

# Faces in the Crowd: A Statistical Portrait of Baseball Spectators in Cincinnati, 1886-1888

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Contemporary observers and popular historians of baseball believed "all classes of our people" attended major league baseball games during the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Though modern researchers doubt the validity of this rosy scenario, they have been unable to clearly describe the spectators of the era. A significant reason for their failure is the lack of attendance data. Although clubs of this period used turnstiles and counted tickets, newspapers almost always printed estimates of the crowd size instead of the official figures, most of which have been lost. Without information of this type it is difficult to determine what people, and which groups, may have attended major league games.<sup>2</sup>

However, attendance data of the Cincinnati Reds of the American Association (AA) from 1886 to 1888, stored in the Cincinnati Historical Society, provide a rare statistical record of nineteenth-century baseball spectators. Each of the 229 games<sup>3</sup> during this period is represented by an official attendance card which includes the number of tickets sold in each of the Cincinnati Base Ball Ground's three sections: the terrace (at a cost of \$.25), the pavilion (\$.40), and the grandstand (\$.50).<sup>4</sup> These data, examined in the context of Cincinnati's baseball history, will help us to better understand the people who attended games in the nineteenth century.

## *Historical Background*

In one sense Cincinnati is the birthplace of major league baseball. The overwhelming success of the Red Stockings in 1869 and early 1870 demon-

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1. *Spalding Official Base Ball Guide*, 1889, p. 9; Jacob Morse, *Sphere and Ash: History of Base Ball* (Boston, 1888; reprint Columbia, S.C.: Cambridge House, 1984), p. 4.

2. Books and articles on baseball spectators are few and far between. Notable examples include Allen Guttman, *Sports Spectators* (New York: Columbia University, 1986); Steven Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1980), pp. 26-47; Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. 223-27, 235-37; David Q. Voigt, "Out With the Crowds: Counting, Courting and Controlling Ball Park Fans," *Baseball History* 2, ed. Peter Levine, (Westport, CN: Meckler Books, 1989), pp. 92-129; George B. Kirsch, *The Creation of American Team Sports: Baseball and Cricket, 1838-72* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. 99-120; and Dean A. Sullivan, "The Growth of Sport in a Southern City: A Study of the Organizational Evolution of Baseball in Louisville, Kentucky. As An Urban Phenomenon, 1860-1900" (M.A. thesis, George Mason University, 1989)

3. Cincinnati played 221 official games during this period. The other eight games, all played against AA opponents, were either rained out before the game became official, or were declared unofficial for other reasons. John Thorn and Pete Palmer, eds., *Total Baseball* (New York: Warner Books, 1989), pp. 2171-75.

4. Ticket sales did not necessarily represent the actual number of spectators at the game since tickets occasionally went unused. Like all major league teams Cincinnati had turnstiles, but they were considered by contemporaries to be misleading in determining paid attendance since they included "policemen, players, score-card boys, waiters, barkeepers, ticketsellers and takers, and the small boys who are admitted every time a ball is knocked over the fence," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 5 August 1886, 1, 10 May 1884.

strated the advantages of all-professional teams stocked with players from all over the country. The next year the National Association (NA), the first professional baseball organization, was formed. However, due to the disbanding of the Red Stockings after the 1870 season, no Cincinnati club participated in the NA during its 1871-1875 existence.<sup>5</sup>

In the summer of 1875 Cincinnati businessmen announced plans to form a new professional team. This announcement inspired their counterparts in Louisville-Cincinnati's fiercest urban rival to follow suit.<sup>6</sup> These two clubs became charter members of the National League (NL) in 1876. Although the Cincinnati team encountered difficulties in its maiden season, it survived through 1880, when the NL dropped it for refusing to stop playing games on Sundays.

The idea of baseball on the Sabbath was anathema to the NL, which was struggling to establish its sport as respectable entertainment suitable for viewing by women and "the better class." However, in Cincinnati—a city with an extremely high percentage of first- and second-generation foreign-born citizens, mostly Germans—Sunday was a popular day of recreation, when many relaxed in beer gardens and in saloons.<sup>7</sup> Similar sentiments in other cities with large immigrant populations, including St. Louis and Louisville, provided an impetus to the movement to establish a second "major league." The AA debuted in 1882, and Cincinnati capped off the league's successful launching by winning the championship. Before the start of the next season the NL, recognizing the economic strength of the AA, and its rival signed the National Agreement. This pact, dedicated primarily to guaranteeing the sanctity of each league's reserve list of players, helped usher in a "golden age" of prosperity for baseball.<sup>8</sup>

The Reds celebrated their own success with the construction of a new ballpark on the site of an abandoned brickyard, just a fifteen-minute train ride from downtown, in 1884. Tragically, a twelve-foot high platform at the base of the terrace collapsed on Opening Day, killing one spectator and injuring as many as sixty others. The stands, however, were quickly repaired, and the Reds finished the 1884 season in fifth place. They could not have known that 1884 would be the first of eighty-seven major league seasons played at that site. The former brickyard was left behind when the Reds returned to downtown Cincinnati and moved into Riverfront Stadium in mid-1970.<sup>9</sup>

The Cincinnati Base Ball Grounds was a fairly typical park of its era. The most expensive section, the grandstand, wrapped around home plate and extended down both baselines. Spectators seated in this section could order beer

5. On the Red Stockings see Darryl Brock, "1869 Red Stockings," *Baseball Research Journal* 16 (1987): 65-67, and Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 56-59.

6. *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 15 July 1875.

7. Steven J. Ross, *Workers On the Edge: Work, Leisure and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788-1890* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 74, 174, 256.

8. Seymour, *Baseball*, pp. 91-3, 135-40, 145-48.

9. Michael Benson, *Ballparks of North America: A Comprehensive Historical Reference to Baseball Grounds, Yards, and Stadiums, 1845 to Present* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co., 1989), pp. 98-103; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 2-3 May 1884, 21 April 1886; *New York Clipper* 10 May 1884.

and other drinks from “white-aproned waiters,” or simply get their drinks from the bar. The pavilion started just before first and third base and continued down the foul lines, hugging them so closely that foul territory was practically non-existent. Like the grandstand, the pavilion was roofed. The cheapest section, the terrace, stretched from the end of the pavilion to the outfield fence. Fans here sat on elevated “bleaching boards,” which were exposed to the sun until 1888, when a roof was erected. On especially crowded days many spectators stood behind ropes in the already-shallow outfield.<sup>10</sup>

### *Analyzing the Data*

Because of the lack of data it is difficult to compare attendance in Cincinnati to that in other major league cities of the era. Thanks to Bob Tiemann, however, enough estimates of annual home attendance exist to be able to make general observations. Based on this information (see Table 1), it appears that Cincinnati drew slightly fewer spectators per game than the average established by the eleven longest-lived teams of the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, other information indicates that among AA teams between 1886 and 1888, Cincinnati was considered to be a good baseball town. Table 2 shows that there was a high correlation between winning percentage and home percentage in the nineteenth century. During this period teams which drew poorly sometimes opted to switch home games to the opponent’s park, knowing that their visitor’s share would exceed the home share they would have claimed had the game site not been switched.<sup>12</sup> The data indicate that Cincinnati attracted nearly as many additional home games as St. Louis, a team with a much better winning percentage located in a more populous city.

Home game percentage may also have been affected by a team’s success at home. Cincinnati’s record from 1886 to 1888 (see Table 3 below) shows that the club’s home game percentage increased dramatically in 1888, even though it finished with virtually the same winning percentage as the previous year. In addition, the Reds dropped from second place in 1887 to fourth the next year.

Actual home attendance played less of a role in the percentage of contests played at home than might have been expected. Despite the increased home game percentage in 1888, the Reds actually drew fewer people per game than in the previous year. A significant reason for the drop in attendance in 1888 was the decision by the AA to raise ticket prices. Before long attendance plummeted,

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10. Cincinnati *Enquirer*, 9 March, 10, 13 April 1884, 30 April, 5 July 1886, 2 October 1887, 31 March. 26 August 1888.

11. These attendance figures, however, were calculated from annual totals which were often either estimated by contemporaries or simply rounded off to the nearest hundred, or even the nearest thousand. A comparison of official Cincinnati attendance records with estimated figures printed in the Cincinnati *Enquirer* on a game-by-game basis reveals that the *Enquirer* average (3264) was 45 percent higher than the official average for those games (2251). Of the 152 attendance estimates in the *Enquirer*, only 21, or 13.8 percent, were lower than the official figure for that game. These figures suggest that nineteenth-century baseball writers may have intentionally overestimated crowd size as a policy of local boosterism, and that these figures should therefore be treated with great caution.

12. The correlation between winning percentage and home game percentage in the AA during this period was .85. In 1888 the Reds had at least seventeen games transferred to Cincinnati because “the crowds are larger, and there is more money in it for both clubs.” *New York Clipper*, 11 August, 8 September 1888.

**Table 1: Selected Attendance Statistics, 1876-1899**

<i>Franchise</i>	<i>Seasons with Attendance Data</i>	<i>Total Attendance</i>	<i># Home Game</i>	<i>Average Att.</i>
Baltimore	1892-94, 1896-99	1,248,434	494	2527
Boston	1876, 1882-85, 1888-94, 1896-99	2,864,163	1013	2827
Brooklyn	1890-94, 1896-99	1,571,125	646	2432
Chicago	1876, 1882-83, 1886, 1889-99	3,295,463	983	3352
CINCINNATI	1876, 1886-88, 1890-94, 1896-99	2,355,633	923	2552
Cleveland	1889-94, 1896-99	945,665	644	1468
Louisville	1876-77, 1882, 1892-94, 1896-99	936,425	560	1672
New York	1876, 1888-94, 1896-99	2,448,894	812	3016
Pittsburgh	1889-94, 1896-99	1,520,291	700	2172
Philadelphia	1876, 1883-99	3,883,905	1189	3267
St. Louis	1876, 1892-94, 1896-99	1,414,995	518	2732
TOTALS		22,484,993	8482	2651

SOURCES: Research by Bob Tiemann published in Dean A. Sullivan, "The Growth of Sport in a Southern City: A Study of the Organizational Evolution of Baseball in Louisville, Kentucky, As An Urban Phenomenon, 1860-1899" (M.A. thesis, George Mason University, 1989), p. 115. The number of home games, and the resulting attendance averages, were recalculated from data in John Thorn and Pete Palmer, eds., *Total Baseball* (New York: Warner Books, 1989), pp. 2171-75.

and the AA was forced to bring back the old prices on August 25.<sup>13</sup> Surprisingly, Cincinnati's average attendance in 1888 declined slightly after this date. It is possible that Cincinnati's attendance in 1888, relative to the attendance of other AA teams, was better than in 1887. This may explain the large number of games transferred to the Queen City in 1888.<sup>14</sup>

13. Between May 6 and August 24, 1888, the average attendance, 1658, was slightly higher than the average for the rest of the year, 1603. Cincinnati Historical Society, Cincinnati Base Ball Club, Box 6 (hereafter, CHS); Seymour, *Baseball*, p. 208.

14. "The attendance under the half-dollar rule this year has been good-very good-though in numbers that of '87 rather takes precedence." *New York Clipper* 25 August 1888.

**Table 2: Winning Percentage and Percentage of Games Played at Home by AA Teams, 1886-1888**

	<u>Winning %</u>	<u>% Games at Home</u>
St. Louis	.685	.543
CINCINNATI	.555	.534
Brooklyn	.545	.510
Philadelphia	.519	.522
Louisville	.467	.481
Baltimore	.452	.456

SOURCE: Thorn and Palmer, *Total Baseball*, p. 2171.

Even before examining the Reds' attendance records in detail we have enough information to assume that between 1886 and 1888 Cincinnati's attendance was better than that of most of its AA competitors. However, we still know little of these Cincinnati spectators. A detailed analysis of their attendance habits—that is, the days on which they most often attended games, and the ballpark sections in which they most often sat—may clarify the picture somewhat.

*When They Attended Games*

Cincinnati's official attendance statistics are broken down by days of the week (see Table 4). The data reveal that certain days of the week, especially Sunday but also Monday and Saturday, were much more popular with Reds spectators than other days. Contemporary accounts not only support this finding, but also suggest that different social classes preferred certain days of the week.

Perhaps the most surprising statistic is that games on Monday, the day on which the fewest games (by far) were played, drew the second-highest average number of spectators. Monday was typically the day off after games on Saturday and Sunday. Even when Sunday games were not being played in Cincinnati, as in the first half of the 1886 season, Monday contests were rare. The first Monday game in 1886 did not occur until June 21, over two months after opening day.

Conversely, Friday games were commonplace, but they had a reputation for

**Table 3: Cincinnati Winning Percentage, Home Game Percentage and Attendance, 1886-1888**

	<u>Win. %</u>	<u>Home Game %</u>	<u>Home Game Win. %</u>	<u>Attendance</u>
1886	.471	.504	.563	1735
1887	.600	.522	.634	2583
1888	.597	.577	.696	1640

SOURCES: Thorn and Palmer, *Total Baseball*, p. 2171; Cincinnati Historical Society, Cincinnati Base Ball Club, Box 6 (hereafter CHS, Cin. BBC).

**Table 4: Average Attendance in Cin. by Days of Week, 1886-1888**

	<u># Games</u>	<u>Avg. Att.</u>
Sunday	41	4075
Monday	17	1905
Tuesday	32	1408
Wednesday	35	1316
Thursday	32	1451
Friday	33	1274
Saturday	39	1843
	<u>229</u>	<u>1970</u>

SOURCE: CHS, Cin. BBC, Box. 6.

drawing poorly. Crowds estimated by the Cincinnati *Enquirer* at 1800 or 2000—substantially below the 1886-88 *Enquirer* estimate average of 3264—were “remarkably good” for Fridays.<sup>15</sup>

Table 5 offers some reasons for these and other differences in weekday attendance habits. The most notable difference between Monday and Friday is the percentage of spectators sitting in the terrace. Monday had the highest percentage—in fact, it was the only day on which more fans sat in the terrace than in the pavilion—and Friday the lowest. Sunday also had a high percentage of “twenty-five cent men.” Sunday, unlike Monday, was a day of leisure for all workers, but in the 1880s blue-collar workers, many of whom spent Sundays drinking beer or cheap alcohol, frequently skipped work on Mondays.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that some of these men sobered up-or continued drinking-at the ballpark on Mondays.

**Table 5: Aver. Attendance in Cin. by Ballpark Sections, 1886-1888**

	<u># Games</u>	<u>Terrace %</u> <u>(\$ .25)</u>	<u>Pavilion %</u> <u>(\$ .40)</u>	<u>Grandstand %</u> <u>(\$ .50)</u>
Sunday	41	43.0	44.1	12.9
Monday	17	46.9	39.0	14.1
Tuesday	32	41.0	44.7	14.3
Wednesday	35	42.7	43.6	13.7
Thursday	32	41.2	44.4	14.4
Friday	33	40.3	45.5	14.2
Saturday	39	41.4	43.2	15.4
	<u>229</u>	<u>42.3</u>	<u>43.8</u>	<u>13.9</u>

SOURCE: CHS, Cin. BBC, Box 6.

15. Cincinnati *Enquirer*, 20. 27 August 1887.

16. In Worcester, Massachusetts, these days were known as “Blue Mondays.” See Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours For What They Will: Workers and Leisure in on Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 38.

On the other hand, it appears that the more affluent ticket buyers, those who sat regularly in the grandstand, preferred Saturday games. A likely explanation is that for some white-collar workers Saturday was the first day of their weekend, rather than the final day of their work week. Reds promoters emphasized this fact in 1887 and 1888 by regularly advertising Saturday as "Suburban Day." They hoped to attract fans from wealthy suburbs like Avondale, Clifton and others located as far as ten miles from downtown Cincinnati. As a result of their efforts, over 19 percent more fans on Saturday sat in the grandstand as on Sunday.<sup>17</sup>

Table 6 reveals other data relating to the game day preference of Cincinnati spectators. Surprisingly, games on three different weekdays-Tuesday, Friday and Thursday, respectively-attracted more affluent spectators than "Suburban Day," as measured by the average ticket price per spectator. It can be no coincidence that these three days were weekdays with relatively low rates of worker absenteeism. In fact, Tuesday games may have achieved the highest per-spectator admission price because the blue-collar workers who skipped work on Monday to attend a game had to return to work the following day or risk losing their jobs. The unusually low average ticket price on Wednesday was most likely an anomaly.

While the differences in average daily ticket prices were very small, they did affect game receipts. For instance, although Saturday games drew fewer spectators than Monday games, they grossed more money per game. Average receipts for Friday games trailed those of Wednesday games by only \$1.53, although games on the latter day attracted on the average forty-two more spectators. Such figures make it easy to understand why the Cincinnati management could afford to discourage fans of lesser means from attending games by blaming them for all ballpark disturbances.

**Table 6: Average Receipts Per Game and Per Spectator by Days of Week, 1886-1888**

	<u>Average \$/Game</u>	<u>Average \$/Spectator</u>	<u>Average Attendance</u>
Sunday	1518.78	.3727	4075
Monday	669.79	.3516	1905
Tuesday	536.21	.3808	1408
Wednesday	485.86	.3693	1316
Thursday	543.88	.3747	1451
Friday	484.33	.3802	1274
Saturday	<u>689.44</u>	<u>.3741</u>	<u>1843</u>
OVERALL	734.04	.3726	1907

SOURCE: CHS, Cin. BBC, Box 6.

17. Cincinnati *Enquirer*, 21 May 1887, 5, 12 May, 14 July 1888; Ross, *Workers On the Edge*, p. 239.

*Fan Behavior, Ballpark Sections, and Social Class*

Many of the comments nineteenth-century observers made regarding the presence of working-class fans at the ballpark focused on their conduct. Unruly behavior in the stands was almost invariably blamed on “hoodlums,” “twenty-five cent men,” and “the foreign element.” The NL attempted to prevent such people from infiltrating its parks by playing games on days and at times when they could not attend in large numbers, but some fans the NL considered undesirable still managed to slip in. The AA, by scheduling frequent Sunday games and halving the NL’s admission fee, seemingly rejected this approach, but some of its owners still felt the need to assert their sport’s respectability.<sup>18</sup>

To this end Cincinnati owner Louis Hauck eliminated Sunday games from his club’s 1886 schedule. He stated that he was “violently opposed to Sunday games,” despite their popularity with Reds fans. He was supported strongly by the Cincinnati Law and Order League, whose members felt Sunday games “attracted a crowd that were unable to attend during work days.”<sup>19</sup> However, Hauck was forced to reverse himself as the club, in last place for much of the season, began losing money. When Sunday games were reinstated on July 4, the largest crowd of the year—and the rowdiest—showed up. On the following Sunday a riot ensued. It appeared to contemporary critics that the decision to renew Sunday games, thereby allowing more blue-collar fans to attend, was a mistake.<sup>20</sup>

A careful analysis of these and other disturbances suggests that the “twenty-five cent men” were innocent of the charges against them. The spectators involved in both incidents were seated in the pavilion, not the terrace. The first disruption was caused when fans in the pavilion, celebrating Independence Day, started throwing lit firecrackers onto the field. One week later the same spectators, angered by the actions of the brother of Brooklyn’s catcher as he protested umpiring decisions against Brooklyn from his pavilion seat, exploded and began throwing beer mugs at each other. While people in the grandstand stood on their chairs to watch, the riot spread to the terrace. The fighting, however, took place primarily in the pavilion.<sup>21</sup>

Such behavior by pavilion spectators was not rare. An *Enquirer* reporter noted on Opening Day in 1886 that “the pavilion was densely packed with a well-behaved crowd, which is saying a good deal.”<sup>22</sup> This observation also held true in 1887, when pavilion occupants instigated, within a five-week period, two more incidents involving the throwing of beer mugs and nickel seat cushions. It must be remembered that in Cincinnati the pavilion was unusually close to the field. The proximity of the fans to the players may have created

18. Sullivan, “The Growth of Sport,” pp. 103-07.

19. The Law and Order League, backed by Protestant ministers and wealthy businessmen, opposed the Haley law, which mandated an eight-hour workday in Ohio. Ross, *Workers On the Edge*, pp. 272, 278-79; *Sporting News*, 29 March 1886.

20. Cincinnati *Enquirer*, 17, 21, 29 March, 9, 24 June, 5, 12 July 1886.

21. *Ibid.*, 5, 12 July 1886; *New York Clipper*, 19 July 1886.

22. Cincinnati *Enquirer*, 19 April 1886.

tension which, on crowded days like Sundays, occasionally resulted in disturbances.<sup>23</sup>

One reason that pavilion fans escaped the blame for ballpark disturbances is that, as middle-class, “respectable” citizens, they were actively wooed by baseball promoters. These men realized that their sport would be judged not only on its own merits but also on the perceived quality of those who endorsed it. For this reason Cincinnati officials scheduled frequent Ladies’ Days to attract the “fairer sex,” left tickets for municipal officials and important businessmen, and placed “telephone bulletins” in the suburbs to inform interested affluent fans of the “exact conditions of the grounds” one hour before game time.<sup>24</sup> Outbursts by upper- and middle-class fans were either ignored or, as in the case of an 1887 incident in Cincinnati, dismissed as “playful exhibitions.”<sup>25</sup>

Baseball officials and reporters often found it easier to blame disturbances on blue-collar fans because they frequently occurred on Sundays, the only day of leisure for these fans. The image of Sunday as “blue-collar day” in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has persisted to this day. Steven Riess states as a matter of fact that “Sabbath crowds differed substantially from weekday crowds because of the number of working-class people present.”<sup>26</sup> The Cincinnati attendance data suggest that this perception is not entirely correct.

Table 7 shows that Sunday attendance was substantially higher than on weekdays. However, the growth was roughly proportional in all three sections throughout the three-year period. Although the percentage of terrace spectators increased at a greater rate on Sundays than that of pavilion spectators, the small increase in the terrace is hardly indicative of a massive influx of working-class fans attending their only game of the week. Moreover, if over 40 percent of all weekly spectators sat in the terrace, when blue-collar fans could not afford to attend in large numbers on a regular basis, it is unlikely that many of these spectators were blue-collar workers.

**Table 7: Percent of Total Cin. Crowd, 1886-1888, In Each Section On:**

	<i>Weekdays</i> (N = 188)	<i>Sundays</i> (N = 41)	<i>Overall</i> (N = 229)	<i>% Increase</i> <i>on Sun.</i>
% TERRACE	41.9	43.0	42.3	+ 2.6
% PAVILION	43.5	44.1	43.8	+ 1.2
% GRANDSTAND	14.5	12.9	13.4	- 11.0
AVER. ATT.	1511	4075	1970	

SOURCE: CHS, Cin. BBC, Box 6.

23. Ibid., 12. 14 July, 21 August, 2 October 1887

24. Ibid., 12 April. 15 June 1886, 7, 11 July, 9 October 1888; *Sporting News*. 29 March 1886; Riess, *Touching Base*, pp. 26-30.

25. In 1897 the Louisville Rooters’ Club, which included the Colonels’ most elite fans, threw eggs at an unfortunate umpire during and after a game. *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 15 June 1897; Cincinnati *Enquirer*, 21 August 1887.

26. Riess, *Touching Base*, p. 31.

In the mid-1880s, despite a booming economy, Cincinnati workers were still suffering from the impact of the depression of 1873-1879. The average family of five headed by a skilled worker earned only \$623 in 1885, 91 percent of which was spent on essentials. According to Steven Ross, between 1877 and 1885 Cincinnati families headed by skilled workers spent no more than 2.1 percent of their annual income, or about \$13, on recreation of all sorts, including alcohol consumption. The percentage of income spent on recreation and other non-essential sundries dropped steadily after 1879. Moreover, labor unrest in Cincinnati reached its peak between 1886 and 1888. After passage of the Haley law, which established an eight-hour workday throughout Ohio, Cincinnati workers staged mass strikes until local factory owners agreed to honor the law without cutting wages. Nevertheless, during this three-year period at least seventy-six, strikes, involving nearly 20,000 workers, were staged.<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to believe that in the midst of such economic turmoil many skilled workers—much less semi-skilled and unskilled workers—could afford to see the Reds play often.

#### *The 1888 Season*

True or not, the image of Sunday baseball crowds as being dominated by rowdy blue-collar fans damaged the reputation of the AA. Just before the 1888 season AA team owners agreed to raise admission prices to the NL level in an effort to exclude those deemed responsible for the Sunday disturbances. In Cincinnati ticket prices for the terrace, pavilion, and grandstand leaped to \$.35, \$.50, and \$.75, respectively. As a result, visiting teams would receive fifteen cents for every spectator (equal to thirty percent of the base admission price of \$.50), with a guaranteed minimum of \$130, double the rate in 1886 and 1887.<sup>28</sup> AA officials felt this move would raise both revenues and the social level of the spectators. In Cincinnati the actual results of the experiment were quite different.

We learned earlier that the ticket prices were reduced to their original level in late August because of the sharp drop in attendance across the league. The Reds, however, fared much better than most other AA clubs, and garnered more home games as a result. Given this fact, it is surprising to see that the Reds' average game revenues during the first two-thirds of the 1888 season dropped slightly from the 1887 average, even with the higher ticket prices.

More significantly was the effect of the increased prices on the home and visitor's shares. Between May 6 and August 24 the Reds' home share dropped by almost 13 percent, while the visitor's share increased by over 28 percent, from the 1887 figures. These differences resulted from the Reds' decision to transform the terrace into a youth section and to charge them only \$.35, down from the base price of \$.50. After the visiting team took \$.15 for every spectator, the Reds kept only 57 percent of each terrace admission for them-

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27. Ross, *Workers On the Edge*, pp. 243-45, 270-93, 310; David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 69-70, 90-91, 171-72.

28. Seymour, *Baseball*, pp. 208-10.

selves, instead of the 70 percent specified by the AA. This loss more than offset the seventeen-cent increase in the average admission fee. In addition, Cincinnati was not helped by the team's excellent winning percentage, which through August 24 was virtually identical to that achieved in 1887.<sup>29</sup>

The reduction in ticket prices after August 24 was financially devastating to Cincinnati. Even though the drop in attendance after the price change was marginal, the Reds' average share per game fell over 37 percent. The loss of revenue resulted nearly as much from the redistribution of spectators as from the decrease in either the ticket prices or the number of spectators.<sup>30</sup>

Table 9 indicates the pattern of seating before, during, and after the ticket price change. In 1886 and 1887 nearly half of Cincinnati spectators bought quarter seats. This option was effectively eliminated in 1888 since the majority of the spectators were adults. As a result, over 90 percent of Cincinnati spectators were forced to buy tickets at the NL rate of \$.50 or more, over six times the rate before 1888. Blue-collar fans, most of whom were unable to afford such a steep price, were all but prevented from attending games. After August 24, however, so many of these spectators returned to the terrace that nearly twice as many people sat there as in the other two sections combined.

Cincinnati president Aaron Stern could not have been pleased with this stampede. Not only did it cost him thousands of dollars in expected revenues, it

**Table 8: Annual Revenues Per Game and Per Spectator for Reds and Visitors, 1886-1888\***

	<u>#</u> <u>Games</u>	<u>Av. \$/</u> <u>Game</u>	<u>Av. \$/</u> <u>Ticket</u>	<u>Av.</u> <u>Att.</u>	<u>Av. Reds'</u> <u>Share</u>	<u>Av. Visit.</u> <u>Share</u>
1886	80	589.11	.3396	1735	458.98	130.13
1887	72	884.43	.3424	2583	690.70	193.73
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1888:						
5/6-8/24	53	852.20	.5140	1658	603.50	248.70
8/25-	24	509.12	.3176	1603	379.12	130.00**
1888 TOTAL	77	745.27	.4542	1640	536.60	208.67

\*: In calculating average per game revenues I did not subtract 25 press personnel from the average attendance, as AA teams did, for statistical simplicity.

\*\* : Represents guaranteed per game minimum. The actual average was \$120.33.

SOURCE: CHS, Cin. BBC, Box 6.

29. Through August 24 the Reds' 1888 record was 58-38 (.604), which put them in third place. In 1887 the Reds finished in second place with a 81-54 (.600) record. Thorn and Palmer, *Total Baseball*, pp. 721, 723; *Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide, 1889*, p. 64; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 6-7 May 1888.

30. If the spectator seating pattern from May 6 to August 24 had remained constant from August 25 on, average game revenues for the final twenty-four games of the season would have totaled about \$639. On the other hand, if the ticket prices had not been lowered, game receipts during this period-even with nearly two-thirds of the spectators in the terrace-would have averaged nearly \$704. CHS, Cincinnati Base Ball Club, Box 6.

**Table 9: Annual Percentage of Cincinnati Spectators in Each Ballpark Section, 1886-1888**

	<i>1886-1887</i> <i>N = 1,52</i>	<i>1888:</i> <i>5/6-8/24</i> <i>N = 53</i>	<i>1888:</i> <i>8/25-</i> <i>N = 24</i>	<i>1888</i> <i>Total</i> <i>N = 77</i>
% TERRACE	49.2	7.4	64.4	24.8
% PAVILION	35.9	82.6	21.4	63.9
% GRANDSTAND	15.0	10.0	14.2	11.3

SOURCE: CHS, Cin. BBC, Box. 6.

appeared to weaken the argument that Reds fans would support their team at NL prices. Throughout 1887 and 1888 rumors spread around the baseball community that the Reds were contemplating a move to the senior circuit.<sup>31</sup>

Stern had publicly expressed his lack of respect for AA leadership on several occasions. In the mid-1880s a series of administrative crises led Pittsburgh to jump to the NL after the 1886 season. Two years later Cleveland seceded. The AA was rapidly disintegrating, and Stern could hardly be blamed for wanting to make the best possible case for his team to gain admission to the NL. Although Cincinnati had initially opposed the plan to raise ticket prices, it took advantage of the experiment to demonstrate to the NL the club's worthiness.<sup>32</sup> Despite the exodus of adult fans to the terrace after August 24, the NL was convinced. Following the 1889 season Cincinnati, along with Brooklyn, was accepted as a NL franchise.

### *Conclusion*

The statistical and historical data disprove the assertions of major league baseball officials in nineteenth-century Cincinnati that baseball attracted a demographically balanced group of spectators. They reveal that Reds officials attempted to discourage blue-collar fans from attending by instituting seating, pricing and scheduling policies designed to isolate and exclude them, and by blaming them unjustly for all ballpark disturbances. These policies, coupled with the economic difficulties of blue-collar workers, resulted in largely homogeneous white-collar crowds.

31. *New York Clipper*, 1 October 1887; *Cincinnati Enquirer* 13 May, 14 October 1888.

32. Seymour. *Baseball*, pp. 212-20; *Cincinnati Enquirer* 16 October 1887, 1 January, 12 February, 29 April 1888.