

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
School of Recreation, Health, and Tourism

SPMT 321
America Through Baseball

SUMMER SESSION A 2010

DAY/TIME:	Online May 17-June 18	LOCATION:	
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OFFICE:	BRH 221C	PHONE:	
		CREDITS:	3

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is an examination of the role of baseball in American culture. The course studies baseball as a cultural and social institution in the United States over the past 150 years.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The student will be able to:

1. Understand the role of baseball in American culture.
2. Understand the operation of baseball as a cultural institution.
3. Understand the legal and political issues that have impacted baseball.
3. Critically analyze baseball themed film and literature.
4. Reflect on his/her relationship to baseball.

COURSE OVERVIEW:

The learning experiences in this course are afforded through film, readings and completion of assignments.

HONOR CODE:

The Honor Code is an integral part of university life. Students are responsible, therefore, for understanding the code's provisions. In the spirit of the code, a student's word is a declaration of good faith acceptable as truth in all academic matters. Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations.

STUDENT SUPPORT:

Any eligible student with an exceptionality documented through George Mason University's Disability Resource Center must notify the instructor so that suitable accommodations can be implemented.

Expectations:

1. All assigned reading should be completed before submitting written assignments.
2. All written assignments must be typed (computer word processing is recommended) and submitted via email.
3. Students must abide by the Honor Code, guided by the spirit of academic integrity.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Jules Tygiel, *Past Time: Baseball as History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

William Hertzog and Christopher Evans, eds., *The Faith of 50 Million: Baseball, Religion and American Culture* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2002).

REQUIRED FILM VIEWING:

Ken Burns, *Baseball, Field of Dreams, The Natural, Eight Men Out, For the Love of the Game, Bull Durham, 61, A League of Their Own*. All films readily available in video stores, Netflix, Amazon etc as well as many being in the Library. The reserve collection in the JC Library will hold a copy of the Ken Burns series.

ASSESSMENT:

Unit assignments: 100% (6 units at 14 points each and Unit 7 [Exam Unit] at 16 points for a total of 100 points). Grading scale is the standard Mason grading scale.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

View the Ken Burns series on baseball history and the assigned movies and submit Unit assignments outlined below. Units 1-3 due by June 4; Units 4-6 due by June 11; Unit 7 due by June 18. The earlier you submit material the more feedback you will receive to use towards subsequent units. Email discussion of unit material will be held as needed. Supplemental material will also appear via email as needed.

UNIT ONE: The Rise of Baseball as an American Institution

Assignment: Watch the first three “innings” or episodes of the Ken Burns series, read the relevant chapters in the textbook and complete the following essay question in 2-3 pages:

What factors led to the rise of baseball as an American pastime? Why was baseball the ‘national’ sport by the early 1900s? Be sure to include key events and people in your discussion.

UNIT TWO: Baseball and Scandal

Assignment: Watch relevant material from the Ken Burns series and the film *Eight Men Out*. Read the relevant section in the textbooks and complete the following essay in 2-3 pages:

What factors led to the Black Sox Scandal? What happened before, during and after the 1919 World Series? Why does it remain as one of the most remembered incidents in the history of American sport?

UNIT THREE: Baseball’s “Golden Age”

Assignment: Watch relevant material from the Ken Burns series and read the material in the textbook on baseball in the 1920s and 1930s and complete the following in essay format in 2-3 pages:

Why was Babe Ruth such a powerful force in the reshaping of baseball after the Black Sox Scandal? How did baseball advance in the “golden age” of American sport. Include the role of the print media and radio in your discussion. Who were the teams and players that dominated this era and what role did they play in further entrenching baseball as the national game?

UNIT FOUR: Baseball and Exclusion

Assignment: Watch the relevant material from the Ken Burns series, the film *A League of Their Own* and read the material in the textbook that deals with Negro League Baseball and the role of women in baseball between 1900 and the 1940s and complete the following in essay format in 2-3 pages:

Why was baseball segregated between 1900 and 1946? How did African-American players and entrepreneurs respond to this exclusion? What factors led to the end of segregation in baseball? Why were women always excluded from Major League Baseball? How did they carve out space in the sport? What factors led to the rise of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League? Why did it ultimately fail?

UNIT FIVE: Baseball, New York and the 1950s

Assignment: Watch the relevant material from the Ken Burns series on baseball in the period from the end of World War Two to 1961, watch the movie *61* and read the relevant material in the textbook.

Why did baseball thrive in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s? Why was New York deemed the capital of baseball in this period? What new dynamics emerged in baseball in this era that changed the shape of the game and made it truly “national” at last? What role did television play in this transformation?

UNIT SIX: Baseball, Business and Strife

Assignment: Watch the relevant material from the Ken Burns series on baseball since 1970 and read the relevant material in the textbook. Address the following in an essay of 2-3 pages:

How did franchise relocations, free agency, fads and gimmicks change the game of baseball in the age of color television? Who were the key personalities and what were key events in this modern era of baseball?

UNIT SEVEN: Baseball and the Popular Imagination: Nostalgia, Religion, American?

Assignment: Watch the movies *Field of Dreams*, *The Natural*, *For the Love of the Game* and *Bull Durham*. Answer the following in 3-5 pages:

At its essence, baseball has often been referred to as THE national pastime, a secular religion, at the core of what was and is good about America and American society. How do these films portray baseball in a nostalgic light? What are the key themes that these films address. Taken as a group, how do these films made between the mid-1980s and 2000 challenge dominant themes that had emerged in professional baseball during the same era? How do the films provide a counter-history to the establishment history of baseball? In what ways do the films and reading on sport and religion suggest that baseball is THE icon of American culture? Can we still say these things about baseball in 2010?