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Image Restoration and the "Black Sox" Scandal of 1919: Corrective Action as an Ideal Image Restoration Model for Professional Baseball

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THE CARL AND WINIFRED LEE HONORS COLLEGE

CERTIFICATE OF ORAL EXAMINATION

Zachary J. Walsh, having been admitted to the Carl and Winifred Lee Honors College in Fall 2001 successfully presented the Lee Honors College Thesis on April 14, 2005.

The title of the paper is:

"Image Restoration and the 'Black Sox' Scandal of 1919"

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Keith M. Hearit', is written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Keith Hearit, School of Communication

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Matt Kurz', is written over a horizontal line.

Mr. Matt Kurz, University Relations

Image Restoration and the “Black Sox” Scandal of 1919
Corrective Action as an Ideal Image Restoration Model for Professional Baseball

Zachary J. Walsh

Undergraduate Honors Thesis

Lee Honors College

Western Michigan University

April 14, 2005

Image Restoration and the “Black Sox” Scandal of 1919

Corrective Action as an Ideal Image Restoration Model for Professional Baseball

The game had been in trouble for several years already. Attendance was in decline and rumors of fixing had caused injury before. The Black Sox Scandal seemed destined to ruin baseball as a professional sport entirely.

Stephen Jay Gould (Asinof, 1963, p. xviii)

After the previously indomitable Chicago White Sox lost the 1919 World Series to the Cincinnati Reds, speculations of foul play abounded. With each suspicious game, the notion of a possible conspiracy to throw the Series became more widespread, reaching its pinnacle when the impossible happened and the Chicago defeat became official (Asinof, 1963). Finding it necessary to address the concerns of the public, Chicago White Sox President Charles A. Comiskey promptly positioned himself as spokesperson for his club. He immediately began to manage the pending crisis through public statements made via media outlets, primarily newspapers. At this point, the allegations of a fix had not been properly investigated, much less proven. Comiskey used the media to distance himself and his organization from the alleged incident and the eight players mentioned in connection to it. He also assured the legions of baseball fans and other stakeholders in the United States that his organization would do all it could to bring the truth to light and vowed that any guilty parties would be forever removed from the game. Public relations scholars would classify Comiskey’s statements and the corresponding actions to vindicate them as examples of dissociation and corrective action strategies employed by an organization as part of a crisis management campaign (Hearit, 1994, 1995; Benoit, 1994,

1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997). The objective of Comiskey's campaign was to return baseball and the White Sox organization back to level of respect it enjoyed prior to the "Black Sox" scandal.

This paper examines Comiskey's campaign to restore the images of both his club and the larger institution of professional baseball after the 1919 World Series scandal. It analyzes and evaluates the discourse used in the campaign in relation to established theories of image restoration. In doing so, the paper demonstrates that the crisis discourse utilized by the White Sox owner represents an image restoration campaign relying entirely on examples of corrective action, with elements of dissociation used as means to achieve corrective action objectives. The paper also identifies Comiskey's tactics as part of an image restoration campaign paradigm for professional baseball in times of organization-threatening crises and explains the social motif of removal and restitution that enables such a strategy to be effective. Today's professional baseball spokespersons can look to Comiskey's strategy as a roadmap by which they may restore the images of their respective organizations. Today's professional sports organizations face constant public and media pressure due to the harsh realities of the current sports climate, the most prominent current scandal being the abuse of steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs. Using the plan Comiskey enacted after the "Black Sox" scandal as a paradigm for successful image restoration, one may conclude the best course of action for today's baseball spokespeople is to clearly identify the problematic individuals, dissociate them from the larger organization, then effectively articulate, disseminate, and enact a plan to remove the "rotten" players from the game, thereby restoring the integrity of the organization in the eyes of its publics, primarily the fans. This paper explains in detail exactly what constituted Comiskey's plan and how today's professionals can benefit by following his example.

To accomplish this purpose, the first section of the paper outlines the six basic strategies available to individuals wishing to restore an organization's image during and after a crisis. The second establishes a setting for the 1919 World Series crisis situation and explains the conditions that led up to it. The third segment of the paper describes the two stages of Comiskey's image restoration campaign and the tactics used in each. This section also explains the social motif that allowed Comiskey to succeed in his image restoration efforts. The final portion of the paper recounts the assertions made in the previous sections and extrapolates upon them, drawing connections to today's professional sports world.

The Roster: Image Restoration Tactical Options

When presented with a crisis, organizations wishing to restore their institutional image must address the concerns of their stakeholders. In doing so, organizations may employ a number of different strategies. According to one popular theory, there are five basic image restoration strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (Benoit 1994, 1995; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Brinson & Benoit 1996; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997). In his research, Hearit (1994, 1995) discusses dissociation as another available strategy. The following paragraphs will discuss the facets of the strategies listed above.

Denial

A strategy of denial has been employed when a corporation either states that the act in question never occurred or states that it did not commit the act (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Benoit, 1994). Two tactics have been identified under the denial umbrella. Coca-Cola used the first strategy, known as simple denial, in 1991 when rival Pepsi-Cola accused the soft-drink giant of charging McDonald's restaurants lower rates than those assessed to other clients. Coca-Cola

responded to the allegations by issuing a statement saying that Pepsi-Cola's accusations "were absolutely false" (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997, p. 40). Coca-cola thus directly and simply denied the charges against it. A second form of denial is to shift the blame for the wrongful acts to another body. Exxon used this strategy when it was held responsible for delays in the cleanup efforts after its ship *Valdez* ran aground in 1989, spilling millions of gallons of oil into Prince William Sound. In response to the allegations, Exxon's chairman "blamed state officials and the Coast Guard for the delay, charging that the company could not obtain immediate authorization on the scene to begin cleaning up the oil or applying a chemical dispersant" (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997, p. 40-41). By shifting the blame away from itself to another entity, Exxon attempted to restore some of the damage done to its image in the wake of the spill.

Evasion of Responsibility

Organizations that cannot deny an act may nevertheless pursue image restoration by evading responsibility. The tactics included as measures by which to implement this strategy are used as attempts to "dodge or reduce responsibility for the wrong-doing" (Kennedy & Benoit, 1997, p. 198). Four such tactics have been identified: provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions.

Provocation. When using the first method, provocation, an organization asserts that its actions were reasonable in that they were a response to the actions of another body (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Kennedy & Benoit, 1997). An example of provocation, according to Benoit and Czerwinski (1997), would be if a company said it refused to cooperate with another business because the other business had been disinclined to cooperate in the past. In doing so, that former would be

trying to evade responsibility for its own actions by claiming they were the result of the actions of the latter.

Defeasibility. In evading responsibility through defeasibility, the next implementation of the strategy, an organization claims the act in question occurred because the company, through no fault of its own, lacked either information about or control over the event in question (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Kennedy & Benoit, 1997). For example, a company accused of not complying with new federal regulations would exemplify the defeasibility tactic if it were to say it had not been notified that the regulations had changed (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997, p. 41).

Accident. The third responsibility evasion tactic is to claim the event in question was an accident. This claim suggests the act was beyond the organization's control, thus the organization should retain less accountability (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Kennedy & Benoit, 1997). An example of this strategy is found in former Sears chairman Edward Brennan's classification of allegedly inaccurate auto-repair charges as "inadvertent" (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997, p.41). By using this terminology, Brennan claimed that any overcharges were accidental.

Good intentions. A fourth method of evading responsibility is by invoking a good intentions tactic that allows the organization to say it committed the offensive behavior, but did so in an attempt to accomplish a positive goal (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Kennedy & Benoit, 1997). Sears also demonstrated this tactic in the case mentioned above. Chairman Brennan issued a statement saying that his organization "would never intentionally violate the trust customers have shown in

our company” (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997, p.42). In doing so, he asserted that Sears had not meant to overcharge its customers and that its intentions were good.

Reduction of Offensiveness

Organizations also may attempt to restore their images by claiming the alleged misdeeds are not as bad as they may seem. This is the reduction of offensiveness strategy of image restoration discourse. Six tactics fall within this strategy: bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, counterattack, and compensation. Each of the six tactics attempts to lessen the offensiveness of the questionable acts as perceived by the organization’s key publics (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Kennedy & Benoit, 1997).

Bolstering. When an organization highlights its good aspects in an attempt to reinforce the positive opinion that an audience already holds for the corporation, the organization has demonstrated the bolstering tactic of image restoration (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Kennedy & Benoit, 1997). AT&T exemplified this tactic during the campaign that followed accusations that it was responsible for a 1992 long distance service interruption that caused millions of calls to be blocked and brought about a plethora of problems for air travelers in the New York City area. As part of his crisis discourse, company chairman Robert E. Allen’s reiterated the corporation’s long-time commitment to providing customers the best and most reliable service possible (Benoit & Brinson, 1994). This reinforcement of the company’s goals reminded the public of what AT&T stands for in an attempt to repair some of the damage done to its corporate image.

Minimization. Another tactic organizations may use to reduce perceived offensiveness is to minimize the negative feelings resulting from an offensive act (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit &

Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Kennedy & Benoit, 1997).

An example of this tactic is found in the following statement from Sears chairman Brennan during the case described earlier in this section. Brennan said, "With over 2 million automobile customers serviced in California alone, mistakes may have occurred" (Benoit, 1995, p. 96). With this statement, Brennan put the overcharging incidents into perspective, insinuating that when compared to the total number of customers served, the "mistakes" were not as significant as they appeared (Benoit 1995, p. 96).

Differentiation. Organizations also have the option to reduce offensiveness through differentiation, in which they create a clear separation between the act in question and other, more offensive acts. This tactic also played a role in the aforementioned example involving Sears. The accusers claimed the overcharges were partially due to Sears' practice of adhering to sales quotas. The company responded to the quota allegations by saying the so-called "quotas" were actually "sales goals" designed to meet public needs, a far less offensive categorization (Benoit 1995, p. 95). Sears implemented this change in nomenclature to show its publics that the acts in question were really not as offensive as the accusers had made them appear.

Transcendence. Transcendence is another tactical option available to organizations facing a crisis. According to Benoit and Czerwinski (1997), transcendence is "placing the act in a more favorable context, either a broader context or a different frame of reference" (p. 43). Dow Corning exemplified transcendence in the image restoration campaign it implemented after being accused of producing breast implants that it knew to be unsafe. A large part of this crisis revolved around documents allegedly proving Corning's knowledge of the potential harm its products caused to customers. A spokesperson for the company referred to the documents as "a normal part of business activity" (Brinson & Benoit, 1996, p. 35). This statement placed the

documents in a larger organizational context in an attempt to reduce them to “nothing more than simple business” (Brinson & Benoit, 1996, p. 35).

Counterattack. When the credibility of the allegations’ source is questionable, organizations can attempt to reduce the offensiveness of an act through counterattack, sometimes called attacking the accuser. When implementing this tactic, organizations challenge the credibility of the source and therefore the validity of the charges (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Kennedy & Benoit, 1997). According to Kennedy and Benoit (1994), former Speaker of the Senate Newt Gingrich used this tactic in 1994 when he was accused by then House Majority Whip David Bonior of putting his own interests ahead of those of the public. Gingrich responded to the allegations by implying that Bonior and other Democrats had brought the allegations upon him in an attempt to discredit him because he was a threat to their “old order” ideals. By attacking his accusers, Gingrich attempted to reduce the offensiveness of the allegations against him.

Compensation. When a company reimburses the victim of the offensive act with “goods, services, or money to help mitigate the negative feeling arising from the act,” it employed the compensation tactic of reducing offensiveness (Benoit & Czerwinski 1997, p. 43). In 1992 for instance, as an attempt to restore the image of his business, a movie theater official gave free passes to a group of disabled individuals who had been denied admittance to the theater (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Benoit 1997).

Corrective Action

In addition to the other strategies mentioned in this section, organizations in crisis may turn to a strategy of corrective action as a way accomplish their image restoration goals. The primary discourse accompanying this strategy is a promise from the organization to take action

to ensure that the problem that caused the offensive act will be corrected or that the act itself will be prevented from happening again (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Kennedy & Benoit, 1997). AT&T relied on corrective action discourse after the service disruption crisis mentioned earlier. Company chairman Allen informed the public that AT&T had identified the cause of the problem and that a full-scale investigation was underway. He stated the investigation would seek to determine what the specific cause of the disruption had been so the problem could be fixed and a similar incident would never occur again (Benoit, 1994, p. 81). By assuring the company's stakeholders that a repeat incident was impossible, Allen attempted to restore AT&T's image.

Mortification

Another strategic option for organizations caught in a crisis is to admit responsibility for the wrongful acts and make a plea for forgiveness. This is the reduction of offensiveness tactic identified as mortification (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Kennedy & Benoit, 1997). AT&T had no other choice but to include this tactic in the image restoration campaign it implemented in the long distance service disruption case mentioned earlier. Chairman Allen delivered the following statement to the media in response to the charges that AT&T was at fault for the service outage: "I am deeply disturbed that AT&T was responsible for a disruption in communications service" (Benoit & Brinson, 1994, p. 81). With this statement, Allen admitted that his organization was at fault and made no attempt to minimize AT&T's responsibility for what happened or reduce the severity of the incident (Benoit & Brinson, 1994, p. 81).

Dissociation

The list of image restoration strategies and tactics discussed to this point is that of Benoit and his colleagues. This list is however not fully comprehensive of all the strategies and tactics that have been identified by researchers. The following section details another image restoration strategy, that of dissociation, which has been identified by Hearit (1994, 1995), who adds three dissociation tactics to the list of options available to organizations facing crises. According to Hearit, corporations engage in dissociation when they “attempt to distance themselves from the wrongdoing” (1994, p. 119). He defines three types of dissociation: opinion/knowledge, individual/group, and act/essence.

Opinion/knowledge. An opinion/knowledge dissociation may be applied when the facts surrounding a situation are in question. In this type of dissociation, an organization asserts that the allegations against it are based on “opinions” that are not indicative of the “facts” of the situation (Hearit 1994, 1995). The Chrysler Corporation implemented what Hearit would define as an opinion/knowledge dissociation as part of its strategy to repair the damage to its image after it was accused of selling previously test-driven cars as “new.” The company claimed the perception of disengaged odometers as an “executive perk” was not in accordance with the facts, and said the odometers were disconnected as a “road testing” program (Hearit 1994). Chrysler thus dissociated opinion from knowledge.

Individual/group. The second type of dissociation Hearit identifies is individual/group. Companies that use this kind of dissociation “claim that individuals acting without organizational sanction are responsible for the wrongdoing” (Hearit, 1994, p. 119). By identifying these individuals, an organization “can label a part of its identity ‘rogue’ and, in the process, mitigate its guilt by scapegoating its employees” (Hearit, 1995, p. 8). Individual/group dissociation is a

useful tool when the validity of the accusation itself is not in question, as it would be in an opinion/knowledge dissociation (Hearit, 1994; 1995). Toshiba used this type of dissociation to separate itself from its subsidiary Toshiba Machine Company in 1987 when accusations arose that the latter had sold top-secret equipment to the Soviet Union. Toshiba referred to its subsidiary as “Toshiba Machine Company” or merely “TMC” to separate itself from its subsidiary and make clear the idea that “TMC” and not Toshiba was under attack. “TMC” was thus dissociated from the larger Toshiba corporation; the individual was separated from the group (Hearit, 1994, p. 120).

Act/essence. An organization will use a dissociation of the act/essence variety if it has “no option but to acknowledge that some wrongdoing has occurred” (Hearit, 1994, p. 120). When this happens, a corporation claims that the act in question does not represent the values and principles for which the organization stands. In this type of dissociation, the company essentially states that the act in question was an aberration not at all indicative of the company’s normal proceedings. According to Hearit (1994), this type of dissociation is largely dependent upon denial of intent. Volvo used an act/essence dissociation when it was charged with “deceptive advertising” in 1990 (p. 120). The company argued that the advertisement in question was “in no way reflective of how it generally does business” (p. 120). Volvo thus dissociated the offensive act from the essence of the organization.

This preceding section of this paper discussed six image restoration strategies available to organizations facing crises. The strategies that have been identified are: denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action, mortification and dissociation. A number of tactics falling under the broader strategy categories were also discussed. The image restoration strategies and related tactics listed herein will be used to critically examine the

discourse of Charles Comiskey in his attempts to restore the image of the Chicago White Sox organization in the wake of accusations that several of his players had conspired to fix the 1919 World Series.

Pre-Game: Conspiracy-Conducive Conditions

Prior to the United States' entrance into World War I in 1917, professional baseball was the biggest entertainment business in America (Asinof, 1963). While the Great War was being fought overseas, American gamblers fought their own battle at home, against boredom. As a result of the war, many horseracing venues were shut down, forcing the gamblers and bookies who lived and died on the ponies to find another activity to occupy their time. They turned to baseball. Consequently, by the end of World War I, baseball gambling had grown to monumental proportions (Asinof, 1963). In the fall of 1919, the nation's attention turned from the conflict overseas back to the action on America's baseball diamonds. The 1919 World Series would be the first fall classic since the end of WWI. The seemingly unstoppable Chicago White Sox of the American League would face the severely out-manned Cincinnati Reds of the National League. The general conception of the public was that a Chicago victory was inevitable (Asinof, 1963, p. 5).

Bookies and bettors were not the only ones affected by the increase in baseball gambling; ballplayers also were very much involved. In 1919, players throwing games was not a new phenomenon (Asinof, 1963, p. 10). Only two years earlier, the same Chicago White Sox team preparing to play in the upcoming World Series had been part of an underhanded plot to win the American League pennant. Almost every player was "openly assessed" \$45 under the auspices of rewarding two Detroit Tigers pitchers for beating Chicago-rival Boston in an important series. The money actually was used to bribe the two pitchers to lose games against the White Sox

themselves (Asinof, 1963, p. 20). Another harbinger of pending massive corruption was the case of Cincinnati first-baseman Hal Chase and his activities during the 1917 season. According to Eliot Asinof in *Eight Men Out* (1963), Chase “became adept at making faulty plays” (p. 14). He mastered the art of making his teammates look bad, thereby giving the opposing team a significant advantage while maintaining his own image. Chase sacrificed the integrity of the game so he could make a few extra dollars betting against his own team. He was eventually exposed and put on trial, only to be acquitted and continue his career with another club (pp. 14-15). These examples represent only a portion of the illegal activity that permeated baseball at this time in the game’s history. Inside gambling thrived in professional baseball in the seasons preceding the 1919 campaign. Asinof (1963) asserts that at this time many gamblers “openly boasted that they could control ball games as readily as they controlled horse races” (p.13). Of course, not all ballplayers were involved in the corruption, but those who remained clean quickly realized they could do nothing to stop the decline of the game (pp. 13-14). The stage was set for the most colossal scam in baseball history.

In 1919, the Chicago White Sox had very nearly become the quintessential baseball club. The team boasted dominant pitching, powerful hitting, and excellent fielding. The only elements the team lacked were satisfied players and team unity. On any other team, the slugger “Shoeless” Joe Jackson, “commonly rated as the greatest natural hitter the game had ever seen,” would have made far more than what Comiskey paid him (Asinof, 1963, p.19). The same was true for the majority of Jackson’s teammates. Asinof (1963) writes, “[Comiskey’s] ballplayers were the best and were paid as poorly as the worst” (p. 15). This situation was compounded by the fact that this was the “take-it-or-leave-it” contract era of professional baseball in which players had only two choices regarding their contracts; they could either play for what the owner

offered, or not play at all (p. 21). Many of the White Sox players were none too eager to find a way to supplement their relatively meager incomes. Their contempt for Comiskey's frugal salary practices was multiplied by the players' disdain for the lavish expenditures their boss made on reporters in order to win favor with them (Asinof, 1963, p. 21). Comiskey's priorities were clear to all involved, especially the players, who greatly resented their boss and his miserly attitude toward their compensation. The salary situation may not have been the sole motivating factor for the players to go through with the World Series fix, but it certainly contributed to their willingness to consider such a heinous act. The other championship component the 1919 White Sox club lacked was team unity. Unknown even to their fans, the team was divided into two cliques, separated as such for a variety of mostly personal reasons. Eventually, these groups would evolve into the players involved in the fix and those who were unaware of it (Asinof, 1963). The two factors that made Chicago an unlikely championship candidate would overwhelm the club's many positive attributes and ultimately result in a World Series defeat.

Three weeks before the 1919 Series was to begin, professional gambler Joseph "Sport" Sullivan approached White Sox first-baseman Arnold "Chick" Gandil and promised him \$80,000 (Gandil's salary was \$4,000 at the time) for himself and a select group of teammates if the Sox lost the Series (Asinof, 1963, pp. 19-20). This meeting put into motion the events that would eventually result in Gandil and seven other White Sox conspiring to throw the heralded culmination of the national pastime's 1919 season. Gandil's group of disgruntled players purposely lost the first two games of the Series. The Sox "rallied" for a victory in the third on the arm of young pitcher Dickie Kerr, who was untouched by the scandal. Cincinnati took Games 4 and 5, giving the National League squad a 4-1 advantage (the 1919 World Series was the only best-of-nine contest in major league baseball history). At this point, the outlook was not

good for the White Sox, both on the diamond and off, where it had become apparent that the crooked players had been double-crossed by the men who were supposed to finance the fix (Asinof, 1963). Partially out of spite for not receiving promised compensation, Chicago claimed victories in the next two games, putting the team down only four games to three. Desiring a quick and favorable outcome, the gamblers assured themselves victory by extorting Chicago starting pitcher Lefty Williams with threats of harm to his wife if the Reds did not win the game. Williams let four runs cross the plate in the top of the first inning, effectively giving away the World Series title; the White Sox lost the Series in eight games (Asinof, 1963). American League President Ban Johnson would later call the throwing of the Series “the greatest crime it was possible to commit in baseball” (“Baseball leaders won’t,” 1921).

The World Series is the pinnacle of every true baseball fan’s year, a contest designed to showcase the very best the sport has to offer. The greatest teams from each league face each other in a battle to determine superiority within the sport. By committing baseball’s “greatest crime” in 1919, the participating White Sox players brought into question the integrity of the World Series and the entire game of baseball. A large part of baseball’s appeal at the time was its perceived purity, an aspect of the game to which the “Black Sox” delivered a severe blow, placing the sport in serious jeopardy. Comiskey knew he had to do something to restore the sanctity of the game or risk abandonment by even the sport’s most loyal followers. His crisis management tactics would successfully prevent baseball from self-destruction. Today, the remnants of the scandal are still evident in occasional references to Pete Rose’s betting indiscretions and sporadic uprisings of support for Joe Jackson’s posthumous initiation into the Hall of Fame. However, in the bigger picture, baseball’s integrity has been generally restored. Baseball is still plagued by a number of issues, the most prominent of which is the use of

performance-enhancing drugs. Because of Comiskey's actions following the 1919 World Series, any concern about betting scandals has been all but eliminated from the minds of baseball fans. The following section will explain the actions Comiskey took to eliminate the major blemishes the "Black Sox" scandal placed on the face of his team and the sport.

The Game Plan: Comiskey's Image Restoration Campaign

Charles Comiskey enacted his image restoration campaign in two stages. The division between the early and late stages of the campaign was the point at which Comiskey accepted as fact the allegations made against several of his players. In the early period of the crisis, before Comiskey recognized the truth about the alleged scandal, his image restoration strategy focused primarily on assuring the public that the validity of the claims would be determined and that the guilty parties or individuals, if any, would be identified. This is an example of Benoit's corrective action strategy (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Kennedy & Benoit, 1997). In the course of his crusade for the truth, Comiskey made certain the public knew precisely what measures he had taken and to what lengths he had gone to remedy the problem. To a far lesser degree in the first stage of his campaign, Comiskey also attempted to place the rumors in a more favorable context in an example of transcendence, reduce the perceived severity of the problem in a display of minimization, and discredit the source of the rumors in a representation of counterattack. The last of these tactics also functioned as an opinion/knowledge dissociation, in which Comiskey differentiated between speculation and fact (Hearit, 1994; 1995). However, despite the presence of these multiple other tactics, by far the most significant strategy used in the first stage of the Comiskey's campaign was corrective action.

Once Comiskey convinced himself that several of his players had indeed conspired to lose the 1919 World Series, he moved into the second stage of his campaign. This second stage still involved heavy reliance on the use of corrective action, but the strategy was present in a new form. While in the first stage, he used this strategy to determine what the problem was, Comiskey now would use corrective action to assure his target audiences that a repeat of the incident would be impossible by vowing to permanently remove the corrupt players from professional baseball. In a manner of speaking, he promised to restore the quality of the batch by removing the bad apples. In making such promises and taking the necessary steps to bring them to fruition, Comiskey also distanced himself from the indicted players in a representation of an individual/group dissociation (Hearit, 1994; 1995). The separation Comiskey created between his organization and the corrupt players was basically a product of his corrective action efforts, but this dissociation strategy was still crucial to his image restoration campaign. The following section outlines the specific discourse the White Sox president used in enacting the two stages of his image restoration campaign. This section also outlines a unique sociological condition that allowed him to succeed by utilizing such a one-dimensional approach.

Stage One: Address and Investigate the Rumors

Comiskey's first attempts to restore the image of his baseball team fundamentally revolved around only one strategy, corrective action. The only real attempt he made to use other tactics came immediately after the World Series finale, when he addressed the public in what may be identified as an example of transcendence, minimization and counterattack. In one of Comiskey's first media addresses after the end of the Series, he delivered the following statement in response to widely spread rumors that the games had been fixed: "There is always some scandal of some kind following a big sporting event like the world's series. These yarns are

manufactured out of whole cloth and grow out of bitterness due to losing wagers,” (“Rumors arouse Comiskey,” 1919, p. 10). In the first sentence of the statement, Comiskey exemplified the transcendence and minimization tactics of image restoration. First, he placed the alleged wrongful act, conspiracy to throw the World Series, in a larger and less offensive context as one of the routine scandals that “always” follow major sporting events such as the World Series. This is an example of transcendence (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Kennedy & Benoit, 1997). By downplaying the accusations as merely another of the alleged scandals that inevitably arise after all major sporting events, Comiskey demonstrated minimization as a means to reduce the negative sentiment, or offensiveness, that his key audiences would have associated with the tampering of the national pastime’s most sacred contest. The second sentence of the preceding statement represents an instance of counterattack. Comiskey’s reference to the “bitterness due to losing wagers” on the part of the people he implies are the source of the rumors was an attempt to discredit the claims of these individuals. Comiskey suggested these people made the allegations based on emotions and not facts, so the allegations should therefore not be considered credible. This statement also serves as an example of an opinion/knowledge dissociation in which Comiskey attempted to distinguish between the allegations (opinions) and the actual events (knowledge) (Hearit 1994,1995). In another section of the statement referenced above, Comiskey introduced the crucial corrective action element of his campaign:

I believe my boys fought the battles of the recent world's series on the level as they have always done, and I would be the first to want information to the contrary. I would give \$20,000 to anyone unearthing any information to that effect.

(“Rumors arouse Comiskey,” 1919, p. 10)

This excerpt represents the beginning of Comiskey's campaign to convey to his audiences that he had taken corrective action to not only determine the truth, but to ensure that if the allegations were verified, the wrongful acts would never occur again. The corrective action tactic would be the primary component of the remainder of Comiskey's image restoration campaign.

Many of Comiskey's actions were representations of corrective action. One way in which he exemplified this tactic was through the multiple reiterations of his offer to compensate any individual found to have relevant information. For example, on December 14, 1919, two months after his original statement, Comiskey “declared the investigation had not ended and that his offer of \$10,000 for proof still stood” (“No evidence found,” 1919, p. 14). He did, for reasons about which it can only be speculated, drop the reward from \$20,000 to \$10,000, but the fact that he still was offering a reward for information is the most significant point. Comiskey proclaimed the \$10,000 offer again on December 30 (“Comiskey renews offer,” 1919) and again the following September during the players' trial (“Says 1919 World's Series,” 1920). Each time he renewed the offer Comiskey demonstrated to his key publics his commitment to correcting the alleged wrongdoings.

Comiskey continued to bombard the public with messages of corrective action in other ways as well. For instance, in December of 1919, he issued a statement describing the progress of his investigation. It read:

We have been investigating all these rumors and I have had men working twenty-four hours a day running down clues that promised to produce facts. Nothing has come of them. Do not get the impression that we are through investigating. I am still working on the case and will go to the limit to get any evidence to bear out the truth of these accusations. If I land the goods on any of my ballplayers I will see that there is no place in organized ball for them. There will be no whitewashing or compromising with crooks as long as I am in the American League. But as yet not one bit of reliable information has been turned up to prove there was anything wrong.

(“Decision reserved,” 1919, p. 12)

In this progress report, Comiskey clearly displayed the tactic of corrective action in an attempt to assure his stakeholders that the proper measures had been taken to determine the truth and identify any guilty parties. The report also provided assurance that, should evidence of wrongdoing be found, precautions would be taken to ensure that a repeat of the incident was impossible. Comiskey suggested such precautions would include the permanent expulsion of any players found guilty.

Comiskey further demonstrated corrective action tactics when he collaborated with Chicago Cubs President William L. Veeck and American League President Ban Johnson during the players’ trial in September of 1920. *The New York Times* reported that all three men “stated that they were anxious to get to the bottom of all charges, and that they were determined to push the investigation and punish the guilty, if any” (“Says 1919 World’s Series,” 1920). As part of this trio of baseball magnates, Comiskey assured his target audience that justice would be served

by expressing a desire to determine the truth in a timely fashion and to make any guilty parties pay for their crimes.

The White Sox owner's September 25, 1920 statement in *The New York Times* is another example of corrective action. In this statement, Comiskey detailed the measures he took immediately after first hearing about a possible conspiracy to fix the 1919 Series, before the Series had ended ("Grand jury hears," 1920). In the article, Comiskey said he enlisted the assistance of White Sox general manager "Kid" Gleason to "safeguard the series as far as possible" ("Grand jury hears," 1920). He claimed he also sent Gleason to St. Louis with the authority to reimburse a well-known gambler there for the \$5,500 he lost on the Series if he could validate his claim that he had valuable information about a fix. According to Comiskey, Gleason's trip proved fruitless. In his September 25 statement, Comiskey also explained how he informed John Heydler, National League President and member of the National Commission, of the rumors. In this statement, Comiskey again made known that his \$10,000 offer for information was still on the table ("Grand jury hears," 1920).

On November 5, 1920, *The New York Times* published a statement by Comiskey that described in detail each step the White Sox owner had taken to that point in his efforts to verify the rumors of a conspiracy. This is another example of corrective action in Comiskey's image restoration campaign. The journalist's introduction to Comiskey's statement read: "The object of the statement is to counteract the impression prevailing in some quarters that Comiskey had been delinquent in his duty and that any credit for the exposé belonged to Ban Johnson, President of the American League ("Comiskey reviews steps," 1920, p. 19). By using this statement to respond to claims of nonfeasance, Comiskey reinforced his corrective action strategy. He listed several elements of his quest for the truth, including Gleason's trip to St. Louis and the

deployment of detectives to locations across the country to search for information. He also revealed the \$10,000 cost he incurred for these efforts. Comiskey further stated, “At no time or place did I cease my efforts to root out the truth regarding crooked ball playing in the World’s Series of 1919” (“Comiskey reviews steps,” 1920, p. 19). Furthermore, he said the following of the actions he took immediately after the grand jury convened to deliberate on the case: “I volunteered all information at my disposal and paid part of the expense of bringing witnesses to testify before the Grand Jury” (“Comiskey reviews steps,” 1920, p. 19). Comiskey continued to describe his role in the trial process when he highlighted the fact that it was his lawyer who procured the testimonies of each White Sox player who had confessed (“Comiskey reviews steps,” 1920, p. 19). In the statement discussed above, each of Comiskey’s assertions regarding his part in determining the truth behind the alleged conspiracy is an example of corrective action as used in an image repair campaign.

Stage Two: Banish the Conspirators

Other assertions extracted from the statement in the previous paragraph indicate the beginning of the second stage in Comiskey’s campaign. At this point, Comiskey felt he had been successful in validating the claims of corruption and began to use public discourse to distance himself and his team from the corrupt players. For example, marking the shift in his corrective action objectives, Comiskey informed the public that he promptly suspended the players mentioned in the first confession shortly after he heard of their alleged involvement in the fix (“Comiskey reviews steps,” 1920). This action outlines one of the first actions the White Sox owner took to correct the situation. He removed the corrupt players from the game, though at that point the removal was only temporary. This was a marked shift from the corrective action

strategy Comiskey employed in the first phase of his crisis management campaign, when he focused on the search for truth behind the allegations.

In the same statement, in an example of dissociation, Comiskey distanced himself from the accused players by explaining the financial and emotional damage caused to him by the indicted players' transgressions:

Even though it ruined my ball team, possibly cost me a pennant and certainly destroyed property of a value of many hundreds of thousands of dollars, I took my loss without a pang or a bit of sadness, other than that occasioned by ascertaining the fact that those in whom I had put full faith and trust had violated the confidence I had reposed in them.

(“Comiskey reviews steps,” 1920, p. 19)

Here, Comiskey painted himself as the victim of the guilty players' actions, drawing a clear line between himself, as a representative of the organization, and the corrupt individuals. Though he never explicitly stated that he wished not to be associated with the conspirators, by labeling himself as the victim and them as the perpetrators, Comiskey attempted to relay this message to the public. In creating a clear distinction between himself and the wrongdoers, Comiskey exemplified an individual/group dissociation (Hearit 1994, 1995). This distinction would prove a crucial stepping-stone for Comiskey's later efforts to correct the wrongs the players had done to the game of baseball.

On March 14, 1921, *The New York Times* reported Comiskey's response to Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, official arbiter of professional baseball, announcing he had officially made the eight indicted players ineligible to play baseball in the major leagues (“White Sox

trial,” 1921). Comiskey’s words are another embodiment of his second stage corrective action technique. Comiskey reportedly said:

Those players are on my ineligible list. It was not necessary for Judge Landis to put them on his, but I am glad he did, as it justified my position. There is absolutely no place for any of them to play on my team again unless they can clear themselves to my satisfaction of the charges against them by three of their teammates.

(“White Sox trial,” 1921, p.6)

In this statement, Comiskey again assured his target audiences that the crooked players would not play baseball again, implying that this would prevent further corruption. His words here are similar to those in the previous statement in which he described suspending the players (“Comiskey reviews steps,” 1920). The difference here is that Comiskey’s actions as described in this statement are less concrete and more symbolic. He made the same point, that the conspirators will not play baseball for him again, but he did so from a different angle, intending to reinforce his previous sentiment.

The corrective action-based campaign took a more permanent turn when, a few days after issuing the statement mentioned in the paragraph above, Comiskey officially and unconditionally released the indicted players from the White Sox organization. In the published formal notice of their release, Comiskey informed the players, “your actions have been highly detrimental to the reputation of the club and entirely inconsistent with your obligations to it” (“Comiskey ousts indicted players,” 1921, p.9). With these words, which were printed in *The New York Times*, Comiskey removed the players from his organization in an attempt to restore its image. He also again illustrated the use of an individual/group dissociation tactic (Hearit 1994, 1995; “Comiskey

ousts indicted players,” 1921). Comiskey distanced the Chicago White Sox organization from the accused players to make it clear to his key audiences that the ball club as a whole was not responsible for the fix. He placed the blame solely on the shoulders of the individual players, who could be, and in fact later were, easily removed from the larger body.

The trial of the players officially began on June 27, 1921 and ended a little more than two months later in the acquittal of all eight men (Asinof, 1963). The day after the acquittal, Comiskey issued another statement explaining his corrective actions, reiterating the fact that he still would not allow any of the players to be a part of his organization, despite the fact that they had been found innocent. He said, “Until they all are able to explain this to my satisfaction, none of them will play with the Sox” (“Baseball leaders won’t,” 1921, p. 1). With this statement, Comiskey conveyed to his target publics a genuine interest in correcting the perceived problem. He demonstrated a willingness to take the matter of preventing another conspiracy into his own hands if another body, in this case the court, refused to do so. This represents another tactic in the White Sox owner’s campaign to convey to the public the corrective action measures he had taken to ensure that a repeat incident would be impossible. Comiskey’s statement was joined by similar declarations from Landis and Johnson (“Baseball leaders won’t,” 1921, p. 1).

The Social Motif of “Rotten Apple” Removal, Rectification and Restoration

Scientists have proven that the antiquated adage is true: “one bad apple spoils the whole barrel” (“Harvesting and storing apples,” 1999, ¶ 4). A rotten apple exudes a chemical called ethylene that triggers the ripening of the other apples, causing them to eventually rot and continue rotting, even after the original rotten apple is removed (“Harvesting and storing apples,” 1999). As a few rotten apples can cause an entire barrel to spoil, so too, at least in the minds of Comiskey’s publics, could only a few players in professional baseball be responsible for the

“Black Sox” scandal . When the “bad apples” or the accused players were removed from the game, White Sox fans and the rest of the baseball community were apparently placated enough to believe the integrity of the team and the game had been restored. Baseball players, however, are not apples and the laws of science do not necessarily apply to image restoration efforts. The success of Charles Comiskey’s crisis management campaign following the 1919 scandal suggests the public held the belief that the reverse of the aforementioned saying is true. People apparently believed the integrity of major league baseball could be salvaged and restored simply by eliminating the corrupt players.

Because of this widespread social motif, Comiskey was able to focus his image restoration efforts around basically only one strategy, taking corrective action to prevent a similar event from occurring by identifying and removing the “rotten” players. He implemented this strategy because he perceived the belief in his target audiences that as long as the bad apples were removed, those remaining would be left untainted and the barrel as a whole would be return to a pristine state. Comiskey worked within the structure of this social motif. He repeatedly told his audiences first that the “rotten” players would be sought out and identified, and later that they would be removed from the barrel, thus assuring permanent resolution of the problem and restoring the integrity of his organization. The first part of this strategy represents an individual/group dissociation that would later serve as part of Comiskey’s corrective action-focused image restoration plan. The audience’s predisposition to the belief that removal of the corrupt players would rectify the situation made Comiskey’s one-dimensional approach a plausible image restoration strategy.

The effects of the “rotten apple” social motif are apparent in other baseball cases as well. When Pete Rose came under fire for allegedly betting on the game, he was permanently banned

from any involvement in professional baseball. The public accepted the removal of Rose as a solution to the problem, when in actuality, the problem likely extended beyond only one player. Accepting Rose's expulsion from the game as a viable solution, the public reformed its generally favorable view of professional baseball. Rose's credibility was forever marred, but his sport's wound healed and its credibility was for the most part restored, as evidenced by the lack of discussion about the problem of insider betting in the current sports forum. Comiskey utilized the social motif of rotten apple removal, rectification and restoration to aid him in restoring the image of his Chicago White Sox team and of professional baseball in general.

Post-Game Wrap-Up: Conclusions

In the presence of widespread rumors regarding a possible conspiracy by several of his players to throw the 1919 World Series, Charles Comiskey knew what he had to do and what he had to work with in order to repair his organization's image in the eyes of its stakeholders. Immediately after he was informed of the rumors, Comiskey recognized that he had two options. The rumors had to be either proven false and dispelled or verified and addressed. He took action to determine the validity of the accusations against his players through an apparently sincere and comprehensive investigation, the details of which he deliberately made public. This public inquiry into the legitimacy of the rumors eventually yielded the unimaginable. Comiskey had a group of corrupt players on his team who were guilty of "the greatest crime it was possible to commit in baseball ("Baseball leaders won't," 1921, p. 1).

Comiskey enacted his campaign to restore his club's image in two stages, both based almost entirely upon examples of the corrective action strategy identified by Benoit. The first stage entailed an investigation into the allegations and numerous statements relaying to Comiskey's audiences the sincerity behind it. The White Sox owner expressed his resolve

toward not only establishing the validity of the allegations, but also toward identifying any guilty parties. Comiskey's investigation into the rumors was the first step toward ensuring that a similar incident would not occur again on his team or in professional baseball. The White Sox owner thus demonstrated Benoit's image restoration strategy of corrective action. Once the investigation yielded information sufficient for Comiskey to accept the conspiracy theories as fact, he moved into the second stage of his image restoration campaign.

The second and final phase of the campaign was similar to the first in that Comiskey again relied almost solely on corrective action. However, the tactic was used in a different manner. While at the beginning of the campaign, the White Sox owner demonstrated corrective action tactics by trying to investigate the rumors and determine any guilty parties, he exemplified these tactics in the second part of the campaign as a way to assure the impossibility of a repeat incident by eliminating the guilty parties from his team and from the game of baseball. First, Comiskey temporarily removed the players implicated in the scandal from his team through suspensions while a more official investigation was conducted. When he became convinced of their guilt, he released the players from his organization and assured his audiences those men would never play for his team again. Finally, Comiskey reassured his stakeholders by attempting to permanently ban the players from baseball's major leagues. These final two actions came in spite of the fact that the players were acquitted in a court of law. Comiskey's corrective action efforts in the second half of his campaign also served the purpose of clearly separating himself and his organization from the accused players. He established the group of alleged conspirators as a scapegoat, and then created a clear distinction between that group, the White Sox organization and professional baseball. Through physical removal of the players from his organization, he attempted to make clear in the minds of his publics that the alleged conspirators

were no longer part of the team. This dissociation harkens back to the purpose of his second-stage corrective action efforts, in which Comiskey assured his stakeholders that another conspiracy was impossible because the metaphorical rotten apples had been removed from the barrel, never to be returned.

Comiskey's campaign suggests the presence of a social motif in American society. He used to his advantage the fact that people tend to believe a problem is solved when the identified causes of the problem have been eliminated. They believe that removal of the rotten apples will restore the integrity of the barrel. By working within the context of this social motif, Comiskey was able to convince his publics that the White Sox organization and the American professional baseball institution was no longer corrupt simply by eliminating the corrupt players. In the absence of this social motif, his stakeholders would have had no reason to accept the removal of the players as viable assurance of restored organizational integrity and a rectified situation. Comiskey's image restoration campaign focused almost exclusively on examples of corrective action that relied heavily on this social motif. He would not have been able to succeed using such a strategy had this social condition not existed.

The campaign to restore the image of the White Sox organization after the "Black Sox" scandal of 1919 represents a paradigmatic approach to image restoration for today's baseball organizations. The social motif of rotten apple removal, restoration and rectification persists today. Thus, just as Comiskey did in 1919, today's baseball organization owners and spokespeople can largely restore the images of their clubs simply by removing the individuals identified as being directly involved in the crisis. A modern day example of an attempt to use this paradigm is Major League Baseball's newest drug program. Professional baseball implemented the new program to placate the governing body's critics, who called for a

crackdown on the use of performance-enhancing drugs by the league's players. At the press conference following the announcement of the new program, Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig described it as "a new, much tougher drug-testing program that is designed to rid our game of performance-enhancing drugs" (Bloom, 2005, ¶ 3). Under the new program, Major League Baseball will strive for Commissioner Selig's goal of a drug-free game by instituting more frequent mandatory testing of athletes and stricter penalties for those who test positive. Those penalties will be assessed in the form of unpaid suspensions ranging from 10 days for a first offense up to one year for a fourth offense, with punishments for further offenses left to the discretion of the commissioner. This leaves open the possibility for permanent expulsion (Bloom, 2005). Selig and other Major League Baseball representatives recently were forced to defend the new policy at a highly publicized congressional hearing, in a situation somewhat similar to Comiskey's frequent iterations of his own corrective action tactics via local and national media. To effectively follow Comiskey's image restoration paradigm, Major League Baseball's new drug program must identify at least one scapegoat, as Comiskey did, then make that individual an example of the organization's commitment to correcting the perceived problem of rampant performance-enhancing drug use by permanently expelling him from baseball. Additionally, throughout its corrective action campaign, Major League baseball must make public the actions it takes to seek out the corrupt individuals and remove them from the game, in much the same fashion as Comiskey did when managing his own crisis. If baseball's fans and critics are not aware of the organization's efforts, these efforts will be for naught. In his frequent disclosures to the media, Comiskey attempted to make certain everyone affected by the crisis knew exactly what he was doing and what he had already done. Today's baseball spokespeople would do well to follow a similar pattern.

Similar to what Comiskey did more than 80 years ago to restore the image of his team, Major League Baseball's new program is designed to assure the public that guilty individuals will be identified and prevented from further contaminating the game of baseball. While the preliminary punishments stipulated by the new program are not as harsh as those ultimately levied by Comiskey and the league following the "Black Sox" scandal, the message is the same: the league is taking action to remove the "bad apples." The new drug program has already come under some criticism for allegedly not doing enough to correct the problem, but in the words of one team owner, "This is real progress" (Bloom, 2005, ¶ 8). The true test of Comiskey's corrective action-centered image restoration campaign as a paradigm for today's sports institution will come after the public has time see baseball's new drug program in action and to weigh in on its efficacy. If the public views the program as a viable means to cleanse the game, then steroid abuse will ultimately become an issue of the past and the nation's faith in the national pastime will be restored, just as it was after Comiskey's campaign more than 80 years ago.

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