

= Disco Demolition Night =

Disco Demolition Night was an ill-fated baseball promotion that took place on July 12, 1979, at Comiskey Park in Chicago, Illinois. At the climax of the event, a crate filled with disco records was blown up on the field between games of the two-night doubleheader between the Chicago White Sox and the Detroit Tigers. Many of those in attendance had come to see the explosion rather than the games and rushed onto the field after the detonation. The playing field was damaged both by the explosion and by the rowdy fans to the point where the White Sox were required to forfeit the second game of the doubleheader to the Tigers.

In the late 1970s, dance-oriented disco music was very popular in the United States, particularly after being featured in hit films such as *Saturday Night Fever* (1977). Despite its popularity, disco sparked a backlash from rock music fans. This opposition was prominent enough that the White Sox, seeking to fill seats at Comiskey Park during a lackluster season, engaged Chicago shock jock and anti-disco campaigner Steve Dahl for the promotion at the July 12 doubleheader. Dahl's sponsoring radio station was 97.9 WLUP-FM, so attendees would pay 98 cents and bring a disco record; between games, Dahl would destroy the collected vinyl in an explosion.

White Sox officials had hoped for a crowd of 20,000, about 5,000 more than usual. Instead, at least 50,000 people, including tens of thousands of Dahl's adherents, packed the stadium, and thousands more continued to sneak in even after gates were closed. Many of the records were not collected by staff and were thrown like flying discs from the stands. After Dahl blew up the collected records, thousands of fans stormed the field and remained there until dispersed by riot police. The second game was initially postponed, but was forfeited to the Tigers the next day by order of American League president Lee MacPhail. Disco Demolition Night preceded, and may have helped precipitate, the decline of disco in late 1979; some scholars and disco artists have described the event as expressive of racism and homophobia while others have denied this connection. Disco Demolition Night remains well known as one of the most extreme promotions in major league history.

= Background =

=== Musical ===

The genre known as disco, named for its popularity in discotheques, evolved in the early 1970s in inner-city New York clubs, where disc jockeys would play imported dance music to get the crowd moving. With roots in African American and Latin American music, and in gay culture, disco became mainstream by the mid-1970s. Even white artists associated with a much more sedate style of music had disco-influenced hits, such as Barry Manilow with "Copacabana". By 1977, disco was very popular in the United States, especially after the release that year of the hit movie *Saturday Night Fever*. This film starred John Travolta and featured music by the Bee Gees; the fact that both actor and performers were white and presented a heterosexual image did much to make disco widely popular. As Al Coury, president of RSO Records (which had released the bestselling soundtrack album for the film) put it, *Saturday Night Fever* "kind of took disco out of the closet."

Despite disco's popularity, there were many who disliked it. Some felt the music too mechanical; *Time* magazine deemed it a "diabolical thump and shriek". Others hated the music for the lifestyle associated with it, feeling that in the disco scene, personal appearance and style of dress were overly important. The media, in discussing disco, emphasized its roots in gay culture. According to historian Gillian Frank, "by the time of the Disco Demolition in Comiskey Park, the media commonly emphasized that disco was gay and cultivated a widespread perception that disco was taking over". Performers who cultivated a gay image, such as the Village People (described by *Rolling Stone* as "the face of disco") did nothing to efface these perceptions, and fears that

rock music would die at the hands of disco increased after disco albums dominated the 21st Grammy Awards in February 1979 .

In 1978 , New York 's WKTU @-@ FM , a low @-@ rated rock station , switched to disco and became the most popular station in the country ; this led other stations to try to emulate its success . In Chicago , a 24 @-@ year @-@ old Dahl was working as a disc jockey for local radio station WDAI when he was fired on Christmas Eve 1978 as part of the station 's switch from rock to disco ; Dahl was subsequently hired by rival album @-@ rock station WLUP , " The Loop " . Sensing an incipient anti @-@ disco backlash and playing off the publicity surrounding his firing (he frequently mocked WDAI 's " Disco DAI " slogan on the air as " Disco DIE ") , Dahl created a mock organization called " The Insane Coho Lips " , an anti @-@ disco army consisting of his listeners . According to Andy Behrens of ESPN , Dahl and his broadcast partner Garry Meier " organized the Cohos around a simple and surprisingly powerful idea : Disco Sucks " .

According to Dahl , in 1979 , the Cohos were locked in a war " dedicated to the eradication of the dreaded musical disease known as DISCO " . In the weeks leading up to Disco Demolition Night , Dahl promoted a number of anti @-@ disco public events , several of which became unruly . When a discotheque in Linwood , Indiana , switched from disco to rock in June , Dahl showed up , as did several thousand Cohos , and the police had to be called . Later that month , Dahl and several thousand Cohos occupied a teen disco in the Chicago suburbs . At the end of June , Dahl urged his listeners to throw marshmallows at a WDAI promotional van , which was at a shopping mall where a teen disco had been built . The Cohos chased the van and driver and cornered them in a nearby park , though the situation ended without violence . On July 1 , a near @-@ riot occurred in Hanover Park , Illinois , when hundreds of Cohos could not enter a sold @-@ out promotional event , and fights broke out . Some 50 police officers were needed to control the situation . When disco star Van McCoy died suddenly on July 6 , Dahl marked the occasion by destroying one of his records , " The Hustle " , on the air .

Dahl and Meier regularly mocked disco records on the radio . Dahl also recorded his own parody : " Do Ya Think I 'm Disco ? " , a satire of Rod Stewart 's disco @-@ oriented hit " Da Ya Think I 'm Sexy ? " This parody song presented discotheques as populated by effeminate men and frigid women . The lead character , named Tony like Travolta 's character in Saturday Night Fever , is unable to attract a woman until he abandons the disco scene , selling his three @-@ piece white suit at a garage sale and melting down his gold chains for a Led Zeppelin belt buckle .

A number of anti @-@ disco incidents took place elsewhere in the first half of 1979 , showing that " the Disco Demolition was not an isolated incident or an aberration " . In Seattle , hundreds of rock fans attacked a mobile dance floor , while in Portland , Oregon , a disc jockey destroyed a stack of disco records with a chainsaw as thousands looked on and cheered . In New York , a rock deejay played Donna Summer 's sexualized disco hit , " Hot Stuff " ; he received protests from his listeners .

= = = Baseball = = =

Since the 1940s , Chicago White Sox owner Bill Veeck had been noted for using promotions to attract fan interest ; he stated " you can draw more people with a losing team plus bread and circuses than with a losing team and a long , still silence " . His son , Mike , was the promotions director for the White Sox in 1979 . Mike Veeck wrote in a letter to a fan before the season that team management intended to make sure that whether the White Sox won or lost , the fans would have fun .

On May 2 , 1979 , the Detroit Tigers ? Chicago White Sox game at Comiskey Park was rained out . Officials rescheduled it as part of a twi @-@ night doubleheader on July 12 . Already scheduled for the evening of July 12 was a promotion aimed at teenagers , who could purchase tickets at half the regular price .

The White Sox had had a " Disco Night " at Comiskey Park in 1977 ; Mike Veeck , WLUP Sales Manager Jeff Schwartz , and WLUP Promotions Director Dave Logan discussed the possibility of an anti @-@ disco night promotion after Schwartz mentioned that the White Sox were looking to do a

promotion with the station . The matter had also been brought up early in the 1979 season when Schwartz told Mike Veeck of Dahl and his plans to blow up a crate of disco records while live on the air from a shopping mall . During a meeting at WLUP , Dahl was asked if he would be interested in blowing up records at Comiskey Park on July 12 . Since the radio frequency of WLUP was 97 @. @ 9 , the promotion for " Disco Demolition Night " (in addition to the offer for teenagers) was that anyone who brought a disco record to the ballpark would be admitted for 98 cents . Dahl was to blow up the collected records between games of the doubleheader .

= = Event = =

In the weeks before the event Dahl invited his listeners to bring records they wanted to see destroyed to Comiskey Park . The disc jockey feared that the promotion would fail to draw people to the ballpark , and that he would be humiliated . The previous night 's attendance had been 15 @, @ 520 , and Comiskey Park had a capacity of 44 @, @ 492 . The White Sox were not having a good year , and were 40 ? 46 going into the July 12 doubleheader . The White Sox and WLUP hoped for a crowd of 20 @, @ 000 people . Mike Veeck hired enough security for 35 @, @ 000 .

Owner Bill Veeck was concerned the promotion might turn into a disaster and checked himself out of the hospital , where he had been undergoing tests . The elder Veeck 's fears were substantiated when he saw the people walking towards the ballpark that afternoon ; many carried signs that described disco in profane terms .

The doubleheader sold out , leaving at least 20 @, @ 000 people outside the ballpark . Some were not content to remain there , leaping turnstiles , climbing fences , and entering through open windows . The attendance was officially reported as 47 @, @ 795 . Bill Veeck estimated that there were anywhere from 50 @, @ 000 to 55 @, @ 000 in the park ? easily the largest crowd of his second stint as White Sox owner . The Chicago Police Department closed off @-@ ramps from the Dan Ryan Expressway near the stadium . Attendees were supposed to deposit their records into a large box , some 4 by 6 by 5 feet (1 @. @ 2 by 1 @. @ 8 by 1 @. @ 5 m) tall ; once the box was overflowing , many people brought their discs to their seats .

The first game was to begin at 6 pm , with the second game to follow . Lorelei , a model who did public appearances for WLUP and who was very popular in Chicago that summer for her sexually provocative poses in the station 's advertisements , threw out the first pitch . As the first game began , Mike Veeck got word that thousands of people were trying to get into the park without tickets . He sent his security personnel to the stadium gates to keep the would @-@ be gate crashers at bay . This left the field unattended , and fans began throwing the uncollected disco LPs and singles from the stands . Tigers outfielder Rusty Staub remembered that the records would slice through the air , and land sticking out of the ground . He urged teammates to wear batting helmets when playing their positions , " It wasn 't just one , it was many . Oh , God almighty , I 've never seen anything so dangerous in my life . " Attendees also threw firecrackers , empty liquor bottles , and lighters onto the field . The game was stopped several times because of the rain of foreign objects . Dozens of hand @-@ painted banners with such slogans as " Disco sucks " were hung from the ballpark 's seating decks . White Sox broadcaster Harry Caray could see groups of people , who were clearly music rather than baseball fans , wandering through the stadium . Others sat intently in their seats , awaiting the explosion . Mike Veeck later remembered an odor of marijuana in the grandstand and said of the attendees , " This is the Woodstock they never had . " The miasma permeated the press box , which both Caray and his broadcast partner , Jimmy Piersall , commented on over the air . The crowds outside the stadium threw records as well , or gathered them together and burned them in bonfires . Detroit won the first game , 4 ? 1 .

= = Explosion = =

The first game ended at 8 : 16 pm ; at 8 : 40 Dahl , dressed in army fatigues and a helmet , emerged onto the playing surface together with Meier and Lorelei . They proceeded to center field where the vinyl @-@ filled box awaited , though they first did a lap of the field in a Jeep , showered (

according to Dahl , lovingly) by his troops with firecrackers and beer . The large box containing the collected records had been rigged with explosives . Dahl and Meier warmed up the crowd , leading attendees in a chant of " disco sucks " . Lorelei recalled that the view from center field was surreal . On the mound , White Sox pitcher Ken Kravec , scheduled to start the second game , began to warm up . Other White Sox , in the dugout and wearing batting helmets , looked out upon the scene . Fans who felt events were getting out of control and who wished to leave the ballpark had difficulty doing so ; in an effort to deny the intruders entry , security had padlocked all but one gate .

Dahl told the crowd ,

This is now officially the world 's largest anti @-@ disco rally ! Now listen ? we took all the disco records you brought tonight , we got ' em in a giant box , and we 're gonna blow ' em up reeeeeeeal goooooood .

Dahl set off the explosives , destroying the records and tearing a large hole in the outfield grass . With most of the security personnel still watching the gates per Mike Veeck 's orders , there was almost no one guarding the playing surface . Immediately , the first of what would be thousands of attendees rushed onto the field , causing Kravec to flee the mound and join his teammates in a barricaded clubhouse . Between 5 @,@ 000 and 7 @,@ 000 people are estimated to have taken the field . Some climbed the foul poles , others set records on fire , or ripped up the grass . The batting cage was destroyed ; the bases were pulled up and stolen . Among those taking the field was 21 @-@ year @-@ old aspiring actor Michael Clarke Duncan ; during the melee , Duncan slid into third base , had a silver belt buckle stolen , and went home with a bat from the dugout . As Bill Veeck stood with a microphone near where home plate had been , begging people to return to the stands , a bonfire raged in center field .

Years later , Lorelei remembered that she had been waving to the crowd when she was grabbed by two of the bodyguards who had accompanied the Jeep and placed back in the vehicle . The party was unable to return to home plate because of the rowdy fans , so the Jeep was driven out of the stadium and through the surrounding streets , to the delight of the many Cohos outside the stadium who recognized the occupants . They were driven to the front of the stadium , ushered back inside , and taken up to the press room where they had spent most of the first game .

Caray unsuccessfully attempted to restore order via the public address system . The scoreboard , flashing " PLEASE RETURN TO YOUR SEATS " , was ignored as was the playing of " Take Me Out to the Ball Game " . Some of the attendees were dancing in circles around the burning vinyl shards . Dahl offered his help to get the rowdy fans to leave , but it was declined .

At 9 : 08 pm , Chicago police in full riot gear arrived to the applause of the baseball fans remaining in the stands . Those on the field hastily dispersed upon seeing the police . Thirty @-@ nine people were arrested for disorderly conduct ; estimates of injuries to those at the event range from none to over thirty . Bill Veeck wanted the teams to play the second game once order was restored . However , the field was so badly torn up that umpiring crew chief Dave Phillips felt that it was still unplayable even after White Sox groundskeepers spent an hour clearing away debris . Tigers manager Sparky Anderson refused to allow his players to take the field in any event due to safety concerns . Phillips called American League president Lee MacPhail , who postponed the second game to Sunday after hearing a report on conditions . Anderson , however , demanded that the game be forfeited to the Tigers . He argued that under baseball 's rules , a game can only be postponed due to an act of God , and that , as the home team , the White Sox were responsible for field conditions . The next day , MacPhail forfeited the second game to the Tigers 9 ? 0 . In a ruling that largely upheld Anderson 's arguments , MacPhail stated that the White Sox had failed to provide acceptable playing conditions .

= = Reaction and aftermath = =

The day after , Dahl began his regular morning broadcast by reading the indignant headlines in the local papers . He mocked the coverage , " I think for the most part everything was wonderful . Some maniac Cohos got wild , went down on the field . Which you shouldn 't have done . Bad little Cohos . " Tigers manager Anderson stated of the events , " Beer and baseball go together , they have for

years . But I think those kids were doing things other than beer . " Columnist David Israel of the Chicago Tribune commented on July 12 that he was not surprised by what had occurred , " It would have happened any place 50 @, @ 000 teenagers got together on a sultry summer night with beer and reefer . " White Sox pitcher Rich Wortham , a Texan , suggested , " This wouldn 't have happened if they had country and western night . "

Although Bill Veeck took much of the public criticism for the fiasco , his son Mike suffered repercussions as the actual front @-@ office promoter behind it . Mike Veeck remained with the White Sox until late 1980 , when he resigned ; his father sold the team to Jerry Reinsdorf soon afterward . He was unable to find a job in baseball for several years , leading him to claim that he had been blackballed from the game . For several years , he worked for a jai @-@ alai fronton in Florida , battling alcoholism . As Mike Veeck related , " The second that first guy shimmied down the outfield wall , I knew my life was over ! " Mike Veeck has since become an owner of minor league baseball teams and in July 2014 the Charleston RiverDogs , of whom Veeck is president , held a promotion involving the destruction of Justin Bieber and Miley Cyrus merchandise . Dahl is still a radio personality in Chicago and also reaches his listeners through podcasting .

The popularity of disco declined significantly in late 1979 and 1980 . Many disco artists continued , but record companies began labeling their recordings as dance music . Dahl stated in a 2004 interview that disco was " probably on its way out . But I think it [Disco Demolition Night] hastened its demise " . According to Frank , " the Disco Demolition triggered a nationwide expression of anger against disco that caused disco to recede quickly from the American cultural landscape " .

Music critic Dave Marsh recalled his feelings after Disco Demolition Night , " It was your most paranoid fantasy about where the ethnic cleansing of the rock radio could ultimately lead . " Marsh , who wrote for Rolling Stone , was one of the few who at the time deemed the event an expression of bigotry , writing in a column , " white males , eighteen to thirty @-@ four are the most likely to see disco as the product of homosexuals , blacks , and Latinos , and therefore they 're the most likely to respond to appeals to wipe out such threats to their security . It goes almost without saying that such appeals are racist and sexist , but broadcasting has never been an especially civil @-@ libertarian medium . " Nile Rodgers , producer and guitarist for the disco @-@ era group Chic , deemed the event akin to Nazi book burning . Gloria Gaynor , who had a huge disco hit with " I Will Survive " , stated , " I 've always believed it was an economic decision ? an idea created by someone whose economic bottom line was being adversely affected by the popularity of disco music . So they got a mob mentality going . "

Historian J. Zeitz suggests that while " an obvious explanation for the Disco Demolition Night riot might center on the desire of white , working @-@ class baseball fans to strike out against an art form that they associated with African Americans , gays and lesbians , and Latinos " , he notes that that demographic group (from which many of the July 12 participants came) swung wildly in the 1980 presidential primaries and election , first supporting liberal Massachusetts Senator Edward M. Kennedy in the Democratic primary , then the conservative Republican nominee , former California governor Ronald Reagan , in the general election , both times opposing President Jimmy Carter . " Viewed in this light , Disco Demolition Night supports an altogether different interpretation of the 1970s as a decade that saw ordinary Americans gravitate to radical grassroots alternatives , both left and right , out of frustration with the political center . " Concerning the event , University of East London professor Tim Lawrence also proposes that , " Following the unexpected commercial success of Saturday Night Fever , major record companies had started to invest heavily in a sound that their white straight executive class did not care for , and when the overproduction of disco coincided with a deep recession , the homophobic (and also in many respects sexist and racist) ' disco sucks ' campaign culminated with a record burning rally that was staged at the home of the Chicago White Sox in July 1979 . "

Nevertheless , Harry Wayne Casey , singer for the disco act KC and the Sunshine Band , did not believe Disco Demolition Night itself was discriminatory , and stated his belief that Dahl was simply an idiot . Dahl himself rejects the notion that prejudice was his motivation for Disco Demolition Night . " The worst thing is people calling Disco Demolition homophobic or racist . It just wasn 't ... We weren 't thinking like that . "

In 2014 Dahl stated that the racist / homophobic view of Disco Demolition Night stemmed from a 1996 VH1 documentary , The Seventies , which presented it in that light ; Mark W. Anderson , in response , suggested that the event gave the participants an opportunity " to say they didn 't like ... who they saw as the potential victors in a cultural and demographic war ... its [sic] hard to believe few if any of those who organized the event didn 't see that underlying reality for what it was " .

The unplayed second game remains the last American League game to be forfeited . The last National League game to be forfeited was on August 10 , 1995 , when a baseball giveaway promotion at Dodger Stadium went awry , forcing the Los Angeles Dodgers to concede the game to the St. Louis Cardinals . According to baseball analyst Jeremiah Graves , " To this day Disco Demolition Night stands in infamy as one of the most ill @-@ advised promotions of all @-@ time , but arguably one of the most successful as 30 years later we 're all still talking about it . "

= = Game results = =

Game 1 :

Game 2 forfeited to Detroit , 9 ? 0 .