

“The Kid in the Sandlot”: Congress and Organized Baseball, 1951

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The paper examines the first major congressional investigation into professional sports, the 1951 House subcommittee on anti-trust and monopoly's investigation into Organized Baseball. It assesses the background of the investigation, including the Mexican League controversy, and offers a narrative of the investigation itself. It focuses on the testimonies of the significant and colorful representatives of the game, such as Ty Cobb, Ford Frick, A.B. “Happy” Chandler, and Philip Wrigley, as well as some lesser known witnesses who bolted from the game's official line, such as Father Francis Moore and minor leaguer Ross Homing. The House subcommittee was chaired by “trust buster” Emmanuel Celler. The primary issue at stake was Organized Baseball's privileged position under the anti-trust laws and certain monopolistic practices of the game, particularly the reserve clause. Congress did nothing in 1951 to remove the baseball “anomaly” regarding the nation's anti-trust laws and the game survived the 1951 investigation (as well as the most recent 1992 investigations) because of its tradition and the image it successfully cultivated in American life as the innocent, pastoral, national “sport.” This research is based on government documents, the personal papers of Emmanuel Celler, newspaper/magazine coverage, and relevant secondary literature.