence on how we view films in general. According to Bryant (1982), "Film tells and re-tells the stories, the myths and folklore, that make us Americans. Film gives us a visual-aural record of the aspirations, fears, and desires that affect our national psyche" (cited in Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991, p. 206). The operative word in Bryant's statement is "myth" because "one of the most recent manifestations of myth in human expression is the cinema" (Hill, 1992, p. 14).

Myth, like rhetoric, is not easily defined but difficulty in doing so has not stopped scholars and critics from trying. According to Brown (1961), Freud called myths "the dreams of a nation" (p. 115). Woodman defines a myth as "the soul's journey, told in a universal story (Peay, 1992, p. 20). Bywater and Sobchack (1989) provide a slightly more solid definition by referring to myth as "a concrete expression of something found in our collective unconscious that has universal significance to an entire culture" (p. 121). If myths are significant to our culture and are, in essence, the dreams of our nation, one does not have to look far to see how myth factors in with this particular film. As Rushing and Frenz (1995) assert, films are like dreams "in that they are primarily visual, they are experienced in darkened conditions, and their plastic techniques allow them to stimulate the surreal qualities of dreams. As such, films are to the cultural psyche what dreams are to the individual psyche" (p. 47).

The cultural communication form of myth refers to a "great symbolic narrative which holds together the imagination of a people and provides bases of harmonious thought and action" (Philipsen, 1987, p. 251). Speech can be identified as mythic when individuals weave cultural themes and resources into their own stories. Myths are not

necessarily fairy tales or ancient stories of unknown origins, but are, in this view, narratives told by members of a speech community in which distinctive aspects of the culture are expressed in the speech in order to “posit a supersensible world of meaning and value from which the least member of a tribe can borrow something to dignify and give coherence to his life” (Philipsen, 1987, p. 252). Members can use the public (cultural) resources of the speech community in their personal stories to affirm their place in the community and to apply creatively those aspects of the culture to their individual lives. For example, Hannerz (1969) describes the mythic expression of African American males in some urban ghetto communities. He found that when the men gathered on street corners in the community, each told a tale of how he “beat the white the man” through cunning and wit. Each story becomes a myth in that the speaker places himself at the center of the tale in which “ghetto man” uses wit and cunning to enact symbolically, and covertly, his moral and strategic superiority to the white “man.” To label these stories as myths is not to question their veracity but to call attention to their communicative form.

Because myth and communication have a definite association with one another, we can say that films both create and extend the myths of a culture while also acting as myths in and of themselves. As cinematic participants, we must realize this mythic quality and remember that film is a created environment where our beliefs, values, fears, ideologies, and so on can be constructed and adjusted to suit the intentions and ambitions of both the auteur and the culture in which the film exists. In their book, *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film*, Rushing and Frenz (1995) take note of this quality when they write:

Films reproduce as well as critique our biases, they are instruments of domination as well as visionary art, they both reaffirm and subvert the status quo. Films can reveal that which is odious to consciousness, but they can also repress it. They can



show us our cultural shadow, but they can also project it onto irrelevant victims in order to purge our guilt and preserve our innocence (p. 47).

Because film is both myth and myth-making, the worlds that exist within its celluloid walls can be dealt with more efficiently than in reality and thus the values that it offers are reflective of our collective desires. In other words, by recognizing both values in an opposition and offering a place where those values can be stabilized (dialectical balance) and consequently resolving the conflicts the characters have between certain values, films in general and, specifically, *Field of Dreams*, reflect the difficulty of living with such oppositions and, consequently, our ambition to balance those oppositions. In addition, by preferring one value over another in a system (dialectical preference), films can symbolically reflect and create the attitudes and perception of their audience. Cultural values and films will always have a very reciprocal relationship. *Field of Dreams* and the value patterns it incorporates reinforce this relationship and point out that film, in all its mythic glory, can take us in a variety of directions and sometimes the places that we end up are exactly where we wanted to go in the first place. To more fully comprehend the ramifications of myth, this film, and these value patterns, it is essential to further examine their implications on baseball and American culture.

### The Game of Baseball

From its inception in the latter half of the nineteenth century, America has had a love affair with baseball. Despite the fact that the game was created in England, it has been educated in America as we have claimed it as one of our most prominent and sentimental institutions. As noted in chapter one, numerous authors, historians, and fans have reinforced this position as well. President Hoover went so far as to say that, "Next

to religion, baseball has furnished a greater impact on American life than any other institution” (Novak, 1976, p. 1). Bjarkman (1990) declares that baseball “was from the outset a perfect analogy for American independence, frontier individualism, and a New World spirit of fair play” (p. 10). In 1919, sport scholar, Hugh Fullerton, wrote that, “Baseball, to my way of thinking, is the greatest single force working for Americanization. No other game appeals so much to the foreign-born youngsters and nothing, not even the schools, teaches the American spirit so quickly, or enculturates the idea of sportsmanship or fair play as thoroughly” (cited in Riess, 1980, p. 25). Baseball’s clean, fast, exciting action captured America’s imagination and by the late 1850s people were already portraying the sport as our national pastime (Riess, 1980).

It is rather obvious that America’s perception of the game of baseball is one riddled with romance and nostalgia. For many, the game is the embodiment of perfection in its simplicity, structure, and symbolism. W.P. Kinsella falls into this category and, as such, wrote a story in *Shoeless Joe* that displays his disposition. In an interview conducted by his wife, Kinsella discusses the story of the *Dream Field*, the original title of the book:

*Shoeless Joe* is a novel about a perfect world. It’s about a man who has a perfect wife, a perfect daughter and wants to keep it that way. In a perfect world, you would be able to resurrect the dead. In a perfect world, you could play ball at midnight on the grass of your favorite ballpark. Because it’s a fantasy about a perfect world, it *has* to involve baseball because baseball would have a part to play in a perfect world (Knight, 1989, p. 76).

Phil Alden Robinson, the writer and director of *Field of Dreams*, has expanded on Kinsella’s viewpoint and crafted a film that contributes to baseball’s role in “a perfect world.” In other words, the film creates a place where the constant balancing act of

values that American culture and baseball display can also exist and ultimately succeed. In allowing the characters to resolve their conflicts between the opposing values of individualism and community and youth and experience, Robinson simultaneously suggests that baseball is conjoined with the values and dreams of America and is, essentially, a means through which those dreams can come true.

With a sacred place where wrongs are righted and dreams become reality, it serves to reason that Robinson would also favor a spiritual over a secular perspective for his film as well. Baseball and religion, recall, have a very symbolic relationship with one another and this connection works to ground the film's spiritual preference. Wisely, however, Robinson does not push the envelope and transform his film or his field into strictly religious constructs. To do so would alienate members of his audience which would, in the end, alienate baseball from the perfect world of which he believes it to be a part. Likewise, by encouraging a pastoral, agrarian perspective rather than an urban one, Robinson incorporates a nostalgic element as well. That is, while baseball may have grown up with the cities, it was born of the country and much of the beauty and romance that are associated with the game are products of that commencement. "Along with its happy connections with other aspects of the divine in America, baseball provides us with a daily reminder of our rapidly disappearing past baseball recollects an earlier and calmer time, forming an organic and unbroken continuum back to those days when men played the game on the Elysian Fields" (Grella, 1975, p. 555). The film's highly positive position toward baseball culminates with a stirring epilogue in which Terence makes this philosophy quite clear:

Ray, people will come, Ray. They'll come to Iowa for reasons they can't even fathom. They'll turn up your driveway not knowing for sure why they're doing it. They'll arrive at your door as innocent as children, longing for the past. 'Of

course, we won't mind if you look around,' you'll say. 'It's only twenty dollars per person.' They'll pass over the money without even thinking about it. For it is money they have, and peace they lack. And they'll walk out to the bleachers. Sit in their shirt sleeves on a perfect afternoon. And they'll find they have reserved seats somewhere along one of the baselines where they sat when they were children and cheered their heroes. And they'll watch the game and it will be as if they dipped themselves in magic waters. The memories will be so thick, they'll have to brush them away from their faces. People will come, Ray. The one constant through all the years, Ray, has been baseball. America has rolled by like an army of steamrollers. It's been erased like a blackboard, rebuilt, and erased again. But baseball has marked the time. This field, this game, is a part of our past, Ray. It reminds us of all that once was good, and that could be again. Oh, people will come, Ray. People will most definitely come (Robinson, 1989).

Just as baseball has unified the characters in the film, Robinson suggests that this field (or rather, this film) can help to integrate the American people around the game. Baseball is "the one constant through all the years" and it "reminds us of all that once was good, and that could be again." This is the case for Ray, Joe, Terence, and Archie and, at the end of the film, it is the case for everyone else as the camera pans back to show hundreds of people in miles of cars making a pilgrimage to the field. As this last scene displays, the community created by baseball is open to all. In addition, by employing such words as "peace," "perfect," and "magic" in this pivotal passage, Robinson subsequently heightens the association baseball has with dreams, perfection, and myth. In fact, baseball, like film, has an immensely powerful connection with the notion of myth. "The sport is the nearest thing to a national Rite of Spring that all Americans can celebrate and enjoy; no other activity in our country is so closely linked to ritual and myth" (Grella, 1975, p. 551). In *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*, a 1986 baseball novel by W.P. Kinsella, a character raves: "There's no place in America that's not part of a major league outfield: the meanest ghetto, the highest point of land, the Great Lakes, the Colorado River. Hell,

there's no place in the world that's not part of a baseball field" (p. 41). In fact, W.P. Kinsella, himself, notes that baseball is an "open" game compared to most sports which are "twice enclosed" and "this openness makes for larger-than-life characters, for mythology" (Horvath & Palmer, 1987, p. 188). Even the origins of the game are shrouded in myth as the legend of Abner Doubleday persists today as perhaps the game's most persistent fabrication.

As the cinematic illustration of baseball, *Field of Dreams* wraps itself in the romance, legend, and lore that have established the game as myth and, as a result, the film tells us precisely what we want it to tell us about the game of baseball. It reinforces our love affair with the game by concocting a means through which baseball is presented as even more perfect than it has already been labeled. As such, the film is not different from other baseball films which typically pursue a similar attitude toward the game. From the earliest baseball films such as *Elmer the Great* and *Alibi Ike* in the 1930s to the biopics of the forties and fifties such as *The Jackie Robinson Story* and *Pride of St. Louis* to *The Natural* and *Field of Dreams* in the eighties, the national pastime has been primarily portrayed as incapable of doing wrong with the most notable exception being John Sayles' *Eight Men Out* which is an account of the 1919 Chicago White Sox scandal. Sayles, as Ardolino remarked, "is the 'dissenter' among directors of contemporary baseball films, exhibiting an uncommon pessimism about the chance, in either baseball or life, for late-inning rallies, sudden and unexpected comebacks" (Good, 1997, p. 24). Nonetheless, most baseball films have undeniably placed the game on a pedestal. Baseball writer, Roger Angell, in his review of *Field of Dreams*, puts it very well when he writes: "I like baseball, the game and the games, but I can't always understand why it's so hard to look

at the pastime with a clear gaze. We seem to want to go on sweetening it up, frosting the flakes, because we want it to say things about ourselves that probably aren't true" (Angell, 1989, p. 56). *Field of Dreams* certainly says a lot about who we are -- as Americans, as baseball fans, and as filmgoers -- and much of what it says is undoubtedly true and some is arguably false. Regardless, it is a film that America has undeniably embraced and, even a decade later, we still squeeze this film to our collective bosom. *Field of Dreams* will be forever linked with baseball fact and fiction and, consequently, it will always be a part of American history. Therefore, I turn now to an examination of its implications on American culture as a whole.

### The Culture of America

America is an unquestionably colossal and complicated country. Accordingly, ascertaining American culture is not exactly peach preserves and Sunday dinner. The country means many things to the many people who call her home and, therefore, determining the nature of American civilization is an effort that will continue to grow long in the tooth. Nonetheless, it is equally imperative to understand that the complex and rather ambiguous tendencies that characterize America do not suggest that our culture is fickle or lacking in substance and heritage. To support this, we need look no further than the values that typify America. Recall that Williams (1970) and Rokeach (1973) have determined that there are a number of values and value clusters that have been historically ubiquitous in America. Furthermore, Trujillo and Ekdorn (1985) point out that even though various values are often incongruous with each other, those values are still "shared by members of society as a whole and by members representing different subcultures of society" (p. 263). The value systems that anchor this analysis are strong examples in that

they are long standing, highly influential cultural themes that have also been used to interpret America's microcosm in baseball.

While it is important that we be aware of cultural values and their import in our society, it is also the case that we need to recognize the fact that balancing said values is not as easy as it sounds. Even though there are, in fact, opposing values that we seek and covet, the conflict that inherently accompanies those oppositions still factors in. For example, as Americans, we constantly struggle with the difficulties of growing old while commonly clinging to our lost youth in the process; we enjoy hard work and the rewards that accompany it, yet we also want time for ourselves and our families; individuality is a valued quality in our culture, but it is perhaps equally meaningful that we be involved as members of society; we often clash on where we want to spend our time be it an urban, populated place or a more rural, nature-oriented area; and so many of us struggle with the obvious questions and concerns that follow a decision between putting our faith in the spiritual or the secular. Obviously, value systems, even balanced ones, do not exist in a state of total harmony and, thus, problems and tensions arise as a result.

Dialectical balance is not dialectical synthesis. We have not taken these and other value systems and merged them such that an entirely new structure has been built. As tempting as this sounds, such a task would be extremely difficult, as the original social-values model points out. Perhaps, in a perfect world, creating altogether new value systems that meet the collective needs of society would be an appropriate solution. Unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world. Such societal wrongdoings as racism, sexism, ageism, religious misconduct, and numerous other forms of exclusion and

prejudice torment our nation. America is far from perfect and, contrary to filmmakers and fans, neither is baseball.

As brilliant and beautiful as the game may be, as an institution of American culture it must also possess the flaws and failures of the country that raised it. According to

Altherr:

More modern sport sociologists and historians have offered depictions of baseball as a mirror of deepseated American values: positive ones such as individual effort, hard work, equal opportunity, cooperative achievement, moral role-modeling, and community pride; and negative ones such as overcompetitiveness, racist exclusion, sexism, swaggering machoism, jingoism, and narcissistic self-indulgence. Even when not presenting a pretty face, baseball has been something for everyone (1990, p. 98).

Even the playing of the game is a reminder that perfection and harmony are nearly impossible to achieve. For instance, when a player does something wrong on the field (strikes out, commits an error, hangs a curve, drops the ball), he may singlehandedly cost his team the win. "Since baseball denies players perfection, and luck plays so large a part in the game, no one can escape being wrong many times throughout the season. The game teaches a humbling lesson: one must approach as nearly as possible to perfection, but will always fail" (Grella, 1975, p. 564). Baseball has taken an admirable swing at living up to its mythic proportions, but, in the end, like those who play the game, it falls considerably short of the ideal that so many want it to be.

Because baseball is as old and revered as it is and because it holds such influence in terms of American history, the game has received a great deal of respect and affection.

With this admiration comes a price as we tend to paint a prettier picture of baseball than it paints of itself and, since the late twenties, many of these positive portrayals of the game have come in the form of baseball's mythic teammate, film. As noted earlier, film has the



power to reinforce attitudes, beliefs, and values and can even, in this case, create a world where the conflict that escorts those attitudes, beliefs, and values can sometimes be resolved. According to Rybacki and Rybacki (1991), films are rhetorical “because they provide answers to our dilemmas and solutions to our problems” (p. 209). While I would be hesitant to say that film or baseball solves America’s problems, I would suggest that each does possess a rather convalescent quality. Put simply, America likes baseball -- it has always liked baseball. And regardless of the many reasons to feel differently, America will, in all likelihood, continue to hold a tremendous affinity for the game. Likewise, America is a nation of filmgoers and we have been since the early twentieth century when thousands of Americans flocked to the nickelodeons to view short, silent pictures. The game and the medium have been two of our country’s most dominant forms of entertainment and enculturating agents for the last one hundred years. In light of this, several researchers of film (Frentz & Hale, 1983; Payne, 1989; Rushing, 1989) as well as baseball scholars (Trujillo & Ekdorn, 1985; Dickerson, 1991) have noted that their respective institutions can be used in such a restorative fashion. Therefore, baseball, with all its mythic history, real or otherwise, when combined with the myth-making machine that is film, creates a sort of “cultural therapy” for many of the conflicts that are inherent within American society.

In his analysis of *Field of Dreams*, Aden (1995) argues that the film offers cultural therapy for “individuals concerned about the ongoing transformation from the industrial age to the technological age” by creating a Garden of Eden where self-sacrifice and producerism offer economic and spiritual health to those who attend the field (p. 307). Whereas Aden’s criticism primarily focuses on the film’s use of a place metaphor to

spiritually re-energize the characters, my analysis recognizes the therapeutic qualities of the film at a higher degree of influence. *Field of Dreams* offers a place where American cultural value systems can be balanced and preferred in such a way as to reaffirm that the American game of baseball, as the one constant through all the years, “embodies some of the central preoccupations of that cultural fantasy we like to think of as the American Dream” (Grella, 1975, 550).

While the film is chiefly therapeutic in that it offers a balancing of values and suggests a preference for certain spiritual and nostalgic values, it also acts as therapy through its ability to integrate a variety of periods in American history. For instance, whereas the film acts as a statement on American culture and baseball in general, it also highlights the tensions significant to American culture in the 1980s. Specifically, in its effort to balance values, *Field of Dreams* reflects the struggle of a society trying to come to terms with the relatively extreme value tensions of the previous two decades. As discussed in chapter one, the 1960s were characterized by optimism, idealism, playfulness, and personal exploration. However, as a result of the Vietnam War, the Kennedy assassination, and downfall of the Nixon administration among others, the 1970s were a decade characterized by selfishness, cynicism, and pragmatism. The eighties, then, became a period of uncertainty as America attempted to find itself amongst the turmoil. The events that led to the great disparity between the sixties and the seventies combined to create a decade in which many of the myths that secured the hopes and heroes of our nation were questionable at best. “Gone were those political, social, and religious leaders who unwaveringly claimed to know right from wrong. Gone were the ‘true’ American heroes. The nation’s heroes had been demythologized” (Dickerson, 1991, p. 119). The

same was true in the sports world as commissioner of the National Basketball Association, David Stern, noted, “they [fans] don’t want to know how it ‘really is’ they want the metaphor, they want to see hard work, discipline, teamwork, sacrifice, and herosim succeed” (Dickerson, 1991, p. 121).

Consequently, in stark contrast to the harsh realities of the day, *Field of Dreams*, drenched in magic and myth, provides for fans the metaphor that they seek. As Dickerson (1991) suggests, Americans in the eighties were tired of their heroes, dreams, and myths being ravished by reality and *Field of Dreams* is a direct reflection of their concerns. By taking long regarded value oppositions and balancing them in a perfect world, the film establishes itself as a manner through which those heroes, dreams, and myths can live again at a time in America’s history when they were desperately needed. Furthermore, because the characters possess the ability to travel through time in the film, the audience is reminded of the glory and greatness that is baseball’s past. The characters of Joe, Archie, and John are all representative of the early nineteenth century, baseball’s purer, simpler Golden Age, as this was when they played the game. In addition, Ray, Terence, and Annie all exemplify the latter half of the century and the complexities that have developed with the growth of the nation. In allowing characters of such differing time periods to come together and play on the field of dreams, the film suggests that if we were somehow able to capture the innocence and the integrity of baseball’s past and combine it with baseball’s less than impeccable present, the game could assist in providing an identity for a decade, arguably, in need of one.

In the end, *Field of Dreams* is an enigmatic, complicated concoction. As such, it serves to reason that this film should act as a cinematic illustration of the equally elaborate

relationship between film, baseball, and American culture. The three elements that have comprised the nucleus of this analysis have had an extensive and instrumental kinship and show few signs of cessation. Since the 1920s, America has made films about baseball and America will continue to make films about baseball. And why not? Baseball films, for all intents and purposes, do a pretty good job of patting us on the back and reminding us of how wonderful the game was one hundred years ago, is currently, and will be in the future. *Field of Dreams*, on one hand, could be regarded as just another in a long line of these charismatic films about our national pastime. On the other hand, the film is head and shoulders above its peers, at least in terms of the film's impact on fans of film and baseball alike. As mentioned, the film was nominated for an Academy Award and was immediately designated for assignment as baseball's principal motion picture. Furthermore, the fact that crowds from all over the United States and numerous foreign countries continue to visit the film site in Iowa years after the film's release, only reinforces *Field of Dreams* as more than just a film about baseball. Rather, as I have suggested, it is a highly significant vehicle that preserves the bond between film, baseball, and American culture.

Ultimately, by balancing social values via a perfect world, the film posits the game as the cultural therapy for not living in that perfect world. In other words, despite the fact that baseball is not perfect, America would sure like it to be and, therefore, films like *Field of Dreams* with their happy baseball endings and perfect baseball worlds will persevere in their production and, therefore, continue to tug at the collective heart strings of American society. Hence, as long as baseball and film remain integral components in American society as they surely will, films like *Field of Dreams* should continue to receive attention from the academic world. Rosenstock-Huessy understood that sport has a stranglehold on

American culture and his success in delineating this relationship should encourage critics, historians, scholars, writers, filmgoers, and fans to go the distance in their search for an understanding between our country, our game, and the films that contribute to each.

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