



Hank Aaron of the Braves and Ernie Banks of the Cubs at Chicago's Wrigley Field (1957): When Aaron began to close in on Babe Ruth's home run record in the early '70s, the Braves were flooded with letters from incensed Ruth fans, who didn't want to see the Sultan of Swat's record broken by a Black man. The team received nearly a million letters addressed to Aaron—so many that they had to hire someone to handle Hammerin' Hank's mail.



Eazy-E in Union Square, New York City (1990): While he may not have had the lyrical gifts of Ice Cube or the production genius of Dr. Dre, Eazy-E brought an unprecedented degree of authenticity to N.W.A. Although Ice Cube wrote the words, "Cruising down the street in my '64," it was Eazy-E's honest delivery of the line that, according to Terrence "Punch" Henderson, "created gangsta rap."

sailed over the heads of many casual listeners and observers. The album cover *looks* unabashedly patriotic, just as the song's chorus *sounds* more like propaganda than protest music.

Like the veteran in Springsteen's song, the baseball cap was born in the U.S.A. On June 19, 1846, when the New York Knickerbockers played the New York Baseball Club in what historians consider the first baseball game, the Knickerbockers took the field in matching uniforms complete with straw hats.

Impractical for athletic contests, the hats were replaced within a few years by six-panel merino wool caps with short leather visors, the precursors of the modern baseball cap.

By 1860, the Brooklyn Excelsiors (later the Brooklyn Dodgers) were wearing a cap with a longer visor and a tall peak featuring a fabric-covered button, "the squatchee." Like the previous iterations, the Excelsiors' hats were floppy. The technology didn't yet exist to make the panels stand up straight, so the hats looked very much like longer-brimmed versions of the flat cap.

The first attempts to find a way around this problem started in the 1880s and 1890s, when pillbox hats produced by Spalding started to become popular among the big-league clubs. The caps had either vertical or horizontal stripes, a short bill, and a flat crown. They were a dramatic improvement over their floppy predecessors, but thanks to their drooping visors, they began to lose their shape almost immediately. In 1903, Spalding introduced a larger visor reinforced with rows of stitches, which held its shape for much longer. The "Philadelphia style" cap became the new standard.

Off field, baseball caps found their way first into prisons and then into the military.



Bruce Springsteen on the cover of his *Born in the U.S.A.* album (1984): When the Boss and his E Street Band were on their first overseas tour, London's Hammersmith Odeon put up posters advertising Springsteen as the future of rock and roll. The singer tore the posters down, preferring to ditch the hype and let his music speak for itself.



Niki Lauda (left) and Hans-Joachim Stuck (right) at the Grand Prix of Spain (1974): On August 1, 1976, Lauda's Ferrari left the track, hit an embankment, and burst into flames. Trapped in his wrecked car, Lauda's face and hands were badly burned. His injuries were so bad that he was read his last rites at the hospital. Six weeks later, a bandaged Lauda finished fourth in the Italian Grand Prix.

In what is widely regarded as the first great prison movie, *The Big House* (1930), a young man is convicted of manslaughter and, upon arrival at the prison, he is issued an outfit that includes a baseball cap. During the World War II, soldiers were often issued caps, particularly the olive-colored M41, which was made of herringbone twill and sported a stitched brim. But they preferred the kind worn by baseball players. The Black Sheep Squadron, a group of naval aviators trained by ace pilot Pappy Boyington, wrote to Major League Baseball and offered to shoot down one enemy plane for every hat they received from the two teams then duking it out in the 1943 World Series. The St. Louis Cardinals sent the squadron twenty caps, throwing a few bats and balls into the bargain. The men made good on their end of the bargain, shooting down 48 enemy planes between them.

With the introduction of the snap-back cap in the 1950s (first worn by the Brooklyn Excelsiors), it became possible for manufacturers to mass produce one-size-fits-all caps. When screen printing technology came into its own, brands started turning baseball caps into advertising tools. At first, it was just the biggest brands, like Coca-Cola, but by the late '60s, brands that catered to rural American farmers, truckers, and mechanics were giving away hats to anybody who would take them, turning their customers into walking billboards. Most of these hats (called "gimme hats" for a while, and then, later, trucker hats) had mesh nylon on the back half and foam on the front half, but some of the more successful brands produced higher-quality six-panel caps. Actor Jerry Reed wears one of these while hightailing it to Texarkana in the film *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977).

In the '80s and '90s, baseball caps were adopted by musicians in nearly every genre. Hip-hop artists like Chuck D and Ice Cube adopted them along with other sports apparel. Grunge rock, which took aim at glam-pop and hair-metal bands, turned to the cap as a symbol of resistance. Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam, Dave Grohl of Nirvana, and Mark Lanegan of the Screaming Trees all dressed like truck drivers