

Great white High Hopes: race, masculinity, and
the 1993 Philadelphia Phillies.

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Great White High Hopes: Race, Masculinity, and the 1993 Philadelphia Phillies

Benjamin Phillips (bio)

Damn, the Phillies are white. The whitest team in baseball. Name another team whose four best players are white; whose first six hitters are white; that fields eight white players when facing a righty? The black players are part-timers and backups who know their places.

Philadelphia Magazine's Bruce Buschel while watching the 1993 World Series. Quoted in Richard Orodnenker, ed. *The Phillies Reader*, 290.

In 2008, as I watched my beloved Phillies win the World Series for only the second time in their 125-year history, players of color like Ryan Howard, Jimmy Rollins, and Shane Victorino held starring roles as they helped lead the team to victory. Today, Ryan Howard jerseys blanket Citizens Bank Park, Jimmy Rollins serves as the vocal leader, and Shane Victorino bobbleheads are given out to fans. But in 1993, in an era when black players like Ken Griffey Jr. graced video games, the Phillies often fielded an entirely white starting lineup (depending on the platoon that day). As Dave Zirin points out, by the 1960s "a substantial portion of America's finest baseball, football, and basketball players" were black.¹ Moreover, during a turbulent time when politicians in the 1992 presidential elections were debating the merits of the culture wars, many white males felt displaced and attacked as challenges to their privileged position came from gains in feminism, minority and gay rights movements, and from a decline in the power of the neoconservatives with the election of President Clinton.² For male patriarchy, "the most striking feature of the present moment in the gender order of the rich countries, is the open challenge to men's privileges made by feminism."³ During the 1970s and 1980s, many white males, having been the privileged group for much of history, joined men's movements in response to the gains of feminists and minorities.⁴ Susan Faludi argues that conservative advocates were "not so much defending a prevailing [End Page 61] order as resurrecting an outmoded or imagined one."⁵ Much of the country's beliefs were changing or at least being challenged.

Yet in 1993 Philadelphia, the Phillies were portrayed as overwhelmingly white. Players of color made up half of the platooned position players at second base, left field, and right field, while David West brought up the tail end of the pitching rotation. Although Phillies first baseman John Kruk stressed that there were no racial problems or cliques on the team, one has to wonder how truthful that statement was, as an inordinate number of the players on the team were white.⁶ In multiple instances, the players and the media discussed the important role of the area of the locker room inhabited by Kruk, Lenny Dykstra, Pete Incaviglia, Dave Hollins, Darren Daulton, and Mitch Williams (known by the name "Macho Row," and alternately the "Ghetto").⁷ Despite claims that race did not matter, every member of the Ghetto was white. They were the leaders, the spokesmen, and the stars. Whether the Phillies and the Philadelphia media were actually unaware of the whiteness of the team or just ignored it, both used a great deal of racially coded rhetoric emblematic of hegemonic, white masculinity. Analysis of interviews in the book *More Than Beards, Bellies, and Biceps* and the documentary *High Hopes*, both produced by the Philadelphia Phillies, reveals that the 1993 Philadelphia Phillies represented hegemonic, white masculinity during an era of social change and perceived attack on the values and traditions of white, American males.⁸

Within Philadelphia, a largely white baseball team holds significant meaning. While minorities make up over half of the population, there have been few black superstars on Philadelphia's teams.⁹ Historically, Philadelphia baseball teams and their fans have had a sordid and regrettable reputation regarding racial equality and acceptance. While Philadelphia fielded many Negro League teams, most were owned and operated by white men. A player for the Hilldales, a team that frequently beat the Philadelphia Athletics in barnstorming contests, cynically remarked, "It [white management of Negro League teams] tells white people in a forceful manner that colored people are unable to even...

Great White High Hopes

Race, Masculinity, and the 1993 Philadelphia Phillies

BENJAMIN PHILLIPS

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