



Baseball and Rhetorics of Purity: The National Pastime and American Identity During the War on Terror (Albma Rhetoric Cult & Soc Crit)

By Michael L. Butterworth

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Baseball has long been considered America's "national pastime," touted variously as a healthy diversion, a symbol of national unity, and a model of democratic inclusion. But, according to Michael Butterworth, such favorable rhetoric belies baseball's complicity in the rhetorical construction of a world defined by good and evil.

Baseball and Rhetorics of Purity is an investigation into the culture and mythology of baseball, a study of its limits and failures, and an invitation to remake the game in a more democratic way. It pays special attention to baseball's role in the reconstruction of American identity after September 11, 2001. This study is framed by a discussion that links the development of baseball to the discourses of innocence and purity in 19th-century America. From there, it examines ritual performances at baseball games; a traveling museum exhibit sponsored by the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum; the recent debate about the use of performance-enhancing drugs; the return of Major League Baseball to Washington, D.C., in 2005; and the advent of the World Baseball Classic in 2006.

Butterworth argues that by promoting myths of citizenship and purity, post-9/11 discourse concerning baseball ironically threatens the health of the democratic system and that baseball cannot be viewed as an innocent diversion or escape. Instead, Butterworth highlights how the game on the field reflects a more complex and diverse worldview, and makes a plea for the game's recovery, both as a national pastime and as a site for celebrating the best of who we are and who we can be.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This book is not for fans trying to understand the emergence of outstanding pitching in the 2010 season, or the impact of drug testing on home run production, or, indeed, any other baseball-related activity either inside or outside the lines of Major League Baseball. Butterworth (communication, Bowling Green State Univ.) is urging reconstruction of baseball as it relates to US patriotism and triumphalism and the US response to 9/11. He is an academic polemicist who prefers that baseball stay away from the symbolic rhetoric of chauvinism that he suggests marks baseball's response to this national calamity. The author devotes more space to President George W. Bush and the war in Iraq than to the expanding strike zone, and he believes that the national pastime has lost its way because of its unreflective commitment to aggressive American domestic and foreign policy during the eight years of the Bush administration. Since the subject of this provocative, well-written book is really baseball as a public ritual that supports a certain political ideology, those who are baseball fans and also wish to stake out a political or religious theory regarding baseball's relationship to the US and its values will find it worth a read.

Summing Up: Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty; general readers."

—CHOICE

"This book is sure to make a splash in sports history, the sociology of sport, American studies, U.S. history, and communication studies. One reason it works so well is because of [Butterworth's] mix of profound affection for his topics (the United States and the sport) with a deep sense of disappointment/hope. This combination kept me riveted from the moment I began reading—bravo!"

—Toby Miller, author of *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age*

"In *Baseball and Rhetorics of Purity*, Michael L. Butterworth has produced a significant work of rhetorical scholarship that also takes its baseball seriously. As such, it merits attention both by traditional rhetoric scholars and by those who affiliate with the growing subfield of communication and sport."—*Rhetoric & Public Affairs*

About the Author

Michael L. Butterworth is Assistant Professor of Communication in the School of Media and Communication at Bowling Green State University. He is a coauthor of the forthcoming book *Communication and Sport: Surveying the Field*.

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