

Burying the Black Sox: How Baseball's Cover-Up of the World Series Fix Almost Succeeded.

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Burying the Black Sox: How Baseball's Cover-Up of the World Series Fix Almost Succeeded (review)

Frank R. Ardolino

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REVIEW

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

Reviewed by:

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Carney's book offers new evidence in the heavily investigated scandal of the 1919 World Series, which the Chicago White Sox lost or threw to the Cincinnati Reds in 8 games. Eliot Asinof's *Eight Men Out* (1963), the standard treatment of the Black Sox scandal, depends mainly on anecdotes and contained no footnotes. Carney also incorporates new materials. These include the grand jury statements, which were "lost" before the trial in 1921 and resurfaced seventy years later; 1919–1920 diary entries by the White Sox secretary Harry Grabiner, which first appeared in Bill Veeck's *The Hustler's Handbook* in 1965; and, finally, documents from the 1924 Milwaukee trial in which Joe Jackson sued the White Sox for back pay that was withheld from him because of his putative role in the fix, and forced the team to reveal what he did wrong in the Series of 1919. As Carney announces, "this is the first book to use the Milwaukee trial information to flesh out the whole picture of 'the Big Fix' . . . [and] its cover-up" (ix).

Carney maintains there are two cover-ups in this scandal: the eleven-month "Big Fix" in which the American public was not told about the plot to throw the Series and the more important one, involving the subsequent successful attempt to prevent wider awareness of the infiltration of baseball by gambling. This second cover-up, which Carney says continues to this day, was initiated with the expulsion of the implicated eight members of the White Sox. By deceptively labeling the fix "the Black Sox scandal" and restricting it to only eight players, some of whom might not have been guilty or as involved as some of the others, the industry covered up the extent to which gambling had corrupted the game. At the same time, the industry prevented scrutiny of **[End Page 129]** the reserve clause, which had virtually made slaves of the players, who were forced to accept their contracts or not play. Overall, baseball as an institution never officially investigated the World Series fix for fear of ruining its image as America's pastime and undermining the growing financial success of the game.

The ongoing dynastic struggle between Ban Johnson and Charles Comiskey, the owner of the White Sox, aided the cover-up. The two titans of the American League were always at loggerheads over policy and power. For reasons that transcended his vendetta with Comiskey, Johnson became the primary establishment advocate for the uncovering of the fix. By contrast, Comiskey used his money and resources to make sure that hard evidence would be hidden from the public. In this scenario, Comiskey emerges as the face-saving villain, and Johnson and the newly installed Commissioner of baseball, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, serve as the heroes who, respectively, pushed for the investigation and cleansed baseball with the expulsion of the accused players. The renowned sportswriter Hugh Fullerton was aware of the fix prior to the Series and wrote about it as it was happening and afterwards, trying to spark an official inquiry. Instead, the baseball establishment and fans excoriated him for his negative attitude toward baseball. Fullerton also claimed that he was the target of an attempted assassination by the gamblers involved, who wanted to keep the lid on. Fullerton was a good friend of Comiskey and depended on him to deliver the truth once it was revealed, but the "Old Roman" buried it.

Despite Comiskey's attempts to prevent any inquiry, there were grand jury hearings in 1920, but the transcripts and the signed "confessions" of the players conveniently vanished a few months before the 1921 trial began. It was generally thought that Arnold Rothstein, the gambling mastermind supposedly behind the fix, and Comiskey were responsible for their disappearance, but Carney maintains that it was the "Old Roman," not Rothstein. Nevertheless, Johnson was determined to continue the investigation, and Landis suspended the pertinent players for the upcoming season. In the ensuing trial, none of the players...

BOOK REVIEWS

Gene Carney. *Burying the Black Sox: How Baseball's Cover-Up of the World Series Fix Almost Succeeded*. Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006. 392 pp. Paper, \$26.95.

Frank Ardolino

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