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The Sacred Meets the Profane: Baseball on Strike

Maryellen Boyle
New York University

This article examines the coverage of the 1981 major league baseball strike in *Sports Illustrated*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Boston Globe*, discerning both what these media had to say about the labor confrontation and presenting a framework for understanding the internal logic of this depiction. Revealed is the complex meta-lens of baseball as sacred ritual or profane mass entertainment which underlies and directs each publication's rhetorical style and interpretive thrust. The "pro-player" or "anti-player" media messages emerge out of the intersection of straightforward economic interests and at times surprisingly autonomous and contradictory discursive relationship with the "imagined community" of readers. [Keywords: Ideology and news conventions, Cultural rituals, Press and labor relations, Baseball and the press]

Reading the sports page to discern media imagery of labor-capital relations is no trivial exercise. If we understand ideology as embedded in all threads of cultural life, we should expect to discover a few in the Sports pages. Sports is generally the most dog-eared section of a newspaper, and, some say, many Americans care more about baseball than most things in life. One sign of this affection—*Sports Illustrated* has the second largest weekly magazine circulation in the United States, trailing only *TV Guide*.* What the press had to say about this baseball labor management confrontation is one objective in this research. More importantly, I attempt here to develop a general framework for understanding the patterns, the internal logic, of this depiction.

The 50-day strike of major league baseball in 1981 wasn't some obscure altercation between nameless, faceless owners and workers down in the industrial section of town. Nor was the strike something just between the players and the owners. It was a dispute of phenomenal cultural proportions, with few uninvolved bystanders. Americans cared, and took sides. TV news, talk shows, newspapers and sports

magazines were absorbed in an often angry national drama played out in the middle of baseball summer.

What can we understand from this national debate about baseball workers and baseball employers? What is understood in the relationship between the striking ball players and the owners, the game, and the fans? Who are the winners, the losers, the victims in this struggle? What meaning is attached to the strike? Who gets to strike, and why? What might the problem be: Interrupting the game? Getting too much money? The good guys striking? In other words, what is the grammar of the coverage?

This is an interrogation of print media practices. To discern the content and patterns of coverage, I have analyzed the pages of three major publications—the premier sports magazine *Sports Illustrated* (*SI*), and two leading daily newspapers—the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Boston Globe*. What about the ideals of balance and objectivity? Do we find here a diversity of viewpoint or a harangue? Content analysis is useful for ferreting out what the press had to say, but this doesn't tell us why the press said what it said. For interpretation I turned to the people who penned some of these articles and who understand well the workings of their publications.

Is Graham Murdock (1977, 1980, 1982) correct in his assertion that we need to understand media material interests in order to account for media content? Is there some one-to-one relationship between economic incentives and editorial reflection? Does it matter that *Sports Illustrated* is owned by Time Inc. (now Time-Warner) rather than the Major League Baseball Players Association?

The 1981 Labor Environment

American workers are often faulted for having an incoherent sense of their interests. Some analysts point to the more egalitarian ideology of a new nation built on the ashes of feudalism. Others argue that the media present a consistent anti-labor stance, one which marginalizes individual disputes and particularizes confrontation resulting in the fragmenting of a natural solidarity. Yet others attribute this blurred consciousness to the material successes of the American working class. Since the 1970s, however, the economic situation of American workers no longer compares favorably with that of their counterparts in Western Europe or Japan. The rapid decline in the economic fortunes of American workers in the 1970s coincided with the decline in organized labor. In the 1980 presidential election organized labor endorsed Walter Mondale; the working class cast their votes for Reaganonomics rather than industrial action.

In spite of mass layoffs and labor contract give-backs in the old industrialized section, the biggest labor news of early 1981 came from Poland. American newspapers were awash with sympathetic coverage of Solidarity and the workers struggle against the Communist state. *Los Angeles Times* labor reporter Harry Bernstein's "If We're for the Right to Strike in Poland, Why not Here?" pointed out Reagan's con-

tradictory position toward public sector workers' right to strike. Bernstein was not addressing the baseball strike in progress, but rather was alluding to the aborning dispute between the air traffic controllers and the Reagan government. The labor issue that John Q. Public cared most about was neither that of the Polish workers nor the air traffic controllers, but rather, the brewing battle in major league baseball.

The Strike

On June 12, 1981, after 18 months of intense bargaining, National Labor Relations Board rulings and court adjudications, the Major League Baseball Players Association executive director Marvin Miller announced the walkout of 650 major league ball players. For 50 days sportswriters and fans alike were bogged down in labor relations legalese. The strike turned on the issue of free agent compensation. According to sports labor historian Paul Staudohar (1986: 27):

> Negotiations that ultimately led to the 1981 strike began the previous year with an attempt to reach a new collective bargaining agreement. Under the old agreement the players had solidified their rights to achieve free agency, and the owners were trying to regain greater controls over player mobility. The crux of the dispute was compensation for the lost free agents. The owners reasoned that if they could require teams that signed free agents to compensate teams that lost them by replacement of a good player, this would put a crimp on free agency and moderate salary escalation.

Free Agency and the Reserve Clause

Theoretically, National Labor Relations Board provisions extend to baseball, as they do to other professional sports. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote the 1922 Supreme Court opinion exempting baseball from anti-trust regulations. Other sports never received such special legal status. The ruling protected the so-called "reserve clause" which bound players to their owners in perpetuity. Prior to 1975, once a player signed a contract, he could move to another team when the contract expired only if he was traded or sold. At the expiration of his contract his personal choices were limited—he could renew or retire from the game.

In 1970 player Curt Flood, represented by former Associate Justice Arthur Goldberg, challenged the reserve clause, contending that the reserve clause was illegal and acted to suppress players' salaries. In its 1972 ruling the Supreme Court upheld baseball's immunity from anti-trust for reasons of a fifty-year old precedent. The court based its decision on its "recognition and acceptance of baseball's unique characteristics and needs." This legal challenge cost Curt Flood his career. The "special" legal status of the game was never the same, for the Court actually called attention for a need to change. The ruling provoked more challenge.

In 1975 federal arbitrator Ron Seitz's ruling in favor of players Andy Messersmith and Dave McNally invalidated baseball's reserve clause and established the players' rights to negotiate new contracts freely, the so-called free agency sys-

tem. Just a year later, in the 1976 negotiations, the players signed a four-year contract which limited the free-agent option to players with six years of major league experience. Clubs losing free agents to other teams could be compensated by receiving an amateur draft choice. Owners and players agreed to come back to the bargaining table again in four years to discuss this issue further. Jim Murray's column on the front page of the hefty Sports Section in the *Los Angeles Times* on December 25, 1975:

Ho-Ho-Ho! Santa Leaves Baseball Holding the Bag

Ho-ho-ho! Look what old Santa Clause left under the tree for major league baseball!

And they thought they had been good boys all year long! Kept their noses clean, minded their own business, did what they were told—and now this!

Wrapped in a big box full of string, pieces of coal, tissue paper and old newspapers are a couple of torn contracts signed by John Alexander Messersmith and David Arthur McNally, hereinafter to be known as Bonnie and Clyde or Mack and the Knife.

Here baseball was expecting a shiny new sled or a stocking full of fudge—and it gets the death sentence.

Baseball's reserve clause, that Holy Grail shimmering in the darkness all these many years, lies with its plumes in the dust.

Someone has taken a hammer to that work of art.

The *New York Times* viewed the Seitz ruling differently and said so in its Christmas Day editorial:

Don't Kill the Umpire

Organized baseball is not quite a slave system, as the cliché has it, but its Establishment does suggest the inflexibility of plantation owners on the eve of the Civil War.

. . . Playing a game two or three hours a day for half the year at a rate of $50,000 or better for a performer of only average skill is by no rational measurement a form of slavery. But club owners, who can make fortunes on the sentimental loyalty of baseball fans and then move whole teams from city to city to swell their incomes, are not purely public benefactors either. They are hard-headed businessmen, entitled to exploit their employees no more than other men of commerce. When a decision like Arbitrator Seitz's goes against them, they are not likely to dear themselves to the public by yelling, "Kill the umpire!"

The Seitz ruling drew blood everywhere within the baseball family. The owners fired him. Back in 1972 Al Michaels lost his sportscaster radio job for allowing Curt Flood to discuss his side of the conflict on the air.

Both sides planned their strategies for the 1980 negotiations, and the nation watched. In the 1980 negotiations the owners proposed a modification of the free agency agreement. The players balked, arguing that to agree to this would be to abandon rights gained in court and arbitration. The press saw it this way:

Since baseball's reserve clause was overturned and the free agent re-entry draft began in the mid-1970's, the only compensation a team received has been an amateur draft choice. The owners, how-

ever, say they can no longer live by that system and want major league players as compensation for losing free agent talent. After a player-owner panel was unable to resolve the dispute, the owners unilaterally implemented such a plan last Feb. 19; 10 days later, the players announced they would strike May 29. *Boston Globe.* 6/21/81.

The players contend their freedom of movement from one club to another would be severely curtailed by the owners' plan to "compensate" a team losing a free agent with a major league player instead of an amateur draft choice. To become a free agent, a player must have at least six years' major league experience and have played out his contract. *Boston Globe.* 6/13/81.

The single contractural issue separating the owners and players is compensation for a team losing a free agent. It's a narrow issue affecting relatively few players . . . *Los Angeles Times.* 6/13/81.

A resolution was worked out 50 days later in Washington, with Labor Secretary Ray Donovan sitting in on the negotiations:

The players yielded to two owner demands: that 20% of all major-leaguers could qualify as "premium" free agents requiring professional compensation from the player-proposed pool, and that a team signing a free agent would provide at least one man from its 25-man roster to that pool. The owners had thus junked their long-standing demand for direct compensation, and had adopted a pool concept espoused by the players. *Sports Illustrated.* 8/10/81.

Framing the Strike—Meta-Lenses

Stuart Hall (1975) maintains that the news is first structured by the newspaper according to its own common-sense categories. These categories become "convenient ways of pigeon-holing the data and generate distinctive idioms of their own. By situating an event within one or another of these categories, a newspaper signifies to its readers . . . in what context it is to be understood" (Hall, 1975: 19). Journalistic conventions assign an event to the typical journalistic pegs—hard news, features, editorials, business, sports, etc. Todd Gitlin claims that "[d]ay by day, *normal* organizational procedures define 'the story', identify the protagonists and the issues, and suggest appropriate attitudes toward them" (1980: 4). I understand *normal* organizational procedures to include, to some degree, pre-existing mental constructions about the world, images that predate the event in question which work to frame an event.

Peter Gammons—the senior baseball editor at *Sports Illustrated* today and former veteran sportswriter at the *Boston Globe*, told me that covering a baseball strike presents its own set of problems, "It's different from reporting the Air Traffic Controllers strike, but we're still thinking about issues that are important." True, a baseball strike won't have a devastating impact on the economy. But as was argued throughout the 50 days, a strike may have a devastating effect on the American soul. To make intelligible the coverage of the strike we first need to understand baseball as Americana. David Halberstam offers a good start: (Chieger, 1983: 9)

> It is a sport that a foreigner is least likely to take to. You have to grow up playing it, you have to accept the lore of the bubble-gum card, and believe that if the answer to the Mays-Snider-Mantle question is found, then the universe will be a simpler and more ordered place.

Baseball players walking away from the game and NLRB rulings don't quite fit within our image of the premier national pastime. What is jarring about this image? Frankly, the words business and baseball can't slide off the tongue at the same moment. Ford Frick, former National League President, once remarked: "Baseball is better than any one man. . . . Baseball is a public trust, not merely a money-making industry" (Chieger, 1983: 58). Baseball dwells in a psycho-historical niche inhabited by Paul Bunyan and Johnnie Appleseed. Baseball and business—two different worlds. Emile Durkheim's (1965 [1915]: 55) notions of the *sacred* and the *profane* shed light on this incongruence:

> Since the idea of the sacred is always and everywhere separated from the idea of the profane in the thought of men and since we picture a sort of logical chasm between the two, the mind irresistibly refuses to allow the two corresponding things to be confounded, or even to be merely put in contact with each other; for such a promiscuity, or even too direct a contiguity would contradict too violently the dissociation of these ideas in the mind. . . . The two classes cannot even approach each other and keep their own nature at the same time.

Durkheim doesn't argue that the sacred and the profane mutually repel each other, but rather, that the logical chasm keeps the profane from flooding the sacred. The chasm ensures the continued existence of the *sacred.*

The paradox of a baseball strike is the problem of the tension between these two natures—baseball as the *sacred* (National Pastime) and baseball as the *profane* (Business). According to Durkheim, this mythic sacred is elaborated from within the profane. These two natures are the meta-lenses through which the media depicted the conflict between team owners and major league ball players. Within the discourse of every publication, we see this clashing of images. Each lens reveals its own understanding of the game, the players, the owners, and the fans. During the strike, all the actors—players, owners, negotiators, the media and the fans found themselves engaged in a complex discourse which transcended traditional labor-capital confrontation rhetoric. The players and owners alike were frequently vulnerable to charges of ruining the game, a charge we can only comprehend from the perspective of the sacred.

The Sacred Lens

> I ain't ever had a job. I just always played baseball.
> Satchel Paige (Chieger, 1983: 7)

The National Pastime is a triadic unity of the game, players and fans. The rules and its rituals are finely etched in the mind of the young fan.

The game. The game ends when the rules say it is over, and this has nothing to do with advertising time, or any time other than the seasons of nature. Minor changes in the game, such as AstroTurf or night games in Chicago, bring howls; structural changes, such as the designated hitter, are considered downright heresies. Infidelities court excommunication, as Pete Rose learned. The game evokes an earlier era; it is blatantly nostalgic. It is a celebration of American-ness: flags; the president tossing out the first ball; baseball, hot dogs and apple pie. One fan complained to the *Los Angeles Times* just three days before the conflict was resolved, "If a disposition of the major league baseball strike is not soon struck, the most significant consequence will be 75 million Americans forgetting the lyrics of our National Anthem."

Political commentator George Will argues that "baseball is the institution that most clearly distinguishes life in America from life in the Third World" (*Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 23, 1981). Humorist Art Buckwald, in a June 21 column in the *Los Angeles Times* sees it somewhat similarly:

> Why . . . is baseball so important to the United States? Because . . . it's the American pastime. Since we play it, and hardly anyone else does, it makes us different from any other country on the face of the globe. God has blessed our people with the ability to hit and field a little ball over a vast area, guarded by some of the highest-paid men in sports. When American men refuse to play the game, the entire world could read this as a sign of this country's lack of resolution and fortitude.

Baseball is everywhere—kids in the streets and little league organizations in the park; working folks in company-sponsored leagues; co-ed recreation department leagues; sandlot pick-up games. It's reinforced in "Damn Yankees," "Bull Durham," "The Natural," "The Bad News Bears," and "Field of Dreams." There are booster club outings to far away spring training camps, and even baseball camps for grown-up boys.

The hero. The major league ballplayer is hero, but at the same time he is just the kid-next-door who made it to "the show." The boys of summer are clean-cut, family type men. Babe Ruth might have been a VD-plagued womanizer and carouser, but that was kept out of sight. And who could be a bigger hero in 1989 than cancer-plagued Dave Dravecky, or injury-struck Bo Jackson in 1991? Jersey numbers are set aside forever. The greatest are canonized into the Hall of Fame pantheon of heroes; baseball cards enshrine them for posterity. The Pete Rose gambling crisis was so confusing because the hero Pete has sullied the sacred with his tawdry financial dealings.

The fans. The fans are forever loyal—their destiny linked to that of the game. In 1888 they watched mighty Casey at bat.

> So on that stricken multitude a deathlike silence sat . . .
> But one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed . . .
> But there is no joy in Mudville—mighty Casey has struck out.

Grantland Rice added a few more lines in his 1910 version:

For after Casey fanned that day the citizens all left,
And one by one they sought new lands, heartbroken and bereft,
The joyous shout no more rang out of children at their play,
The village blacksmith closed his shop; the druggist moved away.

Fans go to the ballpark early to catch player autographs. At the park all the spectators participate in the trivia quizzes flashed up on the scoreboard—"Who was on base when Willie McCovey hit his first major league homerun . . .?" The fans included in the show, their names appear up on the scoreboard as special guests. This is not the exclusive pastime of the rich, thanks to the bleachers, and player largess to neighborhood youth groups.

Fan dedication to the game is captured here in a *Globe* letter-to-the-editor 10 days into the strike:

> Connect the electrodes. Maximum voltage. Call a doctor. Send in the clowns . . . I am incurably depressed because of the Major League baseball strike. I am not an ex-player or even a baseball expert. I am simply a fan who can appreciate and will sorely miss a snappy 6-4-3 DP, a perfectly executed hit-and-run and the calculated maneuvering of a veteran manager.
>
> I cannot wait for the strike to end. I'll greet the players with rounds of applause. I'll pay the owners their tribute. I'll be the first in line for tickets. McNally/Messersmith, artificial turf and the insidious DH rule cannot diminish the charm, tradition and holiday atmosphere of a trip to a major league ballpark. The players and owners are part of an industry built around a game, beautiful in its simplicity, infinite in its possibilities and overflowing with folklore . . .
>
> Steinbrenner, Grebey, Miller and Winfield *et al.*, will continue to wallow in pay dirt only because of people like me who will pay to see a game that is simply bigger than all of them.

The owners. They occupy but a small niche in the mythic representation. They're somehow superfluous. The ritual holds the whole thing together. The history books set them off in bad light from the beginning. Exactly *how* the owners are criticized—and why—is important for this study of labor-capital relations. Money is absent from the National Pastime milieu.

The Commissioner. The Commissioner of Baseball is actually in the employ of the club owners. In the National Pastime his role is to stand above the fray and, like the non-partisan umpires, protect the rules of baseball which somehow come from on high.

The Profane Lens

Is baseball a business? If it isn't, General Motors is a sport.
Jim Murray, *Los Angeles Times* sports columnist

Money is the orienting image of the Business lens. If the owners have a diminished presence in the sacred, they command center stage in the profane. Baseball is not just an escapist summer pastime. It is a multi-million dollar entertainment industry. George Steinbrenner, Gene Autry, Bob Lurie, Ted Turner and Peter O'Malley are not faceless venture capitalists. The owners are depicted as having the

responsibilities most critical to baseball—dealing with players and agents, wrangling with city officials over ballparks, negotiating deals with the media, arranging relations with the public. The club owners are not just individual entrepreneurs; they have their own organization to deal with the player problems—labor relations problems—the Player Relations Committee. Negotiator Ray Grebey handled the labor problems. Bowie Kuhn, the **Commissioner of Baseball**, was responsible for the collective business of baseball, managing, if you will, the cartel. The Commissioner is the owners' man, but not any particular owner's man.

The **players**, from the Business perspective, are commodities. They are bought, sold, traded, put on the "out-of-order" list. Or they're highly paid super-stars, like Kevin Costner or Arnold Schwarzegger. A player is measured against his drawing ability. Fernando Valenzuela's greatest contribution to baseball was not his pitching *per se*. It was the millions of Spanish speaking fans he attracted in the United States, and the Spanish language programs the Dodgers produced and *sold to* Mexican radio and TV. Valenzuela is long gone from the Dodgers, but the Mexican radio contracts are still in effect. The players are more entangled in legalese than in ball-hitting and base-running. In front of the clean-cut kid is his highly remunerated business agent.

The game is a simple nine innings in the sacred. In the profane it is a media extravaganza—pre-game and post-game shows, commercials. It is the key link in a complex industry of souvenir manufacturers, hot dog vendors, charter bus lines, stadium workers, media profits and losses. The World Series is good for business.

The fans are pure consumers, ticket buyers, gate proceeds. Attendance statistics only mean money taken in. If the fans get mad they'll spend their dollars elsewhere.

The Print Media

Sports Illustrated (*SI*), the premier sports fan magazine, presents an interesting set of questions. First is the relationship of the magazine to its parent corporation, Time Inc., an organization known for its pro-business orientation. Will this Time Inc. labor posture be evident in *SI*? What about *Sports Illustrated*'s material interests? A considerable portion of the weekly publication during baseball season is dedicated to major league baseball. Would the threat of loss of advertising and over-the-counter sales prompt the magazine to lobby against the strike, to criticize the striking players? *Sports Illustrated* is a fan magazine. How does it represent the fans, their interests, their feelings?

The *Los Angeles Times* is the largest American newspaper (million plus circulation) with both a significant sports section, a hometown team, and a full time labor reporter known to be pro-labor. This in itself is interesting, considering the paper's historic hostility to labor unions. Given this odd combination, will the *Times* coverage include anti-player editorials and pro-player labor columns? Los Angeles is the

entertainment capital of America. Is baseball "the show" or merely one of many possible money-making shows?

The *Boston Globe* cannot compete with the *Times'* financial position or circulation. While it is the major paper of New England, its claim to fame in 1981 may well have been its premier baseball writer Peter Gammons. And, as Steve Wulf of *Sports Illustrated* reminded us in 1981, no baseball team is so dearly loved as the Red Sox: "The Yankees belong to George Steinbrenner and the Dodgers belong to Manifest Destiny, but the Red Sox, more than any other team, belong to the fans." If the Dodgers belong to Hollywood, the Sox are the only show in Boston during the summer. And unlike their colleagues at the *Times*, the *Globe* writers belong to the Newspaper Guild.

In all three publications I pay particular attention to the coherence of presentation throughout the paper at any one time, and throughout the entire strike. Does the publication appear to take a position, and does this position remain constant throughout the strike? How do we understand the interplay between the baseball as National Pastime and baseball as Business? How can we understand each depiction in relation to the larger orientation of the publication?

Stuart Hall (1975: 11–12) cautions us to look for core values and on-going relationships, arguing that these direct the framing of the news.

> Newspapers do not come absolutely fresh and open to news. They are already in a complex relationship with a body of regular readers. There is already in existence a strong, continuous practice which, by traditions and routines, defines what constitutes 'news', how to get it, how it should be presented, which is the hottest story. Individual items fit in with the longer preoccupations of a newspaper, and these preoccupations differ from one paper to another. Are there core values in a newspaper which provide its staff and its readers with coherent, if not consistent, scheme of interpretation?

In this paper I seek out moments of these continuous practices, preoccupations, and core values.

Sports Illustrated: Heart of the National Pastime

The *Sports Illustrated* (*SI*) format is standard: photo cover, published letter, Scorecard (brief news items), feature stories, game rundowns and statistics, 19th Hole (letters to the editor). The cover of the first strike Issue (June 22nd) set the frame:

THE WALKOUT THE OWNERS PROVOKED

The weekly publisher's letter talked of golf, sailing, but no talk of the strike in this or in any of the six other strike issues. The publisher was to remain silent on the strike through the entire conflict. In the lead Scorecard column, Jerry Kirshenbaum penned a scathing attack of the owners in the first strike issue:

> Over the years the lords of baseball have been treated as special characters by the U.S. Supreme Court (which granted them an exemption from antitrust laws), . . . The owners have been indulged by their players. . . . [I]t was the players' refusal to grant their bosses yet another whopping concession—

not, as popularly believed, the other way around—that led to last week's unprecedented midseason strike.

It is the owners, the lords of baseball, the bosses, who are desecrating baseball. When confronting the details of the strike *SI* accuses the courts, politicians and Commissioner Kuhn of somehow being the puppets of the owners. *SI* expects the Commissioner not to function as an emissary or functionary of the club owners, but rather as an independent umpire. The Jim Kaplan feature in this first strike issue established what was at stake:

> This is a struggle in which the workers fought to preserve the status quo and avoid a strike, while the bosses sought radical change and courted a walkout . . . The issue wasn't just high salaries: it was freedom . . . The players felt the owners were asking them to compromise a right as basic as free speech.

To reaffirm its image of the owners as money-grubbing bosses lacking the appropriate baseball integrity, *SI* ran an eleven-page exposé of unscrupulous American recruiting practices in Latin America in "HEY KID, WANNA BE A STAR?" [7/20/81].

Sports Illustrated does not include in its consideration the general business environment; it doesn't situate this strike in some larger discourse of management-labor relations. Neither do we read about high salaries, fancy lifestyles. In fact, *SI* attempts to isolate baseball from this environment unless pushed to the wall. If player salaries have to be mentioned, *SI* doesn't use Dave Winfield's exceptional $1 million annual salary as the norm.

> It may strain credulity to suggest that some players now face financial hardship, but it may also be true. "Some of these guys will be broke in a month," said Giants Manager Frank Robinson. The lowest-paid Ranger, Dan Duran, who makes the major league minimum of $32,500 . . . [6/22/81]

Sports Illustrated never condemns the striking players. Every week it offers fans the same message—the baseball players are clean cut guys, hard working, loyal-to-the-game. One of the six strike issues features a photo cover of Tom Seaver and the headline "HEY, BASEBALL FANS, NEED A QUICK FIX? WANT A LITTLE INSTANT NOSTALGIA? WE BRING YOU TOM SEAVER . . . STILL TERRIFIC AFTER ALL THESE YEARS" with a five page article on Tom and his family; another cover and feature focus in on the marvelous Brett baseball clan (including dad). Players are seen visiting kids in hospitals, and otherwise wishing the strike would end. In its interview with oldtimers from the Negro League, it reminds readers that baseball should not be business, quoting one oldtimer as saying "[B]aseball was our love; now it's business" [7/6/81]. The critique is directed at the owners.

Midway through the strike *SI* favorably presents the possibility of a player-owned league, similar to the old Federal League of 1914. *Sports Illustrated* interviews Marvin Miller, the Player's Association executive director, who reveals the popularity of the idea among players and notes that many players would be free to enter into such a new arrangement at the end of the 1981 season. *Sports Illustrated*

doesn't reject this player-owned league concept, and suggests that it would be popular among the fans: "There seems little doubt that a strike-born league could have considerable fan appeal" [7/13/81]. *SI* even offers as precedent Hollywood stars Pickford, Fairbanks and Chaplin walking out of big studios, forming United Artists, and the birth of the *New York Review of Books* in the 1962 New York newspaper walkout. Freed of all the commercial arrangements the owners have tacked on to the show, this new worker-owned league gives hope for a purer game, *SI* claims.

While *Sports Illustrated* occasionally acknowledges fan hurt, it downplays fan resentment and does not report on fan defection. The family of fan and sport remain united to the player.

The 19th Hole letters-to-the-editor column includes letters from players to fans explaining the strike, and offering personal details about their own salary situations to counter the lingering fan impression that all baseball players are filthy rich. *SI* takes care to note that baseball economics treats the fans well:

> Cloaking their concern over salaries the owners said their objective was to preserve baseball's "competitive balance." Actually, the balance of power had improved; and judging from recent attendance and television contracts, the same was true of the teams' incomes. The fans' who are often described as "victimized" by high player salaries, were doing just fine, too. The average ticket price of $4.53 was the lowest in major sport. [6/22/81]

From the beginning of the strike until its resolution, *SI* presents a consistent interpretation: the player is in baseball for the love of the game, not big money. The owners are never depicted in a favorable light. They are never acknowledged as individuals who struggle to get a decent park, or develop fan relations. They are only mentioned in relation to the conflict of the strike, or in behaviors antithetical to the moral standards of baseball. They create problems by their cutthroat treatment of each other and the players, cheat youngsters south of the border. Politicians, and Commissioner Bowie Kuhn aren't much better—in collusion with the greedy owners.

The players appear individually defenseless, but are able to hang together collectively and protect their God-given American rights of freedom. Player business agents are left out of this picture too. When forced to examine the strike at the material level, the players are depicted as oppressed workers seeking freedom. I sense that *SI* would rather not be forced into this discourse, and works to keep as aloof from it as possible. This frame is comprehensible only by viewing baseball as the sacred. We see the classic populist notion of the greedy bosses and the innocent little guy in the meta-orientation which otherwise transcends the profane. And what do we make of the endorsement of a player-owner league? In an interesting way we might understand this as the player-heroes uniting to preserve the collectivity of the sacred.

The *Los Angeles Times:* Publication of the Profane

Nobody ever said labor relations in major league baseball bear more than a faint resemblance to the familiar problems of workers and management in the rest of the world of work.
Harry Bernstein, Labor Reporter. 8/24/81

Los Angeles loves its team; the Dodgers, then and now, enjoy the highest attendance in baseball. *Sports Illustrated* claims the Dodgers had the most to lose from the strike [6/22/81]. Ten months before the walkout labor reporter Harry Bernstein filed one story on the "curious labor-management" confrontation. The front page off-lead story sets one of the themes which was to remain central in the *Times* framing of the strike, a perspective which juxtaposed fan to both players and owners:

The average spectator may find it hard to choose the good guys in a fight involving relatively wealthy, astonishingly healthy, seemingly happy, highly skilled and very famous workers going up against very rich, mostly healthy, seemingly content capitalists who run the nation's only unregulated corporate monopoly. [8/4/80]

Bernstein then offers an oddly put critique of the owners intermingled with praise of the union and Miller:

The owners are almost certain to ask the union to help figure out some way for management to hold down wages, saying the individually negotiated salaries are becoming ridiculous. But Miller will indignantly refuse and accuse the capitalist owners of not-believing in free enterprise by pleading with the union to help prevent the owners from overpaying the workers. The union under Miller has generated more loyalty to it than any other union in America. Every player belongs voluntarily.

Bernstein continues his analysis of the economics:

Player salaries have gone up hundreds of percentage points since Miller came along, "but the players didn't get that by threatening to join one another in strike," Miller said . . . The salaries are decided by the owner, and except where he makes a monumental error, the owner has made a conscious economic decision that he will be better off paying this or that salary to a player without any pressure of a strike by the team.

To Bernstein, then, while the fans are the real injured party, the offending party is the club management. This is, indeed, expected language from an acknowledged labor sympathizer. But we don't hear from Bernstein again until *after* the strike is settled. For thirteen months, from August 4, 1980 to August 24, 1981 no *Times* labor reporter covered the strike. It ceased to be a Bernstein assignment and was covered solely by the Sports Section. In a post-strike Sports Section analysis of the dispute Bernstein reiterates his earlier point: "Owners Are Asking Players to Restrain Owners." [8/24/81]

On June 11, 1981, a day *before* the walkout, the Sports Section ran a *Washington Post* special somewhat reminiscent of the tone and message of *SI* coverage: "Shed No Tears for the Poor Owners," a hefty swat at the lords of baseball, [who] tell us they have in mind only preserving the game for the fans, . . . operating a 'public

trust'." The owners are trying to hide their material interests in the game, trying to manipulate the poor loyal fans. In defense of the players:

> One needs ask only a handful of elementary questions to discover that the commish [Bowie Kuhn] is being hyperbolic to a fault. He made a transparent appeal to the widely accepted and grossly unfair idea that money-hungry professional athletes are the destroyers of the games the fans love so much and the kindly benevolent owners take such loving care of.

Once Marvin Miller called the walkout on June 12th the *Times* rhetoric changed. The June 13th Sports Section carried a six column wide cartoon:

> **THE BOYS OF SUMMER: Friday's baseball strike left both sides in the midst of a tug of war over the free agent compensation issue—and both sides falling fairly flat in the eyes of the public.**

Other headlines on the front page of the Sports section:

STRIKE: An Analysis/Baseball has wide rift over a narrow issue

STRIKE: Angels' Reaction/Autry plans to ride this one out

STRIKE: Dodgers' Reaction/Flight to L.A. leaves without team

STRIKE: Fans' Reaction/Benched public tees off with hard hits on both sides

STRIKE: Money/The owners aren't losing—nor are they getting rich

STRIKE: TV and Radio/Little bit of everything to fill the void on the air

Owner Peter O'Malley is interviewed. Owner Gene Autry is interviewed. Fans are interviewed. Media managers are interviewed. Player Relations Committee Negotiator Grebey is interviewed. Not interviewed is Player Association Executive Director Marvin Miller. The only player interviewed during the strike was Davey Lopes, who complained about the Players Association. Unlike *SI*, the *Times* ignored the idled players. One exception was Scott Ostler's "**Work Offered**"—he jabs the players for not wanting menial jobs. The message is clear—if John Q. Public can perform menial jobs, why not Dave Winfield?

Ostler summarizes what appears to be the *Los Angeles Times* perspective on baseball economics:

> We've been conditioned by our economic traditions. We expect owners to be rich because they own, and we expect players not to be rich because they play. But the players *are* rich, or at least they're doing well enough to decline menial jobs.

This resentment against the well-pair workers is a steady theme in Ostler's column, setting fan against player.

The *Times* utilizes the imagery of the sacred to support its primary conception—baseball as business. Baseball is entertainment business. The *Times* didn't substitute

little league and minor league ball for the majors on strike, although it did bring back replays of the good old days of baseball, old series games, old rivalries.

Owners (through their stubbornness) and players (through their greed) have deserted the game. Only the fans remain true. And even that relationship is fragile. Fans are depicted at times as ever-loyal, at times as angered consumers off to spend their dollars elsewhere. Unlike the coverage in *SI*, player defection or possible defection receives considerable play. The *Times* finds no parallels between the plight of the baseball worker and John Q. Public worker.

The game included, of course, the fans. The *Times* dedicated much of its attention throughout the 50 days to the poor fan, the primary loser in the strike. On this first day of reporting, staff writer Joanne Cubran interviewed benched fans whose anger is directed primarily at the players. "I'm 100% behind the owners; I have no sympathy for the poor little rich boys. The longer they strike, the more I'll care less about baseball. As usual, it's the fan who loses again." But the owners did not escape criticism: "I'm glad it's here; the owners and players both deserve it. They are all too greedy." Baseball belongs to the fans: "They shouldn't mess up the public's life because they're upset and can't work out their problems." Of the 13 people interviewed, only an Alhambra policeman sympathized with the players" "[the players] have a legitimate gripe . . . [he is] glad to see them united and standing up for what they believe. The owners think they can buy the players' lives."

During the length of the strike the sole pro-player sentiment expressed in the *Times* was that of the Alhambra policeman in that first fan interview. The players were accused of ruining the National Pastime. Early in the strike (June 15th) the paper launched the first of many criticisms of the self-centered, money-grubbing ball players, utilizing the imagery of the sacred, as we see in the *Times* sportswriter Steve Harvey's Op-Ed rendition of the sacred "Casey at the Bat":

Casey at the Bank

From 5,000 throats or more there rose a lusty yell.
It rambled through the valley, it echoed in the dell;
It knocked upon the mountain, and it sailed beyond the bay;
Casey, the mighty players' rep, had come to have his say.

Management wound its pitch, sent it hurtling through the air;
Casey simply studied it in haughty grandeur there.
Fingering his gold chains, he slowly shook his head,
"No compensation," he declared. "Let's strike!" his agent said.

Now Casey's face grows stern and cold, and all his muscles strain.
The crowd can see him totaling some figures in his brain.
Now Casey kicks the table with his shoes of alligator,
And swings with cruel violence his pocket calculator.
[For the complete version see the Appendix]

To support the critique of the players, old time ballplayer Satchel Paige's voice is called up: "If they keep this up they're gonna get the public against them." The

Times recalls baseball history differently than does *Sports Illustrated*, reminding fans of former pitcher Rip Sewell's successful efforts to forestall a baseball strike in 1946 and his role in the collapse of the Players Guild. **"A Strike Was Called; Rip Sewell Balked/the Owners Were Grateful, but in the End They Didn't Need Him"** [7/23/81]. Sewell chastises the players today, saying they are just as stupid as the players in '46. These flashbacks do not support player autonomy.

Sports columnist Jim Murray's recognition of baseball as business remained the primary theme in the *Times* coverage—"The Owners aren't Losing–Nor Are they Getting Rich," "An Empty Ballpark Costs Stadium Jobs," and "There is No Joy in Mudville, the Golden Goose Has Struck Out," "The Strike's Effect/There's No Loss for Words, Just Money, in the Cities."

The owners aren't lauded, but they have a voice in the paper. In every article on the negotiation details, Ray Grebey, the owners representative, receives more attention than does Marvin Miller of the Players Association. The *Times* never dedicates a single article to the player concerns. The *Times* wants baseball back in the park, and criticizes the owners as well. As the strike nears the end of July the paper ups its pressure. July 24—"Miller: Owners don't want to settle/Mediator says it looks 'worse than ever . . . bad, really bad'"; July 24 photo—"Play Ball"; July 25—cartoon: "1981 Players Strike, 1982 Fans Strike"; July 27 editorial—"The people to whom our greatest sympathy goes in this dark time for American sports are not the owners, the players or even the bookies, but the ever-faithful, long-suffering and too-long-taken-for-granted fans."

The strike was settled on August 1st. Even though the show had resumed, the *Times* continues to report anger. **"Strike: The Fans/Forgive, Forget? Most Say No Way"**, and **"Reopening Day is a Time for Fans to Strike Back at Baseball."** What is surprising is the August 2nd story: **"All Along the Players Were More Flexible/ And Somehow Certain Owners Got the Idea They could Wait for the Union to Cave In."** Sportswriter Mark Heisler argues that from the beginning the players were "the more reasonable party in this."

How should the fan understand the strike? According to the *Los Angeles Times*:

> For reasons that are basically emotional, America is never going to warm up to a union of well-to-do baseball players, no matter how rare their skills or how limited their careers or how much revenue they can generate. The sight of a player's Maserati parked in front of the airport Marriott for last week's union meeting in Los Angeles is just not anything that guys walking high girders in hard hats can relate to all that directly. . . . [Y]ou have to figure out who this game belongs to. Baseball may be made up of players, but they're only hired on. It may belong morally to the fans, but it belongs, in fact, to the owners.

The players might have been more reasonable, but the fans have learned from the *Times* that the players do not deserve fan support; the players are just too rich.

The meaning of the strike: Sportswriter Mike Littwin assures us it is a "narrow issue, meaningless . . . affecting relatively few players and doesn't seem to many sufficiently important to warrant a strike." He agrees that compensation for a free agent is the declared strike issue, but that "it goes beyond that to whose philoso-

phy—player or owner—will prevail". Littwin doesn't elaborate; or rather, he does not give us a sense of the two philosophies at contest. He informs us, deep into the story, "some owners appear determined to have a victory over Miller and over the players, apparently at any cost." Unlike labor reporter Bernstein's observation thirteen months earlier, Littwin doesn't explicate the curious relationship between the players, union, and owners. It may well be that the sportswriter doesn't have the technical labor relations knowhow.

The *Boston Globe*: The Sacred Dipped in the Profane

A WORTHY STRIKE

> We get so used to thinking of baseball as an escapist summer pastime that it is easy to forget that it is not "just a game," but a multimillion dollar entertainment business that consumes large quantities of specialized human skills that take years to develop and constant work to maintain.

This is the *Globe* editorial a day after the walkout. Baseball as business, right from the beginning, but the *Globe* poses a different framing of this business arrangement—concern about worker skills. We fans dearly love baseball, but we are also economic actors and have to remember the larger picture:

> The baseball strike may be hard to explain to a 12-year-old who has saved up the paper money to buy box seats for Father's Day, but it should not be hard to understand for any adult who believes that employers should not have coercive powers over their employees. . . . Players are active for a limited number of years, a span often shortened even further by injury, loss of skills or bad management. They have a right to guard against limitations on their earning power, just as they have the right to share, through large salaries, in their drawing power at the gate.

This isn't the only labor issue in Boston. Boston's Proposition 2 1/2 brought budget cuts and layoffs to city workers. Carpenters, fire fighters and ball players are on strike, and facing the same problems.

The *Globe* editors disagree with *Times* writers Mark Heisler's and Scott Ostler's arguments that fans wouldn't sympathize with the players. The *Times* Sports Section writers did not raise the labor relations issues the *Globe* had raised, nor did they indicate that the fan had anything in common with the economic situation of the striking ballplayers.

This wasn't the only difference in the *Globe* reporting of the strike. The *Globe* ran more than 200 stories and cartoons on the major league game, the players, and the strike. The editors opined four times—each time they pointed to the owners as the source of the problem and identified the players and fans as the victims. The *Times* seem to have had other journalistic priorities; the paper dedicated 64 stories and cartoons and a daily two column inch box summary of negotiations.

Another dramatic contrast was the depiction of the players. While the *Times* depicted players as highly paid prima donnas, the *Globe* presented them as heroes caught in a bind. Boston fans were kept in daily touch with their team, with stories such as the one filed by Peter Gammons on July 2nd.

BILL CAMPBELLL—He recently appeared on a Revere TV cable show to make a pitch on behalf of the Boy Scouts . . .

STEVE CRAWFORD—He was forced to give up his Salem apartment and return to his own home in Salina, Okla.; because he was financially strapped, and if the strike hasn't ended in a week he'll start looking for a job . . .

DWIGHT EVANS—. . . He'll participate in the Jimmy Fund Golf tournament on July 14 . . .

FRANK TANANA—He's participated in several charity golf tournaments and has spoken at numerous Little League gatherings.

The same type of coverage we saw in *SI*, but even more of it—every day some human interest story. The heroes of an earlier era weren't forgotten either. Reaching back nearly 100 years into baseball history the *Globe* recalls the first major leaguers attempt to form a player owned league—the Brotherhood League. "**He started it all: Ward led the 1890 revolt.**" Unlike the *Times* account of the "catastrophic" 1946 Players Guild, and the lessons learned from the "foolish effort," the *Globe* recounts the solidarity of player-trade unions-skilled working men. "**Hall of Famer Charlie Comiskey and Connie Mack joined the revolt**" [6/21/81]. Not content to accept either Grebey or Miller as sole spokesmen for the two sides, the *Globe* interviewed the players themselves. Columnist Ernie Roberts relayed Red Sox icon Carl Yaztrzemski's opinions on owners' offers. Says Yaz,

If they [the owners] would open the books and show us and say, "Look, we're losing money and we can't survive," I'd go back tomorrow. I'm sure every player out there would. But no other way . . . What they're trying to do is just break us. That's the whole thing. They're not going to accept anything short of us going back and agreeing to the reserve system of the 1930's.

The owners aren't to be trusted, we understand from the headlines: "[Player] **Reps cite 'broken' promise/No owners' plan; talks resume today**" [7/16/81]. Baseball players get hurt, and lose their livelihoods and the opportunity to play the game. As if to justify the high salaries these superstars were earning the *Globe* addressed another set of player concerns—player injuries. "**They gave their bodies and they're still paying for it,**" and a large shadow photo of athlete on crutches [6/21/81]; "**Injuries lose out to desire**" [6/22/81]/

What about the game itself? It's not just the major leagues that are important. The *Globe* covered regional ball at Cape Cod and little league around town. It reveled in the old glories of the 1975 season. The *Times* covered the major leagues show, or no baseball. I told Peter Gammons, the *Globe* baseball writer, that the *Times* just switched its coverage to other sports. Gammons responded, "You could never do that in Boston, because people are fascinated by baseball all the time." Gammons points to what may be the central issue: the perceived relationship between the newspaper and the fans.

The June 26th editorial "The Baseball Strike" reflects the dominant *Globe* theme, the depressed fan:

The garden is weeded, the hedges are trimmed, the tomatoes are staked, the lawn is impeccably manicured. The dripping faucet is cured . . . the records have been arranged in alphabetical order and the books rearranged chronologically by author's birth date.

She wonders what on earth has gotten him. He spends Saturdays at the hardware store and Sundays making lists of what is to be done next. They have been to the movies and the museum, out to dinner . . .

Of course, he has had occasional lapses, at times he seems listless and depressed . . . in his sleep . . . he was mumbling something about free agent multi-year contracts and peanuts and crackerjacks. The name Moffett kept coming up. Could it be anything to worry about?

Sportswriter Leigh Montville sharpens the image. In "Baseball strikes at our hearts" he tells us what the "real issues" in life are:

It is a terrible realization that has arrived. I miss baseball a lot . . . How does baseball affect my life? . . . Baseball is no more than a bon-bon of life. Talk to me about important strikes . . . coal miners and air traffic controllers . . . Talk to me about strikes that will affect my life directly.

I was wrong. The baseball strike does affect my life directly. I miss the game as soon as my day begins. The morning newspaper suddenly is a bore. Israel bombs the Arabs. The Arabs bomb Israel. Five die in late-night pile-up. Movie opens to mixed reviews. Chinese restaurant given three stars. I somehow know all that already.

I want the scores from the coast. . . . I miss the sight of my nine-year-old son, just becoming interested in the game, being devastated almost to tears by a Red Sox loss. . . . The sports page is a meal without a main course. [6/21/81]

The *Globe* knows fans have other reactions: **"For the fans it's a shutout"; "The fans are seeing red"; "They talk while fans interest dwindles"; "The fans: for some, end came a little too late; others are already at ticket window"; "Baseball makes a comeback, but this skeptic may stay away."** While fan letters to the editor reveal some of the anti-player resentment expressed by the *Times* sportswriters, this resentment rarely surfaced in the *Globe* stories. And fans were depicted enjoying minor league ball up at the Cape.

During the 50-day strike the *Globe* only ran one article which linked the strike to loss of revenues. The July 3rd front page article **"Boston Business . . . Yer Out! ($6 Million)"** was followed by an editorial a few days later urging resolution of the strike. This marked a slight frame shift:

In any prolonged labor dispute, both sides are convinced of moral superiority and ultimate victory. Neither the players nor the owners plan to yield. In this strike, the owners should yield. . . . Baseball players are hardly charity cases. In four years, their salaries have risen from an annual average of $52,000 to $175,000, a figure that is surely a subterranean issue in the dispute. Who distorted the market with these wages? . . . A few rambunctious owners—George Steinbrenner . . . Ted Turner . . . Gene Autry . . . were unable to exercise restraint, so the owners' response is to restrain the rights of the players.

We don't see the *Sports Illustrated* "coercive power of the employers" labor-capital rhetoric. Nonetheless, the owners remain culpable; it was their greed that caused the problem in the first place. But the *Globe* did not discuss the economic impact of the strike on Boston business again until after the strike was resolved. "Business people suffered big losses" [8/1/81].

The *Globe*'s frame then is a mixture of the sacred and the profane. Baseball is an entertainment industry, and the players are workers, just like other Americans. The rules of fair play, whatever they might be, apply here. What's the problem here? Is it that the owners brought this on themselves (and the fans) by paying the workers too much? (They should keep the wage level down?) Or, are baseball players really entitled to this much money? Or, is this a question of worker rights to demand a equitable share of the fruits of their labor? The Op-Ed section is replete with baseball nostalgia pieces, stories which, for the most part, remind the fan of the charm of baseball. In this profane world view capitalism has a mythic quality. As we will see, this romantic notion of the free enterprise system leads the *Globe* to condemn the owners. Utilizing the *clear-cut* rules of the free enterprise system, democratic sportsmanship, the writer-umpires throw the owners out of the game. The writers seem to believe Boston wants the pure National Pastime at all costs. Or is it just that the *Globe* owners and reporters have some long-standing beef with the Boston Red Sox owners, or the Yankee's free-spending owner George Steinbrenner? Their pro-player stance may well be a fluke, not standard *Globe* coverage—the football team owners weren't pilloried in the '82 strike. Again, making money is not at issue; the problem is violating the rules.

The Logic of the Practices: Is There One?

The depiction of baseball labor is clearly not as straightforward as I had originally anticipated. Baseball historian Charles Korr sees the Bernstein claim that baseball players and the average American worker have nothing in common was the standard media fare during the strike in 1981. But we know that within American newspapers pro-labor rhetoric is indeed a possibility.

The *Los Angeles Times* was one of the few newspapers in the United States to have a full-time labor reporter. The most enigmatic aspect of the *Times* coverage is the silence of Bernstein once the ballplayers walked off the field. Michael Schudson (1982) argues that the ideological orientations of individual journalists or owners may have some bearing in determining content, but he urges us to understand news production as centrally determined by journalistic conventions and routines, by the structure of newspaper organization and practices. What is the role of a daily labor reporter if he doesn't comment on the most important worker strike in the country? Why was the biggest labor story of the year assigned to the Sports Section? To understand the logic and practices of the *Times* I interviewed Harry Bernstein (then the daily labor reporter and now a weekly columnist) and Henry Weinstein (then a general reporter and now the full-time labor reporter). I asked Bernstein if the sportswriters ignored the labor issues because they lacked the technical labor relations knowhow. The inherent problem in having a specialist (beat reporter) cover labor issues, said Bernstein:

My unhappiness would come with somebody covering an industry, especially concerned only with the managerial problems of the industry, the question of reporting on labor-management relations. It's sometimes more difficult for them to be as objective as I think they should be.

The strike was pegged as Sports and it remained primarily in the Sports jurisdiction. That's standard practice, Bernstein explains:

Once it's started in that fashion, that is, it is being handled in Sports or Entertainment for Hollywood stories, it just goes along as a matter of course. I don't try in the middle of it to take it over. Now, that's not limited, if this is any interest to you, to Sports, Education or Entertainment.

Times reporter Henry Weinstein notes that the charge of the Sports Section is narrow. Sportswriters don't write about labor and sports, or drugs and athletes. "Even though the *Times* has a large Sports section, no writer covered the cocaine issue. We use wire services for stories we don't want to follow closely." Sportswriters write about the game, and how the athletes play it, the scores, the trades. Furthermore, "the *Times* does not run baseball (or any sports story) out of Sports unless Dodgers win the Series." What we don't know is why the *Times* has structured the sports peg so narrowly. Henry Weinstein wasn't surprised at the slanted coverage of the strike; "The Sports people have a certain mentality which limits their focus, they are not sympathetic to players, they are "in close" with Dodger management." Berstein sees this the result of writers working too close to the management of industry, to the on-going source of their stories. Weinstein was very dissatisfied with the *Times* coverage of the strike. I asked him why Bernstein didn't do more on the strike. "Personal interest," Weinstein said. "Bernstein isn't interested in sports. Players make a lot of money. Bernstein covers 'industry'." But Weinstein also refers to the conventions of journalism. "At the newspaper on lots of topics, the idea is to do a big 'thumb-sucker' sort of story, and you've sort of done it and then the people who have specialized beats, the ideology people, take over."

A. Kent MacDougall (1989), a *Times* Business Section columnist for over a decade [1977–1987], would understand the paper's pro-owner position, or rather, anti-player position, as being the result of something larger than the personal and individual relationships the Sports Section editors with Dodger management and journalistic conventions:

The *Los Angeles Times* was a right-wing rag . . . But by 1977, [it] had emerged from its disreputable past to become a serious, nationally respected paper. . . . It was still *institutionally* [italics added] oriented. But at least it was no longer in bed with advertisers, real estate developers, and politicians.

MacDougall's concerns for the *Times*'s institutional orientation echoes Bernstein's complaint about the beat reporter's tendency to rely on management sources and thus privilege those viewpoints. According to Schudson, conventions work to produce a certain kind of journalism, a certain perspective, including the institutional bias MacDougall is concerned about. We need to account for *SI* and the *Globe*, by this view the anomalies.

What do we make of the *Globe* coverage? Certainly, as baseball historian Charles Korr reminded me, this was not the mainstream approach. The *Globe* coverage does not reflect one type of institutional bias MacDougall is concerned about. In fact, the *Globe*, unlike *SI* or the *Los Angeles Times*, touches all the bases—team owners, management negotiator, players negotiator, team captains, individual players, old timers, fans of all persuasions. This is the balance that journalists always claim they seek but rarely do. But, in spite of the balance, there is one clear dominant interpretation of the event, a preferred interpretation. The balance of sources does not result in a balance of opinions from the paper itself—the editorial page sounds just like the sports page.

The *Los Angeles Times* and *Sports Illustrated* didn't bother with securing a balanced view of the strike, relying primarily on management views (*Times*) or player views (*SI*). The *Globe* did talk to a broader spectrum of "the interested," but the "preferred reading," as Stuart Hall would call it, was clearly pro-player. Gammons *et al.* reported what the owners had to say, but also listened to what the Players Association had to say. They believed the Players Association, they believed the individual Red Sox players, and reported their perspective on the strike. What about *SI*? Once we acknowledge the *Sports Illustrated* economic basis (making money off hero worship), and recognize the *sacred* frame from which it covers baseball, its coverage makes sense. But the publisher must, within the logic of the publication, either endorse the rhetoric or remain silent. He chose silence.

Nina Eliasoph (1988), in a study of the Berkeley, Calif. oppositional Pacifica Radio station KPFA, maintains that media analysts, in their attempts to account for the structuring of content, have erroneously detached journalistic conventions and routines from the overarching belief structure of the editorial board. The analysts ignore what Dan Hallin refers to as the "structures of consciousness" driving these conventions. Do we then understand the *Sports Illustrated* caustic rhetoric directed at the lords of baseball as an attack on the capitalist system? Do these writers believe this stuff they write?

We see in the case of the *Boston Globe* how journalist ideological perspectives and routines intersect. Gammons claims the *Globe* presented a balanced position:

> I'm not a liberal at any cause, I voted for Reagan and Bush; I guess I'm more of a libertarian than anything else. I try to keep my political beliefs out of it, but there were a lot of things involved in the owner-management relationship that went on that were unfairly reported in a lot of cases. Teams [owners] can always get public opinion on its side. . . . If you don't present them the way management thinks you should present them you're considered to be very anti-management. I always try to tread the line.

> I can remember talking to people and making the argument . . . We don't have access to the books, we don't really know, we don't know all the tax write-offs, the marketplace is supposed to present a figure, and the owners are trying to rig the marketplace and this isn't fair. . . . And they have continually tried to rig right down to this business of this computer bank . . .[a 1988 issue]. . . This is outrageously illegal.

According to Gammons, the *Globe* writers did not trust the owners. They consistently violated what Gammons holds sacred:

> . . . Everything has to be legal and above board according to the playing rules of American free enterprise, and the owners have a tendency to go the opposite way. . . . [I]t is immoral and illegal for owners to be colluding and . . . there are such extremes in the way they view the marketplace and American labor, and I really think that part of it is that owners love to go to parties and tell people "Well, I told this guy, ya know, that I told Dave Winfield he's got to get down on his knees to me."

To Gammons, the owners violate the system of both spheres—the ethics of profane and the etiquette of the sacred. The *Globe* writers saw it their responsibility to counter the owners' PR efforts which had so deeply influenced fans' views of the strike and its issues. It is important to keep in mind that the *Globe* and *Sports Illustrated* were among the very few who supported the players. I asked Gammons how *Globe* policy was organized. He said they're always talking about these issues. At the *Globe* the sportswriter is responsible for covering everything about sports, including book reviews—not the narrow definition of sports the *Times* holds. There is a close relationship between the beat writers and the editorial staff. Gammons says no editorial at the *Globe* is written without input from all those knowledgeable. "There is no heavy handed owner or CEO imposing his beliefs." When asked why the paper didn't support the football players, Gammons argued that the football writers are "in the pocket of the owners." Anyway, those owners aren't considered violators of the American free enterprise system. Does this mean the system isn't the problem, the violations are?

It is here where Benedict Anderson's (1983) notion of an imagined community between the newspaper and readers, an "imagined linkage . . . between the newspaper . . . the market," is insightful. *Sports Illustrated* and the *Globe* are in conversation with its readers. The *Globe*'s conversational pattern, on the other hand, has to be understood as coming out of an on-going understanding what baseball is to a community and how the community understands labor unions—the journalists are unionized, Boston is pro-union, the baseball fans are unionized. Remember Peter Gammons' assertion that Boston fans are fascinated by baseball, and would not be satisfied with merely re-runs; the fans want to know about the players while they are on strike, what they are doing, what they feel about the strike, etc.

The *Los Angeles Times* has a different audience, the vast Los Angeles middle to upper income non-unionized professional class, and baseball is one of many items on the entertainment smorgasbord. Dodger baseball was a front page story last August 1991. The focus wasn't actually the team, but rather the deplorable behavior of the LA fans who regularly arrive in the fourth inning and leave by the seventh inning stretch. The sportswriter first considered fan fear of traffic jams as prompting this unloyal behavior. No, she later concluded, they leave early even when there aren't any crowds. They aren't really baseball fans. They come for the hot dogs, beer, a bit of sun and ballpark ambience. Certainly not the Boston crowd, Gammons would note.

We need to consider again Stuart Hall's caution to understand newspaper content as originating in a historical location, in the context of existing core values (1975: 19):

> Newspapers do not come absolutely fresh and open to news. They are already in a complex relationship with a body of regular readers . . . Individual items fit in with the longer preoccupations of a newspaper, and these preoccupations differ from one paper to another.

"A complex relationship with a body of regular readers"—this sounds like Anderson's "imagined community." The ultimate key to predicting media content is to understand "the longer preoccupations" of one or another paper, as Hall would maintain.

Appendix

Casey at the Bank

The Mudville team convened on a less-than-cheery note;
The ballot count was 10 to 10, with five men left to vote.
When Ryan packed his blow-dry gun and Murphy did the same,
A sickly silence fell upon the patrons of the game.

Flynn was next to ballot, then came old Mahoney;
One had just gone bankrupt, and one owed alimony.
When the dust had lifted and the crowd saw what occurred,
The vote was 12 to 12, with one man yet to be heard.

From 5,000 throats or more there rose a lusty yell.
It rambled through the valley, it echoed in the dell;
It knocked upon the mountain, and it sailed beyond the bay;
Casey, the mighty players' rep, had come to have his say.

There was pride in Casey's bearing as he flashed the fans a smile,
Ease in Casey's manner as he opened up his file.
No one ever doubted that this pro would find a reason
Somewhere in his briefcase to save the baseball season.

Management wound its pitch, sent it hurtling through the air;
Casey simply studied it in haughty grandeur there.
Fingering his gold chains, he slowly shook his head,
"No compensation," he declared. "Let's strike!" his agent said.

But with a smile of Christian charity, Casey's visage shone.
He stilled the tumult and proposed the bargaining go on;
"Throw me your final offer," he said without a twitch.
"Sorry, Casey," owner replied, "that was our last pitch."

Now Casey's face grows stern and cold, and all his muscles strain.
The crowd can see him totaling some figures in his brain.
Now Casey kicks the table with his shoes of alligator,
And swings with cruel violence his pocket calculator.

Oh somewhere in this favored land, the sun is shining bright.
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light.
And somewhere girls are laughing, and a child rides a bike.
But there is no joy in Mudville—Casey's gone on strike.

by Steve Harvey. *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1981; reprinted by permission.

Note

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