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## Bill Veeck and the Racial Integration of Baseball

In his 1962 autobiography, Veeck (as in wreck), life-long maverick baseball entrepreneur, disclosed that his attempt in 1942 to purchase the Philadelphia Phillies and stock the club with black players (thus antedating Jackie Robinson's historic signing by four years) was thwarted at the last minute by Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis. Since 1962 the story of Veeck's aborted plan has been cited as evidence of baseball's virulent racism by virtually every historian who has written general histories of baseball or studies of the Negro Leagues and the racial integration of sport in the United States. It has become a staple of historical lore and legend. My research on the history of black baseball reveals that the story is patently untrue. This paper both demonstrates the falsity of Veeck's claim and discusses how and why the fanciful story became an article of faith for historians. The latter is perhaps the more interesting aspect: how is it that scholars uncritically accepted an assertion that prevented striking new and fundamentally important information on the history of racial integration in America from emerging? The import of the paper, then, is two-fold: to set the record straight on a long-accepted distortion of history, and to explore the role of the historian as myth-maker.



Larry Gerlach demonstrates the art of historical criticism.