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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

While the descriptions might be potentially useful, none is properly documented and there is little consistency from one to the next. This would be fair enough if the book were simply a picture book intended for a popular audience, but the book maintains an academic pretense. Partially funded by the Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council, it is one of a number of similar books to have received such support. One wonders why?

John Taylor, Canadian Review Editor
Carleton University.

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Melvin Adelman's *A Sporting Time* and Rob Ruck's *Sandlot Seasons*, two contributions to the University of Illinois Press's "Sport and Society" series, are contrasts in American historiography as well as style. Although the study of sport and leisure by professional scholars is new, these two authors bring established historiographical traditions to their work. Both books make solid contributions that suggest leisure can be as important as work in understanding society. Both also argue that sport is not a free floating aesthetic but is indeed rooted in specific social reality and historical circumstance.

In *A Sporting Time*, the more contentious of the two books, Adelman resurrects modernization theory with a few appropriate apologies for some of its shortcomings. Organized sport of the present, he believes, has a greater social value than earlier less-structured, pre-industrial forms. Adelman's argument owes much to the work of Richard Hofstadter, Robert Wiebe, and the English sociologist Eric Dunning. The book pays tribute to Wiebe with its contention that the development of modern sport was the result of the American middle class's "search for order."

Modernization theory in American history has been one focus of those in search of national exceptionalism. Critics charge that it glorifies the middle class at the expense of a heterogeneous society. It asks Americans to choose a national history based on a rural (often southern) "cracker" influence, an industrial/business aristocracy, or the virtues

of the urban middle class. Presented in this way, the choice for most people is obvious. Adelman is firmly convinced that what is urban and middle class is uniquely American, while the rural and aristocratic tendencies are a hindrance to national advancement. Those groups that are not part of the urban middle class can be incorporated into this mythology or face exclusion.

Between 1820 and 1870 leisure in New York City was transferred from the wealthy (rural) influences to the urban middle class. Those sports unable to adapt to the process of modernization and rationalization, such as cricket, fell by the wayside. Other sports such as harness racing and rounders (baseball) proved more adaptable and became dominant forms of organized leisure in New York. Adelman's model, using value-laden terminology, defines pre-modern sport as sporadic, imprecise, static, and inconsistent. In the hands of the middle class it became formal, rational, dynamic, orderly and ideologically consistent. Sport and leisure by 1870 had come to reflect the modern American personality: rational, individualistic, autonomous and achievement-oriented. Baseball and harness racing had become the best examples of the triumph of the search for order in American sport. Under urban, middle-class/entrepreneurial guidance, these sports were the most ideologically and highly commercialized.

The question left begging by *A Sporting Time* is what role did blacks, the working class, and farmers play in the development of modern sport? Adelman states that racial prejudice excluded blacks. "The lower class was conspicuous by its absence," and rural America fought and retarded modernization. These peremptory dismissals are at odds with the bulk of recent histories of working-class leisure. Adelman argues that the urban, middle-class, through the aid of a powerful press with national influence, used sport to propagate its own attitudes and values, ultimately establishing a national identity for sport consistent with its own ideology. Those

unable or unwilling to conform were left to their own devices.

In contrast to *A Sporting Time*, Rob Ruck's *Sandlot Seasons* examines the important social role of sport (especially baseball) to Pittsburgh's black community. Ruck, like Adelman, has a partisan commitment to a specific historiographical tradition. In response to books such as *Beyond the Melting Pot* and Stanley Elkin's *Slavery*, historians of the Afro-American experience have attempted to show that black Americans possessed a unique cultural experience. Ruck extends this to sport. Sport was not merely a ticket out of the black ghetto, it was a positive element that channeled social behavior into constructive and meaningful experiences. It gave the black community its own heroes and provided one of the few opportunities for inter-racial contact on an equal basis. *Sandlot Seasons* portrays black baseball in Pittsburgh as possessing a character not unlike the pre-modern games described by Adelman. It continued to be a local, ritualistic, simple and vague activity almost a century after the era discussed in *A Sporting Season*.

Ruck's book romanticizes, is personal and impressionistic, but is consistent in dealing with the aura surrounding semi-professional baseball and the sport's local heroes. Black baseball survived and even prospered in times of economic depression, extreme racism, and two world wars. Records are sketchy and comparisons with white professional athletes are inconclusive, but the mythology of the sandlot seasons has survived. The shattering of the colour bar in professional baseball signalled the demise of the local, community-centred sandlot teams, such as the Homestead Grays and the Pittsburgh Crawfords. Integrated professional baseball attracted top black athletes and fans, establishing city-wide, rather than community-based support for the game. In the 1950s black baseball was consumed by modernization and with it a key feature of black community identification disappeared.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, baseball, its players and its administrators had been, according to Ruck, a cohesive element in black Pittsburgh. Although many linked the game to petty crime, it provided a focus for community loyalty. Despite sport's emergence as a middle-class business, Ruck shows that this was not necessary to make baseball socially valuable.

Each of these books contains a disquieting element. *A Sporting Time* is too pat, too homogenized. *Sandlot Seasons* is too sanguine, too romantic. Both, however, are valuable additions to American sport's history. They succeed in affirming the historical importance of leisure and, like baseball itself, they remain loyal to tradition while extending legitimate boundaries.

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Rybczynski, Witold. *Home: A Short History of an Idea*. Markham, Ontario: Viking Penguin Books, 1986. Pp.256. Black and white photographs. \$9.95 paper.

What makes a house a home and how did it get this way? These are the questions McGill University architect Witold Rybczynski addresses in his latest book. The answer for Rybczynski is deceptively simple. The home is an idea invented and developed to provide for the growing needs of comfort and other amenities such as domesticity, privacy, intimacy and efficiency.

The discovery and elucidation of these attributes of hominess and how they evolved make a most interesting journey. It begins in the current age with Rybczynski calling to the page images of contemporary culture. He describes the archetypal man of comfort, Ralph Lauren. Lauren is comfortably dressed in Ralph Lauren shirt and pants, comfortably coiffed and smelling of Ralph Lauren cologne

and comfortably housed in a home decorated by none other than Ralph Lauren himself. For Rybczynski, Lauren is not merely a faddish couturier, but a designer who reflects potent bourgeois traditions. His new line of home furnishings has become popular because its design is based on comfortable elegance, rehearsed informality, and polite rusticity, and, most of all, it evokes an idealized sense of the past. Is all this merely nostalgia? What are we missing that makes us willing to pay so dearly and search so diligently for a domestic tradition, Rybczynski asks.

To answer this, Rybczynski examines the evolution of "comfort." Comparing a 16th century writing-room with his own study, he notes that to a casual observer the modern room is far more comfortable. What is important, however, is that if the same comparison were to be made by a 16th century person, one would expect little more than a puzzled stare since the idea of comfort was unknown. On the basis of this illustration Rybczynski concludes that comfort as a measure of domestic amenity is rather recent in origin.

In tracing the roots of the idea of home, Rybczynski turns his attention to the middle ages. During this era, class divisions distinguished by a wide chasm in housing conditions existed in society. The poor, enduring the most wretched conditions of rural feudalism, did little more than camp out, more or less permanently, in hovels. By contrast, the wealthy enjoyed extravagant, if not especially cosy, lodgings. In neither case, however, was there a concept of "home" or "family" as we understand it today. The revival of towns in the 13th and 14th centuries coincided with the emergence of the free bourgeois or middle-class town dwellers. The burgher's town house combined the workplace and business establishment of the artisan and craftsman with the living quarters of the owner's extended family, which often included servants and apprentices. All lived without privacy in one or two large, poorly heated