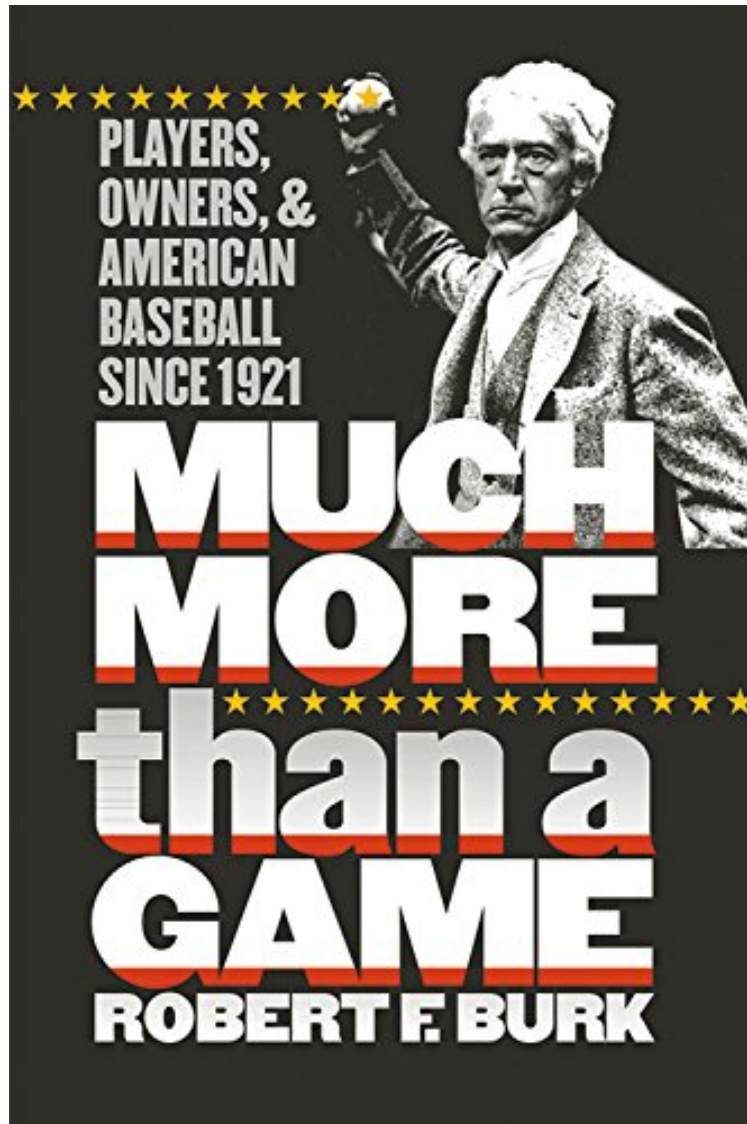


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Much More Than a Game: Players, Owners, and American Baseball since 1921

Robert F. Burk

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Robert F. Burk : Much More Than a Game: Players, Owners, and American Baseball since 1921 before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Much More Than a Game: Players, Owners, and American Baseball since 1921:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Fine Discussion of Labor Relations in Major League Baseball since the Roaring Twenties By Roger D. Launius This is the second volume of a projected two-volume history of labor relations in Major League Baseball (MLB). It deals with the period since 1921 and focuses on the integration of the

game beginning in 1947, the labor disputes of MLB in the 1960s and 1970s when a rejuvenated Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) under Marvin Miller won a series of bitter contests with the owners that eventually led to "free agency." During this period profound changes took place in labor relations in MLB. Mining records of MLB at Cooperstown and at other repositories, Burk fashions an interesting and useful narrative of the evolution of labor relations. He divides his book into two major parts; the first is what he appropriately calls the "paternalistic era" between 1921 and the early 1970s and the second is an "inflationary era" in the post-free agency period since that time. Although he discusses earlier management/labor issues, the centerpiece of this book is its discussion of the transformation of the Major League Players Association from a moribund organization into an efficient and exceptionally effective union in the 1960s when Marvin Miller assumed the position of executive director. Perhaps no union leader has been more effective than Marvin Miller in changing the nature of owner/employee relations. When he took over the MLPBA in the middle part of the 1960s Miller brought a wealth of experience in union organizing to a completely new arena. The moribund organization he took over had been a defacto arm of MLB and had succeeded in aiding in the preservation of the status quo in the game that has reigned since the first part of the twentieth century. Miller immediately began to change that relationship. He worked with the players to achieve a succession of small victories ranging from the raising of minimum annual salary to modest changes in such things as meal money to salary arbitration and finally free agency. The ending of the longstanding "reserve clause" in MLB was the MLBPA's penultimate achievement. This "reserve clause" had been established in the nineteenth century by MLB and stated that the club had the right to renew a player's contract following each season even without the player's authorization--effectively making the player's contract the property of the team that first acquired him for the rest of the player's career. While the contract and hence the player could be traded, a player could not unilaterally choose to play for another team even if he did not have a current signed contract. Robert Burk follows the efforts of a succession of players, as well as Miller, who challenged the "reserve clause." He includes an important discussion of Curt Flood, an all-star center fielder traded from the St. Louis Cardinals to the Philadelphia Phillies in 1969 who refused to accept this trade and filed a lawsuit that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court advocating for his right to tender his services to other teams. He lost that case, but the dam had cracked and within a few years, with the Messersmith decision, free agency became the norm for MLB. It fundamentally changed the nature of MLB and its economics. Because of Marvin Miller's enormous influence on MLB I believe he deserves to be inducted into MLB's "Hall of Fame," but it is a real stretch to see that ever happening because of the hatred he evoked from the owners. And, by the way, Curt Flood vdeserves induction too. This is a fascinating, detailed, and scholarly analysis of how the business of baseball has evolved in the twentieth century. It is well-researched and reasoned, and relatively well written for most scholarly history but certainly not a breezy reading experience. It is a companion volume to Burk's earlier book, "Never Just a Game: Players, Owners, and American Baseball to 1920" (University of North Carolina Press, 1994), which should be read before "Much More than a Game" to provide background to this study. Burk's work is representative of the growing number of serious historical works on MLB. I wish there were more of them.

To most Americans, baseball is just a sport; but to those who own baseball teams--and those who play on them--our national pastime is much more than a game. In this book, Robert Burk traces the turbulent labor history of American baseball since 1921. His comprehensive, readable account details the many battles between owners and players that irrevocably altered the business of baseball. During what Burk calls baseball's "paternalistic era," from 1921 to the early 1960s, the sport's management rigidly maintained a system of racial segregation, established a network of southern-based farm teams that served as a captive source of cheap replacement labor, and crushed any attempts by players to create collective bargaining institutions. In the 1960s, however, the paternal order crumbled, eroded in part by the civil rights movement and the competition of television. As a consequence, in the "inflationary era" that followed, both players and umpires established effective unions that successfully pressed for higher pay, pensions, and greater occupational mobility--and then fought increasingly bitter struggles to hold on to these hard-won gains.

From Publishers Weekly As a microcosm of society, organized baseball has survived its share of battles over racism, pay inequity, unionizing and scandals. Here, Burk, chair of the history department at Muskingum College, follows up *Never Just a Game: Players, Owners, and American Baseball to 1920* with an in-depth look at the sport as a business from its post-WWI golden age to beyond the 1994 players' strike. With the increasing globalization of baseball, Burk argues for a future of greater economic predictability and increased on-field-off-field cooperation ("the players' own interests might prove best served by agreeing to a new partnership in which labor peace and a formal coequal role in industry decisions was gained in exchange for accepting reasonable leaguewide minimum and maximum payrolls"). The author divides the past 80 years into two discrete periods: the first, the "paternalistic era," and the second, the "inflationary era," which began when baseball, and the nation, were forever changed by the civil rights movement and a generation unafraid to question authority. As he chronicles the history of baseball's labor movement (the section describing the conditions minority players had to endure in the '40s and '50s is especially interesting), Burk focuses on the major people like Curtis Flood, who accused the league of conspiracy when he was traded, and Fay Vincent, who

alienated players and team owners during his reign as baseball commissioner a focus that significantly animates his heavily detailed narrative. (Mar. 5) Forecast: Although primed for publication just before Opening Day 2001, Burk's exhaustive analysis is geared for a keen but ultimately small readership among the legions of baseball book-buying enthusiasts; despite its energetic title, stores should anticipate only modest sales. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Burk (history, Muskingum Coll.) has written a companion to his *Never Just a Game: Players, Owners and American Baseball to 1920*. Burk focuses on baseball's volatile labor history, contrasting the "paternalistic era" of 1921 through the early 1960s (which was often bleak and unfair to many players) with the seeming prosperity of current times. In these days of escalating salaries and costs and the friction that exists between players and management, this book provides scholarly background. Libraries featuring comprehensive sports and/or labor relations collections should consider. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. Burk has given us a penetrating and savvy history of baseball's turbulent labor relations. (Andrew Zimbalist, Smith College) This book is a rich addition to the literature on the social and economic history of our national pastime for scholar and fan alike. ("Choice") As he chronicles the history of baseball's labor movement . . . Burk focuses on the major people . . . a focus that significantly animates his heavily detailed narrative. ("Publishers Weekly") In these days of escalating salaries and costs and the friction that exists between players and management, this book provides scholarly background. Libraries featuring comprehensive sports and/or labor relations collections should consider. ("Library Journal") The second and concluding volume in Burk's business history of baseball covers the seismic changes that have affected the game, from the tenure of judge Landis through modern issues that continue to cause confrontation between ownership and the players. ("USA Today Baseball Weekly")