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Rooting for the Clothes

The Materialization of Memory in Baseball's Throwback Uniforms

STEPHEN ANDON

At their essence, sports jerseys function as symbolic materializations that foster a constitutive identity and unity between fans, players, and cities or regions. When new teams are created, often the team logo and uniform are the first manifestations of the team's identity. These designs are so important that many franchises consult with professional marketing firms on new designs intended to connect with new fans and maximize merchandizing streams.¹ Furthermore, when teams acquire new players, the first act as a new member of the team often involves a ceremonial press conference that is opened by the new player donning the team's jersey (a similar practice takes place during amateur drafts for new players). The jersey thus signifies both an identity and a membership while existing as a transformative object with its own magical provenance: the wearer, whether on the field or off, defers their individual identity for the sake of a team. As such, jerseys are constantly put in place as performance pieces, as when uniforms are raised to arena rafters to give enduring presence to their greatness, or when city statues are draped in team jerseys to unite the citizenry. These uniforms come to symbolize more than just a team; they can become transcendent icons that represent a city, even a country, and its enduring memories.

In the United States, the most enduring uniforms belong to the nation's pastime: baseball. With several teams founding their identities in uniform designs established almost a century ago, the symbolic power of uniforms has reached unprecedented levels in a society that is enamored with nostalgia. Major League Baseball (MLB) franchises have sought to exploit this infatuation by unveiling and donning "throwback" or "retro" uniforms on a regular basis. These garments mimic the uniform histories of earlier teams, utilizing new fabrics and sewing techniques to meet contemporary expectations for uniforms while appearing as a facsimile of a bygone era. As proof of the popularity of throwbacks during the past decade, every MLB franchise—save the Colorado Rockies—has deployed some version at least once.

Given that baseball uniforms first appeared in the 1840s, MLB clubs have an almost infinite number of throwback uniforms to delve through. With such a library of offerings, the commemorative and nostalgic functions that throwbacks provide is occasionally placed in contrast with histories that reopen divisive franchise relocations. With uniforms serving as the materialization of this divisiveness, multiple teams throughout the major leagues have employed throwback jerseys that highlight their clashing histories. Specifically, the Seattle Mariners recently wore throwbacks to the Seattle Pilots, a franchise that moved to Milwaukee in 1970 and became the Milwaukee Brewers. Conversely, the Brewers have also worn throwbacks to the Milwaukee Braves, a franchise that originated in Boston, moved to Milwaukee to start the 1952 MLB season, and then moved to Atlanta before the 1966 MLB season. The Washington (DC) Nationals, a franchise with roots in Montreal, has ignored Expos throwbacks and instead has used Washington Senators jerseys, recalling two earlier franchises that did exist as the Senators but relocated to two different cities. After the 1960 season, the Senators moved to Minnesota (and became the Twins) while, simultaneously, a new expansion franchise was given to Washington, thus keeping a professional baseball franchise in the nation's capital. That version of the Washington Senators left DC after the 1971 season, moving to the Dallas area to become the Texas Rangers.

These complicated, contextual, and, at times, contradictory histories make throwback uniforms, as nostalgic symbols loaded with meanings and memories, appealing targets for rhetorical criticism. Specifically, throwbacks force us to consider how the material representation of history is fraught with questions regarding collective memory, commemoration, and the impact of materialized style. Perhaps the most contentious and significant relocation in MLB history was when the beloved Brooklyn Dodgers relocated to Los Angeles, California, after the 1957 season, as then-owner Walter O'Malley clashed with New York City's officials over a new stadium and sought to capitalize on the lucrative Southern California market. The relocation, which seemed incredulous given the franchise's roots in the borough since the late 1800s, cruelly reminded fans that a sports team is far more a business than an outlet for civic identity, unity, and pride. This memory was revisited when the Dodgers announced their plans to wear Brooklyn Dodgers throwback uniforms for six home games during the 2011 MLB season. Rather than celebrate the team's history, however, the throwback jersey, contextualized by the franchise's recent financial troubles, served as a reminder that teams are financial entities whose commitment to a city is temporal.

Therefore, this paper will consider how commemorative and material rhetorics, as well as a rhetoric of style, operate to contextualize the meaning of

throwback jerseys. I will first outline the rhetorical literature that frames the design of throwback jerseys as intended for nostalgic effect. Next, I will trace the history of baseball uniforms in order to locate how throwbacks emerged as nostalgic products in the late stages of the twentieth century. Finally, I use the Dodgers' decision to wear throwback uniforms in 2011 as a rhetorical choice that reveals how uniforms can materialize conflicted identities, resurrect politics of memory, and further subjugate fans to the commercialization of sports.

MATERIAL RHETORICS AND SELLING NOSTALGIC STYLE

Driven by attempts to expand merchandise offerings, teams that offer throwback jerseys are tapping into powerful symbols. In this section, I will outline the complexities of these commemorative symbols by implementing the theoretical approaches used to analyze commemorative and material rhetorics while considering throwback jerseys as material manifestations of memory. In order to do so, I argue that a rhetorical approach offers a grammar for conducting such an analysis because throwback uniforms exist as non-discursive texts, implement colors and shapes for emotional effect in both commemorative and commercial contexts, and exemplify postmodern nostalgic appeals.

At a foundational level, Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott define rhetoric as "the study of discourses, events, objects, and practices that attends to their character as meaningful, legible, partisan, and consequential."² As such, rhetoric is not limited solely to discourse. Their definition allows material objects to be submitted to the four aforementioned categories as follows. First, an object is meaningful when it is emotionally significant as well as when it is thick with "signs that may take on a range of signification."³ Second, the legibility of rhetorical objects requires that, as a public symbol, it is identifiable within context. The partisanship of a rhetorical object proposes that it cannot exist objectively, but is "tendentious."⁴ Finally, in channeling rhetoric's origins as outlined by Herbert A. Wichelns's 1925 essay, objects must have, at least, the potential for effect. This definition provides Blair, Dickinson, and Ott with a starting point for examining rhetoric and public memory as implemented in commemorative museums and national monuments.

This kind of definition was necessitated by rhetorical scholars' lack of attention in effectively engaging symbols like memorials. Across all rhetorics, Carole Blair posits, scholars bypassed "the material articulation of the symbol . . . [except] as a means of transport to its *telos*—its meaning."⁵ This gap allowed for the possibility to engage in what of Dickinson calls "'non-discursive' texts like visual and spatial texts," as outlined above.⁶ Even though these kinds of texts have received some attention from scholars of architecture

and landscapes, Blair ultimately sees their work as “fail[ing] in my view to describe adequately how the places they study do rhetorical work.”⁷⁷ Because, Blair asserts, while they may understand that architecture has its own grammar, they fail to grasp what it means for architecture to have a rhetoric, “in that it does not just speak, it advocates.”⁷⁸ These shortcomings are matched by rhetoricians’ failure to effectively address “what happens to or with a text, once it has been produced.”⁷⁹ Consequently, Blair insists that “we must ask not just what a text means but, more generally, what it does; and we must not understand what it does as adhering strictly to what it was supposed to do.”⁸⁰ Importantly, this means that critics must also consider the context surrounding the memorial in order to understand its effect.

Moving past the legitimization of the rhetorical implications of material objects, Carole Blair and Neil Michel are primarily interested in how the design of a memorial site acts upon its audience via its “color, shape, size, and inscriptions,” a distinction that is consistent in their other memorial studies.⁸¹ In material rhetoric scholarship, design is important because certain colors, shapes, sizes, and placements become evocative tools. Among other functions of material objects, they “work in various ways to consummate individuals’ attachment to the group.”⁸² Thus, the reflective black granite of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, serves to emplace visitors with the memory of the fallen while the decision not to reveal soldiers’ ranks acts as a unifying force.⁸³ In another example, the individuality of the many different colored panels in the AIDS Memorial Quilt speaks to its democratic—rather than synecdochal—representation.⁸⁴ Both exist in distinct contrast with the other bright white memorials that cover the National Mall.

The significance of colors and shapes in material objects extends beyond memorials to include a role in constructing commercial spaces as well. Notably, Greg Dickinson’s analysis of Starbucks focuses on how the natural shapes, colors, and design orientation of a local coffee shop convey an authentic experience that masks any potential negative connotation associated with being part of the global economy. The analysis pays specific attention to color, noticing the images of the coffee beans pictured throughout the store’s displays, as a means of creating a visual naturalness that delivers a kind of serenity to the consumer. Among these displays, Dickinson also observes the predominance of the corporate logo: “Perhaps the best place to start the discussion of the visuality of naturalness is with the dominant color in the space, namely the color in the Starbucks logo.”⁸⁵ While the color of the logo, he asserts, connects Starbucks with the natural green of nature, the logo’s design “makes an implicit argument about the quality of the coffee itself.”⁸⁶ Essentially, the logo advocates a connection between Starbucks and the rainforests of Cen-

tral America without invoking complicated associations to global labor inequities that may be perpetuated through the images of say, Juan Valdez, the characterized representative of Colombian coffee. Furthermore, the store's Art Nouveau-inspired design aesthetic, implemented in the color and shapes of objects throughout the store, speaks to that art movement's connection to nature, all as a means of creating a naturalized and ritualized authentic coffee experience.

While logos, colors, and shapes are used in Starbucks to create authenticity, they have an equal power in creating a commodified nostalgia in commercial projects, as identified in Greg Dickinson's examination of Old Pasadena, California. A redeveloped commercial project whose "rhetorical strength lies in its nostalgic invocations," Dickinson sees Old Pasadena as a construct enabled not only by its architecture but the way "memories [are] encoded by inscriptions, signs, and legends."¹⁷ Specifically, these signs appear everywhere, in what Dickinson calls "the nostalgic style," to match the style of the town's new buildings, which are retro as well. These structures, new replicas built to look old, forego historical accuracy in a way that makes them "look 'better' than the 'originals' . . . in the guise of historical forms."¹⁸ Thus, the deployment of retro or nostalgic style leads Dickinson to conclude that "rhetorical invention must be expanded to include not just the invention of linguistic arguments but the stylized invention of the self," as consumers pour into places like Old Pasadena and heavily-stylized, faux-nostalgic stores like Victoria's Secret and Banana Republic.¹⁹ Importantly, this style is an appealing sales technique that helps to situate identity in postmodernity.

The notion that style can be fabricated to evoke nostalgia speaks to the predominance of style over substance in popular culture, as Barry Brummet attests: "Style is so central to popular culture that the rhetoric of style and the rhetoric of popular culture are practically the same thing."²⁰ The use of signs and images in popular culture may be merely stylized manipulations, but Brummet's example of the projected self-image associated with wearing a cowboy hat underscores that it is the "surface/skin/screen spaces of style [that] people respond to. I can take on the skin of a cowboy, if that is what persuades, by adopting certain styles."²¹ These surface manipulations, as Dickinson observes in Old Pasadena, are borrowed across a range of contexts in order to provide a familiarity in public memory. As twentieth-century industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss explains, "People will more readily accept something new, we feel, if they recognize in it something out of the past. Our senses quickly recognize and receive pleasure when a long-forgotten detail is brought back."²² Such is the fabricated nostalgia on display in MLB, where teams have worn throwback jerseys, putting authenticity aside in favor of his-

toric jersey amalgamations designed to evoke a nostalgic style and affirming Andreas Huyssen's claim that "memory . . . is itself based on representation."²³ The accuracy of these throwback jerseys, as symbols, is far less important than the nostalgic style they convey in their colors, patterns, shapes, and logos.

There is no greater example of this fabricated nostalgia than in the throwback uniforms worn in 2012 by the Tampa Bay Rays. Having run out of historical uniforms to resurrect during their annual turn-back-the-clock promotion, the Rays invented a hypothetical throwback uniform. Labeled a 1979 throwback, the uniform predated the existence of the franchise, established in 1998, by nearly two decades. In order to "[embrace] the style of the era while keeping the Rays modern colors," the Rays' design team channeled the uniform aesthetic of the 1979 San Diego Padres.²⁴ Despite their anachronistic quality, Rays manager Joe Maddon praised the uniform and verified the accuracy of its style: "They're tasty colors, a great design . . . definitely a '70s moment."²⁵ In this case, the appropriation of another team's style history, replete with colors and fonts popular at the time, allows the Rays throwback uniform to evoke nostalgia despite having never existed.

Although the nostalgia of sport has received some critical attention, detailed investigations of uniform style are notably missing. Even as scholars make note of the nostalgic power of baseball films like *Field of Dreams*, *The Natural*, and dozens of others, they fail to mention the use of purportedly historically accurate throwback jerseys. There is, however, a precedent for deploying the grammar of rhetoric to contemporary baseball uniforms. Conducted in the span of a few short paragraphs, Michael Butterworth briefly mentions the logo style of MLB's Washington Nationals. Relocating from Montreal after the 2004 season, where the franchise existed as the Expos for over three decades, the new team identity capitalized on nationalist sentiments with the new name and the team's red, white, and blue color scheme. Yet, the context of the redesign had implications in the politically divisive Capital region. A scripted "W" atop the team's home caps, a reference to the professional Washington baseball teams from the first half of the twentieth century, was interpreted by some fans and members of government as a symbol of support for then-president George W. Bush. As Democrats opted to wear the team's alternate blue caps adorned with an interlocking "DC" logo instead of a "W," Butterworth highlights the irony in "the Nationals [being] celebrated for bringing Washington-area residents together, [since] the very symbols of fan unity drove at least some of them apart."²⁶ This short section highlights the potentially divisive power of sports uniforms logos, yet the case is made more intriguing in the context of throwbacks since retro merchandise is still produced for the now-defunct Montreal Expos.

Therefore, the Los Angeles Dodgers' throwbacks case study will utilize the approaches and grammar of material rhetoric and nostalgic style, and apply it to the complexities of throwback uniforms, outlining not just what they are but what they do. Using the definition of rhetoric offered by Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, I posit that the Los Angeles Dodgers' decision to wear 1944 Brooklyn Dodgers satin uniforms during six home games in the 2011 season reflected a complicated identity, which the team was unprepared to fully engage, in exchange for the commercial exploitation of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Instead of offering memorial pieces that consummate a group identity, the resurrection of their Brooklyn origins in material form invited a level of divisiveness from fans in both Brooklyn and Los Angeles. As such, selling reconstructed memories in a nostalgic style has repercussions for fans who see sports jerseys as more than just manipulated surfaces. To understand the potential for jerseys to act as powerful symbols, however, I must first outline the historical trajectory of sports uniforms and the development of fashion that revived throwback jerseys on a regular basis.

SPORTS UNIFORM HISTORY: FROM WOOL TO THROWBACKS

Baseball uniforms are an essential part of baseball history, pictured in old photos and films of America's greatest players. The value of some of these historic jerseys and the prices they fetch in sports auctions aside, the overwhelming number on display in Cooperstown at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and various stadia and museums across the country are a testament to the enduring aura of baseball uniforms.

Their beginnings can be traced to 1845 and the New York Knickerbockers. Notably, the Knickerbockers were organized in accordance with "a formal constitution and bylaws . . . that were based upon those men's social clubs of the era."²⁷ As a result, the club strictly adhered to a level of gentlemanly propriety that behooved their position as elites. Beyond requiring membership dues, the club also issued fines on its members for using profanity (e.g., "damned imprudence"), arguing with umpire decisions, and drinking alcohol during games.²⁸ According to the National Baseball Hall of Fame, at a club meeting on April 24, 1849, the Knickerbockers decided to establish a team uniform comprised of "blue woolen pantaloons, white flannel shirts and chip (straw) hats," with leather belts.²⁹ These fashionable sartorial choices empowered the uniform to further denote elite status. Uniform scholar Jennifer Craik posits that the Knickerbockers channeled contemporary aristocratic fashions and were generally inspired by British cricket uniforms that shared a "close parallel history to that of school and military uniforms."³⁰ Concordantly, the

National Baseball Hall of Fame attests that the blue color of the Knickerbockers pants resembled the color schemes of other “well-established, manly organizations such as fire departments and volunteer military companies” and thus maintained a separation from the lower classes.³¹ The result of the especially close association between baseball clubs and volunteer fire companies, Warren Goldstein asserts, created some “striking . . . cultural similarities between the two institutions,” including similar club and team names, socializing procedures, and uniforms.³² This relationship was also manifest in “distinctive shirt fronts” that comprised “the most visible resemblance” between fire companies and baseball clubs.³³ The team’s jerseys were based entirely on firemen’s uniforms, with a shield-front or a bib-like attached piece of fabric that covered the chest. This part of the uniform would feature team names, crests, or initials, typically in Old English or similar fonts.

As for the materials used in the uniform, wool was (and still is) far from a reasonable cloth for athletic endeavors. It was chosen because, at the time, cotton clothing was associated with the working class. For society’s elites, therefore, wool uniforms signified the affluence to afford separate clothes for the purpose of playing sport.³⁴ Furthermore, the team’s straw cap, Craik suggests, was also a style that American baseball teams borrowed directly from cricket, although, in time, teams would draw from a plethora of different kinds of hats inspired by jockeys and conductors.

With the assistance of new technology (Elias Howe is credited with inventing the sewing machine in 1846), baseball uniforms embraced new trends. Famously, the Cincinnati Red Stockings made baseball fashion history in 1868 by adopting brilliant-colored knickers that prominently evidenced their team’s namesake. Though they were more comfortable than baggier pants that could be tripped over, this amount of showmanship, Craik asserts, made for “a rather unlikely outfit for virile males, [though] knickerbockers have nonetheless remained the basis of contemporary baseball uniforms.”³⁵ However, the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s coverage of the Red Stockings during their California tour in 1869 posed the opposite conclusion, noting:

It’s a bully set for good legs. It’s easy to see why they adopted the Red Stocking style of dress which shows their calves in all their magnitude and rotundity. Everyone of them has a large and well-turned leg and everyone of them knows how to use it.³⁶

In either case, the widespread use of knickerbockers patterned after the Cincinnati team helped to create nicknames for a handful of other teams like the White Stockings, the Browns, and the Grays. The Detroit Tigers, known earlier as the Wolverines, earned their current nickname by wearing dark socks with horizontal yellow stripes during the 1896 season.³⁷ But uniform history

does not end with the introduction of stockings. Other developments in uniform fashions during this time included the introduction of bowties as well as the transition from the shield-front to lace-up and, finally, button-down jerseys. Teams also experimented with jersey designs by introducing pinstripes and checks. Through the first two decades of the twentieth century, full city names and player numbers would become commonplace on jerseys, while teams would also begin to implement collarless shirts, reflective satin fabrics, script and arched lettering, zippered-fronts, and vests. Many of the wordmarks and logos that eventually became iconic symbols for Major League Baseball (MLB) franchises were introduced at this time, including the Detroit Tigers' Old English "D" (1904), the Cincinnati Reds' wishbone "C" (1905), the Chicago Cubs' encircled "C" (1909), and the New York Yankees interlocking "NY" (1912). From the 1930s through the 1950s, the Baltimore Orioles, Boston Braves, Boston Red Sox, Brooklyn Dodgers, Chicago White Sox, Cleveland Indians, Philadelphia Phillies, Pittsburgh Pirates, and St. Louis Cardinals also instituted what would become long-standing logos and designs.

In the second half of the twentieth century, professional baseball franchises altered and updated their looks via new fabrics and fashions. Notably, MLB teams continued to wear wool until the 1950s and wool-blend jerseys until 1970, when the Pittsburgh Pirates introduced a double-knit synthetic pull-over style jersey. Soon afterwards, every MLB team adopted the polyester synthetic standard. This lighter, more breathable fabric led to wholesale adoption across all four professional leagues. Commercially, MLB licensing began in 1970 and the sale of authentic MLB jerseys began just four years later. The first company to market these jerseys was Medalist/Sand-Knit, a company that began as an athletic uniform supplier in 1921. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Medalist/Sand-Knit not only outfitted MLB teams but provided replica jerseys for sale as well. The company was eventually purchased by MacGregor, and when that company filed for bankruptcy in 1991, both team uniforms and replica jerseys began to be produced by a variety of corporate suppliers.

Also during the 1970s, as color televisions became common, new uniform colors and logos found their fashion.³⁸ Garish oranges and yellows smothered the jerseys of the Houston Astros, Oakland Athletics, Pittsburgh Pirates, and San Diego Padres. A powder blue color seemingly invaded the MLB uniform landscape throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with eleven teams (out of twenty-six) wearing a shade of the color as a primary part of their road uniform during the 1980 season. One of those franchises relying on powder blue in the early 1970s, the Chicago White Sox, even experimented with wearing shorts on three separate occasions during the 1976 season. Used as a publicity stunt by team owner and promoter extraordinaire Bill Veeck, the shorts are consid-

ered by many—including baseball historian Bruce Markusen—to be one of baseball history’s worst uniforms. The designation is impressive, considering the first ninety years of professional baseball in America produced nearly three thousand uniform variations.

Strange colors and logos continued to infiltrate uniforms of all types well into the 1990s, primarily for new and expansion franchises that delivered some “cartoonish logos” and an almost overwhelming amount of teal blues and greens.³⁹ But for all of the advancements in jersey fabrics as well as the pressures to provide new and fashionable logos, a serendipitous discovery of some old fabric encouraged one small sportswear company to look back, sparking a national fashion trend that continues to influence uniform choices today. Mitchell & Ness got its start as a sporting goods supplier in Philadelphia in 1904, but from 1938 through 1955, their business included supplying jerseys for the NFL’s Philadelphia Eagles, the Philadelphia Phillies, and the Philadelphia Athletics. Then in 1983, a customer brought two game-worn wool baseball jerseys to then-owner Peter Capolino and asked for some repairs to be made. Two years later, the challenging request fatefully led Capolino to a stockpile of twelve thousand yards of discarded wool flannel at Maple Manufacturing, a Philadelphia clothing manufacturer that sewed local and college team uniforms before the switch to synthetic fabrics.⁴⁰ After acquiring the extra fabric, Capolino went to work copying old wool baseball jerseys, beginning by imitating one of the jerseys brought to him two years prior—a 1949 St. Louis Browns jersey. Because accuracy was critical, a significant amount of research was required for Capolino before he could begin manufacturing more jerseys. Fortunately, the bookstore located above his Philadelphia shop maintained an extensive library of old sports journals. He spent days investigating the exact details of jerseys he would go on to recreate, including Warren Spahn’s 1957 Milwaukee Braves and Stan Musial’s 1946 St. Louis Cardinals jerseys. Given the nostalgic nature of these jerseys, Capolino’s white-collar customer base soon purchased his entire first-run stock of these \$125–\$175 jerseys.

While Capolino had discovered an emotional reaction to retro sportswear, he was also becoming one its few pioneers. The novelty of his products drew the attention of *Sports Illustrated* and, in 1987, a short article chronicled the growing trend. Carefully crafted and historically accurate sports jerseys had not yet been made available in any sort of quantity. As the article noted, Capolino asked, “If baseball hats can sell, why not shirts. . . . Collectors will pay \$2,000 to \$25,000 for authentic uniforms, so wouldn’t a serious fan pay \$125 for a good reproduction of a [jersey]?”⁴¹ While other merchandise was entering the mainstream, Capolino was selling limited quantities of his throwback replications to mostly “white collar” clientele. The hefty price tag, however,

soon caught the attention of MLB's copyright divisions. At roughly the same time, MLB was also alerted to a second company recreating flannel jerseys, a Seattle-based outfit known as Ebbets Field Flannels. Channeling the inherent nostalgia of the Dodgers' former Brooklyn home, Ebbets Field Flannels was founded in 1988 by a former rock musician with a dedicated eye for baseball jersey accuracy. Soon after catching the attention of MLB, the company decided it could not afford the expensive licensing fees for the rights to produce MLB jerseys. Instead, their business shifted to reproducing the jerseys of minor-league teams, a turning point described in a 1990 *Sports Illustrated* article as "a blessing in disguise" by company founder Jerry Cohen.⁴² Consequently, in the years since, the company has expanded to producing flannel throwbacks for minor-league football and hockey teams.

Conversely, Mitchell & Ness decided that rather than cease-and-desist MLB jersey production, Capolino would hand over his sales records, pay fifty thousand dollars in back royalties, and ask MLB to allow him to license their properties.⁴³ Beginning in September 1988, their official collaboration specifically sold throwback jerseys from what was deemed "the Cooperstown Authentic Collection."

While throwbacks eventually became a fashion fad in the late 1990s and early 2000s with hip-hop artists sporting Capolino's creations throughout mainstream culture, the enduring legacies of Mitchell & Ness and Ebbets Field Flannels point towards the discovery of nostalgia as material commodity in sport. With baseball leading the way, the practice of utilizing throwbacks continued, at an abated pace initially, but steadily throughout the remainder of the decade and onward, as MLB teams continued to see the value of nostalgic marketing opportunities. Deploying nostalgia, however, resurrects the potential conflicts that are most clearly manifest in material form.

THE DIVISIVE HISTORY OF THE DODGERS

As one of MLB's oldest franchises, the Los Angeles Dodgers have a storied yet complicated identity, rooted in significant historical ties to Brooklyn, New York, where the team resided from 1890 through 1957. After the conclusion of the 1957 season, however, the team joined the New York Giants in their pilgrimage to the west coast when owner Walter O'Malley moved the franchise to Los Angeles (the Giants moved to San Francisco). Introducing a throwback jersey from the 1944, as the team did for six home games during the 2011 MLB season, therefore, hearkens the team's deep connections to the borough as part of its identity narrative.

Beginning in the late 1800s, the team spent its first few decades under var-

ious designations and iterations (Trolley Dodgers, Bridegrooms, Superbas, Robins), permanently becoming the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1932.⁴⁴ The team nickname originated from an old, derisive nickname that Manhattanites used for Brooklyn baseball fans who had to avoid (dodge) the borough's new, but ill-planned, trolley tracks.⁴⁵ After playing in different stadiums, the team most famously made their home in Brooklyn's Ebbets Field from 1913 to 1957. During this time, the Dodgers enjoyed various levels of success. From 1941 to 1953, for example, the Dodgers won five National League pennants, only to be thwarted by the New York Yankees in the World Series each time. Another trip to the World Series was derailed in 1951, due to a dramatic collapse against the archrival New York Giants, punctuated by Bobby Thomson's game-winning, walk-off home run in the final inning of a playoff series between the two teams. The victory for the "patrician Manhattan followers of the Giants against the plebeian Brooklynites" was devastating for Dodgers fans whose team had occupied first place throughout the regular season.⁴⁶ However, their pain has endured throughout history, given that Thomson's home run is one of MLB's most famous ever—familiarily known as "The Shot Heard 'Round the World."

Such failures engendered a unique bond between the Dodgers and their fans, a bond that was further strengthened by the local feeling surrounding the club as well as the consistency in the team's roster. Fans appreciated the local interaction and commitment to the oft-overlooked borough: a former Brooklyn Dodger fan told NPR in 2005, "The Dodgers were family because they lived in Brooklyn. You know, we loved them dearly."⁴⁷ Consequently, while the locals' nickname for the club, "Dem Bums," as well as the team's unofficial slogan "Wait 'Till Next Year," thoroughly encapsulates the frustration with losing, the Dodgers were a lovable fixation in Brooklyn.⁴⁸ Dodger dreams finally came true in 1955, when the club overcame the label of perennial losers and defeated the New York Yankees for their only World Series championship in Brooklyn.

Notably, the Brooklyn Dodgers are also known for featuring a cadre of future Hall of Famers, including Pee Wee Reese, Duke Snider, Roy Campanella, and Jackie Robinson, the league's first African American player. Robinson's iconic role in breaking MLB's color barrier in 1947 endures through today, as his number is the only one to ever be permanently retired by every team. In regard to his debut appearance on April 15, 1947, Michael Butterworth claims, "It is difficult to overstate the significance of this moment, and I agree with sportswriter Bob Ryan, who claims it to be 'the single most important social happening in American sports history.'"⁴⁹ Robinson spent all ten of

his MLB seasons with the Brooklyn Dodgers and, in 1973, he was the first African American player elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

While a stable and respected Dodgers identity in Brooklyn was solidified by the 1955 title, the owners behind the franchise had begun to make the news themselves and shake the team's roots in Brooklyn. By 1945, Walter O'Malley, the Dodgers' attorney since 1941, had an ownership stake of 25 percent. According to Dodger historian Glenn Stout, "O'Malley was first and foremost a businessman . . . who believed that a man of his business sense, among the rubes who ran baseball, could make a killing."⁵⁰ Thus, one of O'Malley's first concerns for his investment was a new ballpark to replace Ebbets Field.⁵¹ Yet, despite the success of the Dodgers that culminated with the 1955 title, O'Malley had a hard time getting his new stadium built, as Stout attests, "[because] there just didn't seem to be a compelling *need* for a new ballpark apart from O'Malley's desire for one."⁵² Even after playing a handful of games during the 1956 season in Jersey City, New Jersey, O'Malley could not mount the pressure needed to obtain a new stadium. Throughout the subsequent offseason, O'Malley held meetings with various councilmen from Los Angeles to hammer out a deal. Meanwhile, in concert with O'Malley's behind-the-scenes machinations, which included the purchase of a minor-league franchise in Los Angeles and selling Ebbets Field, a hostile debate raged between O'Malley and New York City construction coordinator Robert Moses over where to build a new stadium for the team. Moses's proposal to move the team to a site in Queens, as well as his stern opposition to a stadium on Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn, underscored his aversion to compromise and a general disdain for the borough and the Dodgers.⁵³ Baseball historians Donald Dewey and Nicholas Aocella go even further to say that "Moses . . . detested O'Malley personally."⁵⁴ This stalemate was accompanied by O'Malley's "public relations B.S." in regard to staying in Brooklyn while he kept the Los Angeles deal quiet.⁵⁵ Therefore, unable to procure a new stadium to replace Ebbets Field, O'Malley announced in October of 1957 he was moving the team to a three hundred-acre site in downtown Los Angeles the following season.⁵⁶ The fallout from the move vilified O'Malley, whom Brooklyn sportswriters Pete Hamill and Jack Newfield infamously placed, along with Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler, among the worst people of the twentieth century.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, as one of the first West Coast MLB teams, O'Malley took advantage of the growing baseball market in the western half of the United States and cultivated a new generation of fans with three World Series victories in their first eight seasons in California.

Several decades later, the shock of the Dodgers' move across the country still lingers, as baby-booming Brooklynites continue to cherish the memories of their beloved team.⁵⁸ This aging demographic remembers the legends that

lived next door as their neighbors, as part of a tight-knit Brooklyn community.⁵⁹ For those baby-boomers who were still very young during the Brooklyn Dodgers era, there is an equally strong connection to the team by virtue of their parents. In Ken Burns's definitive nine-part historical documentary, *Baseball*, historian Doris Kearns Goodwin recalls crying with her father the day they learned the Dodgers would be moving to Los Angeles: "We lost the Dodgers, my father never transferred his allegiance to Los Angeles, nor did I, and baseball was gone out of our lives for many years."⁶⁰ Far from a bandwagon fan, Kearns-Goodwin's memoir reveals a deep bond with her father over baseball, gleefully reminiscing about her father teaching her to keep score and telling her animated stories about the 1920s and 1930s Dodgers.⁶¹ When Peter O'Malley, son of Walter, put the Dodgers up for sale in 1997, a host of local New York politicians—many of them barely teenagers when the Dodgers moved—drummed up support to investigate the possibility of the team returning to Brooklyn as part of what New York Governor George Pataki called an "all-out effort" to bring the Dodgers "back to Brooklyn, where they belong."⁶²

Considering Columbia journalism professor Michael Shapiro's claim that the Brooklyn Dodgers "endure as a ghost," there is little more than memory that substantiates the former franchise.⁶³ But, while the number of Brooklyn Dodgers fans and players is slowly dwindling, the team maintains its presence across a variety of formats. Sports histories and memorabilia regarding the Brooklyn Dodgers remain popular and the team is a constant focus of sports documentaries on ESPN, HBO, and PBS. Notably, the Dodgers are a central focus in the 1950s episode from Burns's aforementioned documentary. Officials at the Library of Congress estimate that there are over one hundred Brooklyn Dodgers titles in their collection, more than any other team besides the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox.⁶⁴

Still, this divisive identity, a history torn between Brooklyn and Los Angeles, which has been separated by decades and abated (somewhat) by aging memories, is rarely materialized. In fact, the only place where the team's new location in Los Angeles is put in conflict with its Brooklyn past is through team merchandise and memorabilia. For decades, however, the commercial value of this past was not recognized in Los Angeles. The sale of Brooklyn merchandise was not spearheaded by the team, but by throwback jerseys and caps produced in the late 1980s by Mitchell & Ness and nostalgic hat manufacturer Roman Pro.⁶⁵ Notably, Brooklyn Dodgers merchandise began to catch on in the mainstream after filmmaker and Brooklyn-native Spike Lee wore a Brooklyn hat and a Jackie Robinson throwback in his 1989 film, *Do the*

Right Thing.⁶⁶ Over twenty years later, sports memorabilia executive Brandon Steiner estimates that upwards of \$20 million in Brooklyn Dodgers merchandise is sold every year.⁶⁷

MATERIALIZING THROWBACKS

Within this context, the Dodgers' use of throwback uniforms during the 2011 season was a meaningful rhetorical practice that engendered a wide range of emotional reactions not intended by the franchise. These material symbols resurrected over one hundred years of a disparate Dodgers' history, one that began with Brooklyn's love affair with their local team, the introduction of Jackie Robinson, the ultimate triumph in 1955 after years of frustration via their local rivals, and the painful loss of a civic institution. Resurrecting and representing uniforms from the team's history in Brooklyn, therefore, had a series of unintentional, but interrelated, consequences. First, by inaccurately reproducing the throwbacks, the Dodgers deceived their fans in order to make a marketable and profitable product that forsook the team's unique identity. Second, by wearing a Brooklyn throwback in their home stadium, the Dodgers portrayed an attitude that the franchise owns with absolute authority the memory and history of Brooklyn's famous franchise. Consequently, the throwbacks communicated that the Dodgers own the symbol but only intend to use it for commercial purposes, a position enhanced by the context of the team's dire financial straits during the 2011 season.

As part of a six-game promotion entitled "throwback days," which included a special rate for purchasing a ticket package for all six contests at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, the franchise elected to let their fans choose one of three road Brooklyn Dodgers uniform throwbacks for the team to wear during afternoon home games. Over a period of three weeks in February 2011, over fifty thousand fans voted online for their favorite of the three uniforms options. The oldest throwback choice was used during the 1911 season and, other than its function as a centennial marker for the team's 2011 season, was noteworthy for two specific designs. First, the jersey featured narrow navy pinstripes, a design that remained with the team through the 1936 season but is most famously ascribed to other historical MLB franchises like the Chicago Cubs and the New York Yankees. Second, the front of the jersey displayed "Brooklyn" in capital letters vertically along the shirt placket, a unique feature in MLB history. A block letter "B" atop the cap of the 1911 uniform is the only link to the second available throwback choice, a 1931 uniform that positioned the same block "B," in baby blue, on the left chest. The off-white uniform also featured the same baby blue color trim throughout and the team cap delivers

the same script “B” popularized by later Brooklyn teams. Overall, this style is also unique in that it lasted for just one season for the Dodgers, as full city and team names adorned their jerseys in subsequent seasons.

The baby blue color of the 1931 jersey did not reappear for Brooklyn until the 1944 season, when it was predominantly featured in the team’s road alternate uniforms, Dodgers fans’ final throwback option. These uniforms, made of a reflective satin fabric in order to increase player visibility during the first night games in MLB history, were first used in the 1944 season and then sporadically throughout the latter half of the 1940s. Outside of the new uniforms, the 1944 season was a largely forgettable one as the team stumbled to a seventh-place finish in the National League.⁶⁸ Without any particular historical event or achievement to celebrate, the design of the 1944 uniform was critical to understanding why it was an available choice for the 2011 season. The baby blue uniform had white trim, with “Brooklyn” in a familiar white script across the chest and a royal blue cap with a white script “B,” by then a prominent feature of Dodger uniforms. With fans intrigued by the possibility of reintroducing satin to the major leagues for the first time in seven decades, albeit for afternoon games, the 1944 alternate jersey won the online vote over the 1911 jersey by less than two thousand votes.

However, when the winner was announced, the Dodgers indicated that although the color and design of the 1944 jersey would remain, the fabric would not be satin but a modern polyester blend instead. In recreating the uniform, however, the details are not always necessary, as Pierre Nora asserts: “Memory, being a phenomenon of emotion and magic, accommodates only those facts that suit it.”⁶⁹ Such is the predicament of many throwback jerseys utilized across all sports. Because of the material composition of any remaining originals, if any still exist, the replication of jerseys is fraught with the opportunity to revise history. The vulnerability, therefore, of the original presented an opportunity that was inherently rhetorical because even as it offered new access, it “[was] an intervention in the materiality of the text, and it is important to grapple with the degrees and kinds of change wrought by it.”⁷⁰ In this instance, that change obscured accuracy for the sake of a more marketable product.

In specific response to the 1944 throwbacks, the color choice of baby blue is not an inherent part of Dodgers history. The color is especially contradictory to the team jerseys since the team has established “Dodger blue,” the shade of blue that regularly adorns the team, as both a legitimate part of the color wheel and a euphemism for playing for the Dodgers. Popularized by former Los Angeles Dodgers manager Tommy Lasorda, who is known for coining the phrase “bleed[ing] Dodger blue,” wearing Dodger blue is an important part

of Dodgers identity.⁷¹ The baby blue of the 1944 throwback violated that in principle, although the players wore Dodger blue throwback caps during all six throwback games, the baby blue color of the throwbacks approximated the conspicuously baby (or powder) blue styling of the far-less prestigious Kansas City Royals. The Royals wore baby blue as their primary color on road jerseys from 1973 to 1991, the team's most competitive era, and in recent years the look has popularly served as a throwback. The resulting confusion between Royals and Dodgers colors was exacerbated by the decision to forgo satin for the modern fabric technology that official uniform supplier Majestic uses for all MLB teams. As a polyester double-knit, the jersey lost the shimmery look and feel of the originals, thus exaggerating the blandness of the re-creation. Further curtailing the uniqueness of the Dodgers' throwback, baby blue jerseys were not only one of the most popular colors of the Mitchell & Ness throwback fad but the color was represented on the jerseys of almost half of MLB franchises throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, in addition to betraying Dodger blue, the 1944 throwback for the 2011 season sacrificed its potential uniqueness by embracing modern technologies and reverting to fashionable colors for the purposes of marketability.

Importantly, all three choices for Dodgers fans in 2011 were road uniforms that prominently featured a Brooklyn wordmark or logo, to be worn during Los Angeles Dodgers home games. The use of "Brooklyn" on all of their throwback jerseys, therefore, attempted to further congeal the franchise's unified historical narrative that delivers one team, albeit in two cities, and not two separate and unique teams. The throwbacks performed as supports that tell a selective story about the Dodgers, a story controlled by Dodger ownership interests who seek to control and contain Brooklyn Dodger history by controlling its material deployment. Thus, everything Brooklyn Dodgers—especially its extremely valuable historical significance—is owned by a franchise that left the city and now resides thousands of miles away.

As a result, numerous Brooklyn Dodgers fans regard the Los Angeles Dodgers as unsympathetic to their history. The interpretation follows that the Dodgers are only interested in Brooklyn when they want to use nostalgic appeals for commercial purposes. Such was the rationale behind the team suing a Brooklyn bar in 1993 for their use of the Dodger name to, as the *New York Times* wrote, "secure the tightest possible grip on sales of merchandise carrying team logos . . . [a] business [that] grew from about \$200 million in sales in 1986 to \$2 billion in 1991, according to testimony at the trial."⁷² As those profits have soared in the past two decades, these interests have kept an eye on Brooklyn. For example, in 2010, MLB, on behalf of the Los Angeles franchise, sued a restaurant, "Brooklyn Burger," on account of the restau-

rant's script "Brooklyn" logo. In reaction, borough president Marty Markowitz defended the local business: "They left us in 1957 and they've got the gall to think that they own the name Brooklyn."⁷³ Given the numerous lawsuits the franchise has brought against residents and businesses in its former home, Brooklyn fans interpreted the Dodgers throwbacks as merely a convenient "tribute" guised in a potential financial windfall for the current team. As borough president Markowitz defiantly asserted, "If they have any interest in nostalgia, they could leave L.A. and come back home."⁷⁴

By deploying the Brooklyn Dodgers at their discretion, the franchise sought to utilize the commercial value of their history without reminding the public of the real consequences of their tragic past. That history is an unpleasant reminder to fans that even the most beloved local sports franchises would not hesitate if given the opportunity to relocate to a more financially profitable locale. The Dodgers treated the Brooklyn throwbacks as a stylized symbol and as copyrighted property they own for the purpose of selling, not commemorating.

Finally, the decision to again prioritize their Brooklyn past was contextualized by the time of deployment and the beleaguered financial standing of the team's then-owner, Frank McCourt. The plan to wear the throwback uniforms for weekday afternoon games during the 2011 season revealed no purpose except to increase merchandise sales and attendance for these often poorly-attended games. Considering that the team had already used 1955 throwbacks in the past, the new throwback choices were not honorific items, but merely new products added to the team's inventory. In part, this understanding is based on the fact that, as previously mentioned, the 1944 throwbacks did not celebrate any of the team's specific seasons or significant accomplishments. In addition, the satin jerseys were a footnote in MLB history, with just a few teams experimenting with them for a handful of games during the 1940s. From this standpoint, the satin uniforms were remembered as a unique gimmick, not an enduring jersey that is representative of Dodgers history. When packaged as a featured part of a six-game throwback plan, where fans who purchase the entire six-pack of tickets can receive half-priced food and drink (including alcohol), the legitimacy of the attempt at commemoration was placed in doubt.

The criticism of the throwbacks as a blatant promotional tool was furthered by the financial indiscretions of the McCourt family, who while "using the Dodgers and related assets as collateral—had racked up a staggering \$459 million in debt, much of which was used personally."⁷⁵ The bitter divorce that took place between Frank and Jamie McCourt from 2009 to 2011 also revealed the Dodgers' attempt to procure a \$200 million loan, as an upfront payment for television rights, from their cable broadcaster Fox.⁷⁶ The financial stand-

ing of the team, which the *Los Angeles Times* believed affected the team's ability to field a championship roster, contextualized the throwback promotion for the 2011 season.⁷⁷

Given his lavish indiscretions and abuse of funds intended for the Dodgers' franchise, MLB spent most of the 2011 season trying to oust McCourt as team owner. In April, as a response to the divorce proceedings and the belief that McCourt was no longer fit to run the team, MLB commissioner Bud Selig stepped in to manage the franchise's finances. As part of a bankruptcy agreement signed three months later, McCourt agreed to sell the team at auction. Despite the apparent turmoil, the team was sold for a record price of \$2.15 billion—over five times what McCourt paid for the team in 2004—to a group of investors that included former basketball star Magic Johnson and veteran baseball executive Stan Kasten.⁷⁸ The new sale brought closure to an ignominious chapter of Dodgers history and represented a new opportunity for the Dodgers and their material history.

CONCLUSION

Comedian Jerry Seinfeld once attempted to clarify sports team devotion by focusing on team uniforms. Because teams (and players) are constantly moving, he opined, "You're actually rooting for the clothes when you get right down to it. You are standing, cheering, and yelling for your clothes to beat the clothes from another city."⁷⁹ This observation both points to the significance of sports jerseys, which have operated as symbolic representations of cities and fans for over a century, and implies that sports jerseys can simply exist as ahistorical (or historically-inaccurate) stylized clothes.

Jerseys then, as the example of the Dodgers' throwbacks has revealed, comprise a critical library of commemorative material that have strong, evocative appeals. The Brooklyn Dodgers and their jerseys thereby encapsulate a wide range of emotions, covering Brooklyn's underdog status as representative of the working-class borough, engaging the deep connections that fans in Brooklyn had with the players who lived in their community, and epitomizing the potential of sport to stand against racism. But the Los Angeles Dodgers' 1944 throwbacks, beset by their inconsistencies in fabric and their attitude towards the powerful Brooklyn symbol, are overwhelmed by the context of their deployment as a commodity. Like all memorials, throwbacks are susceptible to their surroundings and, in this instance, the financial questions that surround the team adversely impact the jerseys' potential to advocate a Dodgers history.

The case study reveals how difficult it is to materially represent a complex

history, yet MLB teams continue to deploy throwbacks with little concern for historical accuracy or consistency. Rather than be concerned with the potential divisiveness that reveals questions about the ownership of memories, these teams are only interested in the financial rewards of exploiting these memories as stylized symbols. Ultimately, the power of nostalgia encourages a style so vacuous that it can overcome the weight of its substance: messy legacies, moral questions about the appropriateness, and the contradictory context of the team's current identity. Producing a stylish throwback is enough. And so the Brooklyn Dodgers play on, in Los Angeles.

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