



0. FOR LOVE of the GAME - Story Preface

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This print, by L. Prang & Co., depicts a game of baseball, circa 1887. The image is online [via the Library of Congress](#). Click on it for a full-page view.

Mark Twain observed that baseball matched the character of nineteenth-century America. It was, he said:

*the very symbol, the outward and visible expression of the drive and push and rush and struggle of the raging, tearing, booming nineteenth century.* (Quoted in *Autumn Glory: Baseball's First World Series*, by Louis P. Masur, page 192.)

Walt Whitman, the poet, went further, declaring that baseball was as important to Americans as their Constitution. He affectionately called it:

*America's game: has the snap, go, fling, of the American atmosphere - belongs as much to our institutions, fits into them as significantly, as our constitutions, laws: is just as important in the sum total of our historic life. It is the place where memory gathers.* (Quoted in *Autumn Glory: Baseball's First World Series*, by Louis P. Masur, page 192.)

By 1925, Virginia Woolf - the British novelist who was touring the United States that year - agreed with the conclusion of Ring Lardner (a then-famous writer) that "in America there is baseball instead of society." In a country which was vast, young and lacking centuries of unifying traditions - unlike her own - Woolf saw baseball as an American common denominator. Unifying people, the game was

*a centre, a meeting place for the divers activities of a people whom a continent isolates, [and] whom no tradition controls.* (Quoted in *The Norton Book of Sports*, edited by George Plimpton, page 162.)

From reading H.L. Mencken's *American Language*, published in 1919 (and subsequently updated), Woolf also knew that phrases like "play ball," "strike out" and "shut out" were already part of America's vocabulary. Admiring how Americans reacted to the sport that was "indigenous to the soil," Woolf observed:

*Americans are doing what the Elizabethans did - they are coining new words.* (Quoted in *Walt Whitman's Native Representations*, by Ed Folsom, page 28.)

Let's take a look at the game - and how it was played - in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

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### Baseball Game during 1887

L. Prang & Company, circa 1887; [online via the Library of Congress](#). Public Domain.

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### Portrait of Mark Twain

Photo courtesy [visitcarsoncity.com](http://visitcarsoncity.com) website.

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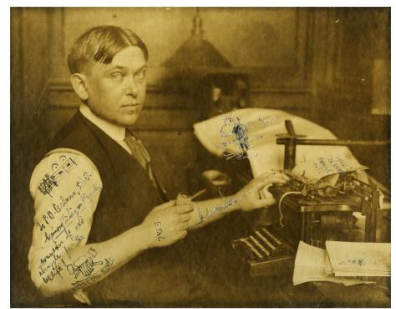
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### Walt Whitman

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### H.L. Mencken

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