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The Politics of Glory.  
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Dick Allen

Fifteen years ago, when I wrote in an article that Dick Allen would probably be in the Hall of Fame eventually, a number of readers wrote to me to tell me how stupid I was. Now, he's a popular Hall of Fame candidate. As time passes, the evaluation of a player comes to rest more and more on this statistics. There is a simple reason for this, which is that everything else tends to be forgotten. His statistics remain exactly the same and eventually the statistics become the central part of the player's image.

No questions that Dick Allen had Hall of Fame caliber skills. Allen as a rookie had pretty much the same numbers that Joe DiMaggio did:

	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SB	Avg	SIPct
Allen	162	632	125	201	38	13	29	91	3	.318	.557
DiMag	138	637	132	206	44	15	29	125	4	.323	.576

Which, when you consider that DiMaggio did this in the thirties and Allen did it in the Sixties, is good company. Allen's 1964 season is certainly on the ten greatest rookie seasons of all time.

He built on that, hitting 40 home runs in 1966, and winning an American League MVP Award almost by acclamation in 1972. He is a great hitter, and excellent base runner and an OK fielder in his better years. He scores 28 on the Black Ink test, a good total and meets 36 percent of the Hall of Fame standards. The statistically most-similar player, Johnny Mize, is in the Hall of Fame. Allen was a great athlete, and almost certainly could have been a star in the NBA.

The "other stuff", the stuff that is gradually being forgotten and revised and rewritten out of existence is that Allen never did anything to help his teams win, and in fact spent his entire career doing everything he possibly could to keep his teams from winning. What he could do was considerable.

On a sports team, the best and most talented players are the leaders, for good or bad, because they're the people who everybody else pays attention to. Allen had so much talent that he was always the focus of attention, and in addition that he was a manipulator of extraordinary skill. He could, and can, charm a rabbit out of its whiskers. And having convinced his teammates A, B, and C that he was a great guy who had

just been misunderstood, he would immediately begin to convince them that teammate D was a racist, teammate E didn't want to win, the press was out to get them all and the manager was an idiot for playing teammate X, rather than teammate C. Every team he played for eventually degenerated into warring camps of pro-Dick Allen and anti-Dick Allen factions.

In 1965, when the Phillies were trying to overcome the memory of having blown the pennant in the last few days of the 1964 season, Allen got into a fight with a teammate early in the season, forcing a trade. For four years after that Allen engaged in constant headline making battles with his managers, and the Phillies, a young team at the time, never did come together, and were never in a position to win again.

In 1973, after Allen had won the MVP Award by leading the White Sox to a twelve-game improvement in 1972, Allen ridiculed the manager (Chuck Tanner) behind his back, expressed his dislike for three teammates in the newspaper and "voluntarily retired" to force a trade. That team didn't go anywhere, either.

In 1976, when the Phillies won the division with Allen at the end of his career, Allen ripped management and threatened not to play in the playoffs because the Phillies wouldn't make a spot on the World Series for one of his teammates. The Phillies held two separate victory celebrations, the pro-Dick Allen faction locking themselves in the trainer's room to hold their own party.

It has become fashionable to say that Dick Allen was a victim of the racism of his time, and for this reason it is politically incorrect for me to even mention any of this old business. Bob Carroll, in making Dick Allen's Hall of Fame case wrote that "Rugged individualism is more admired at a distance than up close and personal." Rugged individualism? How about alcoholism, irresponsibility, and vindictiveness? How about paranoia and pettiness? They're all easier to admire from a distance.

"Had Dick Allen played fifty years ago," Carroll continued, "he might be lauded today as a shining example of American independence. Instead, his moodiness, self-absorption, and free-and-easy approach to baseball make him anathema to many." Well, pardon me, but was there an era in baseball history where moodiness, self-absorption and a casual approach to the game were considered desirable qualities in a ballplayer? Was there a time in baseball history when a player could not show up at the ballpark once in a while without anybody making an issue out of it?

Dick Allen was a victim of the racism of his time, that part is absolutely true. The Phillies were callous to send him the Little Rock in 1963 with no support network, and the press often treated Allen differently than they would have treated a white player who did the same things. That's all true.

It doesn't have anything to do with the issue. Willie Mays was a victim of the same racism. Jackie Robinson was. Roy Campanella was, Curt Flood was, Bob Gobson was, Hank Aaron was, Ernie Banks was, Monte Irvin was, Lou Brock was, Minnie Monoso was and Roberto Clemente was. Those are all very different personalities, and they dealt with racism in different ways. The best of them used the racism in the outside world to bond the team together, us against them, the bad guys out there. Allen directed his anger at the targets nearest him, and by so doing used racism as an explosive to blow his own teams apart.

Dick Allen was at war with the world. It is painful to be at war with the world, and I feel for him. It is not his fault, entirely, that he was at war with the world.

But that's not the issue. Allen was jerk; that's not the issue, either. There are a lot of jerks in the Hall of Fame, white and black. There are irresponsible people in the Hall of Fame, and there are alcoholics in the Hall of Fame. That's not the issue.

When the White Sox were trying to trade Dick Allen in 1974, somebody asked Joe Burke of the Royals whether he was interested. "I wouldn't pay the waiver price for him," Burke replied. "I wouldn't pay a dollar for him. I wouldn't take him if you paid me \$10,000." That's the issue. Did he have value? Did he help his teams win?

He did more to keep his teams from winning than anybody else who ever played major league baseball. And if that's a Hall of Famer, I'm a lug nut.