The Press and the Modern Integration of Baseball

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Introduction

If you ask someone to describe a baseball, she or he would, without hesitation, say it is white. Any other color – the red seams of thread and the inky black lettering – are incidental because the ball could be stitched together just as easily with white thread as red. The black lettering could be an afterthought; after all, it is not essential that black ink indicate the ball's maker or its league. Indeed, the peripheral writing could be in mauve, or chartreuse, or even neon pink, aesthetic concerns aside. At any rate, our hypothetical baseball is a metaphor for the big leagues of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Organized baseball then was mostly and undeniably white, which is exactly what the so-called "lords of baseball" wanted.

That's why the history of baseball and race relations might lead us to several questions. For example, did baseball lead the way in desegregating American life near the middle of the 20th century? After all, baseball was integrated before the armed services, interstate buses, or Southern lunch counters.

Or did baseball reflect the unenlightened racism of the times? Keep in mind that the several Negro Leagues existed not only because of the intransigence of white team owners and players, but also because of the interpretation of the Supreme Court's 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which upheld "separate but equal" notions across the country in many walks of life. This paper focuses on the role of the press in the fight for equality and opportunity for all ballplayers.

A start to answering the above questions may be found in the Jake Powell incident of 1938. Powell, a New York Yankees outfielder, told a radio interviewer that he kept in shape in the off-season by working as a policeman in Dayton, Ohio, and cracking African Americans (though he didn't use that term) over the head with his nightstick. Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis suspended Powell for 10 days because of those bigoted public remarks. However, the irony is that baseball was

segregated at the time. Powell was suspended because of pressure brought on the baseball establishment by the media, which included some mainstream dailies, the African-American press, and The Daily Worker, the American Communist Party paper in New York City (Lamb, 1999).

So this paper starts with the premise that America HAD to have a Jackie Robinson, even if America resisted, because of the fight against fascism in World War II and then against communism in the Cold War. The press either helped the cause of baseball integration (via the socialist and African-American press) or came along reluctantly (the mainstream white press). Therefore, the generic title "press" is broken down into three distinct newspaper segments:

First, there was the African-American press. As San Francisco State University History Professor Jules Tygiel wrote, "Two groups that emerged in the late 1930s provided this impetus: a small coterie of young black sportswriters and the Communist party" (Tygiel, 1997). Most of the African-American newspapers were weeklies with national reputations. For example, the weekly Pittsburgh Courier was the nation's largest African-American newspaper with a circulation of about 300,000 at its peak in the 1940s (Wolseley, 1990). Sportswriter Wendell Smith wrote about desegregating baseball almost as soon as he was hired by the Courier in 1937. Other prominent sportswriters and columnists who lent their voices to the struggle in the 1920s and 30s were Sam Lacy of The Baltimore Afro-American; Joe Bostic of The People's Voice of Harlem; Frank A. Young of the Chicago Defender; Chester L. Washington, publisher of the Wave Newspaper Group in Los Angeles; Dr. W. Rollo Wilson of the Philadelphia Tribune and Pittsburgh Courier; Dan Burley when he was at The Amsterdam News from 1936-48; and Ed Harris at the Philadelphia Tribune (Reisler, 1994).

The second group was the socialist press. The Daily Worker began its campaign for baseball integration in the 1930s with sports editor Lester Rodney, and then later Bill Mardo (Silber, 2003). Until the 1930s, The Daily Worker was thought of as a dry, toe-the-line party paper without mirth or soul. But once it popularized its content, the paper enjoyed a brief golden age before its demise in 1958, although circulation never topped much more than 35,000.

> During the Popular Front era of the 1930s – so called because the party attempted to broaden its base – the Daily Worker adopted a breezier style and omitted the weighty theoretical discussions of the past. The paper included features, reviews of books, films and radio shows, and even a sports page. It was probably the first non-Black newspaper to publish scores of the Negro Baseball League (Kessler, 1984).

Yet that sports page was a double-edged sword. Editors of a book on baseball integration echo Tygiel's hypothesis that said the communist press was a force for baseball integration:

> Rodney recalls how it looked, sounded, and felt to work for and witness the social transformation of baseball. He points out that the ban in baseball was rarely mentioned or challenged by the establishment press; only the Negro and communist papers kept the issue constantly alive (Dorinson and Warmund, 1998).

However, there was a problem with that coverage as well. Joseph Dorinson and Joram Warmund hypothesize that owners resisted calls for integration because they felt threatened by a campaign in a communist newspaper. Wendell Smith saw the danger in any alliance between the African-American press and the socialist press when he wrote, "the Communists did more to delay the entrance of Negroes in big league baseball than any other single factor" (Tygiel, 1997).

The white press lumped the socialist and African-American press together as outsiders. For example, The Sporting News charged that "agitators," such as Rodney and Smith, among the others mentioned earlier, were the only people calling for integration of baseball. And that brings up the third group. As Tygiel wrote in his seminal book on baseball integration, "Baseball's Great Experiment," there were some people in the white press who spoke up against segregation that the baseball establishment denied existed. In particular, nationally syndicated columnist Westbrook Pegler, Shirley Povich at the Washington Post, and Jimmy Powers of the New York Daily News, would sometimes call for abolishing what they termed the "color barrier." But for the most part the mainstream press remained silent.

> White indifference, rather than fan hostility, posed the principal obstacle to integration ... the forces of inertia overwhelmed those of change. Before World War II no great demand for an end to baseball segregation arose; few critics challenged the rationalizations of the major league owners (Tygiel, 1997).

Since no new ground was broken by the mainstream dailies and national sports weeklies, this paper will focus on their attempts to frame the issue of integrating the national pastime.

Slants on the News

One of the unfortunate effects of the integration of baseball was that it killed off the Negro Leagues and other related businesses, such as restaurants that catered to players and fans, transportation services that took people to and from the games, printers who printed programs, etc. The signing of Jackie Robinson effectively split baseball history into "before" and "after" eras, with African-American press coverage largely shifting from the Negro Leagues to the major leagues once Robinson signed a Brooklyn contract in 1945.

That raises a question: Did the journalists involved in the crusade think about the long-range effects of their efforts, or did they acknowledge a price must be paid?

Sam Lacy of the Baltimore Afro-American acknowledged that the shift in coverage from the Negro Leagues (which was spotty at best due to the nature of the barnstorming teams and the rise and fall of several leagues as franchises came and went) to Major League Baseball was a death sentence. As he put it, "the Negro Leagues was a symbol I couldn't live with anymore" (Reisler, 1994).

Also, once integration was accomplished it gradually reduced employment not only for Negro Leagues players, but also for umpires, stadium staff, announcers, trainers, etc. Not many of the players or ancillary workers caught on with the big leagues. Historian Janet Bruce estimated that the Negro Leagues employed about 500 people and pumped 75 percent of its income back into the African-American community. Most of that income vanished by the 1950s. (As a side note fewer than 60 Negro League players ever made the big leagues.) Before selling her club, the Newark Eagles, Effa Manley blamed the black press and Negro fans for her organization's demise (Simons, 1985).

There's a side argument to be made here as well. By casting the Negro Leagues owners as racketeers, Major League owners reduced the market value of the Negro

Leagues teams and players. On an individual level, saying a player is shiftless, or that he chokes under pressure, are stereotypes that African-American ballplayers heard before. So it could be argued that even the perceived heroes of integration – the owners and/or managers such as Branch Rickey and Bill Veeck – exploited black players and black owners with no notice of it reported as newspapers busily tried to sculpt heroes from the molds.

After the 1947 season, Rodney and Mardo showed a revisionist bent. They argued that Brooklyn Dodger boss Branch Rickey was not a crusading integrationist, as the mainstream press portrayed him (or damned him), but someone who hoodwinked many in the press. The reporters and columnists of the time framed Rickey's role in history as something noble. But Rodney and Mardo argue that Rickey was merely an opportunist who knew "the handwriting was on the wall" and that the time had come to integrate baseball (Dorinson and Warmund, 1998).

There were other slants on the news, too. Some implied that forces outside of baseball prodded integration along the path to Robinson's signing in late 1945. Ed Danforth, sports editor of the Atlanta Journal, wrote, "The only menace to peace between the races is the carpet-bagger white press and agitators in the Negro press who capitalize on racial issues to exploit themselves" (Simons, 1985).

Yet there were some mainstream journalists who opined that Robinson's signing was a good thing. For example, Dave Egan, a sportswriter for the Boston Daily Record, believed owners would not truly accept integration, "until public opinion forces them to accept the basic principles of such an old and conservative document as the Constitution of the United States of America" (Simons, 1985).

Mostly, however, the white press accepted integration as a *fait accompli* due to the times or legislation. The New York Post said that the "anti-discrimination Ives-Quinn law, written into the New York State statutes this summer, increased the demands of those organizations, who now had the law on their side" (Simons, 1985).

The Firsts

We are a culture that revels in firsts (and sometimes loves "lasts"). School

children are taught who was first in war, first in peace (and last in the American League). Sports exaggerates the trend, even to the point of trivializing some accomplishments and significant anniversaries. It's not too far-fetched to imagine watching a game one day and hearing an announcer say something like, "It was 10 years ago today that Sam Southpaw became the first left-handed middle reliever facing a full count to hit a grand slam home run the whole 395 feet into center field at Dodger Stadium."

So the first thing to remember is that Jackie Robinson was not the first African-American to play major league baseball (Kleinknecht, 1977). Baseball scholars have said that honor goes to Moses Fleetwood Walker, who was a catcher with the then minor league Toledo Blue Stockings in 1883, which was part of the Northwestern League. In 1884, the team joined the major league American Association. Walker was thus a major leaguer 35 years before Jackie Robinson was born in 1919.

However, the first black professional ballplayer at any level was minor leaguer John Fowler, a second-baseman from @1869-77 with about a dozen teams in seven leagues (Kleinknecht, 1977). Researchers estimate that there were probably about 55 African-Americans playing major or minor league baseball in 14 states, mostly in the Northeast and Middle West, in the late 19th century (Kleinknecht, 1977).

But it is Walker who is remembered more than any of them, and that's mostly because his name will forever be unceremoniously linked with Hall of Famer Adrian "Cap" Anson, a player and manager of the Chicago White Stockings. Anson was not the first – or last – bigot to play baseball, but he was among the first to make his feelings known and to act on them, which was a force that changed baseball. For example, he refused to play in an 1883 exhibition game against Walker. Anson only relented when told his team would lose its share of the gate receipts. He also refused to play another exhibition game against the International League Newark Little Giants on July 14, 1887, because of the presence of Walker and left-handed pitcher George Stovey. Walker was supposed to sit the bench, but he ended up leaving the ballpark; Stovey (who would win more than 30 games that season) feigned illness (Jantz, 1993).

That same season, at the minor league International League owners meeting,

the owners voted, 6-4, to no longer sign black ballplayers. The major leagues soon followed the practice of segregation, though there was never anything written in major league bylaws officially banning African Americans.

From time to time in the minors there would be all-black teams that briefly played in white leagues. Probably the last was the Celeron Acme Giants (near Jamestown, N.Y.), in the defunct Oil & Iron League. But the team disbanded July 5, 1898, after posting a dismal 8-41 record. Also, in late July of 1898, left-handed pitcher Bert Jones played briefly for Atchison in the Kansas State League (Clark and Lester, 1994). Jones was the last black player in white baseball until Jackie Robinson played for Montreal in 1946. Except in off-season exhibition games against barnstorming teams, blacks and whites were no longer teammates by the end of the 19th century (Kleinknecht, 1977).

As Tygiel points out, segregation continued not only because of the indifference of the white press, but also because owners reflected the racism of the time. Although there was no formal edict banning African Americans from major league diamonds, the owners would argue in the pages of white newspapers that black players weren't equal to the competition. Their argument broke down along four lines:

First, owners and some newspaper columnists would say that African Americans simply weren't ready for the big leagues. "There is not a single Negro player with major league possibilities," opined the Sporting News in the mid-40s (Tygiel, 1997).

Second, in a bizarre bit of Catch-22 logic, the owners and administrators said no African Americans were ready for the big leagues because they had no minor league experience. But the minor leagues had codified the exclusion of African-Americans. New York Yankees President Larry MacPhail said the average major league player spent seven years in the minors learning and honing the necessary skills. However, since no one in the major leagues respected the overall skill level of the Negro Leagues in general (though they did respect some individuals such as Satchel Paige or Josh Gibson), no African-American players were being properly coached and developed to big league standards.

To support this position, MacPhail quoted none other than Sam Lacy, one of

> integration's most ardent proponents. Lacy and other black writers frequently criticized the absence of fundamentals in the Negro Leagues. Some black athletes excelled in hitting or fielding or baserunning, Lacy contended, but few demonstrated the all-around talent necessary for success in the majors. He concluded, "I am reluctant to say that we haven't a single man in the ranks of colored baseball who could step into the major league uniform and disport himself after the fashion of a big leaguer." It was an unfortunate piece of writing, one which the black sportswriter later regretted. Aimed at improving the quality of play in the Negro Leagues, the frequently reprinted passage had overshot its mark and became valuable ammunition for those who sought to keep blacks out of baseball (Tygiel, 1997).

Third, some writers suggested that integrated baseball would only be a dream because there would be a backlash by fans and Southern players. Sporting News baseball writer Fred Lieb said that some stars of the past, most notably Rogers Hornsby and Tris Speaker, told him they were Klan members. But Wendell Smith went out and asked major league players and managers what they thought of interracial teams. Smith said four-fifths of those he asked in the National League would not object to a black teammate. And, he pointed out, Northerners, Southerners, blacks and whites played with and against each other in Latin America or on post-season barnstorming clubs to make extra money.

Finally, the argument was that baseball could not integrate because spring training sites were in the Jim Crow South. But since Florida cities competed to host major league camps, the threat of possible lost cash from a team that threatened to move to a more enlightened city eventually softened hard-nosed attitudes. That doesn't mean people liked each other, it just means some people were willing to give lip service to change and make some concessions. Another facet of the argument is to remember who the customers were. North and South were affected by the changes brought about by the African-American Diaspora of the 1930s and 40s. Tygiel writes that the African-American population in the industrialized North increased by 50 percent in the 1940s and that African Americans made up a significant proportion in urban areas for the first time in U.S. history.

> Apprehension about the impact of desegregation at the box office constituted perhaps the owners greatest … fear. Many owners, if not most, favored keeping the game on a segregated footing. But baseball owners were businessmen. If the expectation of profits outweighed the fear of financial loss, some owners might gladly have overcome their

> prejudices. Until World War II, however, integration held few apparent economic benefits. Three quarters of the nation's black population lived in the South; major league franchises existed only in the North. "Black patronage was negligible," asserts Sam Lacy, "so they didn't feel that it was worthwhile to appease those black customers and run the risk of the white customers who were in the majority of the population" (Tygiel, 1997).

After World War II, however, changing demographics meant changing consumer markets and baseball had to adjust.

Interpretation

People can debate ad infinitum how deeply ingrained racism is in the world, or how deeply racism runs in individuals, but what can't be denied is that racism played a part in the development of the United States. It hindered people from playing together, working together, eating together, even being buried together in some states. So several examples of the American mindset should show why the signing of a baseball player was a revolutionary idea in the mid-940s.

As early as the founding of the republic, the framers of the Constitution despaired of ever ridding the country of slavery. In fact, it was also considered an accepted fact that any freed slave would also have to be relocated because people believed that the two races could not – indeed, should not – live together.

In his 1857 *Dred Scott v. Sandford* decision, Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney infamously wrote that blacks – both slave and free – were "beings of an inferior order; and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior [to whites] that they had no rights which a white man was bound to respect" (DeGregorio, 1984).

Almost a half-century later, the courts were still ruling against the egalitarian virtues in the canonical documents of the United States. As noted earlier, it is important to understand that baseball's Negro Leagues existed not only because African-American players were banned from the major leagues, but also because of the interpretation of the 1896 Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Michael Klarman, in his *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality*, argues that *Plessy* showed without doubt that many whites both North and South would not

support the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments (Gillman, 2004). Tygiel wrote that sentiment was evident in baseball during World War II when the major leagues turned to older players and players with 4-F deferments rather than Negro Leaguers.

Those attitudes may not have changed and equality may not have been embraced by a majority of the white population in the United States by the mid-point of the 20th century, but like a door slowly creaking open in some Hollywood movie, the times were changing enough to allow Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby to make their marks in 1947.

A quick review of civil rights progress from *Plessy* to the Negro press' "Double V" campaign of World War II (symbolizing victory overseas in the fight against fascism and victory at home in the fight against racism) shows how society slowly moved from the segregation of the *Plessy* era to the push for greater civil rights during the New Deal.

One of the seminal events was a planned march on Washington in 1941 by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The march was only called off after President Roosevelt and A. Philip Randolph, founder of the union, negotiated better working conditions. Randolph called off the march and President Roosevelt signed a law establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission.

Just a few months later, Pittsburgh Courier publisher Ira Lewis began the "Double V" campaign in the paper's February 7, 1942, edition. Taken together, there wasn't a sea change in racial attitudes, but it was enough to generate a more modestly liberal feeling in the land than had existed before.

> "Those who were good enough to fight and die by the side of whites," stated Elmer Ferguson of the Miami Herald, "are plenty good enough to play by the side of whites." ... Lee Dunbar of the Oakland Tribune saw it "fitting that the end of baseball's Jim Crow should follow the conclusion of a great war to preserve liberty, equality and decency." (Tygiel, 1997)

But the end of the war didn't mean the end of the struggle. Another factor to consider, albeit after the desegregation of baseball, was the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling by the Supreme Court that essentially overturned *Plessy*. Klarman said the media glare on segregated America meant Jim Crow could not be ignored in vain

hopes it would just wither and die (Gillman, 2004).

There was a flip side to *Brown* that might explain the mindset that resisted integrating baseball. Briefly, Klarman argues that *Brown* stirred up a conservative backlash that created more suppression. That backlash was not present in the 1940s, partly because of America's self-image and partly due to the good fortune of the times Robinson played in – just after a war against fascism and during a cold war against communism to show the world that the United States was the shining city on the hill. What it all means, according to Klarman, is that an assault on entrenched social wrongs requires constant sacrifice, patience, pain and struggle. And so, then, the sacrifices of Fowler and Walker led to the success of Robinson, Doby and others down the years.

Mainstream Press

In his seminal work, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944), Gunnar Myrdal says that Americans believe in an essential creed that emphasizes "dignity of the individual human being, of the fundamental equality of all men, and of certain inalienable rights to freedom, justice, and a fair opportunity" (Simons, 1985). The paradox here is that if Americans believed that, they did little to prove it during the Jim Crow era as Robinson and the other African-American players struggled with segregation.

The press, either deliberately or unconsciously, cloaked any attacks on African-American players in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Newspaper columns focused not so much on race, but on athletic abilities when it was becoming evident that integration would come about in the 1940s. Racism was still there, though it was more subtle and patronizing as white managers and players said Robinson and other African-Americans likely wouldn't measure up to big league standards. Perhaps one of the most often quoted assessments after Robinson's 1945 signing (Washington Post, Oct. 25; Chicago Daily News, Oct. 31; and Baltimore Afro-American, Nov 10.) – and quoted since by baseball historians – is Cleveland Indians pitcher Bob Feller's thoughts on Robinson's chances:

> He's a typical football player – they're all alike. He is fast as blazes and a great athlete,

> but that doesn't make him a ball player. Honestly, I can't see any chance at all for Robinson. And I'll say this – if he were a white man I doubt if they'd even consider him as big league material (Simons, 1985).

The Sporting News, the self-styled "bible of baseball" echoed those sentiments in an editorial after the 1945 announcement of Robinson's signing:

> In New York there is the feeling that the engagement of Robinson is, in the main, a legalistic move. Last July 1, there became effective in the state of New York what is known as the Anti-Discrimination Law. This has to do, in part, with the barring of Negroes from jobs and professions.
> Rickey virtually admitted the legal facet of the Robinson signing when he said that, before long, every professional baseball club operating in the state of New York would be forced to engage Negroes.
> But how? Col. Larry MacPhail of the Yankees, who some time ago wrote a long report on the Negro-in-baseball question to the Mayor's Committee in New York and Rickey himself, admits there is not a single Negro player with major-league possibilities for 1946. Satchel Paige, of course, is barred by his age. Nor could he afford to accept a major contract, even if he were 10 years younger. Robinson, at 26, is reported to possess baseball abilities which, were he white, would make him eligible for a trial with, let us say, the Brooklyn Dodgers' Class B farm at Newport News, if he were six years younger.

There was some grudging acceptance of Robinson as a ballplayer after his successful '46 season with Montreal in the minors. But he was still considered a novelty and not a serious contender to make the Brooklyn roster, as evidenced by an article Lloyd McGowan wrote in the Jan. 8, 1947, Sporting News:

> When you first bump into Robby and get past the fact that he is colored, you get the impression that he is run-of-the-mill, strictly a journeyman ballplayer. Then you consult the records and they slam you in the face, for you find that he batted .349 righthanded to top the International League and that no pitcher was able to get his number.

A counterpoint in the same Sporting News issue, by Buffalo sportswriter Cy Kritzer, relied on the old familiar knock that Robinson lacked the tools to make it in the big leagues, especially if he had to switch positions. Kritzer didn't dismiss Robinson outright, rather he argued that Robinson needed more seasoning in the minors. But that is the same argument African Americans had heard before in many fields. They were told that now is not the time. They were told to be patient and wait. They were told to be the right kind of Negro – "a credit to the race" – and the time will come. To

be fair, that may not be what Kritzer had in mind when he wrote:

> ...There are many around the International League who still believe, after watching the Negro star do everything expected of a future major-league player, that he was playing over his head in 1946, that his crusading zeal to pave the way for others of his race into pro baseball actually increased his ability.
> In time, like an old-fashioned alarm clock, such things as inspiration, zeal, ardor all run down.
> Can Jackie continue at the inspired pitch he attained last summer at Montreal? We don't think so. However, that isn't the main deterrent to his chances for making the grade with the Brooklyn Dodgers. The big issue is whether Jackie can make the switch from second base to third base [Robinson played first base in 1947, before switching to second the following year] and learn a new position quickly and efficiently to open the season with a major-league pennant contender, under the handicap of limited physical assets.

By 1947, though, on the eve of Robinson's major league debut, the Sporting News had conceded he would play in the big leagues. An editorial in the April 23, 1947, edition of the weekly newspaper congratulated Robinson on being the "right kind" of Negro, while at the same time paternalistically admonishing the Negro Leagues:

> It is up to Negro baseball to recognize the elevation of Robinson to the majors by cleaning house and establishing itself as a clean, well-conducted feeder of the higher company.
> To Robinson, no warning is necessary. He is a well-behaved, highly understanding man who recognized his unique position and the fact that on him rests the burden of persuading Organized Baseball to engage more players of his race.

By July of 1947, Robinson wasn't alone in the media spotlight because the Cleveland Indians had signed 22-year-old infielder Larry Doby. But the press treatment of Doby in the American League was something Robinson would have recognized in papers that covered his National League team. Doby was portrayed rather paternalistically as the "right kind" of Negro to be the first of his race in the other major league. Cleveland News sports columnist Ed McAuley wrote on July 7, 1942:

> Personally, Doby is a well-built boy of 22 who looks even younger, especially when he smiles.
> He speaks only when addressed directly and then his voice is so soft that one has to strain to hear him.
> The new infielder doesn't drink, smoke or swear. He attends two churches, his own New Zion Methodist and Mrs. Doby's Presbyterian. His father died when he was in his early teens and his mother worked hard to enable him to remain in the private school for colored youngsters.

After the signing of Doby, Cleveland owner Bill Veeck was praised as a shrewd businessman who also had a keen interest in social justice, as evidenced by a Roy L. Gillespie column in the Cleveland Plain Dealer on July 13, 1947:

> The purchase of Doby did not come out of any sudden flash of sentiment on the part of Veeck. Soon after he bought the Indians I asked him about his attitude toward colored players entering the big leagues. He did not quibble as to his personal opinion. Veeck said:
> "The time is near when they will be given a chance to make the grade."

In other words, signing a former Negro Leagues player is as American as having sound business sense. The white press lionized Rickey and Veeck and justified their steps to sign Negro Leagues players by often quoting Rickey's assertion that the owners were racketeers and the leagues poorly run. Along a similar line, mainstream and African-American papers also published claims that owners charged exorbitant sums for Negro Leagues teams that played in white-owned or controlled stadiums. For example, the Washington Post reported that New York Yankees President Larry MacPhail said that park rentals of Yankee Stadium and other stadiums in the organization at Newark and Kansas City added about $100,000 annually to the ledger (Simons, 1985). So the pages of the mainstream press at the time made it seem as if Rickey and Veeck were busting the rackets and exposing greed. They were on the side of the angels, as well as emancipators of African-American ballplayers, the white press reported (Lowenfish, 2007).

What also was reported was that white owners and executives were aware of racial tensions and stereotypes. Therefore, they were careful about the appearance of integration.

> On the other side … is the story of Larry Doby. Larry would have been the first Black player to integrate MLB, but Cleveland Indians owner Bill Veeck had had a woman play for him, a midget play for him and even a guy 6 foot 8 inch in an Indians uniform. He felt that if be brought Larry into the system, he would be viewed as just another act in Bill Veeck's circus (Lacy, Beginning).

So if the quasi-beatification of major league owners was reported, what wasn't reported? For one thing, the reaction of the Negro Leagues owners to player raids by

major league execs. Tom Baird, the white co-owner of the Kansas City Monarchs, threatened to sue Rickey for signing Robinson away from his team. African-American owners persuaded him not to because they didn't want to be seen as impediments on the road to integration.

Two major points must be kept in mind when gauging the coverage of the mainstream press with the signing of Robinson and others.

The first is that baseball only slowly signed players of color. The Boston Red Sox, the last major league team to integrate, didn't have an African-American player until infielder Elijah "Pumpsie" Green made his debut in July 1959 (Ashe, 1988). This isn't to say that the New England press ignored the issue, but it does show that the initial signings were just one point in a larger crusade for social justice. The African-American press had been writing about integrating baseball since the 1920s; the socialist press soon followed; and the mainstream press somewhat reluctantly joined the fight during and after World War II. However, the struggle didn't end with Robinson's debut in 1947. The struggle for baseball equality continued throughout the '50s, '60s and '70s as reporters championed the integration of Southern spring training sites; and it continues today as the press challenges baseball to hire more managers and administrators of color.

Secondly, Robinson's signing in 1945 was a Page 1 story and magazine cover piece. So were stories about his treatment by Dodger teammates and others in baseball. But the game-to-game details of his hits, runs and errors in 154 games over the course of several summers were routine sports stories. Simons (1985) argues that this dichotomy shows that the press framed its coverage to show that baseball could redeem itself. The implication was that there was nothing inherently and permanently wrong with American society. So most Americans, Simons writes, believed in Myrdal's American Creed because that's the way the press portrayed the times.

But even today what is stressed is that baseball needed both a saint and a pioneer in the same package. It needed players who could quietly challenge the status quo. Robinson, and later Doby, fit the bill the way the mainstream press framed it.

> Jackie Robinson, the first to be selected for the Dodgers ... and Larry Doby, the first to

> play for the Cleveland Indians ... weren't necessarily the best players available at the time, but they were the most suitable as far as temperament was concerned. It was extremely important for the players ... to have talent, but the most important ingredient was self control because they would surely be tested (Lacy, History).

Finally, what has gone unsaid up to this point is not what America did or didn't do for Jackie Robinson and the thousands of other ballplayers who followed him. That isn't really important. What should be noted instead is what Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby did for America. Sociologist Gunnar Myrdal wrote about the eventual end of institutional racism in the United States because of an inherent fairness in a somewhat mystical American Creed. Perhaps he was too much of an optimist for the 1940s of Robinson and Doby, but he was on target with the idea that equal opportunity had to be more than words on a tattered document in the National Archives. Robinson and Doby suffered and endured to give America its dream. The dream continues today on ballfields, in schools, on factory floors and in executive offices, even in the White House. There is still so much to do, but Robinson and Doby took the first modern steps.

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