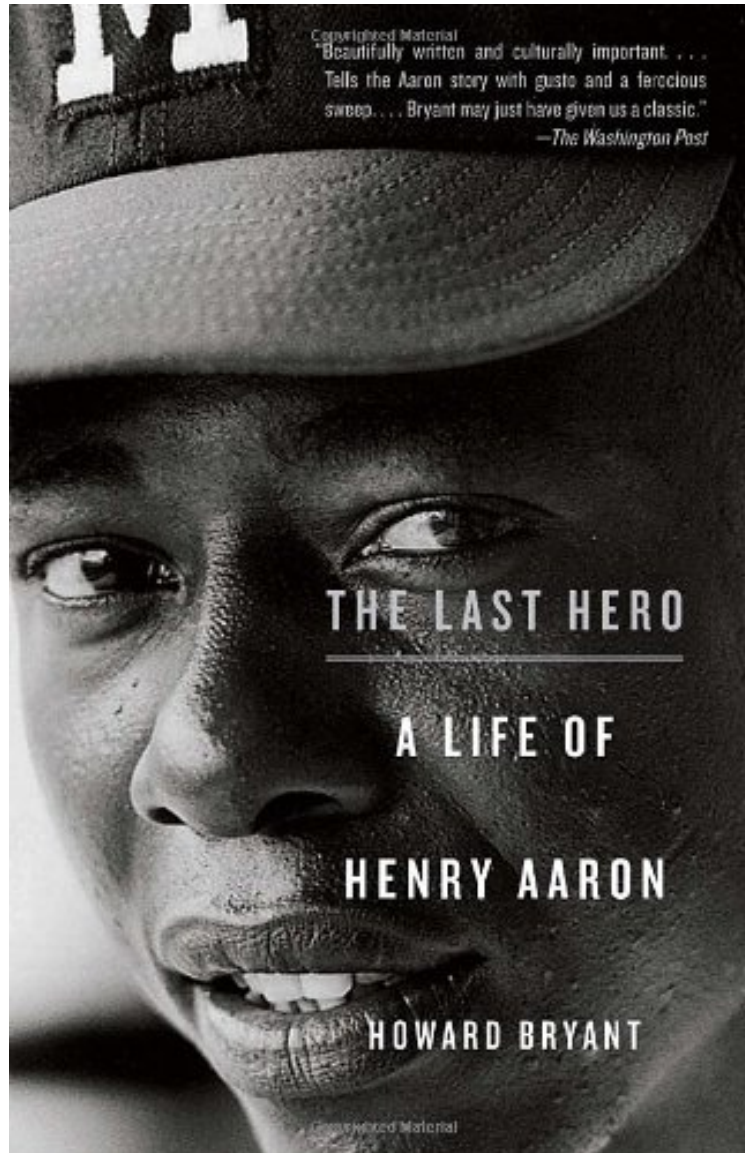


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The Last Hero: A Life of Henry Aaron

Howard Bryant

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#1049204 in Books 2011-05-03 2011-05-03Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 7.98 x 1.28 x 5.16l, 1.29
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Howard Bryant : The Last Hero: A Life of Henry Aaron before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Last Hero: A Life of Henry Aaron:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An epic Henry Aaron storyBy Nicholas R.W. HenningHenry Aaron and the varying social climates throughout his life combine to provide a monumental narrative. Newspaper articles and various personal anecdotes from many people that have known Aaron complement one of baseball's greatest ever

journeys. The account identifies baseball achievement as one layer of Aaron, yet gaining a fuller insight of him recognizes that Aaron has reached and succeeded well beyond the borders of the sport. Nicholas R.W. Henning - Australian Baseball Author

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The most underrated superstar of all-time By Barry Sparks Author Howard Bryant gives Henry (what he is called by all of his friends) Aaron, whom he calls "the most underrated superstar of all time," his due in this exceptional biography. When Aaron retired after the 1976 season, he held baseball's records for most home runs, most at-bats, most RBI, most total bases and most extra base hits. Only Ty Cobb had more hits and scored more runs. Aaron, however, never quite received the publicity he deserved during his 23-year career. Considered bland by reporters, Aaron preferred to let his actions speak for themselves. Early in his career, he was overshadowed by his Milwaukee Braves teammates--Warren Spahn, Eddie Mathews and Lew Burdette. Later, he played second fiddle to the flashy, child-like and exuberant Willie Mays and the more flamboyant Roberto Clemente. Aaron, however, didn't help his case. Suspicious of the press, self-conscious about his background and uncomfortably thrust into the pre-dominantly all-white world of professional baseball at an early age, Aaron, a loner, built a wall around himself. Non-confrontational, he allowed writers to turn him into a caricature of a simple, uncomplicated black man who wasn't smart enough to understand the reasons for his success. By the age of 24, Aaron had been voted NL MVP, played on a World Championship team, won a batting title and a home run crown. He was, according to the New York Times, "Milwaukee's answer to Mickey Mantle." The Braves played the Yankees in the World Series in 1957 and 1958 and lost a three-game playoff to the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1959. Aaron always felt as if the Braves should have won four consecutive pennants. While Aaron enjoyed some of his best years from 1960-65, the Milwaukee Braves spent just four days in first place during those years. When the Braves moved to Atlanta after the 1965 season, Aaron was less than enthusiastic to return to the deep South where segregation and racism were ever present. Concerned about civil rights, Aaron was reluctant to speak out and he was often criticized for his lack of involvement. He became more outspoken near the end of his career and in retirement. After being overlooked in the 60s, attention turned to Aaron in the early 70s as people realized he had a chance to break Babe Ruth's career home run mark. The quest to break Ruth's record became joyless as hate mongers threatened Aaron. Even baseball snubbed him when Commissioner Bowie Kuhn wasn't present for his 700th homer and baseball didn't recognize the achievement in any special way. Aaron, the first player to collect 3,000 hits and 500 home runs, resented being considered a one-dimensional power hitter and being defined by his home run record. After the Braves made little or no attempt to keep him after the 1974 season and didn't seriously consider him as a potential manager, Aaron was traded to the Milwaukee Brewers. Although it was a chance for the financially struggling Aaron to cash some hefty checks, all the magic was gone. In two seasons with the Brewers, he batted .234 and .229, slugging a total of 22 home runs. In retirement, Aaron prospered financially and made peace somewhat with the baseball establishment. Although he hoped to be the first unanimous selection to the Hall of Fame in 1982, Aaron received 97.8 percent of the vote, second highest to Cobb's 98.2 percent.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Outstanding By David Dearborn As some of the other customer reviewers have indicated, this is a book about America in the 1950s and 60s, just as it's a fine personal account of the great Henry Aaron. I found it exceptionally well-written, with the baseball action always vivid and the cumulative portrait of Aaron across the decades no less riveting in a different way entirely. This is because, even with Aaron's cooperation (a coup in itself), the author had to meet the challenge of portraying a relatively private man who never wore his heart on his sleeve (well, maybe with the exception of his uncharacteristic, in-air fight with Rico Carty). Howard Bryant succeeded admirably -- his analyses of Aaron the man and athlete are clear and penetrating, and the reader comes away with well-rounded pictures of both realms. No matter what cruelties he encountered (including from the press) amid his many triumphs, Aaron stayed true to himself and proved to be more of an unassuming role model than people knew when the steroid era dawned. Seeing places like Mobile, Milwaukee and Atlanta through the prism of Aaron's experience, we learn a lot about America (south and north) and baseball in an era when both nation and sport moved slowly to more enlightened levels. The story of the Braves' move from Boston to Milwaukee is fascinating in itself (as are the portraits of teammates Spahn, Mathews, Adcock, Bruton and Burdette). Bryant also gives us deep thematic contrasts between Aaron, Willie Mays and Jackie Robinson. There's a lot of rich baseball history in "The Last Hero," and throughout it towers a class act whose ambition to be the best baseball player alive was matched by his pure strength of character. A genuine page-turner.

In the thirty-four years since his retirement, Henry (Hank) Aaron's reputation has only grown in magnitude. But his influence extends beyond statistics, and at long last here is the first definitive biography of one of baseball's immortal figures. Based on meticulous research and extensive interviews *The Last Hero* reveals how Aaron navigated the upheavals of his time—fighting against racism while at the same time benefiting from racial progress—and how he achieved his goal of continuing Jackie Robinson's mission to obtain full equality for African Americans, both in baseball and society, while he lived uncomfortably in the public eye. Eloquent, detailed and penetrating, this is a revelatory portrait of a complicated, private man who through sports became an enduring American icon.

.com In the thirty-four years since his retirement, Henry Aaron's reputation has only grown in magnitude: he broke

existing records (rbis, total bases, extra-base hits) and set new ones (hitting at least thirty home runs per season fifteen times, becoming the first player in history to hammer five hundred home runs and three thousand hits). But his influence extends beyond statistics, and at long last here is the first definitive biography of one of baseball's immortal figures. Based on meticulous research and interviews with former teammates, family, two former presidents, and Aaron himself, *The Last Hero* chronicles Aaron's childhood in segregated Alabama, his brief stardom in the Negro Leagues, his complicated relationship with celebrity, and his historic rivalry with Willie Mays—all culminating in the defining event of his life: his shattering of Babe Ruth's all-time home-run record. Bryant also examines Aaron's more complex second act: his quest to become an important voice beyond the ball field when his playing days had ended, his rediscovery by a public disillusioned with today's tainted heroes, and his disappointment that his career home-run record was finally broken by Barry Bonds during the steroid era, baseball's greatest scandal. Bryant reveals how Aaron navigated the upheavals of his time—fighting against racism while at the same time benefiting from racial progress—and how he achieved his goal of continuing Jackie Robinson's mission to obtain full equality for African-Americans, both in baseball and society, while he lived uncomfortably in the public spotlight. Eloquently written, detailed and penetrating, this is a revelatory portrait of a complicated, private man who through sports became an enduring American icon.

Questions for Howard Bryant on *The Last Hero*

Q: Why Henry Aaron? A: After my second book, *Juicing the Game*, the natural progression for my thought process was heading toward one question: "Who in baseball do you admire? Is there anyone this sport can be proud of?" It wasn't simply the fatigue of writing about steroids and tainted heroes that drifted me toward Henry Aaron, but because the steroids scandal occurring during the same time as the housing-and-mortgage scandal told me something larger was taking place in this country, that the value systems we ostensibly seek--honor, integrity, accountability--were becoming almost quaint. In baseball, as the drug scandal intensified, players would tell me, "If you ain't cheating, you ain't trying." It was that level of cynicism that made me consider writing about someone who certainly was not perfect but had a larger mission for himself beyond money, that here was a person for whom those values are not quaint.

Q: Did he cooperate? A: It took roughly eighteen months for him to agree to speak with me. I first began working on this project in May 2006 and that was in the middle of when Barry Bonds was nearing Henry's record. Henry Aaron wanted nothing to do with the Bonds record chase. He didn't want to be asked questions about Bonds, did not want to be placed in the debate about anabolic steroids. He did not want to engage at all. When Henry's attorney, Allan Tanenbaum, and I spoke for the first time, he was extremely pessimistic about the book and the public's reaction to Henry Aaron. He was convinced that the public did not care about him except in being positioned as the polar opposite of Bonds. He was certain that I was only interested in one thing: Bonds. Over many phone calls spanning several months (the key conversation taking place over Thanksgiving 2007), Allan finally accepted that my motives for writing the book had nothing to do with Bonds and everything to do with a man I considered to be an American icon. A few months later, on January 31 (ironically on Jackie Robinson's birthday), Henry Aaron and I had our first phone call. He was extremely pleasant and engaging but echoed Allan's sentiments about his own life. "People don't care about me," he told me. "They only care about what I did as a baseball player. There's more to me than that." I was amazed at the considerable divide that existed between the enthusiasm I received whenever I mentioned the possibility of writing about Henry and what he considered to be the public's perception of him.

Q: What most surprised you during the writing/research? A: There were many surprising aspects of the research, which is why I truly love to research and write books. Whatever your initial thoughts of your subject are, they will invariably be altered the deeper you learn. I was as guilty as anyone in following the accepted Aaron myth: played in Milwaukee, was always overshadowed by players in bigger markets, snuck up on even the shrewdest evaluators of talent from the day he entered the big leagues to the day when suddenly he and not Willie Mays was in the best position to break Babe Ruth's all-time home run record. None of this is true, and that was the most surprising thing. Henry Aaron was a phenom, a top prospect from the day he joined the Indianapolis Clowns. He was a comet tearing through each level in the minor leagues, and when he arrived for his first spring in Bradenton, Florida in 1954, all eyes were on him to be the next great player. The myth came later. As the Milwaukee Braves fell in the standings at the beginning of the 1960s, people did begin to forget about Henry, and he quietly accumulated Hall of Fame numbers. But that was only because the public lost interest in a losing team, not because it was unaware of his enormous ability.

Q: What is the lasting legacy of Henry Aaron? A: A famous sociologist told me during an interview that the steroid scandal has created a gap between the record holders and the standard bearers of major league baseball. Barry Bonds is a record holder. Henry Aaron is a standard bearer. The latter is far more important and valuable than the former. And it carries weight beyond the baseball diamond, where Henry always wanted respect. He spent his life being compared on the baseball diamond to Willie Mays, but Henry Aaron wanted to follow in the legacy of Jackie Robinson, to use his platform to provide opportunities for people who did not have them. Baseball was simply a means to that end. (Photo © Erinn Hartman) Photographs from *The Last Hero: A Life of Henry Aaron* (Click on Thumbnails to Enlarge) Clemente, Mays, and Aaron Jacksonville, 1953 Bradenton, 1957 Aaron and Family Aaron in Atlanta Breaking Babe's Record Aaron Today From Publishers Weekly

This biography of the African-American baseball great doesn't amount to the epic it wants to be. ESPN reporter Bryant (*Juicing the Game*) portrays Aaron's journey from Jim Crow Alabama to superstardom with the Milwaukee, then

Atlanta Braves during the 1950s, '60s, and '70s as both a sports saga and a struggle against racism. (The Braves' spring training facilities stayed segregated into the 1960s, and Aaron's 1974 breaking of Babe Ruth's home run record was marred by racist death threats.) But while the author takes very seriously the sports commentator's traditional task of investing trivia with near-biblical portentousness—And thus it came to pass that Henry Aaron became the first black majority owner of the first BMW franchise in the country—he never quite succeeds at establishing Aaron's heroic stature. The slugger comes off as a superlatively skillful but unspectacular player whose civil rights activism is cautious and muted (though more outspoken later when he became a Braves executive). Throughout, he's a wary, reticent man given to rancor over slights, and the narrative can't help wandering toward more charismatic figures like Willie Mays and Jackie Robinson. Mightily as he swings, Bryant fails to knock Aaron's story out of the park. Photos. (May 11) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist*Starred * Bryant, a senior writer for ESPN.com and ESPN the Magazine, delivers a definitive biography of Hall-of-Famer Henry Aaron, whose reputation only grows as those of such modern-day sluggers as Barry Bonds and Alex Rodriguez become tainted. Bryant's research here is exhaustive, but it only serves to add texture and context to Aaron's compelling story, which starts with an impoverished but proud Mobile, Alabama, boyhood, then follows Aaron's long and steady trajectory as the greatest home-run hitter (if not player) of his generation, ending with Aaron's public and private responses to the breaking of his home-run record by Bonds in 2007. There's thorough, concise play-by-play of Aaron's benchmark games; good background on such seminal events as the Milwaukee Braves' move to Atlanta in 1966; and a solid account of Aaron's agonizing though successful conquest of Babe Ruth's homer mark, in 1974. And Bryant addresses the long-standing rivalry between Aaron and Willie Mays, giving justice to both careers—James S. Hirsch's *Willie Mays* (2010) helps do that, too—while showing that Aaron's stats more than hold their own. Must reading for baseball fans of every generation. --Alan Moores