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Revisiting the Black Sox Scandal in the 1990s: Ken Burns' Baseball, the 1994-95 MLB Strike, and Dyersville, Iowa

In early October, 1919, the Chicago White Sox played the Cincinnati Reds in the World Series and lost, five games to three. By most accounts, the White Sox should not have lost to the underdog Reds. Less than a year later, "Shoeless" Joe Jackson and several other prominent White Sox players confessed that they had conspired with gamblers to lose the Series. It was news which sent shockwaves of disbelief across much of the country. Although they were acquitted in court, the implicated players were banished from the game and forever branded the "Black Sox."

During the 1980s the Black Sox scandal was deployed by a variety of storytellers to dramatize and critique some of their concerns about their historical moment. In addition to three Black Sox-related novels—W.P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe* (1982), Eric Rolfe Greenberg's *The Celebrant* (1983), and Harry Stein's *Hoopla* (1983)—the 1980s also saw versions of the scandal appear on a few stages and thousand of movie screens. If it were not for the fact that the scandal was never actually out of popular consciousness, it would seem as though the 1980s was a renaissance period for the Black Sox scandal.

Because the Black Sox scandal is intimately entwined with American history, popular culture, and collective memories, it is not surprising that it has continued to be put to various uses since the 1980s. If anything, interest in the Black Sox—especially Joe Jackson—seems to have been whetted by the previously mentioned narratives. A few examples will suffice: full chapters are devoted to the Black Sox in several recent histories of the game; alleged scandal participants have been the subject of two recent books by Harvey Frommer and Irving Stein; in 1993 the San Francisco's Court of Historical Review ruled that Jackson ought to be reinstated by Major League baseball and thus should be eligible for the Baseball Hall of Fame; and there are currently several movements underway to procure amnesty for some of the other now deceased Black Sox.

In this paper I intend to discuss three of the more vibrant sites of Black Sox scandal re-articulation in the 1990s: the "Third Inning" of Ken Burns' acclaimed documentary *Baseball* (1990) the disastrous 1994-95 Major League baseball strike, and the Dyersville, Iowa baseball field where the movie *Field of Dreams* was filmed in 1988 and which annually attracts thousands of tourists from all over the world. By examining these disparate yet interconnected sites, I propose to illuminate the ways in which the Black Sox scandal continues to be re-told and remembered, and I argue that renditions of and allusions to the affair ultimately reveal more about those who produce them—and about the culture that enthusiastically consumes them—than about long-ago fixed games.