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“Sultans of Swing: 100 Years of Baseball, Jazz, and Short Fiction”
Session 4: Film, Myth, and Stadia
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Session Transcript

Scott Peterson: [For] the Film, Myth and Stadia session, [I'll] turn it over to Lee.

Lee Lowenfish: [0:00:09] Well, I've been challenged to tell a literary joke by J.T.R. before. My paper concentrates on Joe E. Brown, but don't worry, we'll get to Ring Lardner before the end. He and his very literary sons used to have a lot of fun at home and according to the great book by Ring Lardner Jr., *My Family Remembered: The Lardners*. They decided the longest trip in the Bible was when Joshua went to Jericho on his ass. So. The name of Joe E. Brown hardly brings a ripple of recognition these days. People in older generations may remember him as the rowdy millionaire Osgood Fielding III, who falls in love with Jack Lemmon masquerading as a woman in Billy Wilder's hilarious satire *Some Like it Hot*, set in Prohibition-era America. Brown's blithe answer to Lemon's saying that they can't marry because he's a man, "Well, nobody's perfect," has been widely acclaimed as the best closing line in the history of movies. Although, I think the ending today wouldn't seem so strange.

[0:01:27] What has been unjustly forgotten is the prominent role that Joe E. Brown played in American popular culture from the 1920s through the 1940s. He was a star on Broadway in the 1920s, a top-ten Hollywood box office draw in the 1930s, second only to Shirley Temple in popularity among the kids, and during World War II, he was a beloved, tireless entertainer who made countless trips to the Pacific, entertaining G.I.s before Bob Hope.

His rise from the lowest rungs of show business and screen stardom is remarkable. He was born in 1891 in the small town of Holgate, 40 miles outside of Toledo. His father, a house and sign painter, worked hard to support his wife and eight children. But it was not easy to make ends meet. So, before he was 10, Joseph [Evans] Brown went on the road with the Marvelous Ashton Acrobat Troupe. In his aptly named autobiography in 1956, *Laughter Is a Wonderful Thing*, Brown quipped, “I’m the only boy who ever ran away from home to join the circus with his parents’ permission.”

[0:02:49] Still known mainly as Evan Brown, he stayed with the Ashton troupe until April 1906, when its tour ended abruptly because of the great San Francisco earthquake and fire. Brown’s family feared their son had perished, but in a pattern that would repeat itself throughout his life, he found a silver lining in calamity. Sympathetic citizens from all over the country shipped enormous baskets of food to those who survived the earthquake, and the slender acrobat never ate better in his life. He later wrote that his independent career began at the age of 13, when he stood in the aisles of a refugee train taking earthquake survivors to Chicago. Brown was not out of work for long, soon joining the Frank Prevost-Tommy Bell Trio based in New York. Prevost became like a second father, encouraging not only his work as an acrobat, but also urging him to develop his singing, dancing, and comedy.

[0:03:57] Vaudeville stages would soon welcome the young man, and shortly after World War I, he made his debut on the Broadway musical stage. The name atop the marquee now was Joe E. Brown. In gratitude for the kindness of Frank Prevost, whose real name was Frank [LeRoy Guise], Brown named his second son Joe LeRoy Brown. That is the Joe L. Brown who became in 1955 the Pittsburgh Pirates general manager and builder of the world champion Pittsburgh teams of 1960 and 1971. Joe E. Brown became as proud of his son’s baseball accomplishments as his own in entertainment – probably even more so, because the senior Brown had been bitten by the baseball bug at an early age. Whenever there was a break from his traveling in circuses and carnivals, he eagerly joined semi-pro baseball teams. He was an excellent, left-handed hitting second baseman, good enough to play a few games in 1910 for the Minor League St. Paul Saints.

[0:05:06] Alas, that gig ended quickly when he broke his leg sliding on the base paths not once, but twice. He reached the painful conclusion that he was not good enough to make

the major leagues. Yet life on the road enabled the affable young man to befriend scores of pro baseball players. Working mainly at night, he spent countless afternoons at the ballpark. In New York, he grew close to future Yankee immortal Lou Gehrig, manager [Miller] Huggins, and general manager Edward Barrow, who he had known when Barrow managed Babe Ruth and the other Red Sox before 1920. The Yankee front-office honchos frequently invited him to work out at Yankee Stadium, and Brown attended at least one Florida spring training.

[0:05:57] Traveling with the road companies of his Broadway shows, Brown made many other baseball friends, notably Hall of Fame outfielder Tris Speaker, who gifted Brown with his 1912 World Series medal, a keepsake that Brown would carry in his pocket for the rest of his life. Athletes loved Joe E. Brown. They saw a brother in him, and they gave him priceless memorabilia that he put in his “room of love,” that he called, in Hollywood. Unfortunately, a lot was lost in a couple of fires, and some of it may have been stolen, and I’m on that case for another paper.

[0:06:36] Brown did not forget his baseball contacts when in the fall of 1927 he moved to Hollywood. His timing was perfect, because it was the dawn of the talking-picture era, and Brown’s great rubbery face and Tarzan-like yell soon made him a big favorite of the younger audiences. In 1929, Warner Bros., the first studio to fully embrace sound, inked him into a lucrative seven-year contract that ultimately would see him make a few dozen films, often at \$100,000 a pop. But he insisted on a stipulation that the studio must outfit a team of “Joe E. Brown All-Stars.” The baseball-mad comedian played second base whenever his work schedule allowed, and he hired many of his baseball buddies as teammates, often including Major League stars wintering in California, like Smead Jolley and Ivy Olson, and even – I believe at one time – Rogers Hornsby.

[0:07:39] Needless to say, his All-Stars were the class of the Hollywood studio leagues. Buster Keaton, the great silent movie comedian, was another baseball nut that fielded a team, but it usually wasn’t a match for Brown’s squad of ringers. They did square off against each other each in 1932, in a benefit to raise money for the L.A. Olympic Games.

[0:08:03] Brown always kept his 5’8”, 160-pound frame in shape, and Warner Bros. took advantage of his fitness in several of his early films. He played a physical fitness instructor and wrestler in *Sit Tight*, co-starring the hilarious, full-size comedienne, Winnie Lightner.

He played a swimmer in Ginger Rogers first starring vehicle, *You Said a Mouthful*, both happily now available on DVD.

[0:08:34] But Brown craved the opportunity to portray a baseball player on the screen. He got his chance when *Fireman, Save my Child* was released in early 1932. It is Brown's first fully developed movie role. He plays Smokey Joe Grant, a hard throwing, right-handed pitcher for the Rosedale Rosies from Kansas. But he's more interested in patenting a baseball-shaped fire extinguishing bomb than pitching baseballs for the St. Louis Cardinals. My mind was blown when I saw this film on TV, and there's a telegram early in the film in which he's invited to join the Cardinals, and it's signed by Charlie Barrett, Branch Rickey's top scout.

[0:09:21] Brown's Smoky Grant speaks with a homey Midwestern accent. He pronounces *fires* as "fars," as in *bars*. David Kalat, in a recent valuable critique on the TCM website, notes that though this plot may be ridiculous, it highlights Brown's gentle conservative nature, traits that explained his growing appeal to rural audiences in the increasingly desperate climate of the great depression. The baseball scenes are quite realistic, aided by the technical expertise of Brown's friend, Frank Shellenback, who had briefly pitched for the White Sox and was still active as a spitball pitcher in the Pacific Coast League. He would become the PCL's all-time winningest pitcher, and a few years later he would be Ted Williams's first manager in San Diego, and in 1954 he was Leo Durocher's pitching coach for the team that won the World Series. Frank Shellenback. He also appears on screen in *Fireman* as a relief pitcher, when Brown's Smoky Grant is knocked out of the box. *Fireman*, as far as I know, remains available on DVD, but the very collegial Rob Edelman shared his TV copy. But happily, the last two films in Brown's baseball trilogy, both based on Ring Lardner stories, are available: *Elmer the Great*, and *Alibi Ike*.

[0:10:51] There is no evidence that Brown and Lardner were friends, but it is safe to assume they at least ran into each other at baseball games and Broadway shows. Lardner was six years older, born in 1885, and from a wealthy background, unlike Brown, who once remarked that he came from "out of nowhere." Yet they were both sons of the Middle West, they shared a visceral passion for baseball, and a mutual love for what Rob Edelman has called Lardner's creation of the all-too-human and flawed baseball players.

[0:11:27] *Elmer the Great* and the story of how it came to the screen is fascinating. It's based on Lardner's story "Hurry Kane," and initially was a Broadway play that opened in the fall of 1928, starring Walter Huston as Elmer. Yes, John Huston's, father. It was adapted by patriotic, popular entertainer George M. Cohan, but when Lardner saw a rehearsal on a day when Cohan wasn't present, he was appalled by what Cohan had done to his play. In an open letter published before the play's opening, the clever humorist wondered if he hadn't fallen into the wrong theater by mistake. He offered free tickets to the next appearance of the White Sox in the World Series if theatergoers could identify what lines the writer had slipped into Cohan's adaptation.

[0:12:16] The Broadway run of *Elmer the Great* lasted only forty performances, cost Lardner money in investment and soured him on the adaptation process, so he did not get involved when Hollywood's Paramount Studios, one year later [in] 1929, put out "Hurry Kane" under the title *Fast Company*. It starred Jack Oakie, who 10 years later would earn immortality for playing the Mussolini character, Benzino Napaloni, against Chaplin's Hitler look-alike Adenoid Hynkel in *The Great Dictator*. Oakie's take on Elmer Kane was well received, although it's a hard film to find, and if anyone has a copy let me know. UCLA Archives probably does.

[0:13:03] Joe E. Brown still felt that he could add something to the portrayal, and so in 1931 he started performing Elmer at a L.A. dinner theater. Audience marveled at Brown's [prodigious] eating capacity, food usually prepared by Brown's personal chef. In scenes that would be in the film when it was filmed two years later, Brown eats two huge breakfasts, to the disdain of his grandmother, but his more kindly mother asked if he'd like some apple pie. "I'll flirt with it," Elmer says. Director Mervyn LeRoy, fresh from the success of *Little Caesar* with Edward G. Robinson, came to see Brown's live performance, and convinced Paramount to make another film version. LeRoy was a big baseball fan, so he deferred to Brown's knowledge and passion.

[0:13:55] Lardner had based Elmer Kane on spitball pitcher Ed Walsh, who incidentally had taught the pitch to Frank Shellenback, but Brown added a characterization based on Harry Coveleski, the raw rookie for the 1908 Phillies, who came out of the Pennsylvania coal mines to beat the Giants five times during the pennant race. If the Giants had beaten Coveleski just once, we would never have heard of Fred Merkle and the playoff loss to the

Cubs. Some critics felt that the opening breakfast scene of Elmer in the movie that I just detailed, taking place, by the way, at two in the afternoon when Elmer wakes up – it was too slow. But I found it certainly whetted my appetite and also revealed Elmer’s character. Joe E. Brown called *Elmer the Great* his favorite film. He would play it again on the stage, on the radio, and when he tirelessly entertained the troops in World War II, the G.I.s always insisted that he give another performance of Elmer.

[0:15:04] It’s interesting that Brown’s autobiography makes no mention of the final film in the baseball trilogy, *Alibi Ike*, maybe because there’s less madcap Brown antics in that film, but it is actually more faithful to Lardner’s creation of not just a ballplayer, but a type – a person who not only had an excuse for doing something wrong, but had an excuse for not doing something better. Brown obviously drew on his familiarity with Dizzy Dean, who had displaced big Babe Ruth by now as baseball’s biggest star, especially after he led the Gashouse Gang Cardinals to the 1934 World Series triumph.

[0:15:48] To give you a sense of how intimate Brown was with key baseball people, he mentions in his book that he was sitting next to Branch Rickey during game four of that series, when pinch runner Dizzy Dean got hit in the head with a thrown ball and feared the worst – Rickey feared the worst. Dean later said that x-rays of head showed nothing.

Alibi Ike is also memorable for the debut of 19-year-old Olivia de Havilland as Brown’s love interest, and William Frawley, another baseball-mad actor and the future Fred Mertz of *I Love Lucy*, plays *Alibi Ike*’s manager.

[0:16:30] As Wes Gehring says in his vital book, a bio-bibliography of Joe. E. Brown, “The star would never attain the height of popularity that he reached in 1935.” It was also the year where he received high critical praise for his performance as Flute the bellows-worker in Warner Bros.’s lavish production of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Yet he remained a vital presence on the entertainment and sports scene for more than 30 years. A genuinely liberal man, he testified in 1939 before a House Committee in Washington, DC, urging unsuccessfully the admission of twenty-thousand Jewish boys from Germany. In the ’50s and early ’60s, he served as the President of the Pony League, a youth baseball league. Thankfully, we can draw upon Brown’s preserves, screen humor artistry, and the perpetually optimistic spirit to give us hope in these increasingly cynical and troubled times. Thank you for listening.

César Love: [0:17:40] So, we're good to go. [I] just want to say thank you [to] Scott and thanks to the community of Dayton. It's been a wonderful last couple days. My talk is titled, "Baseball, Jazz, and the Short Story: An Examination of Dionysian Vessels." So, I'm going to start. Jazz music and baseball are both associated with an energy of rapture that seizes its participants, so I'm proposing that baseball and jazz both act as vessels for the Dionysian spirit. Both serve as containers for Dionysian energy. I'm also proposing that baseball has a narrative structure that is similar to the narrative structure of the short story, and that this shared narrative structure also contributes to baseball's Dionysian energy. So, for this talk I'm going to be employing the dichotomy between Dionysus and Apollo which was explored in Friedrich Nietzsche's work *The Birth of Tragedy*.

[0:18:49] I'm also defining Dionysian energy as an ecstatic, overflowing, irrational, emotional energy. It can be joyous, it can be sorrowful, it can be both at the same time, but we feel it when we listen to jazz. We also feel it when we watch baseball. Since it is irrational, it defies precise definition, but to misquote Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, we know it when we feel it. So, let me get a second slide. So, here's Dionysus, the Greek god of wine.

[0:19:43] So, this energy [is] not something new. It's as old as life itself, and it is of course named after Dionysus, the Greek god of wine. It's an energy of rapture. It can bring a loss of control, but it can also be contained. And it's interesting – it can be experienced by an individual alone in the moonlight, or perhaps on a long-distance run, yet I'm examining the Dionysian not as a sole individual experience, but as a cultural experience, something that's shared with other people, shared with other human beings. So, throughout history civilizations have created vessels that serve as channels for this energy, and by vessel, I mean a cultural form that contains and channels this energy. In Ancient Greece, one of these channels was the Greek tragedies, specifically those of Sophocles and [Aeschylus], and of course you had the Dionysian festival itself.

[0:20:50] But let's not stay in Ancient Greece. Let's enter the late 1800s. [It's] the passing of the Victorian Era and the beginning of the modern era. This is a period of intense cultural change, and this was a time when new vessels, new cultural forms, were being born, to channel this energy and encourage it. Two vessels that emerged during this period were

jazz music and baseball. So, I'm going to stray [away] from Dionysus for a little while and talk about one of his brothers, specifically his brother Apollo, who's the god of the rational, the god of reason. Okay, so although both baseball and jazz serve as vessels for the Dionysian, it's their Apollonian elements that allow for the Dionysian energy to flow through them.

[0:21:47] By this I mean the rational, fixed structures within jazz music and the rational, fixed structures within the game of baseball. I'm so happy that the performers in the last set – I mean the speakers in the last set – presented the technical side of jazz, because I'm at a little bit of a disadvantage. I'm going to gloss over that, so you guys did me a big service by explaining some of the technicalities. So, in a jazz performance of a song, there's a basic structure of thirty-two measures divided into four phrases, and within these phrases there's an underlying harmonic progression for each of the four [phrases]. These elements are generally fixed. They remain constant, [yet] it's these rigid elements that allow for the improvisation within jazz. They allow the soloist his freedom of improvisation.

[0:22:50] You know, a jazz musician will feel the Dionysian energy when he or she begins playing and then just lets it all out, in all its ecstasy, in all its splendor. But it's only possible because of the Apollonian formal elements within the music, those formal elements which the previous speakers were discussing. In baseball, the Dionysian rapture – we can experience it by watching a homerun, close play, walk-off win, you know, rooting for your favorite team, rooting for your favorite player, or just being at the ball game. We're pretty familiar with the Dionysian rapture of baseball, but it's the Apollonian structures of baseball that are more of a mystery. So, this is Red Smith, the sportswriter, and he's got a very famous quote about baseball. So, let me read the quote.

[0:23:54] "Ninety feet between bases represents man's closest approach to absolute truth, and nobody knows for sure how it came to be." The full quote's more interesting. "Ninety feet between bases represents man's closest approach to absolute truth. The world's fastest man can not run to first base ahead of a sharply hit ball that is cleanly handled by an infielder; he will get there only half a step too late. Let the fielder juggle the ball for one moment or delay his throw an instant and the runner will be safe. Ninety feet demands perfection. It accurately measures the cunning, speed and finesse of a base stealer against

the velocity of a thrown ball. It dictates the placement of infielders. That single dimension makes baseball a fine art – and nobody knows for sure how it came to be.”

[0:24:53] So, Red Smith located it. This is the Apollonian vessel of baseball that allows the Dionysian energy to be channeled. Yet, he insists nobody knows for sure how it came to be, and, well, this is the kind of statement that, as scholars, we’re not satisfied [with]. This demands an investigation. So, of course there are various mythologies of how the baseball diamond came to be. I mean, of course there’s Abner Doubleday, the Civil War general said to invent baseball, and that [has] been debunked, and then Abner Doubleday became replaced with Alexander Cartwright. His plaque [in] the Hall of Fame actually states that he did set the bases at ninety feet apart, but poor Cartwright’s been debunked as well.

[0:25:51] There are some facts that we do know for sure about the origin of the baseball diamond. We know that a baseball convention took place in 1857 that standardized the diamond with ninety-foot distances between bases, but it wasn’t born at that convention. There is documentation that the ninety-foot [distance] between bases was used as far back as 1845. Well, it’s an important investigation on how the ninety-foot infield was born, but right now it’s kind of at a dead-end. We don’t know the discussion that took place at that 1857 convention. I mean, were they discussing the placement of the infielders? Were they discussing the speed and cunning of a base-stealer? Or were they discussing Apollo and Dionysus? Sure, I’d love to know, but at this point I don’t think the memo has been unearthed. You know, the minutes.

[0:27:00] So, I’m going to propose that let’s not look at the mystery of the diamond as a history problem. Instead, let’s look at it as a math problem. Specifically, a geometry problem, and a very old geometry problem. Let’s look at it through the age-old geometry problem of how do you square the circle? So, the puzzle of squaring the circle asks, how do you create a square that has the same area as a given circle? [You’re] given two tools to do it. You’re given a compass and a straight edge. It also asks you, how do you construct a square that is the same perimeter as the circumference of a circle, given the same tools, a straight edge ruler and a compass, and you’re given a finite number of attempts at trying it.

[0:28:10] I didn’t have to try this in my tenth-grade geometry class, but the Babylonians tried it a long time ago, and then the Ancient Greeks gave it a shot. Then, in Victorian England,

several brave Englishmen gave it their best shot. So, nowadays squaring the circle is seen as a metaphor for a futile effort by someone with too much time on their hands, but – let me go forward. But for those who pursued it, squaring the circle was not considered merely a geometry problem. There's a spiritual component to this exercise as well. There is symbolism to be explored behind both the circle and the square. Let me give you an image. We're familiar with this image from Freemason iconography, and the compass here is not about what it does, and neither is the square. The compass is symbolic of the circle, and the circle itself is symbolic of the sky and of the heavenly realms, whereas the square is symbolic of material reality and the earth that we're walking on. So, you put them together. It's about the relationship between the sky and the earth. In other terms, spirit and matter. So, those people were practicing this seemingly idle pursuit of how do you square the circle. What's really going on here on a metaphoric level, on a spiritual dimension, and as a spiritual pursuit, [is] they're trying to bring spirit into matter, and [to put] it in Christian terminology, bring heaven onto earth.

[0:30:26] So, let's get back to baseball. A baseball diamond is of course also a square, and it's also a square with ninety-foot distances between bases, as Red Smith told us, but what is fascinating is just the simple math here. You add all those ninety-foot distances between bases, and you get the sum of three-hundred and sixty. [Three-hundred] and sixty feet is the perimeter around the baseball diamond. And this number three-hundred and sixty is indelibly associated with [something] else you find in geometry, and that something else is the circle. We've got three-hundred and sixty degrees in a circle, and we've got three-hundred and sixty feet around the perimeter of the baseball diamond.

[0:31:42] A coincidence? Maybe. But it's something to contemplate. Here is this number, three-hundred and sixty degrees of the circle, which – I don't know the history of geometry, but I'm assuming it's very close to three-hundred and sixty-five days that it takes for the Earth to go around the Sun. Three-hundred and sixty-five days in the year, you know, you round it off to three-hundred and sixty, it's something more manageable. And then we've got three-hundred and sixty feet around the perimeter of the baseball diamond. So, I am suggesting [that] when Red Smith is talking about ninety-feet as man's closest approach to absolute truth, the baseball diamond itself, on some strange level, serves as a connection between spirit, matter, heaven, and earth, and for our purposes, in our connection with jazz

in the twentieth century, as a vessel for the Dionysian energy. Something irrational is being channeled in through this diamond, just as it is in jazz, and when we start waxing poetic about baseball, we become inarticulate. That's part of the reason why I think baseball can inspire some really bad poetry, because, well, you just kind of lose it. There's no grounding. There's no philosophical underpinning for what is it about baseball that is so unusually captivating. Well, [think] of it as a channel for the Dionysian energy.

[0:33:45] Okay, so now I'm going to change channels a little bit and talk about the short story. What I find remarkable about the short story as an artform, as an Apollonian vessel, is its relationship to time. The short story [is] a very flexible vessel. It can be as long as thirty pages, perhaps longer, or as short as seventy words. Yet, inside that, it can contain decades of time, or it can contain just a few minutes. One can write a two-hundred-word story that narrates twenty years. Similarly, you can write a thirty-page short story that narrates just an hour. This is a marvelous relationship that the short story has with that beast we call time.

[0:34:46] So, baseball has a similar relationship with that beast we call time. Baseball has a flexibility in its narrative structure. One can discuss the – I'll wrap it up. The narrative of single at bat, a game, a series, a homestand, a season, the career of a player, the life of a franchise, and as you know, baseball time is not measured by a standard clock. Unlike football, which has an hour of playing time and then the game ends, baseball time is measured in innings, and with that, there's the theoretical possibility that each game can go on forever. Similarly, each inning can go on forever, and each at bat can go on forever. [We've] seen this. You've got the batter with the three and two count [who] keeps falling off pitch after pitch. It's as if he's managed to stop time. So, there's the suggestion of eternity happening here. You know, the game of baseball is often depicted as something timeless, an experience beyond that of ordinary time. We've seen *Field of Dreams*. It's like, whether you like it or not, it's just one of the common tropes of the game of baseball.

[0:36:05] So, baseball's extraordinary temporal forms also serve the Dionysian by suggesting that energy from a timeless realm is arriving through this game. Time becomes altered in baseball. I've got this picture from Salvador Dalí. I think it's [part] of *The Persistence of Memory*. Like in the short story, baseball time has an amorphous quality. The game provides a breaking free from time as we are used to it, a freedom from the

everyday demands of arriving and departing at precise hours and minutes. Baseball time brings a liberation from the demands of the clock. I'm glad one of the previous speakers was talking about jazz as a freeing thing, either internally or externally. It has that rebellious quality, and it's just like there's this sense of freedom that comes with the sense of time, of being at the ballpark, of breaking away from the regular demands.

[0:37:10] This liberation, I want to say, contributes to the Dionysian energy. So, in closing, I want to make the point [that] it's the same liberation that we feel at a jazz club, and it can be the same liberation that we feel when we escape into a good short story. So, thank you very much.

Rob Bellamy: [0:37:50] How's everybody doing? Good to see you. I'm Rob Bellamy. This is Jim Walker. Jim is doing A/V today, but he contributed to this paper. Well, I guess it depends on how it goes actually, [whether] he'll want me to say that or not.

Jim Walker: [0:38:11] We did notice that we are the last of the panel presenters today, which means we're the baseball equivalent of the number-nine hitters, and I think that should set your expectation appropriately for this presentation. And not just any number-nine hitter. Think of John Lester for the Cubs last year, who was hitting for the first time in his Major League career, and that's pretty close to what you're going to get from us today. We're going to start with a few images to remind you of what the cookie cutters looked like, and we'll actually start with blowing something up, which I think is a good way to end.

Rob Bellamy: [0:38:47] Or start. Okay, let's see it.

Jim Walker: Well, there'll be a commercial [that we'll have to see].

Rob Bellamy: [0:39:45] I knew I should have just done this solo.¹

¹ Here, Jim gets the video to work, though it still appears to be out of sync with the audio. Then, as he closes the tab, we see that a second video has been playing on another tab, this one titled "Top 10 U.S. Stadium/Arena Demolitions." He closes that tab as well.

Jim Walker: [0:40:35] Well, that went really well. Okay. Well, just a few images to remind you of the cookie cutters that we're talking about, and mostly serious captions, but occasionally not.

Rob Bellamy: Do you want me to go ahead and start?

Jim Walker: Yeah, go ahead.

Rob Bellamy: [0:40:50] Okay. Here at the conference, of course, we've been talking about music, baseball, and literature, and all of these things, of course, depend so much – the resonance of these things depends so much on history and memory. Okay? We want to introduce the constructs of nostalgia and sense of place to a discussion of what we call the “cookie cutter stadiums,” which also include the domes, the venues that were Major League Baseball's primary playing facilities from roughly the 1960s through the end of the century or millennium, if you will. Of course, to most people, most observers, these plain facilities are considered to be soulless atrocities, although at the time of their construction, they were considered absolute marvels of the age, the last word [in] modernity. [In] fact, when they were first opened, several of these facilities – you've got Riverfront there – won architectural awards, like the stadium in Cincinnati, and in fact, famous architects worked on some, like the Busch Stadium II in St. Louis. So, [the] circular behemoths that dotted urban America, though over time became regarded as what? A blight, as mistakes, as concrete [behemoths] surrounded by acres of asphalt. The seats were lousy and too removed from the action, and AstroTurf was a sacrilege, and on and on and on and on.

[0:42:47] These cookie cutters, these architectural ashtrays, these urban donuts are regarded as best forgotten by the majority of popular and academic baseball writers, and apparently by most of the fanbase. In fact, these perceptions – or facts, if you will – are well established that they have become part of the received and conventional wisdom of baseball. Okay? In fact, regarding these stadiums, this is one of the few areas in baseball history that is not regarded with positive nostalgia, or as baseball fans tend to do, they're not part of a fetish movement. There are very few people who [have] mourned what has been lost with these

mid- or late-twentieth century stadiums. Now, obviously, it's not our intent – it's not mine, I don't know about Jim. It's not our intent to say that these were great and they're better than what we have now, because that clearly is not the case. However, there are some questions we want to try to get you guys to engage with, okay?

[0:44:00] To what degree can one be nostalgic for something that a person has only fleetingly or perhaps never experienced in her or his lifetime? Referring here primarily to the stadiums that came before the cookie cutters, the ones that are looked back [upon] so fondly now. You know, the Shibe Parks, the Ebbets Fields, and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. Or, even today, although they've been completely rehabbed, the Fenway Parks and Wrigley [Fields]. Although, who knows what they're doing at Wrigley. It's a mall. Second question: is it possible to be nostalgic for something that is a myth, and to what degree is that the case? And what defines nostalgia and sense of place as related to baseball?

[0:44:50] You know, I was just looking at a new book by an author, Stephanie Coontz, and the book is called *The Way We Never Were*. It's one of these books that I would say takes a melancholic – maybe *negative* would be a better descriptor – of how we looked at family life in the '50s and '60s, and basically her thesis is, well, we don't remember it very well at all. What we think was the case was for the vast majority of people not true. And indeed, nostalgia can be melancholic as well as utopian. In fact, [one] way to use nostalgia as a critical tool is to look at it as the difference between an active user, someone who is engaged with a given place, [and] a non-transactional and more negative [user], someone who [always thinks], "Everything's so bad today. It was so much better then."

[0:46:02] Of course, sports fandom is often tied to nostalgia. It's a key component of being a sports fan for most or many people, at least. The relevance of nostalgia for the old ballparks, the pre-cookie cutter era, and the disdain for the cookie cutters is multidimensional. There is an increasing recognition that nostalgia is associated with the construction or reconstruction of events by the mass media. In other words, our nostalgic memories, whether positive or negative, are often memories of a mediated experience. And what kind of mediated experience were we getting in the 1980s and 1990s? Well, what were we hearing? "Baseball was better in the good old days. This artificial turf has changed the game for the worst. This city is dangerous and scary right outside the park."

[0:47:02] These were messages we heard. There were some other messages, right, related to – let’s face it – labor management disputes within the game, the institution, the business of Major League Baseball; race and class considerations; urban vs. suburban arguments. There was a lot of this going on, and these were the messages of Major League Baseball and the circuits of promotion, primarily media driven, of course, that conveyed these messages over and over and over. Roughly, we went through at least a generation or more where the message conveyed was, “Baseball sucks. We own it, but it sucks.” Right? “What you’re watching is trash.” I mean, it’s like taking your own product and just for twenty-plus years knocking it over and over and over, and yet they wonder why they lost a generation of younger people. Because that’s all we ever heard.

[0:48:02] Of course, as the years went on, there came an addition to the narrative. Of course, you know what it was. “Oh, players are paid too much. The team may have to leave. Maybe there can’t be baseball in [Pittsburgh] anymore. Owners [have got to] have more revenue. Owners must have a new stadium, because if they have a new stadium, baseball will be restored to its rightful place in America, and all will be well.” This is the nostalgia. Now, [I’ll] just briefly tie this to the concept of sense of place. [I] just started working with this in something I wrote about Madison Square Garden, which is very interesting, but I’m not going to talk about that here, although I could. If this isn’t working for you, I could talk about that. Alright.

Jim Walker: [0:48:58] Poll the audience on that.

Rob Bellamy: Yeah, Jim. Pass out the ballots, alright. We’ll need a committee to count the votes. A related issue of sense of place. Now, there’s not one universally accepted definition of the concept – or construct, I should say – of sense of place, but a common argument is that a destination is, quote, “both a geographic place and a metaphysical place determined by a network of meanings and values.” No, one need not be physically present to engage with an object or facility. For example, it would seem that many people have a fairly well-developed sense of place about things like the Golden Gate Bridge, the Lincoln Memorial, and certainly the former World Trade towers – double towers – even if they’ve

never seen them, if they've never been in them, they've never been around them, except purely through mediation.

[0:50:00] [We're] not arguing this is exactly the same experience. However, the ability of media to frame an understanding of the importance of places and events and objects and to set an agenda for what is important to consider, okay, argues for media not to be relegated to second-class status [in] consideration of sense of place. Now, you know, I've often – more than Jim actually, though we both have done it – I've often joked about Ebbets Field and [Brooklyn], and I've often said, “My God, if there were that many people who loved that place, and attended those games, and watched them on [early] television, if that were actually true, then the fans, with their own bare hands, would have built them a new stadium. Right? I mean, it's unbelievable.

[0:51:00] You realize, of course, that assuming you have memories since you were five years old – which I don't. Hell, I don't even have memories of when I was fifty. But anyhow, if you assume that you might have some memories from the time you're five, how old would you have to be to literally have a memory of Ebbets Field now? And the answer is sixty-four, sixty-five, okay? And yet, that is something that still has a strong resonance, sense of place dimension, although most people, of course, have never been there, have never seen it, have no idea, have never touched it, felt it. Of course, similar things – not as much as Ebbets – have been said about Forbes or Crosley Field, Tiger Stadium, blah blah blah blah. Now, you can walk out here to the lobby and see some of the baseball books being sold, right, and get this idea of sense of place and nostalgia.

[0:52:00] It is the baseball market, but it completely skipped over this era of stadiums. Now, I grew up in a rural area. I was trapped in a rural child's body. I'm an urbanite, or I'd like to think of myself that way, but I grew up in a rural spot. Grass, to me, is not good. Grass means work. I don't want to see real grass. The first time I saw Riverfront Stadium with that beautiful sea of AstroTurf, I thought, “This is the greatest thing ever. I wish Dad would install this. I wish he made enough money to install this in our yard.” There was no joy there. The first game I ever attended, I was about seven, it was at Crosley Field, and my memory is not a particularly good one. It's sweat. It's smoke. It's piss. It's spilled beer. It's crowded [and] cramped. Not good.

[0:53:03] My first experience at Riverfront a few years later was like the Space Age has arrived. [This] ship has landed on the riverbanks of the Ohio to take us all to baseball heaven. Right? I mean, I'd just never seen anything like it. The multicolored seats, the spacious aisles. Again, [why] is it that that era of stadiums that [actually] must have been the essential memories of most people living today – why has that been so overlooked? Why has that been so beaten up? Why is that considered not worthy of nostalgia? Let's face it. The new stadiums, with all of their aesthetic issues – although again, I like the artificial turf, and certainly I'm not a typical representative. I would never claim that. Self-report is the worst form of measurement, and it was to me self-reporting, definitely.

[0:54:09] But you know, despite the nostalgia we may have for the pre-cookie cutter [stadiums], there are very few people left who spent much of any time at them. Thinking of the new ones, let's face it, the giant scoreboards, despite all the advertising and the contrived hoopla, was and is and remains an essential component of following the action and an essential educational tool for millions of attendees. Shea Stadium ensured the return of the National League to New York City. Riverfront and Three Rivers saved franchises in [the] smaller markets of Cincinnati and Pittsburgh. Domes made it possible for chains to prosper in Houston, in Minneapolis-St. Paul, in Seattle. And at a time when other cities were becoming depopulated, poverty stricken, and crime ridden, the cookie cutters and domes made it safe, even if in a contrived, very controlled way, for people to come into the cities in many respects.

[0:55:15] Also, it was the development of these stadiums that made women and children regular and consistent customers of baseball. That simply was not the case prior to the rise of these stadiums. So, without a doubt, nostalgia and a sense of place for a too-often mythologized past was a major factor of the development of the retro parks that we have today, whether Major League parks like down the road here at Great American in Cincinnati, or [the] Minor League park here in Dayton. But let's show maybe just a little more respect, or maybe a little more tolerance, for the 1960s to '90 [era] of the multi-purpose stadium and the memories it created in person, if not through media. And then, we've got a – go ahead, roll it! We've got a big explosion.

Jim Walker: [0:56:12] Well, the first one went so well, so let's see how this goes.

Rob Bellamy: And we're going to blow this up now. Blow it up real good. Oh, that's a football stadium.

Jim Walker: [It's top-ten] stadiums.

Rob Bellamy: Top ten stadiums.

Jim Walker: [0:57:42] I will say the fans do seem very happy about the stadium going down.
[0:58:45] You can watch the total [video] on YouTube [at any time].

Rob Bellamy: So, thanks everybody, and thanks to Scott, CELIA, [[*unintelligible*]].

Jim Walker: And we wore the caps.

Scott Peterson: [0:59:03] Thank you all, speakers from the last panel. Now we'll take some questions.

Audience member 1: [0:59:13] Bertrand Russell once commented that the Dionysian is what makes life interesting, but it's also what makes life dangerous. Would you like to comment on that?

César Love: No. [[*Laughs.*]] Well, okay. Baseball fans are known to riot and go over the edge and be obnoxious. I don't think it's as bad as in other sports. It's an energy of rapture, which – I'm talking about – I'm thinking, in the 1890s baseball and jazz became vessels that encouraged it, but yet contained it. This is a container for Dionysian energy, and I think when the container is broken, that's when you have chaos. That's when, possibly, you could lead to, like, fascist movements. Think of a college football crowd that is just out of hand, just feeling the Dionysian energy. It turns into a riot. Or the fascism that rose prior to World War II. You could say that was a perversion of the Dionysian energy. Perhaps if

there had been more jazz and more baseball in Europe, [if they had learned] from us early on, that wouldn't have happened.

Audience member 2: [1:00:40] Well, I'm [in] Californian where I've got to tell you that grass has a whole different meaning to us out there, so it was actually...

Rob Bellamy: I was okay with that.

Audience member 2: ...a good thing, yeah. What I'm curious about is [kind] of the myth that you talked about. Is that passed on from generation to generation? We talked about the New York Ebbets Field, and [soon] there won't be many people that actually knew that personally. How about their offspring and their generations? Is that myth carried on?

Rob Bellamy: Well, I can only say this anecdotally. I have actually heard people talk rapturously about Ebbets Field who couldn't possibly have been old enough to have been there, who are younger than me, and I'm not old enough to have been there. So, yeah, I'd have to say it certainly does endure.

Lee Lowenfish: [1:01:35] There's a wonderful man who passed away a couple years ago named Marty Adler who created the Brooklyn Dodger Hall of Fame, and that's now at Cyclones Park, the [Met farms] on Coney Island. He took his grandson – Marty Adler, by a wild connection – talk about connections. He was an assistant principal at a junior high school where Ebbets Field stood, and when Maxie was maybe eight or nine, he takes him to school and points the school out and says – and I think there's a housing project on the exact side, junior high school next door – and he points out the building, you know, the housing project. He says, “[Kid], the Dodgers played here,” and the kid says, “What floor?”

Audience member 3: [1:02:35] Actually, Jim and Rob, I wonder if there's some connection between this obsession with Ebbets Field and the Dodgers and also all the people who supported Jackie Robinson. [You] speak to a lot of the real nostalgia people, including people who were old enough to remember it, and you ask them where they lived, and they

all say, we moved to Long Island, we moved to Connecticut, we moved to New Jersey, because we couldn't live with, quote, "those people," unquote. I'm interested in this. I wonder if the lack of nostalgia for the cookie cutters has to do with, on one hand, the reality that drove the nostalgia – I'm not sure if I'm putting it correctly – the reality that the flight to the suburbs is—

Rob Bellamy: Well, I think white flight is an issue. It's also interesting – and I don't want to make too much of this, but the peak of participation in the Major Leagues by African-Americans was also during this era.

César Love: Oh.

Rob Bellamy: Okay?

Lee Lowenfish: Mm.

Rob Bellamy: I'll just leave it at that, but that's what happened.

Audience member 4: [1:04:00] I just wanted to point out – I mean, I don't know if it's something, too, with your childhood, because I have a great amount of nostalgia for Three River Stadium, and I was very, very sad when it was torn down. We went and actually watched on the top of Mt. Washington, and the Veterans Stadium was open for a couple of years longer, and I know I went there and it was this fantastic feeling, because it was so much like Three River Stadium, it was like walking into Three River Stadium.

Rob Bellamy: It was.

Audience member 4: And then, I actually have very bad memories of Veterans Stadium specifically, but for many other reasons. It's a very long story. But I do have nostalgia for the cookie cutters, just because I feel like – I felt like my family—

Rob Bellamy: It was your era.

Audience member 4: Right! And I always felt my family drilled into me, “This is bad. You shouldn’t like this. This is terrible. What we used to have was so much better.” And I didn’t want to hear it. I was like, “Well, this is downtown, and it’s new, and it’s nice.”

Rob Bellamy: Exactly, it’s cool.

Audience member 4: “...Yeah, why do people not like this?”

Rob Bellamy: It’s awesome. I agree completely.

Audience member 5: [1:04:58] Just a thought on the white flight stream of thought. When Clark Griffith was asked why they moved the Washington franchise to Minneapolis, what was his comment? “They’re white.”

Audience member 6: [1:05:20] Yeah, I also feel there’s something going on here with the prosperity of sports, and also the amount of leverage that sport has over communities. There’s a limited number of teams. There’s a lot of communities. So, the competition is not among sports franchises. The competition is among cities. So, essentially, the nostalgia was to say these multipurpose stadiums don’t work. They’re bad for baseball. They’re bad for football. One of the conclusions is we need a new facility, which works out financially for both sports.

Rob Bellamy: Sure.

Audience member 6: [1:06:00] And I think it is part of this sort of larger trend. So, you really do have to run down what existed for actually a relatively short time to partially justify a much, much more expensive and generally publicly financed, or at least substantially publicly financed, alternative. So, the multipurpose stadium couldn’t work, right? And even now, we get the legacy of that in the discussion of the Oakland Coliseum,

and how that has to be replaced, and it's just going to kill that franchise. Well, it's been going to kill that franchise for about twenty-five years, and it's still not dead, so, you know, maybe that argument isn't totally valid. I definitely think that's a part of this, and I don't want to say it's an orchestrated campaign, but I think it definitely feeds into some things that are very beneficial for those who want to build new stadiums.

Audience member 7: [1:07:00] As I was listening to this, I [wondered] to what extent our experience of watching these games on television has impacted our sense of this.

Rob Bellamy: A lot.

Audience member 7: I mean, if you think about the 1950s, to the extent that you see film of the 1950s – you know, it's the infancy of television, right? If you think about – at least, I'm starting to think about some of the '60s, '70s, '80s, the cookie cutter era. A lot of times, the stadium's not really that influential in the image that you're watching on television.

Rob Bellamy: The artificial turf was.

Audience member 7: The artificial turf certainly was, and I must admit I'm not so much a fan of that. At least from our current perspective, once you get Camden Yards and others, comparing bookends of this, I think, has a lot to do with why people look at those cookie cutter stadiums and say, you know, I didn't like them.

[1:08:05] Certainly, one thing about them was their similarity.

Rob Bellamy: Sure.

Audience member 7: You could be sitting in almost any of them and feel like, yeah, they're all alike.

Rob Bellamy: But we loved Holiday Inns for that very reason.

Lee Lowenfish: Speak for yourself.

Rob Bellamy: The American public in general.

Audience member 7: So, I wonder if that's maybe it. It is interesting that – and I think it's going to be interesting to watch at least with one of the reasons that a lot of us are here, with writing about the game, that there's still this interest in the pre-expansion era stadiums, and maybe not so much necessarily written about the '70s and the '80s, and perhaps it's just a question of—

Rob Bellamy: [1:09:00] The whole narrative – I shouldn't say the whole – a lot of the narrative of those telecasts – this is just my own experience, and I think people roughly my age – was, you know, these were old players, a lot of them, and there was no love for these fields. “Well, you know, at Forbes Field, that would have been a double play.” You know, it was that kind of narrative. I remember that narrative very strongly. It was always like, “Wow, we had something great” – which was not true, but, “We had something great and now it's gone.” So, it fed in. [That's] kind of one of the points Jim and I were trying to make. [This] media narrative directly impacts our memory, our sense of nostalgia, and even a sense of place, whether or not we actually were there.

César Love: [1:09:45] If I could add, I want to say how this media narrative [upset] the franchise the Kansas City Royals. They were a thriving team, I believe, through the 1980s, and then, [in] the beginning of the juiced ball era, they tore out the artificial turf, replaced it with natural grass, and they brought in the fences to encourage a different kind of game. More home runs, less of a speed and defense game, which the artificial grass had helped them – they had built their team to fit the stadium, a team built around speed and defense, which the artificial grass helped. And then, okay, they bought into the narrative of the nostalgia of grass, and they went for the big booming homerun stadium [and] thought fans [would] come out and see this. Well, it kind of backfired. The team could not compete with high-priced free agents that hit homeruns, and they went into a pretty steep decline, which they have managed to climb out of recently because they've gone back to a speed and

defense emphasis team, you know, now that the juiced ball era is over. They still have the grass, but the outfield is back somewhere near its original dimensions.

Audience member 8: [1:11:03] Well, hello. Having been reminded of the sometimes drawn connection between sport and religion, I recall Felicitas Goodman writing that sport is what people now use to obtain altered states by consuming intoxicating liquids and stripping their bodies half-bare in inclement weather and painting themselves funny colors. The next presentation made me wonder, is there some of the religious aspect of the sacred space that makes people want to have their own special temple for the observance of their connection to the numinous?

César Love: [1:11:50] Yes, and I think that part of the game – when I think about narratives of time in baseball, how there's that suggestion of the eternity going on that brings that in, the nostalgia feeds into that, because baseball has a dualism of being crusty, old, and nostalgic, mired in the past, [and] at the same time, [it's] eternally new. You've got the new rookie, someone like Mike Trout. Very young. He's the new Babe Ruth. We're watching him. We're watching him emerge, and the media paints Mike Trout as this new Adonis god that has emerged that we will all get to follow. And then we've people like Yogi Berra, you know, the opposite archetype. [A] crusty, Saturnian sage who's been around, you know, since time immemorial. So, this odd sense of time feeds – I mean, we're talking about nostalgia for Ebbets Field. I mean, I feel nostalgia for Ebbets Field, and I've been to Brooklyn once in my life, and I didn't go looking for it, but [I'm] a Giants fan. Not that I hate the Dodgers, but I feel nostalgia for Ebbets Field. So, yeah, it permeates that, and you're looking for some place where someone emerged that was able to just transcend the limits of day-to-day, hard reality. So, yeah, the sites of the old stadium, yes, they become the place of a pilgrimage. So, yeah, you've got sacred space that comes into [it.] It very much feeds the nostalgic narrative, and the nostalgic narrative feeds the sense of sacred space.

Audience member 9: [1:13:35] I just wanted to say I appreciated all three of your presentations. Thank you very much for coming to Wright State. I had a question for César.

I was really [compelled by the] idea about the time narrative, and I was wondering if you were at all influenced by Clive Bell's treatise on the aesthetic experience. When you were talking, you compared Nietzsche and *The Birth of Tragedy*, and I thought to myself, I wonder if that's where you got that idea of that timeless human connection to the short story, jazz, and baseball.

César Love: I'll say no. I'm not familiar with that text. I think I just kind of winged it. I got the call for papers and said okay – you know, I'm a comparative literature major by training. [As] I was discussing to someone last night, we like to take things that seem to have no connection. We'll push them together and, you know, find the thread that connects them.

Audience member 10: [1:14:35] Alright, I wanted to ask Lee – here we stand, a hundred years from the publication of *You Know Me Al* as a novel, and beyond the 1930s, I don't know if there have been any film adaptations of Lardner's work. I wanted to ask, what would it take? Would it take another Joe E. Brown to appear on the scene to do a Lardner film today?

Lee Lowenfish: That's a very good question. I love – I read *You Know Me Al* straight through over the summer, and for good students, it should be used in a baseball history class, because the Federal League is popping in. It's an amazing text, and it's hilarious, you know? I mean, he was the – I don't know what it would take. I know there was a – anything now that we want to do to get a wide audience has to have sex and violence and sickness, right?

[1:15:37] So, you know, Doc Ellis – there's a movie on Doc Ellis, a documentary rather, and to do something that's good, that's popular, is always a challenge. And Lardner, sadly, I mean, what tragedy in the life? John Lardner, who's a fantastic writer, too, died at the same age as Ring Lardner, forty-eight, also [of] alcoholism. [And] the other thing in terms of connecting everything – you know, Joe E. Brown wanted to do a movie on Rube Waddell, and there's a wonderful guy in Indianapolis named Dan O'Brien who's written a script on Rube Waddell, and certainly *Fireman, Save My Child* was inspired in part by the fireman

who's more interested in the fireman who's more interested in stopping a fire than throwing a pitch at times.

[1:16:45] But for the future, it's – I know Derek Jeter has got his own website now in *The Players' Tribune*, which is an amazing document of the time, but whether there'll be a movie about that – you know, I wouldn't be surprised [if] there'll be an autobiography of Joe Madden out soon, especially if the Cubs win the World Series. And you go to the spring training as we did in the last month, and he's talking about Hazelton, [and] there's a cult of personality that's building around him, and he's [kind of] a worthy subject, but it will be hard, but of course always worthwhile.

Audience member 10: An autobiography or perhaps sainthood, at the very least.

Scott Peterson: [1:17:25] Alright, we're right up against the break, so let's take a ten-minute break and then reconvene at 4:30 for Hal McCoy. And once again, a big thanks [and a] round of applause for our panel.

[1:14:45]