

# The National Pastime and the National Scene

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Towards the close of the last century, baseball had become so intertwined with American life that it not only reflected what was going on but affected and was affected by the course of events.

The sport exerted an impact on society in a variety of ways. While in middle-America, for instance, it helped break down the blue laws through the holding of games on Sunday, farther East the question stiffened support for the keeping of the Sabbath and brought about incredible alliances and promulgations. To the city that possessed a major league ball team, the sport added prestige, inflated civic pride—according to the citizens—, and enhanced the economies of local businesses. For many of the millions of immigrants pouring into the country, baseball was the first institution in the strange land with which they associated and through which they became partially Americanized; and for the fanatic followers of the pastime, it presented hard, clear lessons in the unlikely subject of high finance—in everything from stockpiling and foreclosures to the intricacies of interlocking directorates.

The owners of the twelve clubs in the single major league, unlike the present, sought publicity, strutted in the limelight, and were as familiar to the fans as were the Ed Delahanties and the White-Winged Tebeaus. Together, the twelve mirrored the standards and values of the day. Singly, each formed a replica of individualism run rampant that on occasion reduced their conclaves to outrageous brawls.

But baseball was also subject to the tide of events, 1898, at its onset, promised to be a great year—the year when ladies were lured to the parks in large numbers—by October, the major and minor leagues were a shambles and knowledgeable men were talking about “the dying sport.” Foreign affairs, with the outbreak of the Spanish-American War; Anti-Semitism, with the Ducky Holmes Affair; and the economic phenomenon of cartel-building had created a situation out of which the hounds of chaos broke loose.