



The Betrayal: How the 1919 Black Sox Scandal Changed Baseball

Charles Fountain

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In the most famous scandal of sports history, eight Chicago White Sox players—including Shoeless Joe Jackson—agreed to throw the 1919 World Series to the Cincinnati Reds in exchange for the promise of \$20,000 each from gamblers reportedly working for New York mobster Arnold Rothstein. Heavily favored, Chicago lost the Series five games to three. Although rumors of a fix flew while the series was being played, they were largely disregarded by players and the public at large. It wasn't until a year later that a general investigation into baseball gambling reopened the case, and a nationwide scandal emerged.

In this book, Charles Fountain offers a full and engaging history of one of baseball's true moments of crisis and hand-wringing, and shows how the scandal changed the way American baseball was both managed and perceived. After an extensive investigation and a trial that became a national morality play, the jury returned not-guilty verdicts for all of the White Sox players in August of 1921. The following day, Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis, baseball's new commissioner, "regardless of the verdicts of juries," banned the eight players for life. And thus the Black Sox entered into American mythology. Guilty or innocent? Guilty and innocent? The country wasn't sure in 1921, and as Fountain shows, we still aren't sure today. But we are continually pulled to the story, because so much of modern sport, and our attitude towards it, springs from the scandal.

Fountain traces the Black Sox story from its roots in the gambling culture that pervaded the game in the years surrounding World War I, through the confusing events of the 1919 World Series itself, to the noisy aftermath and trial, and illuminates the moment as baseball's tipping point. Despite the clumsy unfolding of the scandal and trial and the callous treatment of the players involved, the Black Sox saga was a cleansing moment for the sport. It launched the age of the baseball commissioner, as baseball owners hired Landis and surrendered to him the control of their game. Fountain shows how sweeping changes in 1920s triggered by the scandal moved baseball away from its association with gamblers and fixers, and details how America's attitude toward the pastime shifted as they entered into "The Golden Age of Sport."

Situating the Black Sox events in the context of later scandals, including those involving Reds manager and player Pete Rose, and the ongoing use of steroids in the game up through the present, Fountain illuminates America's near century-long fascination with the story, and its continuing relevance today.

The Betrayal: How the 1919 Black Sox Scandal Changed Baseball Details

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David Blankenship says

Most baseball fans know the story of the Black Sox scandal of 1919, and this book tells that story from a critical perspective, honestly admitting that there are some facets to the story we cannot know. But this book is different, in that it puts the scandal in a bigger context of decades of gambling and game-fixing, the ongoing war over who controlled baseball. This book is interesting all the way through, but the first third, in which many earlier scandals are detailed, was for me the best part of the book.

Chris Jaffe says

Good book. Comparing it to the most famous "Eight Men Out" - this isn't as engaging, but it is a more solid historical effort. Those facts are combined. Eight Men Out famously made up some stories -- most memorably, the hit man threatening Lefty Williams's wife just before Game Eight of the Series. Fountain notes that there are numerous gaps in the record where we really don't know what was going on. EMO filled in those gaps with conjecture, myth, or just picking up the best of the various & conflicting stories. Fountain is more likely to note the conflicting stories. For instance, EMO had Ray Schalk get into a fight with one of the pitchers. Fountain notes that Schalk fiercely denied that to the day he died, and the story came from one questionable source. The famous story of Eddie Cicotte plunking the first batter as a sign the fix was in? There's no real evidence for it (and little reason to think the result of the first batter would mean much to the gamblers).

The book is solid in its history, but some interpretations are a bit much. Fountain says that only Ruth and Jackie Robinson have a place in the American mythos up there with Shoeless Joe. He dismisses Ty Cobb and DiMaggio as comparables out of hand, and doesn't even bring up Mantle or Mays. Er, I guess you can make the argument that Shoeless Joe has that big a hold, but it's hardly such a slamdunk that you can just assert it.

Overall, though, it's a very good book.

Brian Taylor says

Got just what I hoped for from this book - a freshly-researched update clearing up some of the myths surrounding this story, and historical context outlining events in the decades prior that led up to the 1919 World Series scandal.

Paul Miller says

The baseball players all know many of their peers are cheating. The owners and league officials also know this, but are afraid to kill the golden goose so just let it slide. The story of PEDs in today's baseball? Yes, but also the story of rampant gambling in the early days of baseball. Eerily similar tales.

This book is about the 'fixed' World Series (Shoeless Joe, Eight Men Out, ... you know it). Paints a vibrant and detailed picture of the characters involved and of the bygone era. Fun period piece for baseball history buffs.

My hope is that the same approach for curbing game fixing =that worked really well in the 20s - lifetime bans for the cheaters - will be revisited again upon today's group of lowlifes. (Dee Gordon, Ryan Braun and your ilk - hope you're reading this.)

William Kriner says

Very highly recommended. This is a thorough analysis of the Black Sox Scandal involving the 1919 World Series. The first part of the book is a primer on the gambling problems in baseball that lead to the scandal. The ongoing power struggle among baseball brass and especially between Charles Cominsky, owner of the White Sox, and Ban Johnson, American League President and de facto czar of baseball, is particularly outlined. The fact of missing facts after all these years is not ignored and there is a presentation of all the possible alternative factual situations. The post scandal legal proceedings are detailed and the individual players are painted in an evenhanded manner. The White Sox brass and the gamblers involved received a pass and the author reports how that happened. There is an especially poignant chapter on Shoeless Joe Jackson, who had the highest average in the series and made no errors. He was guilty of taking \$5000 of gambler's money, but when the whole story is reported, one has to look at him sympathetically. An extremely talented ball player banned from the Hall of Fame, he never attended a day of school but was able to make good investments and business decisions after being thrown out of baseball in 1920. The Black Sox Scandal is the most famous of American sports scandals. Based on this book, it is not well understood and this is a correction to that. If you like baseball and history, you will like this book.

Tabitha says

I am reviewing a copy that was sent to me by the publisher in exchange for a review. With that said, I'm really giving this book a 3.5 and in rounding up.

I've always been interested in the Black Sox scandal (thanks dad for foisting Field of Dreams upon me during my formative years.) While I've always been a bit curious, I've never really studied it much and much of my opinion was based in popular culture. Let's just say that I was really excited to read this. Very excited and I spent much time discussing every little thing I learned with those around me. As far as history books go, this one was well written. It held my interest and at no time did I want to bang my head on a table (you laugh, but as someone who has a graduate degree in history I can safely say that that happens often.) It is a bit slow to start, but I blame that on the myriad of people we have to meet and the basics we need to know in order to really follow the events of 1919.

My only real issue is with the editing of the book and not the actual content. There were a lot of punctuation and word usage issues that forced me to reread sections in order to figure out what was being conveyed. I don't blame Fountain at all. It smacks of reworking and editing sections. The proofreader should have caught those things. Maybe that's petty, but those things bother me and in the case it did make parts of the book (and I mean paragraphs and sentences) difficult to really understand. That's a problem in the book world.

P.e. lolo says

Mr. Fountain takes you back in time to the scandal of baseball that changed a team, a generation, and for some the idea that the game was on the up and up. He begins with going back into the 1880's and bringing you up to 1919, and the gambling, and players known at those times to change a game. One of the most egregious was Hal Chase. He was brought up quite a bit and discussed about plays and throws. I must say I have read in other books about baseball that he was someone that was not thought highly of after having high praise as a fielder and hitter. In other books it was mentioned about him throwing a game but this author goes into more detail. He also goes into how once, or more than once he admitted to just that when it was brought to owners, and Johnson who was the President of the American league nothing was done, so this was allowed to go on just like steroid use was decades later. You get a look at Johnson, Cominsky, and the players. He also takes a look or tries to at the men or gamblers that were accused of meeting with a few of the players to begin the whole scandal. He then takes you through the hiring of Judge Landis, and the back story behind that. I do agree with the author on point that if Joe Jackson was not part of this we would not be talking about it here almost 100 years later. His name being attached has made this still to this day a big story. I do think the players had the intention of losing but then got shafted. Also I think after reading this book I think they felt nothing would happen because of the men who had done it before them. Landis would change the game forever and the way he worded his statement after the jury found the men innocent, meant that they were out of baseball for life. There is one part that Joe Jackson did go to try to see Cominsky and tell him about it but was turned away. That Cominsky knew and didn't want to hear it. Then later it all blew up. Don't know how true but if it is once again the owners get away at the players expense. It should be noted that the author takes you negotiations and how each player was stuck to a team and what the team offered to play. That they could play in expeditions, but in a few years' teams were having them play in expeditions and not paying them. This does not justify, but this is what led to free agency in the 1970's, and how many years it took. I also liked the end where the author goes into Joe Jackson's career that was fascinating since I remember my father telling me how good he was but reading about it was something else. Overall a very good baseball book and the history of the game. I got this book from netgalley. I gave it 5 stars. Follow us at www.1rad-readerreviews.com

Gary Schantz says

The grade that this book deserves is a C+ but I can't do that so it's a C.

Yes I learned a lot of things about this baseball scandal that I hadn't read before.

The book gave in-depth biographies of the many people involved in this story such as Joe Jackson (who was not the idiot he has been made to be in movies and other books); Arnold Rothstein (who was more involved than other books portrayed him to be); and Hal Chase (who basically invented the throwing of games - I had never heard of this guy). And that was just three of the people who got the full treatment.

Unfortunately, the author was just getting started as there were at least 20 others who were detailed from head-to-toe.

There was even a point in the book where a few people were mentioned as being lost to history...and that is

exactly where all of the minor characters should have been left instead of getting a full treatment on this lawyer or that investigator. Minor characters deserve a mere mention not a full recollection. This was mostly the middle 100 pages which I just thumbed through.

However the book did save itself at the end when it finally retreated back to the major characters and detailed what became of every one of them as a result the scandal.

Steven Peterson says

I am a Chicago White Sox fan. Books on the Black Sox give me heartburn! This volume does a really fine job of outlining the events and the context in which eight members of the team were kicked out of baseball. The names: Chick Gandil (the key culprit), Joe Jackson, Fred McMullin, Buck Weaver, Lefty Williams, Happy Felsch, Eddie Cicotte, and Swede Risberg. Two of these--Jackson and Weaver--may have been innocent of "throwing" games. But they were both aware and had gone to meetings of the conspirators.

This is a book, in part, about powerful personalities and clashes. Ban Johnson, President of the American League, and Charles Comiskey (former major league player and then owner of the Sox); cliques on the White Sox, with "clean" Eddie Collins in one camp and some of the conspirators in another; Arnold Rothstein, eminent gambler) and other more marginal figures in the gambling world; prior exemplars of baseball players throwing games--with Hal Chase being one of the most eminent examples.

The book explores the development of the American League and third leagues and the evolution of baseball in the first quarter of the 20th century. The White Sox season in 1919 is depicted. Then, the series. The reason for players to begin discussing playing a crooked game, to throw the series to the underdog Cincinnati Reds. The players got shortchanged by gamblers at the outset of the Series. Did the Sox, in the end, lose it through their chicanery? Or did the Reds simply play better? The reader can decide.

Then the aftermath. A new position was created--Commissioner of Baseball, with very strong powers. Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis was the first incumbent. Baseball went after the eight Sox. They were banned from baseball. The book ends with a discussion of what happened to those eight men out after their banishment.

A well done work. . . .

Barney Beins says

The fixing of the 1919 World Series has generated a lot of writing and film. This book is a great addition. Fountain dug deep into the archives and ended up with a compelling (and apparently complete) retelling of the scandal. He didn't pull any punches, showing that the moguls who ran baseball at the time were quite a bit more interested in their pocketbooks than in any rigging of outcomes or influences of gamblers. There is a lot in the book that will be familiar to baseball readers, but there is plenty of new evaluation. It's not just a retelling of the story, there is a good bit of analysis of people and motives, both players and owners. It's a great book during the cold winter season as you wait for the rookies to report to spring training in February.

Daniel A Littman says

Very enlightening

The Chicago Black Sox scandal is the stuff of myth & legend. But most of what has been written about it & it's protagonists is myth, whether slight or significant. This book does an excellent job sweeping away the myth & more importantly, putting the story into the proper context of the period & of early baseball.

Casey Wheeler says

I received a prepublication copy of this book (October 2, 2015) through NetGalley with the understanding that I would publish a review on my blog, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Google + pages along with NetGalley, Amazon and Goodreads.

I requested this book as I have an interest in baseball (especially the New York Yankees) and have always been interested in the events surrounding the 1919 World Series and the "Black Sox."

The author, Charles Fountain, does a very good job of researching the subject and addressing as many of the myths surrounding the Black Sox scandal. Like many subjects that took place during this time a great deal of what transpired can not be totally verified. He takes us back to the beginning of baseball as we know it covering other instances of possible collusion between players and players and gamblers. It appears to have been somewhat prevalent up to the 1919 World Series and it was only with the appointment of Kennesaw Mountain Landis that it was finally curbed to a large extent. He also does an excellent job of detailing the roles and what happens to the key players (both baseball and gambling related).

The author's writing style is very engaging making the book a quick read for those who are interested in baseball and this particular episode in its history.

I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the history of baseball.

Mark Shrager says

I'm 25% of the way through *The Betrayal: The 1919 World Series and the Birth of Modern Baseball*, and I already know I'm not going to finish. The 1919 World Series - also known as the Black Sox Scandal, because the Chicago White Sox sold out to gamblers and threw the series, allowing the underdog Cincinnati Reds to win - is one of baseball's most compelling subjects. Author Charles Fountain, unfortunately, barely begins his book before he finds it necessary to criticize Eliot Asinof, whose *Eight Men Out*, published in 1963, has long been the must-read on the topic.

The number at the bottom of the Kindle page is 2% when Fountain informs the reader that Asinof's book is "the best known if also the least-reliable book on the subject." Worse, from that point he begins describing a great many scenarios that might have led to the fixed World Series, and concludes, "We really don't know." So why should we be persuaded that Fountain's book is any more reliable than Asinof's, or any other work on

the subject? If Fountain, with 50+ years of additional research available and the Internet at his fingertips, can't shed new light on the scandal's beginnings, the answer, quoting the author, is that "We really don't know."

It can certainly be debated whether Fountain's book is better or worse than Asinof's, but that's almost beside the point. If you think you've written a better book than the genre's generally accepted standard, let your readers concur or disagree. Maybe being a writer myself prejudices my views on the subject, but it bothers me to see an author who can no longer even defend himself (Asinof died in 2008) critiqued in the pages of a book that purports to advance the sport's knowledge base. It made the book less readable for me that the author chose to high-handedly and needlessly demean the work of his predecessor.

victor harris says

A rather mundane account committed to debunking previous coverage and mythology associated with the Black Sox scandal. Good insights into the Comiskey- Ban Johnson rivalry that would ultimately bring Judge Landis in as commissioner and spell doom for the players who were acquitted in court but banished from the game by the imperious Landis.

The 1919 Series was not unique as far as fixing games and gambling, baseball had been contaminated by shady operators since its inception. To his credit, Landis would be effective in minimizing that influence but would be a stain on the game in ensuing years for his racist stance that helped maintain the color barrier. Sadly the biggest villains in the 1919 Series would emerge unscathed. Arnold Rothstein masterminded the fix but through legal maneuvering and use of his underling buffers, he would avoid prosecution. Likewise for Charles Comiskey, the Sox owner, who though he wasn't involved in the actual betting, attempted to keep a lid on the story and had control of a power block that shielded him from harm. The real tragedy is that both Landis and Comiskey are in the Hall of Fame and Shoeless Joe Jackson is not.

I give it a 3.5 for some of the biographical sketches of Jackson, Landis, et al, but not great on the readability part, too dry and muddled.

Emily says

I won this in a giveaway. According to the FTC rules I need to mention that =).

As a fan of the Cubs I didn't know much about the White Sox, so I was excited to get this book and read it. History, baseball, scandal, what's not to love? It even had pictures!

Overall I give it a 4 out of five stars. I actually really enjoyed it. There were some slow parts, but every book has that. I plowed through them and was happy I did. Amazing book, would recommend.
