

Ty Cobb, Baseball, and American Manhood. By Steven Elliot Tripp (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016). Pp. 388. Hardcover, \$45.00.

Ty Cobb played baseball with a ferocity that intrigues and perplexes historians. Investigations of Cobb have led scholars to label him as violent, egotistical, and bigoted. Even if these are accurate characterizations, Steven Elliot Tripp presents a more satisfying explanation for Cobb's pugnacious personality in *Ty Cobb, Baseball, and American Manhood*. Tripp reexamines Cobb by placing him within the "broader social and cultural currents in American life" (x). He asserts that Cobb's "values, ideals, and social constructs" reflected a "southern culture of honor" that informed his behavior, which offers a more judicious analysis of baseball's greatest hitter (31). Born and raised in rural Georgia, Ty Cobb discovered his baseball talent at an early age. His father, William, taught Cobb discipline and the importance of a strong work ethic, which helped Cobb refine his skills as a ballplayer. William's influence imparted Ty with a strong reverence for a code of southern honor that valued masculine virtues of "courage and competitive aggression" (3). Cobb made the commitment to become a professional baseball player after his father was shot and killed. According to Tripp, when rumors swirled that his mother's lover had murdered his father, Cobb embraced baseball as an "affair of honor" (34-35). He set out to protect his family's honor using his personal talents and becoming a great ballplayer.

Cobb attained national fame during the Progressive Era when baseball provided Americans with an escape from industrial and urban anxieties. Tripp asserts that Cobb's southern code of honor drove him not only to outplay his opponents, but also humiliate them. Tripp believes that Americans embraced Cobb's brazen, "spikes in the air" style because he introduced a unique southern swagger to the game. His abrasive performance helped strengthen his legendary status, in turn reinforcing his masculine honor. Delving further into Cobb's playing career, Chapter 4 uses honor culture to explore how Cobb bridged the regional divide in the United States. Tripp argues that southern culture informed Cobb's idea of honor, which differed from northern conceptions. Cobb's distinct southern flair was a novelty for northern baseball fans who acknowledged and welcomed his peculiar type of play (233).

Cobb also won over baseball enthusiasts because, like the game itself, he blended traditional and modern conceptions of manhood. Baseball was an arena where tradition was tested, and Tripp teases out this tension in Chapter 8 with the rise of a new "modern" ballplayer: Babe Ruth. Cobb retained fame even as Ruth's record-breaking achievements overshadowed his career. Tripp maintains that the media's constant comparison of the two superstars kept Cobb relevant and reinforced his "superiority as a ballplayer and as a man" (307). Off the field, his actions reinforced a modern masculine archetype at times while repudiating it at others. No matter which version of Cobb was at the ballpark, fans paid to see him.

Tripp does not challenge the historiography on southern honor. He relies on Edward Ayers and other southern historians to establish the broader social context that supports his assertion that southern honor was crucial to molding Cobb's behavior and conceptions of manhood. His attention to southern culture provides a different interpretation of William's death. Previous scholars have focused solely on the night Cobb's father was fatally shot to

explain his volatile nature. They suggest this incident altered Cobb's psyche and drove him to become a violent ballplayer. Tripp argues that psychoanalyzing Cobb produces conclusions that are ahistorical and "monocausal" (31). Tripp succeeds in presenting William's death as a catalyst to Cobb's baseball career, not his behavior. His research moves the conversation on Cobb from the realm of unreliable interpretations from amateur psychologists to a focus on cultural analysis. Tripp presents a more compelling case for Cobb's demeanor as influenced by the south's peculiar code of honor as opposed to psychological trauma.

Deviating from conventional histories, Tripp extrapolates at times to validate his argument. While establishing evidence for Cobb's honor code in the first chapter, he states, "Ty showed a penchant for violence and a thirst for competition – just like every other white Southern boy of his generation" (31). Another player, Joseph Jefferson Jackson – "Shoeless Joe" – was a white Southern boy from that generation who was the antithesis of Cobb. Tripp appears to labor with proving his point at times, which causes him to overlook simple explanations for Cobb's motives to play baseball. Perhaps the sport offered immediate confirmation of his masculine superiority. Cobb was intelligent enough to pursue another career, but baseball offered him something he could not find in another profession.

Why is Ty Cobb's character embedded deeper within America's collective memory than his statistical accomplishments? *Ty Cobb, Baseball, and American Manhood* contributes a more scholarly answer to this question about Cobb. Tripp engages an intriguing conversation about the impact of prominent sports figures in the formation of masculine culture in early twentieth-century America. Baseball held a privileged place for American fans during Cobb's time, and historians should continue to search for other members within baseball's fraternity who, along with Cobb, "shaped American sporting culture for the next century and beyond" (xxii).

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