

How has the Film Industry Shaped the Public's Perspective of Baseball?

Madeleine Poirier

Introduction:

My research began with the topic of baseball. As a relatively new baseball fan myself, I wanted to dive into the world of this classic game to expand my knowledge on it. So, I thought to myself, what really got me into the game of baseball? Movies! As I've researched baseball, the film industry has crept its way into my search for understanding this great sport. I have read a wide variety of scholarly articles and popular sources, and I've even dabbled in completely uncreditable sources (these I did not cite) to familiarize myself with the conversation of film and baseball. These sources have mostly been written by experts in sports and media, which obviously add a reputable and knowledgeable perspective to my paper. But that's not to say that I don't have a couple authors who do not have a large background in baseball, and I believe these voices will help me connect with a wider audience who are not baseball scholars or experts but just ordinary people who love the game and movies about the game. While reading these reputable sources, I've found one word that keeps reemerging repeatedly - nostalgia. The idea of nostalgia is cited by almost every article I have read. Nostalgia presents itself as an emotion driven by the timeless feel of baseball films and the retro-Esque nature of ballparks. But what I want to figure out is how nostalgia appears in baseball films. I intend to incorporate this theme of nostalgia into my analysis of the effect of films on baseball. In addition to nostalgia, baseball has also been cited as a representation or vessel of the American Dream – for immigrants, women, and African Americans. Baseball is a huge element of American culture and has been a constant throughout the past hundred or so years. My sources explain that baseball has brought people together throughout history, and these baseball movies have been a continuation of the idea of community. In this annotated bibliography, I hope to knit these sources together to better understand my topic for my multimodal project. I have chosen to use APA citation style as it relates to the current major I am studying.

Annotations:

Baker, A. (2021, Feb. 1). Hollywood baseball films: Nostalgic white masculinity or the national pastime? *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 39(4), 731-759.
doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2021.1876512.

This scholarly source aims to target historians who want to better understand what baseball was like in a world riddled with segregation. The author works to shed light on the checkered and restrictive past of baseball by highlighting different cultural aspects of America. Baker dives into how Hollywood has produced films that encompass unity and a sense of belonging, which was ironic in a time of great separation and hate. Movies like *A League of Their Own* and *42* began to touch upon the harsh realities of living in a white male dominated world, but these movies can only portray so much. As Baker writes, baseball is often referred to as America's pastime, which tends to bring people back into the past. The past is nostalgic, sure, but also deeply segregated and full of prejudice, when really society should be looking towards a more diverse and inclusive future. Aaron Baker is a professor of film and media at Arizona State University, giving him a unique voice that will add an academic perspective to my research paper. Because he is a professor whose job it is to teach other people about film and media, in this case in relation to baseball, the topics he discusses in this article are complex and rich in thought provoking ideas. Due to the honest and harsh reality of these subtopics of race and equality in America, this article will add a possibly negative perspective in my paper. The original exclusion of people of color and women in baseball are a dark part of the sport's past, but there are movies that create stories or report on when inclusivity improved in the sport. Thanks to movies, these vital steps of inclusion in baseball have been documented and will live forever. I believe this source will enrich my paper with complex ideas of social inequality and how the sport has evolved, as well as how movies have kept baseball alive.

Burg, R. V. & Johnson, P. E. (2009, Oct.). Yearning for a past that never was: Baseball, steroids, and the anxiety of the American dream. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 26(4), 351-371. research.ebsco.com/c/qhqmd7/viewer/pdf/leabiluofb?route=details.

In this article, the main audience is those interested in journalism and media. Burg and Johnson work to explain how nostalgia is portrayed across the game of baseball and in the media. They also touch upon both the positives and negatives of nostalgia in baseball. Burg and Johnson also report on the epidemic of performance-enhancing drugs in baseball, highlighting a dishonest and very un-America element of this classic sport. They shed light on taboo topics like drugs in sports and how the media has reported on baseball and how that has affected the game as a whole, both negatively and positively. These writers also emphasize the importance of the fans in baseball and how they drive the atmosphere and the character of the game. Without the fans, who keep coming back for that nostalgic feeling despite the sport's trials and tribulations, baseball would not be where it is today. This could aid me in bridging a connection between baseball and film. As for the authors themselves, Burg is an associate professor of communication and Johnson is a historian and former professor. These academic perspectives

add great knowledge and depth to my paper, however I have read a lot of articles from other professors, so the information in this article has the potential to be repetitive. But this source does have lots of good keywords and phrases that could be cited in my paper to legitimize the information I'm trying to pass on to my readers.

Marshall, P. (Director). (1992, July 1). *A League of Their Own* [Film]. Columbia Pictures & Parkway Productions.

When this iconic movie hit theatres, it aimed to showcase the beauty of women in sports and the challenges they faced back during World War II. This film follows two sisters, Dottie and Kit, during WWII as they are scouted and recruited into playing baseball in this new all women's league based on the real-life All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL). Due to most of the men in America being across the Atlantic fighting in WWII, the MLB was unable to function, hence the rise of this women's league. Dottie and Kit join the Rockford Peaches team under their grumpy manager, Jimmy Dugan. This movie follows the Rockford Peaches and the two sisters as the women balance playing baseball on top of being mothers, spouses, and working women. This movie is an inspiring tale of how baseball brought these women comradery and gave their communities a slice of happiness to watch them play in a time of great uncertainty and sadness. The director, Penny Marshall, was an actress, producer, and film director. Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel, both screenwriters for this movie, are long time work partners. They wrote several films together, indicating a clearly successful pair who added to the quality of this movie. In terms of the usability of this source, I think it will really aid me in giving a first-hand account of what watching a baseball movie is like. On top of that, the strength of these characters and how they persevered made me proud to be a woman and made me want to play baseball...I can only imagine how it made other women feel. I believe that watching baseball movies, like *A League of Their Own*, and simultaneously reading scholarly articles will consciously bring my attention to the elements that really draw people, including myself, to these baseball movies.

Pincus, J. D. (2020-2021). It's about the moments: What baseball means to me. *Nine*, 29(1/2), 25-36. www.proquest.com/docview/2555431177?pq-origsite=primo&accountid=8285&sourcecetype=Scholarly%20Journals

In this peer-reviewed, scholarly source, Pincus looks to reach an audience that seeks a more story-like writing style surrounding the topic of baseball. In this article, Pincus wants to share pieces of his childhood that relate to baseball and showcase how the beauty of baseball consistently draws you in and makes us all nostalgic for the past. Over the course of this piece,

Pincus walks the reader through different periods or moments in his life that are significant because of some element of baseball in them. He shares how baseball brought him closer with his dad, and how playing baseball contributed to his life in a positive way. Pincus cites that, “just maybe, it [baseball] was more than just a game,” giving way to the possibility that baseball is more deeply rooted in the lives of American’s than we realize (Pincus, 2021, para. 21). Pincus, a retired communications and business professor who taught at three majors universities across the country, gives a nice perspective as Pincus probably encountered both agree-ers and dissenters to his theories, henceforth making him a more well-rounded and creditable author. Because this source is written in a more casual language, this source is easier to interpret and therefore easier to incorporate into my final project. I plan to use this text as a more relatable and popular source, despite this article being academic. I believe this article could really help my paper be more personable because of how this article pulls at your heartstrings with the details of Pincus’ childhood stories. With that being said this source is also limiting for the exact same reason it has the potential to reach a wide audience; it’s not very complex with layered ideas or theories of baseball, so I plan to use this source with caution in order to not over or underuse it.

Robinson, P. A. (Director). (1989, April 29). *Field of Dreams* [Film]. Gordan Company.

As my primary source for this annotated bibliography, *Field of Dreams* looks to target father and sons who may be baseball fanatics. Through this film, the director uses the life of Ray Kinsella to showcase to the audience the importance of slowing down and having relationships with your loved ones. *Field of Dreams* begins with Ray hearing a voice in his head that leads him to build a baseball field in his yard. Now this gets a little confusing, but in his head, Ray then sees a bunch of dead baseball legend ghosts that play on his homemade field. And then the voice returns and tells Ray to go looking for a couple different men across America that he is fated to meet and know their story, also baseball related people. This is a very imaginative story about a man who missed his dad and just wanted the opportunity to play baseball with him again. Phil Alden Robinson, director of *Field of Dreams* and a decorated screenwriter, carefully crafted this movie into its final product. As an experienced professional in the film industry, I trust that this movie is the best version it could be under Robinson’s supervision. A lot of great phrases have been born out of this movie like, “The one constant through all the years, Ray, has been baseball,” making the watcher stop and think about the true weight of this phrase and many others in the movie (Robinson, 1989). This film is highly referenced in pop culture today, so including it in my final paper will help my readers better understand the ideas I’m trying to convey. This movie has also been released for more than 30 years, so it has been seen by a large population of people, once again, allowing me to relate this movie to my thesis effortlessly.

Slavich, M. A., Dwyer, B., & Hungenberg, E. (2019, Jun.). Taken back at the ballgame: The impact of nostalgia within the Minor League Baseball spectator experience. *Journal of Sports Behavior*, 42(2), 200-224. www.proquest.com/docview/2272728653?accountid=8285&pqorigsite=primo&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals.

In this article, the authors report on a study that inspects how the nostalgic features of ballparks invoke emotional and behavioral responses. The authors hope to reach a more scientific audience who love to dabble in research and response-to-research type scholarship. These writers want to investigate and educate their readers on nostalgia's place in the sports industry. Looking at two ballparks, the study shows that it is important for spectators to have plenty of space for social interactions and talking with fellow fans. Slavich, Dwyer, and Hungenberg also compare and contrast the two baseball parks in this study. They look at the quality of food and beverages as well as the overall location of the park, and what aspects triggered feelings of nostalgia in spectators. They wanted to find out what kept people coming back to baseball game. What was the irresistible pull that this ball game seemed to have? As for the authors, Slavich is an associate professor of sports management, Dwyer is a professor of sports leadership, and Hungenberg is another professor who specializes in practical applications of sports nostalgia. All these professors have slightly different fields of expertise, and they are experts in precisely what I'm looking for. Not only is it one professor but it's three, adding more variation in the information I'm going to be able to draw from. I think this source will be able to give me knowledge of what nostalgic elements to look for in movies about baseball. This article gives very clear information on nostalgia and baseball which will help me enrich my understanding of how baseball movies with nostalgic aspects contribute to baseball and the future of the game.

Welch, M. (2023, May). The expensive, seductive nostalgia of Field of Dreams. *Reason*, 55(1), 64-71. www.proquest.com/docview/2786752248/fulltext/B19FFD837FCE458DPQ/1?accountid=8285&sourcetype=Magazines.

This magazine article is intended for readers interested in the world of baseball, specifically those who are interested in the *Field of Dreams* movie and how it influenced the building of a new ballpark in Iowa. The writer reviews *Field of Dreams* while sharing his take on how baseball has changed over the years. The author shares how the movie is a microcosm for the modern template of building baseball stadiums to draw people in. Build a new stadium that looks retro and has a very old and eclectic look, and people will pay to experience that classic experience. In the article, Welch discusses how people will pay for nostalgia and the feeling it brings, hence

the idea that a new retro looking ballpark will draw in substantial income and keep baseball popular. So how are movies any different? Won't people pay to see nostalgic movies with the same classic feel as ballparks? Welch also shares how baseball has stayed constant in a world that is ever changing and watching movies like *Field of Dreams* comforts viewers and bring them back to a "better time." Matt Welch, the author of this article, is a longtime journalist and baseball writer who typically focuses on the Los Angeles Angels. Because Welch is familiar with the world of baseball, I believe this article will add a helpful, expert opinion to my paper. This source will be beneficial to my paper because on top of reporting the monetary costs of this nostalgia in ballparks, he layers in how movies can also give an audience those same feelings of nostalgia when created with the proper elements.

Young, N. (2018, Oct. 17). After dark: Rooftop screening of 'The Sandlot' hits home with nostalgia. *University Wire*. www.proquest.com/docview/2123986198?pq-origsite=primo&accountid=8285&_oafollow=false&sourcetype=Wire%20Feeds.

This short and sweet article is meant for movie lovers who want to revisit the timeless films that remind us of our childhoods. The author, Nina Young, aims to report on a screening of the coming-of-age comedy, *The Sandlot*. She talks about this outdoor lawn where people set up their chairs and retro signs with the movie's signature catch phrases. Young explains how the cozy movie atmosphere and the young and carefree nature of the movie inspire nostalgia. There is that word again! Along with this nostalgic feeling, this movie also inspires what Young calls a "childlike sense of humor," giving people of all ages a chance for a good laugh. The author also explained how impactful it was that the main protagonist of the movie was Latino. She explained how having a main character that was Latino inspired young boys and girls who were also Latino and gave them a powerful and good role model. At this outdoor movie, Young interviewed the venue manager who shared, "I'm Latino and seeing a young guy in a movie that is this popular being ethnically Latino, ... I connect with it on that basis. I really do," showcasing how there are people who watch this movie, see a Latino character as the most talented and cool character, and feel a sense of pride for their ethnicity. That diversity and Latino pride means a lot to the Latino community and encourages children watching the movie to dream big and believe you can be anything you want to be. The author of this article, Nina Young, is graduate from McGill University and MIT with degrees in music, which is different as music does not necessarily pertain to children's baseball movies, but I believe it will add a welcomed, possibly amateur perspective to my paper. Because this source isn't written by a scholar in this field of study, this source might not be the most fruitful when it comes to supporting my thesis. However, it will help give a positive perspective on the classic comedy, and how this diverse image of kids playing baseball helps encourage all to play and love this sport at an early age.

Conclusion:

After finishing my research and annotations for this project, I have identified the idea of nostalgia as somewhat of an overarching theme in the greater conversation of baseball and the film industry. Through the movies and articles, I've discovered how this element of nostalgia is woven into movies about baseball in such a way that creates this irresistible pull or attraction towards the sport through these films. In my continued research, I hope to find what element or elements of these baseball films creates this feeling of nostalgia for the audience. In my next steps, I also want to further explore how these baseball films have not only influenced the narrative surrounding the sport but how these films have influenced society as a whole. I plan to explore the idea that baseball films have helped report and keep alive the importance of inclusivity in this country, through women and people of color portrayed in films. It would be helpful to uncover how these films have changed their viewers after they have watched a movie about baseball. I want to discover how baseball films have shed light on the darker and less inclusive past of baseball, while also sharing the stories of great strength and perseverance from women and people of color to succeed in what was, and still could be, a very unwelcoming world. I can also consider what lessons people learn from baseball films and how does this affect the future of baseball for society? I intend to conduct more research to find my answers and discover the entire conversation surrounding baseball films so that I am able to create a successful and informative multimodal project.