tion on the open road. He hoboed to most parts of the United States looking for employment and worked on tramp steamers that took him to Africa, Australia, and Latin America. He advocated socialism, joined the Industrial Workers of the World, and then studied syndicalism and foreign languages in Britain, France, and Germany. Although Foster clearly possessed more gifts than most of his contemporaries in the movement, his final ideological journey, from syndicalism to communism, typified “a whole generation of labor radicals, men and women who made the ideological leap in faith that the Communist Party represented a more suitable vehicle for achieving a working-class revolution” (p. 197). Barrett argues that the movement’s failure to achieve a more egalitarian American society resulted from a complex dynamic of bad Communist party decisions and government repression.

In telling Foster’s exciting story, Barrett displays an insight applicable to other top Communists as well. “It would be difficult to analyze Foster’s own development as distinct from . . . organizations he helped shape, because his identity had merged with these movements” [emphasis in original]. “The paucity of personal material . . . reflects Foster’s personality as much as a dearth of sources” (p. x). His individuality became “fused with his politics.” To “disengage the two” would be “misleading and artificial” (p. xi). Decades earlier, contemporaries Elizabeth G. Flynn, Joseph Freeman, and Steve Nelson made observations that support Barrett’s point (pp. 203, 241).

If commitment to the class struggle was Foster’s strength, distrust of democracy was his weakness. When he was a Syndicalist, Foster wanted “facts and figures” to replace the capitalists. “These would be interpreted and executed not by rank-and-file workers, but by technical experts in each industry” (p. 56). As a Communist, Foster always sought rule by a Leninist vanguard, not a mass toilers’ party. After Nikita Khrushchev’s “secret speech” caused other American Communists to reconsider their movement’s entire nature, Foster continued to defend Joseph Stalin.

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In the very last paragraph of this fascinating labor history of baseball, Robert F. Burk writes of the “contentious history . . . [and] the
self-destructive hatreds” of team owners and major league baseball players that has characterized the sport from its beginnings in the nineteenth century to the present (p. 312).

Burk, a professor of history and chair of his department at Muskingum College in New Concord, Ohio, began charting baseball’s labor woes in Never Just a Game: Players, Owners, & American Baseball to 1920 (1994), and he continues his detailed narrative in this book, dividing the last eighty years into “The Paternalistic Era: The Age of Rickey,” and “The Inflationary Era: The Age of Miller.”

His division makes sense, as does his selection of Branch Rickey and Marvin Miller as the two most influential figures in his story. Although baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis presided over the sport from 1921 to 1944, Burk punctures Landis’s importance—much of it self-importance—and shows that Rickey, in his perfection of the farm system and his relentless cost efficiency, was the main force in baseball from the late 1920s through the 1950s. Rickey was also the master of paternalistic labor practices, including his most famous action—the racial integration of organized baseball with his signing of Jackie Robinson, first to a minor league contract and then to the Brooklyn Dodgers. Burk argues persuasively that Rickey acted more from economic interests than racial idealism. The clever executive saw African American players and their Negro leagues as an untapped pool of cheap labor for his and other major league teams, and he signed Robinson mainly because he wanted to demolish incipient player unionization as well as a possible competitor to major league monopoly, the Mexican league. In this action and many others, Rickey shaped organized baseball into a cartel that maximized profits for owners, particularly the bosses of the Dodgers and the New York Yankees, and kept player salaries at an amazingly low level.

Rickey’s triumph prepared the way for the 1960s Player Association and its hiring of an experienced labor union official, Marvin Miller, to press salary and pension demands. The intransigence and stupidity of the team owners allowed Miller to maneuver the sport into 1970s free agency and its subsequent consequences—a relatively open market that allows veteran players, particularly stars, to sell themselves to the highest bidder for fabulous sums of money. During the Rickey era, the average major league salary never topped $15,000, and player payroll consumed a minor percentage of team operating costs; now, on many teams, average salaries are at the $1.5 million mark, and total player payroll far exceeds the book value of the franchise.

Burk tells this story well, drawing upon many sources and transforming his research into a highly readable narrative. He also adds a long “Bibliographic Essay” on the literature of baseball history, treating the many sentimental paeans to the sport, including ones by fellow historians, with a kindness that they do not deserve and that
is undercut by his own clear-eyed view of what actually occurred, particularly between players and owners. After finishing *Much More than a Game* and its predecessor, *Never Just a Game*, no reader will be able to swallow another essay by an Ivy League academic treating the Boston Red Sox as if they were cursed heroes of Greek mythology. For this gift and his superb labor history of baseball, serious fans of the sport should give Burk a standing ovation.

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