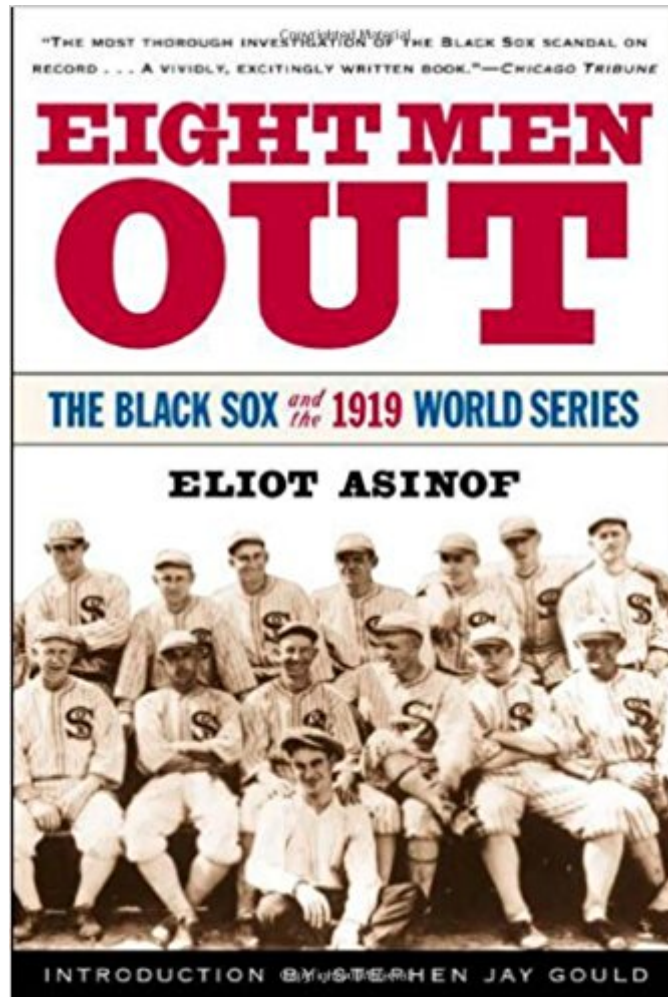


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Eight Men Out: The Black Sox And The 1919 World Series



Synopsis

The headlines proclaimed the 1919 fix of the World Series and attempted cover-up as "the most gigantic sporting swindle in the history of America!" First published in 1963, *Eight Men Out* has become a timeless classic. Eliot Asinof has reconstructed the entire scene-by-scene story of the fantastic scandal in which eight Chicago White Sox players arranged with the nation's leading gamblers to throw the Series in Cincinnati. Mr. Asinof vividly describes the tense meetings, the hitches in the conniving, the actual plays in which the Series was thrown, the Grand Jury indictment, and the famous 1921 trial. Moving behind the scenes, he perceptively examines the motives and backgrounds of the players and the conditions that made the improbable fix all too possible. Here, too, is a graphic picture of the American underworld that managed the fix, the deeply shocked newspapermen who uncovered the story, and the war-exhausted nation that turned with relief and pride to the Series, only to be rocked by the scandal. Far more than a superbly told baseball story, this is a compelling slice of American history in the aftermath of World War I and at the cusp of the Roaring Twenties.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

From the first paragraph to the last sentence of this gripping book, Asinof grabs your interest and doesn't let go. The story he is telling is fascinating - a tale of talented but clueless ballplayers, manipulating gamblers, money-hungry owners, and corrupt politicians, all coming together to create the greatest scandal the world of baseball has known. He tells it with clear, clean prose that keeps

the story moving through every detail to its tragic conclusion. The eight disgraced ballplayers who threw the 1919 World Series have been dubbed the Black Sox for posterity, yet with two exceptions, they are the most sympathetic characters in the whole sordid story. Chick Gandil, the tough first baseman who hatched the scheme, and his friend Swede Risberg, nasty tempered shortstop, who needed no prodding to join in, don't come off well. The rest of the crew, however, seem to have joined in a half-hearted, hapless manner. Particularly tragic are Shoeless Joe Jackson, one of baseball's greatest all-time hitters, whose talent was only exceeded by his naivete, and Buck Weaver, the outstanding third baseman whose only real fault was his loyalty to his friends in not reporting the scheme, as he took no part in throwing the games, and accepted no money. These clueless, grossly underpaid ballplayers, most of who profited little or nothing from the fix, were the only ones punished for the scandal that rocked the nation. The tale of the gamblers involved is as fascinating as it is telling. Three distinct levels of gamblers were present in the fix. Sleepy Bill Burns was an ex-ballplayer and small time gambler who did the legwork, consulting with the players. He went bust and was double-crossed by both the gamblers above him and Chick Gandil.

I thought this was an excellent read that I found hard to put down. It is rightly ranked by Roger Kahn ("The Boys of Summer") as one of the best 10 baseball books of all time. No matter how much you know about baseball, this book gives a great background on what being a ball player was like during the first two decades of the century. While it is true it is hard to sympathize with today's athletes who seem to be loyal to the highest salary, this book makes it hard not to sympathize with players who were subject to the salaries imposed upon them and whose only recourse was to sit out. There was no free agency in those days and under the reserve clause a player was at the whim of the team's owner. If he didn't like his pay he could choose not to play for that team, but the owner would also make sure he couldn't play for any team. While not condoning gambling by players or throwing games (especially in the World Series), it is hard not to understand the temptations faced by many players who were underpaid, near the end of their careers and with no other skills other than baseball. In those days before social security and major league pensions, a bribe of more than your annual salary and the chance to get even at the owner who, in your eyes, was exploiting you, must have been very tempting indeed. The book certainly makes you feel sympathetic toward "Shoeless" Joe Jackson and Buck Weaver. Like Pete Rose, these two players probably deserve some of the forgiveness that we're so proud of. Jackson should be in the Hall of Fame and Weaver's name should be cleared. The writing is superb. It gives us a good feel for the intensity surrounding a World Series, the world of gamblers and the world of sportswriters.

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