

BASEBALL: THE NEGRO LEAGUES AND RACISM IN AMERICA

By

John L. Hull

Presented to the American Culture Faculty  
at the University of Michigan-Flint  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Liberal Studies  
in  
American Culture

December, 1999

First Reader

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bruce A. Hubert", written over a horizontal line.

Second Reader

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John L. Hull", written over a horizontal line.

"Sports permeates any number levels of contemporary society, and it touches upon and deeply influences such disparate elements as status, race relations, business life, automotive design, clothing styles, the concept of the hero, language and ethical values. For better or worse, it gives form and substance to much in American life."

Boyle (1963)<sup>1</sup>

From Ecclesiasticus 2:1-2

My Son, if you aspire to be a servant  
of the Lord, prepare yourself for testing.  
Set a straight course and keep to it,  
and do not be dismayed in the face of  
adversity.

A passage from the film, "Black Baseball,"  
shown at the Negro league's baseball  
museum in Kansas City, Missouri.

## Baseball, The Negro Leagues and Racism

My endeavor toward completion of a graduate thesis involves research on the subjects of "*Baseball, The Negro Leagues and Racism.*" Documenting the lives of American Negro sports figures, their professional as well as their personal lives, backgrounds, racial/ethnic make up, the hardships they endured as well as the challenges they encountered, demonstrating how they experienced adversity and prejudice, turning it into fame and acceptance.

These include:

- Rube Foster, founder of the American Giants and catalyst for Negro league
- J.L. Wilkinson, white owner of Kansas City Monarchs
- The Negro League/Monarch Baseball Team of Kansas City, Missouri
- Moses Fleetwood Walker
- John "Bud" Fowler
- Josh Gibson
- Satchel Paige, pitcher/player
- Buck O'Neill, coach, player and scout
- Jackie Robinson, first Negro in 20<sup>th</sup> century to play in major leagues
- Roy Campanella
- Hank Aaron
- Monte Irvin

- Larry Doby

Because American sports is a microcosm of American culture, my efforts will trace the trends and emergence of the final acceptance of athletes of color, based upon skill rather than color.

The question arises, "*Is the sports arena the only hope of the disfranchised for acceptance into mainstream America*"? It appears in American society that sports and acceptance of a gifted athlete are a social leveling device. If, in fact, the athlete is extraordinary, racial origins and cultural differences are neutralized.

Gunnar Myrdal in his famous study of American race relations, *An American Dilemma* (1962), observed that "*Negroes who have accomplished something extraordinary, particularly in competition with whites,*" automatically were accorded great power and glamour while accepting its responsibilities. The Negro players were part of a coterie of professionals, the "*invisible men of American history.*"<sup>2</sup> Black men of substance--players, managers, owners, Negro newspaper men and even Negro league fans--infused Negro baseball with an ethos that stressed discipline, hard work, competency, sacrifice and pursuit of excellence. On the field of play, Negro leagues were expected to represent their town, Negro baseball and the Negro race.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to DeAn McDaniel, secretary/typist; Dr. Bruce A. Rubenstein, History Department, graduate study; and Dr. Fred Svoboda, English Department.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
CHAPTER 1 – A View of Sports in America .....	1
CHAPTER 2 – Early History of Negro Baseball Teams in America .....	6
CHAPTER 3 – Andrew “Rube” Foster .....	11
CHAPTER 4 – Negro Leagues .....	19
Early Negro League Players .....	21
“Bullet” Joe Rogan .....	21
“Smokey” Joe Williams .....	21
Josh Gibson .....	22
CHAPTER 5 – J.L. Wilkinson and the Kansas City Monarchs .....	25
CHAPTER 6 – The End and the Beginning .....	31
CHAPTER 7 – Jackie Robinson and the Monarchs .....	33
CHAPTER 8 – The Kansas City Monarchs .....	38
CHAPTER 9 – Jackie Robinson, The Beginning .....	49
CHAPTER 10 – Robinson’s Call to the Major Leagues .....	62
CHAPTER 11 – Total Integration of Baseball .....	64
The Stacking Phenomenon in Baseball .....	65
CHAPTER 12 – Summation .....	68
End Notes .....	72
References .....	78

## CHAPTER 1

### A View of Sports in America

My thesis, "*Baseball, The Negro Leagues and Racism in the American Culture*," is based upon the premise that sports are an integral part of our society. Sports dominate our everyday life, in print, television, and competition between youth as well as adults. It influences clothing, figures of speech, interaction in business and social life, as well as the workings of government/politics, from the first ball thrown at the season-opener by a politician to legislative action on behalf of ball club owners in their efforts to garner support for franchises and construction of stadiums.

Perhaps to look at sports from the viewpoint of sociology one begins to understand how class, status, as well as ethnicity, determine the length and breadth of those who participate and how successful they become. Social mobility factors are present in sporting and athletic pursuits. Sports in the American culture is a leveling device, and success on the diamond or gridiron may well translate to economic gain and social acceptance, "*Sports also involves inequality, oppression, scandal, deviant behavior and violence.*"<sup>3</sup>

American culture is that "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of our society"<sup>4</sup> (Tylor, 1913). The culture includes beliefs of what should be, values that give a general criteria by which we judge people,



behavior and norms, rules, regulations, laws and understandings how we are expected to perform in particular situations such as game plans and rule books that are followed in an organized sport.

Interpretation of Football and Baseball in American Society, by Harry Edwards in his study of the sociology of sport in 1971, suggests that football represents our present stage of capitalism with its "corporate sport" while baseball represents capitalism in its earlier stages with emphasis on individual entrepreneurs.

*We view baseball as a pastoral sport that stresses harmony, the individual, a slower pace, and ritual. In contrast, football is a heroic sport, is more complex, violent, war like and reflects a collective pattern of life (Ross, 1985).*

Sporting contests between individuals can bring out conflict. Between groups of racial differences it can tend to reinforce inequalities evident in society to lessen the chances of the disadvantaged to attain their place on the vehicle that may bring social changes off as well as on the field of contest.

Some experts, such as Boyle<sup>5</sup> and Olsen<sup>6</sup> (1963-1968) have glorified sports as an ideal model of race relations respectively. Boyle writes that, "*Sport has often served minority groups as the first rung on the social ladder. It has helped further their assimilation into American life*" (p. 100). While Olsen notes, "*Every morning the world of sport wakes up and congratulates itself on its contribution to race relations*" (p. 7).

In North America, Negro slaves often boxed other Negroes at the urging of their masters, wagering on the outcome. Slave owners occasionally freed the slave and his family for a job well done. The means of personal freedom and economic opportunities were gained through participation and excellence in task.

There were few Negro baseball teams in the 1880s, but several Negroes played in the American Association. Increasing discrimination in the late nineteenth century in America forced most blacks out of baseball.

To better understand the racial climate of America in the 1880s it is best to look at the aftermath of the Civil War, Reconstruction, party politics and the Compromise of 1877. The roots of slavery ran deep, and one of the roots was racism. The sentiments of Southerners had not really changed, but rather had only stretched to accommodate the Northern victors in whose place the Negro had become politically powerful. The law eradicating slavery had been enacted, but the belief of racial superiority was an integral part of Southern culture.

When President Rutherford Hayes withdrew federal troops from South Carolina and Louisiana, reconstruction governments of the South collapsed. Although Negroes were still able to vote, hold office, and Jim Crow laws had not yet come into existence, nevertheless Southerners began to contemplate where the Negro was to be in white Southern society. When Negroes shared trains, hotels and public places, whites began to enact "Jim Crow" laws fashioned to

separate the races. What was even more disturbing about the enactment of *Plessey vs. Ferguson*,<sup>7</sup> the Supreme Court ruling of 1896 that enacted the "separate but equal" law, was the government, as well as the people in the North who had fought, suffered and died to preserve the Union, barely paid notice to a law that said "separate but equal." This law would guarantee unequal education, housing, opportunities, civil liberties as well as lack of protection and constitutional rights by all Negroes. This animosity was to spread throughout the North as well, due in part to the resurgence of Southern influence in Congress.

Although observers of professional sports in America may claim the involvement of blacks in organized sports gives them high visibility and respect as well as economic advantages, racism is deeply institutionalized within the games and is a part of the power structures controlling the contests. Perhaps this is an indicator of American society in general; after all, sports is a microcosm of American society and the core of racism is domination by a supposed superior race. Observing the game of baseball from its early days to the present mirrors the attitudes developed and maintained by owners and players alike.

Contrary to popular belief, Abner Doubleday was not the originator of American baseball. General Washington's soldiers played baseball at Valley Forge. It is based on the English game of "Rounders". "*Who wants to know the*

*heart and mind of America," wrote Jacques Barzun, "had better learn baseball, the rules and realities of the game."*

Baseball was the dominant sport in the eighteenth hundreds in American colleges and carried well into the twentieth century. "*Baseball,*" said Mark Twain, "*is the very symbol, the outward and visible expression of the drive, the push, the rush and struggle of the raging, tearing, booming nineteenth century.*"

The Mills Commission, under the leadership of President Theodore Roosevelt, wanted the English influence taken from the game of baseball and to call it the national pastime in America, whereby the myth of Abner Doubleday was created.

*“At dat time we played what we called “Town Ball”....  
we had bases en we run frum one base tuh de  
udder cause ef de runner wuz hit wid de ball he  
wuz out. We allus made de ball out a cotton en rags.  
We played wid de niggers on de plantation.”<sup>8</sup>*

John Blassingame's Oral History  
of Henry Baker, Alabama slave,  
born 1854

## CHAPTER 2

### Early History of Negro Baseball Teams in America

About six months before the start of the Civil War in 1861, two Negro teams played against one another at a ball diamond in Brooklyn, New York. The Unknown Club of Weeksville and the Union Club of Williamsburg played to a 11-0 finish. The Unknowns won and revealed their true name, the "Colored Union Club." Apparently they did not want to be confused with the White Union Club.

In 1865, two amateur clubs were formed, the Monitor Club of Jamaica, New York, and the Bachelors Club of Albany, New York, and within the next several years various Negro ball clubs began to form, including:

- The Blue Sky Club of Camden, New Jersey
- The Excelsiors of Philadelphia
- The Pythians of Philadelphia
- The Monrovia Club of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
- The Hannibals of Baltimore, Maryland
- The Tecumseh's of Alexandria, Virginia
- The Mutuals and Alerts of Washington, D.C.

*(featuring Charles and Fred Douglass, sons of Frederick Douglass, first nationally known Negro*

*leader)*

- The Uniques of Chicago
- The Rialtos of Detroit

Shortly after the Excelsiors of Philadelphia were organized in 1866, local competition arose from a team called the Phythian Baseball Club, organized by Jacob C. White and Octavious V. Catto, two teachers from the Institute for Colored Youth. The City of Brotherly Love became host for a three team series between the Excelsiors, Phythians, and Albany New York Bachelors. These events were not only athletic in nature, but also social. Women graced the games with their presence, bringing picnic lunches for players and fans alike. Teams donated a sizable sum of eighty-four dollars for ham, chicken, ice cream, cake, cigars and beer. The invitational aspect of Negro baseball began in 1867 with a letter sent from the Mutual Baseball Club of Washington, D.C. to the Phythians, inviting them to a competition between Mutual Alerts of Washington, D.C. and the Phythians.

The Phythians finished 1867 with a record nine victories and one loss. Shortly after the season, the Phythians received notice that several white baseball clubs were meeting in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in December to organize a new league. An application for membership was submitted against the advice of delegates and a vote was held off until the next evening when more members would be in attendance. Although club owners and delegates expressed their sympathy, the league would be composed of only white teams.

*"Better to withdraw your application than to officially show you were blackballed,"* Raymond Burr, a team player said.

The Phythians continued to compile undefeated records, but the organization was to be short-lived. Philadelphia, like much of America, was in racial turmoil because of the 1870 ruling giving Negroes more freedom under the Fifteenth Amendment guaranteeing voter rights for Negroes and angering the nation's white voters. Philadelphia turned into a war zone, resulting in the shooting death of Octavious Catto by a white man. The Phythians disbanded soon afterward.

The handicaps endured by Negro players during this time could be exemplified by the Moses Fleetwood Walker experience. Moses Fleetwood Walker, born on October 7, 1857, the first black major league player in organized baseball, grew up as a privileged child. His father was a practicing doctor in Steubenville, Ohio. Moses entered Oberlin College and graduated in 1882. He then entered law school at the University of Michigan. In the summer of 1882 he played baseball for New Castle, Pennsylvania. Moses then left law school to catch full-time for the Toledo Mudhens in the Northwestern League. In 1883, as a member of the Mudhens team, Walker came to bat at a game with a Richmond, Virginia team. Walker had received threatening letters sent to his manager, Charlie Morton. One of the letters stated:

*We the undersigned do hereby warn you not to put up Walker, the Negro catcher, the evening you play in Richmond. We could mention the names of seventy-five men who have sworn to mob Walker if he comes on the*



*ground in a suit.*<sup>10</sup>

In 1884, there were eleven leagues of baseball under a national agreement that in part said ball clubs were to not raid other ball clubs for valuable players. Of these eleven teams, the four strongest were: *The National League, The American Association, The Eastern League, and The Northwestern League.* A young Negro player named John W. "Bud" Fowler played with the Still Water Minnesota team of the Northwestern League. "Bud" was the subject of several newspaper articles published on his abilities as a great ball player. The jaded plaudits follow:

*August 19, 1885*

*Fowler, the colored player has signed with the St. Joseph, Missouri Club.*

*August 26, 1885*

*John W. Fowler has signed with the Colorado Pueblos.*

*December 30, 1885*

*Fowler, the crack second baseman is still in Denver, Colorado disengaged, the poor fellow's skin is against him, with his splendid abilities he would long ago have been on some good club had his color been white instead of black. Those who know him say there is no better second baseman in the country, he is besides a good batter and a fine baserunner.*

Over one hundred years have elapsed since the above incident took place. All of the characters in this scenario are gone, but the attitudes toward skin color remained a factor even when the first Negro was signed to play baseball on a

white major league team in 1947. The team was the Brooklyn Dodgers; the player was Jackie Robinson, a recently discharged U.S. Army officer and college student.

On July 25, 1907, the Centre, Kansas county newspaper dispatched an article entitled:

### **The Darkies Too Swift**

*The Topeka Giants, the colored aggregation of ballplayers, were here Monday to show our boys a few new tricks in the art of baseball playing. At the start of the game it looked as though it would be close and interesting, no scores being made in either of these innings but in the third the fireworks started and it was a chase around the diamond one after the other, until the finish. At the close of the sixth inning the score was seven and seven but in the next the dark complected [sic] boys did some hard batting and piled up five more scores. Our boys got only one more man over the rubber during the balance of the game, the colored fellows making another score in the ninth, the game finished 13 to 8. It seemed as though the colored fellows had their rabbits foot with them and Neil Rellhan nor Mathes could keep them from pasting the ball on the nozzle whenever it came over the plate. The largest crowd turned out to see this game that has been at a ball game here for some time, the receipts amounting to \$139.00 of which the Giants got 60%. The final score was Topeka Giants 13, the Smith Centres 8.<sup>11</sup>*

This type of commentary was the norm when reporting Negro baseball; at best, a begrudging admiration.

## CHAPTER 3

### Andrew "Rube" Foster

Referred to as the Father of Negro Baseball, Andrew Foster earned his place in baseball's Hall of Fame in Coopertown, New York in 1981. Foster was epitomized as a Christy Mathewson, John McGraw, Connie Mack, Al Spalding and Kenesaw Mountain Landis--great pitcher, manager, owner, league organizer, and baseball czar all rolled into one. Foster's first team, the Chicago American Giants, was the forerunner of the black league in 1920. Foster urged Negro players to maintain a high standard of athletics as well as good conduct on and off the field of play, so that "*when the doors to the white major league open, the Negro players would be ready.*"<sup>12</sup>

"Rube" Foster, the pistol packing pitcher, gained his nickname by beating Connie Mack's pitcher, Rube Waddell, 5-2 in a 1902 ball game. Foster enjoyed the admiration of baseball greats such as: Honus Wagner, John McGraw and Frank Chance. In fact it was Rube who taught Mathewson how to throw a "fade away ball."<sup>13</sup>

Andrew Foster was born in Calvert, Texas, between Dallas and Houston, on September 17, 1879. His father, an elder in the Church of Southern Texas, saw to it that young Andrew attended church early Sunday morning and went to the ball diamond every Sunday afternoon. After Andrew's mother died, his

father remarried, and young Andrew ran away to Fort Worth and devoted his life to the game of baseball. The game would bring fame but also some bitter, heartbreaking memories. He would recall later that he would travel the country by railroad cars, experiencing the contempt of people who considered baseball a "*lowly and ungentlemanly game*,"<sup>14</sup> but he never stopped loving the game and worked at nothing else the rest of his life.

In 1901, at the age of twenty-one, Andy was pitching for the Black Lelands Club, owned by Frank Leland, and traveling as far north as Oswego, Michigan. The next year found Foster playing with the Cuban Giants team at forty dollars a month plus fifteen cents in meal money. By this time, he referred to himself as the best pitcher in the country.

Foster, when offered a \$650 raise to play for an eastern team, refused, saying he felt the Giants would fold if he left. In the 1908 season the team won 64, lost 21 and tied one. Thirteen of their wins were shutouts by Foster. An incident that would haunt Rube Foster for the rest of his baseball career took place in a game with the Chicago Cubs of the National League in October of 1908. What follows is an account written by the famous Ring Lardner:<sup>15</sup>

*A pitcher named Mordechai "Three Fingers" Brown with a 27-9 series and a 1.31 earned run average pitched the first game against the Cubs, Brown held the Cubs to five hits, Joe Green slid into third base on a steal and broke his leg, hobbling to home in an attempt to score but was called out. In the second game of a double hitter, Rube was in command of the game until the ninth inning, with a 5-2 lead by the Giants, but Rube began to weaken, the bases became loaded and Del Howard singled off the right field fence, scoring two runs, at this point, Foster called time and*

*walked to the dug out, to get someone to relieve him, as he left the pitchers mound, Frank Schutte, an outfielder ran from second base to home to score. The umpire called him safe and the Cub fans went wild swarming onto the field. The umpire would not relent and the game went into the statistics books at a 6-5 victory for the Cubs. Foster tried for years after to get a rematch of the game but with no results.*

In 1909, Foster and a white saloon keeper named John Schorling gained control of the Black Lelands from Frank Leland through a court battle.

Schorling, a brother in law of Charles Comiskey, and Foster changed the name of the team to the "American Giants." It was to become the greatest of all Negro League teams, and included players such as Pete Hooker, John Henry Lloyd, Bruce Petway and Wes Pryor.

Rube would recall later with pride that his 1910 American Giants team was the best ever. Out of 129 games, they lost six. The Giants enlisted the help of Jack Johnson, the first Negro heavyweight boxing champion, to promote ticket sales. The Giants were the innovators of giving free souvenirs to fans, along with furnishing cold water and fifty-cent box seats. In the fall of 1910, Foster, now sole owner of the American Giants, took his team to Seattle, playing white teams, then wintered in Cuba, playing tough Cuban teams. The American Giants team was becoming famous. Charles Comiskey became worried about Foster's success, with Foster's ballpark only two blocks from Comiskey Field--Rube ignored the warning and challenged both the Cubs and the White Sox to an attendance duel on one Sunday when all three teams were in town. The attendance was:

<i>Chicago Cubs</i>	<i>6,000</i>
<i>Chicago White Sox</i>	<i>9,000</i>
<i>American Giants</i>	<i>11,000<sup>16</sup></i>

By 1916 the Giants had led many successful years, but Rube Foster was now thirty-six years old, gaining weight, slowing down, and appearing less and less on the mound. Meanwhile, another baseball rival was forming in the west, the Indianapolis ABC's. They beat Foster's team two out of three in the 1916 play-offs. When the United States entered the great war of 1917, baseball teams began to disintegrate because of the military draft.

It was known to all in baseball circles that Foster would do anything to win, New York infielder Frank Forbes, who later would become New York boxing commissioner, said Rube Foster was a mastermind at baseball, but was also a "thieving son of a bitch."<sup>17</sup> From soaking the infield the night before games to slow down a bunted ball, to using frozen baseballs to deaden the impact of what would otherwise be a home run ball, to building a ridge that was unnoticeable along the base line to first that would keep a bunted ball from going foul, it was all in the game for Rube Foster. By 1919, with the war over, bidding wars for players ensued and players jumped teams so often that all professional clubs were in trouble. In the winter of 1919 Rube Foster made a decision and contacted all of the best black clubs in the Midwest to come together and form a Negro National League. Some would argue later that the forming of the Negro League at the Kansas City, Missouri YMCA on February

13, 1920, was as significant as the historic *Brown versus The Board of Education* case desegregating schools as a positive force in Negro history. A constitution was written and agreed to by all, including rules such as:

- *Barred raiding each other for players*
- *Outlawed jumping*
- *Instituted reserve clause bind player to club*
- *Levied fines for ungentlemanly conduct on or off the field of play.*

Foster wanted black players, the black league and to keep black money in black pockets. He relented and allowed one white owner: J.L. Wilkinson of Kansas City, Missouri. After all, Wilkinson could be very useful within the new league, possibly serving as a mediator when dealing with white people on behalf of Negroes.

The teams in the new league were:

*The American Giants*

*Joe Green's Chicago Giants*

*The Peripatetic Cuban Stars*

*The Detroit Stars*

*The Saint Louis Stars*

*The Indianapolis ABC's*

*The Kansas City Monarchs*

*The Dayton Marcos*

Rube Foster's dream was to consolidate major and minor leagues all within the all-Negro league fashioned after the white leagues. The ultimate would be a World Series of games, Negro against whites. This would enhance Negro players' chances of entering the white major leagues. This dream would come true some twenty-five years later with the acceptance of Jackie Robinson in the Brooklyn Dodger line-up. "*We are the ship, all else is the sea*"<sup>18</sup> he told his colleagues. Rube Foster was a man of good heart and worthy intentions. He once said, "*You cannot keep good players without paying them good salaries*,"<sup>19</sup> Often Foster would give money from his own pocket to players. Once he loaned a rival owner money to pay his team and waited until the next season to collect. Rube Foster made the rules for his team to follow to the letter, whether at hitting, fielding or especially bunting. If Rube gave the signal and a player ignored it, he found himself playing for someone else. Rube's leadership tactics often came under fire. One of the early pitchers, Arthur W. Hardy, in an interview for the book Only the Ball Was White,<sup>20</sup> stated:

*I wouldn't call him reserved, but he wasn't free and easy. You see, Rube was a natural psychologist. Now he didn't know what psychology was and probably couldn't spell it, but he realized that he couldn't fraternize and still maintain discipline. He wasn't harsh, but he was strict. His dictums were not unreasonable, but if you broke one he'd clamp down on you. If he stuck a fine on you, you paid it. There was no appeal from it. He was dictatorial in that sense.*<sup>21</sup>

In order that a clear picture comes into focus on the Negro leagues, the originator, Rube Foster, his trials, hardships and endurance must be understood and appreciated. In 1922, the American Giants won the Negro



league pennant and Foster's league prospered, but other leagues began to form in 1923. A Southern and Eastern league were formed and the raiding of players began. The American Giants team began to weaken because of the loss of players. Although league attendance was up, Foster felt ready to give up but it was his league, "*nurse it, help it, keep it*"<sup>22</sup> he said. In addition to his responsibilities to his team and his league, he owned a barbershop and an auto service shop, which helped him send his son Earl to college. The following year Rube sent some of his key players to Indianapolis to help C.I. Taylor's widow keep her team afloat. Although Rube had a keen memory, he began to act erratically, chasing imaginary fly balls, breaking into a run, and barricading himself in a washroom. Finally, in 1926 he snapped. It took a number of policemen to subdue him and he was taken to an insane asylum in Kankakee, Illinois. Team management was taken over by Bill Foster, Rube's brother, twenty-five years his junior, who had resisted Rube's efforts to make him a great pitcher. When the team prospered, young Bill stated: "*I'm just doing what the master taught me.*"<sup>23</sup>

Rube Foster languished in the asylum, and oftentimes his players would visit him, bring his car along, an Apperson Jackrabbit, for him to drive. Rube Foster died on December 9, 1930, raving about winning one more pennant. The beloved Rube received a mammoth funeral from the fans he loved and who so adored him. Three thousand mourners attended his funeral, while

pallbearers carried his body to its final resting place to the strains of "Rock of Ages."<sup>24</sup>

Rube's league died with him, a victim of the Depression. It was reborn in the mid-thirties, which was still in the depression.

Rube Foster's reservoir of Negro talent later became the backbone of the major leagues (white). Thirty-six of the Negro players advanced to the majors. Through the first fourteen years they dominated most valuable player votes in eleven of those years, plus eight rookie of the year awards.

Rube's greatest contribution to Negro baseball was the organization and perpetuation of Negro baseball. Rube Foster fought to give the likes of Roy Campanella, Roberto Clemente and Jackie Robinson the chance to play in the big leagues. When Branch Rickey gave Robinson a starting position with the Brooklyn Dodgers, he enriched the white leagues to the sum of forty-million dollars worth of players for nothing. "*The pasture, the harvest, the crop was the result of Rube Foster's enterprise.*"<sup>25</sup>

## CHAPTER 4

### Negro Leagues

It is a popular belief that the Negro leagues played to small audiences and deserted stadiums, but is far from the truth. Whether at home or overseas, crowds flocked in to see the *unknown* stars of the game.

*In 1943, 51,723 fans packed Chicago's Comiskey Park to see the East/West All Star game, an annual event that brought together the best players of the Negro leagues. Not only did it bring together the best players, but the events outdrew the major leagues All Star games on seven occasions between 1938 and 1948.*<sup>26</sup>

In 1925, the Chicago American Giants drew more than 200,000 fans to games at Schorling Park. The Kansas City Monarchs played before 315,000 in 1943. In 1946, the first year of minor league integration, 120,000 saw the Newark Eagles at Ruppert Stadium. Both league games and the traveling "barnstorming" games generated great fan support. It was not uncommon for crowds of 30,000 or more to attend games at Wrigley Field or Yankee Stadium when teams such as the Homestead Grays, Pittsburgh Crawfords, Kansas City Monarchs, or Newark Eagles played.

Most towns had a semi-pro team and were able to see professional teams only on occasion. *"People were only able to see major leaguers in the big cities, but they were able to see me everywhere, I played in farm fields, penitentiaries, any place there was a ball diamond"*<sup>27</sup> said Satchel Paige.

*It was not only in America that Negro players were known, as far back as the 1900's they played in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Venezuela. But as Judy Johnson once said, "One year I hit a .392 and the owner gave me a ten dollar raise, but we played for something greater that couldn't be measured in dollars and cents. The secret of our game was to enjoy and endure."<sup>28</sup>*

One could consider Negro baseball as the contest of determination and devotion. It has a long history of men of strong will and dedication who refused to accept the idea they were unfit to share in the rewards of the "great American pastime." They were players of baseball who made glory in an inglorious time. Every man who played had a hand in bringing the racial barriers down. Joe Greene, a catcher for the Kansas City Monarchs expressed it best, "*They say Jackie Robinson paved the way. He didn't pave the way. We did.*"<sup>29</sup>

For many years, Negro baseball players suffered from the exploitation of white booking agents and owners. David Wyatt, in an article for the *Indianapolis Freeman*, stated,

*The white man has induced someone to take on the role of "Good old Nigger" to gather a lot of athletes and use circus methods to drag a bunch of our best citizens out onto a playing field and subject them to humiliation while they sit back and grow rich off a large percentage of the proceeds. Writers and players alike called for a "Moses" to lead the baseball children out of the wilderness.<sup>30</sup>*

J.L. Wilkinson, although a white man, would help lead the baseball children out of the wilderness.

## Early Negro League Players

### "Bullet" Joe Rogan

"Bullet" Joe Rogan was probably the most versatile professional ball player in the Negro Leagues. He played every position except catcher and was outstanding. Rogan earned his first notices as a pitcher with the 25<sup>th</sup> Negro Infantry team at Schofield Barracks in Honolulu. From there, he played with the Los Angeles White Sox and in 1930, at age 20, joined the Kansas City Monarchs as a pitcher. Until he retired in 1938, he was the mainstay of the Monarchs. "He was never once relieved," said J.L. Wilkinson.<sup>31</sup> The only person to throw a faster ball than Rogan was Satchel Paige, the elder statesman of the mound," added Wilkinson. "Bullet Joe"<sup>32</sup> is generally regarded as the finest fielding pitcher in Negro baseball history and displayed unusual talent as a manager during his later years with the club. After retirement from baseball altogether he accepted a Civil Service position in Kansas City and umpired Negro league games for several years before his death in 1967.

### "Smokey" Joe Williams

Many in the Negro leagues regarded "Smokey" Joe Williams as the greatest black pitcher. Williams, a right hander, was guarded about his age, but historian John Holway believes the date of Williams' birth was April 6, 1886. While pitching in 1908 for the San Antonio Broncos, he was pitching against the

Leland Giants in Birmingham, he was invited to Chicago by Rube Foster to join the Leland Giants. From that time until his retirement at the end of the 1932 season he pitched for the Chicago Giants, Lincoln Giants, Homestead Grays, American Giants, Bacharach Giants and the Brooklyn Royal Giants. In 1914, he was credited with forty-one victories, while suffering three defeats. A twenty strike-out game was not unusual for Joe. His record was twenty-five in a single daylight game with the Brooklyn Bushwicks. At age forty-two he pitched a no-hit, no-run game against a strong Akron, Ohio club. His last manager, Cum Posey of the Homestead Grays, related, "Only Walter Johnson, Lefty Grove and Satchel Paige could match Williams' fast ball."<sup>33</sup>

### Josh Gibson

Josh Gibson, "The Black Babe Ruth" to many, might well reverse that title to "Babe Ruth," the White Josh Gibson. The difference is that Gibson suffers from the lack of certifiable records to his accomplishments on the field of play. Many old-timers credit Gibson with eighty-nine home runs in one year and seventy-five in another. Gibson, a right hand hitter, holds the record for the length of a home run in Babe Ruth's Yankee Stadium, 580 feet from home plate; had it been two feet higher and cleared the wall, it would have been a 700 foot blast. In a note of irony, the game's greatest slugger, and a drawing card for attendance, was traded for two journeymen players and \$2,500 in 1936 back to the Homestead Grays, his first team, from Effa Manley's Newark Eagles.

Gibson, with Satchel Paige, traveled to the Dominican Republic to take advantage of extra money earned in off-season play, warm climate, as well as being accepted without prejudice, but returned later in the 1937 season to help win the Negro National League Championship. In 1942, at the height of his career, he began to "fail observing training rules." According to Cum Posey, drinking and excessive headaches began to plague Gibson, and on January 1, 1943 Josh was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Gibson refused an operation, maintaining he would become a vegetable.

Although very ill, in 1944 he led the Negro National League in homers with six, while batting .338 in thirty-nine league games. In 1945, he averaged .393 in forty-four games. Josh Gibson spent winters/off seasons in Puerto Rico, Cuba, Mexico and Venezuela. In 1946, his headaches and blackouts increased in frequency and severity, and to ward off the pain, he relied on liquor, always maintaining a cheerful easy-going attitude. On the evening of January 20, 1947, with his mother, family and friends around his bed, he suffered a stroke and died.

Many believe his premature death came about from a disappointment that he was never taken up to the "White Major League." Others maintained his love of the game, travel and the experiences in the game were ample reward. Gibson never complained about the hard lot of a Negro professional baseball player. Ironically, Josh Gibson died the year after Robinson broke the color line

at Montreal and only a month before Jackie would become the first Negro in the major leagues since Fleetwood Walker in 1884.

Josh Gibson could have been one of baseball's superstars if the color line had been lowered earlier. Gibson did achieve a considerable measure of fame in his career and made a good living from it. One of his fellow players remarked upon learning of his death—"He was a big, overgrown kid who was glad for the chance he had, he loved his life."<sup>34</sup>



## CHAPTER 5

### J.L. Wilkinson and the Kansas City Monarchs

J.L. Wilkinson, the man who gave Satchel Paige his second chance when many club owners in the Negro leagues assumed that Satchel Paige's arm was "burned out" because of overuse, and Jackie Robinson his first chance because Robinson was bright, hard working and a consistent hitter, will be remembered by many for what he gave to baseball, Negro and white alike: overhead lights. It was only one of many of his accomplishments to the game, the players and fans. Without Wilkinson, it is possible Jackie Robinson might not have made the big leagues. Because Jackie came under careful scrutiny while in the Negro Leagues, major league scouts covered the progress of promising Negro players.

J.L. Wilkinson was born in the little town of Perry, Iowa, the son of a college president and attended Highland Park College in Des Moines, Iowa, where he pitched for three years. While playing ball there, the manager ran off with the gate receipts and left the team stranded. The players elected J.L. to manage them. "Wilkie," together with J.E. Gall formed a group of players called "The All Nations" team, comprised of Negroes, Cubans, Mexicans, Orientals and one girl whom they advertised as "Carrie Nation." The players traveled throughout the Midwest in a fancy pullman car and they toured with both a

wrestling team and dance band. In 1915, the All Nations beat Rube Foster's American Giants. The military draft interfered with the team in 1917 as five of its fourteen players were drafted.

When Wilkie attended the conference called by Rube Foster to form a Negro league, Foster was less than pleased and reluctant to have a white owner in the league, but Wilkinson could bargain with whites and possibly keep the peace in inter-racial squabbles on or off the playing field. With Foster's blessing, Wilkinson began to assemble a top-notch team. Wilkinson dressed his players in white uniforms with royal maroon letters and called the team, "*The Monarchs*".

Bill Drake, a member of the pitching staff of the Monarchs, related years later:

*Wilkinson was an awful good man. He was a white man and he thought different. He was strictly business. We always had a tourist railroad coach to ride in, a cook, we ate and slept in that car, we stayed in the best Negro hotels and Negro restaurants. The Monarchs lived good. We were the Yankees of Negro baseball.<sup>35</sup>*

The Monarch's biggest rivals were Rube Foster's American Giants. Foster's men were "race horses" who could bunt and run the opposition to death; while Wilkinson's were sluggers who could stand up and swing away. Both teams had fine pitching, and both played to win. The threat of a melee was always in the air. In fact, one did break out in Chicago one Sunday when the Monarch's combative catcher, Frank Duncan, deliberately leaped at Chicago catcher Johnny Hines with his spikes. In an instant the field was

engulfed by brawling players and fans until as one player said, the grass almost ran red with blood.<sup>36</sup> The Monarchs, being the visitors, were badly outnumbered, and "*were a pretty well beaten bunch,*" according to young outfielder George Sweatt. They could not wait for Chicago to arrive for its next game in Kansas City. Some of the Giants arrived packing guns for protection, and before the game some Kansas City fans waylaid Chicago catcher Jim Brown under the stands and knocked him cold. Another blood bath was in the making.<sup>37</sup>

J.L. Wilkinson put a stop to it, "*I'm paying you to play ball,*" he told the Monarchs, "*not fight. Remember that. If you start any fights, you're gone, and I'll see to it that you don't get on any team. I'll blackball you.*"<sup>38</sup> The Monarchs played the game, sullen but peacefully.

The Monarchs were one of the strongest baseball teams in the country yet local newspapers usually ignored them. The Negro newspaper *CALL* did not consider baseball worthy of its attention until 1926 and the white newspaper *STAR* ran the team's scores only when they were at home. The Kansas City *CALL* said, "The Monarch players meet the most exacting conventions of an English family."<sup>39</sup> No rough stuff was the rule with Wilkinson, impeccable behavior by the players was demanded. When the players left the game, they were attired in suits and hats.

Wilkinson instituted Ladies Day, cut box seat ticket prices from \$1.10 to 60 cents and invested in an eighteen passenger coach to carry the team to

games, thereby saving thousands of dollars in train fares. The Depression struck in October, 1929 and ticket sales fell off sharply the following season. Wilkinson figured that double headers and night games would increase attendance and profits. Although night lights had been tried before, they had not been successful before because of set-up and take-down problems. Equipped with the idea, he formed a partnership with a Kansas City pool hall owner named Tom Baird and gave his plans to a builder to begin construction of a portable lighting system. Wilkinson mortgaged everything he owned to raise \$50,000. "*What talkies are to movies,*" Wilkinson said, "*lights will be to baseball.*"<sup>40</sup> On April 28, 1930, history in baseball was made when a game under lights took place against Phillips University in Enid, Oklahoma, with Monarchs winning 12-3. Nineteen years after that historic game, on the same field, a seventeen-year-old shortstop named Mickey Mantle hit his first professional home run. The attraction of the game being played under lights drew extra-large crowds, and Wilkinson was able to pay for the lights in the first season of use. On Saturday, May 16, 1930, another history-making game took place. The first no-hitter was pitched under lights at Waco, Texas with the Monarchs beating the Waco Cardinals 14-0.

J.L. Wilkinson's idea for night games saved black baseball by allowing it to survive during the hard time of the Depression. Barnstorming by the Monarchs caused it to become somewhat like Okies in pursuit of work and a living with all of their earthly possessions piled atop vehicles.

In 1934 Wilkinson hired the Dean brothers, Diz and Paul, recent winners of the World Series over Detroit, to play against the Monarchs in post-season exhibition games. The Dean brothers made more money at this venture than they did playing in the World Series.

In 1936, Jesse Owens joined the Monarchs caravan. Recently the star of the Berlin Olympics, he ran exhibitions against everyone and everything, college boys, motorcycles and horses.

The Monarchs were recovering from the Depression when Wilkinson received a phone call from a sore-armed pitcher named Satchel Paige. Paige was given the job as pitcher on the Monarch's B-team of rookies and veterans. Wilkinson stated, "*They've done a lot for the Negro leagues and made us all some money, I'm just trying to pay them back a little.*"<sup>41</sup> With therapy and patience, Satchel Paige's great pitching arm was healed. "*I'd been dead and now I'm alive*" said Paige. "*He was one of the best owners of baseball, ever!*"<sup>42</sup>

In 1942, the military draft devastated the Monarchs, and with his best stars taken from him, Wilkinson's team began a descent. Although the war brought prosperity to America, it hurt Negro baseball. Wilkinson did his share for the war effort, scheduling games for war workers, giving free tickets to military personnel, selling war bonds at games and putting on Red Cross benefits.

After World War II, profound social changes were to begin in America, Wilkinson recognized this and acknowledged that it may hurt the club but it will

be best for the Negro players and the game of baseball. Although the *CALL* newspaper acknowledged the role of the Monarchs in Negro baseball, the leagues had in its early days been associated with numbers games, racketeering, as well as a lack of proper record keeping and players that changed teams as well as names. Again, the *CALL* wrote, "*The Monarchs and J.L. Wilkinson have done more than any single agent in Kansas City to break down the damnable outrage of prejudice that exists in this city.*"<sup>43</sup>

## CHAPTER 6

### The End and the Beginning

With the beginning of World War II, Negro baseball prospered as never before because Negroes began to move to large cities in the North and secure decent paying jobs, but it also began the process of integration of the races which would hasten the end of Negro baseball. At least fourteen Monarch players were drafted into the military, while the older and the very young players took their places. Baseball also suffered from "Mexican fever." A Mexican millionaire, Jorge Pasquel, lured many major and Negro Leagues players south of the border, including Josh Gibson, Willie Wells, Buck Leonard, Joe Greene, and the Monarch's Jessie Williams. Rationing of fuel cut the use of buses severely, and the black team owners appealed to Washington to not destroy the Negro Leagues. Wilkinson stated, "*The Monarchs have produced over thirty thousand dollars in taxes to the government in the past year.*"<sup>44</sup> Because President Roosevelt wanted to maintain the game of baseball during the war for morale purposes, the Monarchs, along with other clubs, received exemption from rationing of gasoline thus the Monarchs once again were "barnstorming," however, certain restrictions were imposed, such as mileage allowance being reduced by twenty-five percent. Negroes were able to obtain defense factory

jobs, because the President implemented "fair employment practices" programs and good paychecks translated into money spent for baseball games.

Wilkinson was quick to use patriotism to promote Monarch games, and declared, "*We're going to play for war workers, we'll play day games, swing shift games and give free admission to those in uniform.*"<sup>45</sup> It was not uncommon for attendance to top ten thousand fans and went up to thirty and forty thousand when Satchel Paige was pitching the game. During this war period, Monarch players were paid between three hundred and five hundred dollars a month. Satchel Paige was drawing between thirty and forty thousand dollars a year. But as Lefty Bryant, Monarch pitcher, said, "*I was making three hundred dollars a month for having fun, baseball for me was fun.*"<sup>46</sup>



## CHAPTER 7

Jackie Robinson and the Monarchs

As early as the spring of 1940 Negro newspapers had carried reports of "Jitter bug" Jackie Robinson's athletic abilities at the University of California in Los Angeles, where he lettered in football, track and baseball. Hilton Smith, a pitcher for the Kansas City Monarchs, was a friend of Robinson's and Jackie asked him to intervene on his behalf for a job with the Monarchs. Robinson had joined the army in 1942 and was discharged in the fall of 1944 as an officer. On Smith's advice, Wilkinson invited Robinson to join the team for spring training in Houston, Texas. When Wilkinson signed Robinson in March, 1945, it was said by a reporter for the *Chicago Defender* that "*the Monarchs had slipped one over on the other clubs when they signed Jackie Robinson to play.*"<sup>47</sup>

Jackie Robinson played shortstop on the Monarch team and was spectacular. He began to make a name for himself, and major league scouts watched him closely. The Negro Leaguers were well aware of the pressure to integrate the major leagues, as white owners were beginning to envision filling their stadiums with Negro and white spectators alike. When the media began to focus on Satchel Paige, with photos and articles in the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Time*, and *Life* magazines, Dizzy Dean proclaimed, "*He was my idea of the greatest pitcher I ever saw.*"<sup>48</sup>

"Branch Rickey was looking at the crowds," said Hilton Smith.<sup>49</sup> The Negro teams were drawing large numbers to their games, while major league attendance was dwindling. As one player said, "*Integration of the game would be an economic decision; it would happen when black and white makes green.*"<sup>50</sup> Negro fans began to shun ball parks with segregated teams and seating, adhering to the idea that as long as they filled the stadium, the owners would feel they were satisfied.

Many rumors circulated in the early 1940s, that an integration plan would bring one Negro team into the white major leagues. The Monarchs supposedly would be picked because of their ability to not only play good baseball, but also to draw large crowds. When Leo Durocher, manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, announced he would gladly hire Negroes on his team if it were not for the baseball commissioner's opposition, Kenesaw Mountain Landis was quick to counter, "*Negroes are not barred from organized baseball by the commissioner,*"<sup>51</sup> yet, when promoter Bill Veeck mentioned to Landis he was planning to buy the lackluster Phillies and stock the team with Negro talent, the franchise was quickly sold to someone else.

With the death of Landis in the fall of 1944 his opposition to integration was removed, but the owners expected the new commissioner, Kentucky's former governor "Happy" Chandler, to be against integration. Chandler, however, announced, "*I'm for the four freedoms. If a Negro boy can make it on Okinawa and Guadacanal, hell, he can make it in baseball.*"<sup>52</sup>

New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia appointed a committee to study how integration in baseball might be brought about. He appointed Larry MacPhail, owner of the New York Yankees, and Branch Rickey, president of the Brooklyn Dodgers, to represent the two leagues on the study commission. The group issued its report in October 1945. It stated that "*Negro baseball met a need among rural baseball in America and that signing Negroes to the white major leagues would destroy Negro teams.*"<sup>53</sup> The report was academic, because Branch Rickey had signed Jackie Robinson to a contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers the week before. Rickey's motive came under fire, with accusations of using Negroes "*for his own selfish interest that disregard the race.*"<sup>54</sup>

For the owners of Negro ball clubs this news was bittersweet. For Wilkinson and the Monarchs, it was a thread of continuity as he was the sole survivor of the first Negro National League organized in 1920. In true Wilkinson Fashion, he said, "*I think it would be a fine thing for the game, even though we would lose some of our stars.*"<sup>55</sup>

Although Robinson and Wilkinson had a handshake agreement as a contract, Rickey ignored the request to buy that contract, contending that "*the Negro leagues were nothing more than booking agents in the zone of the rackets, they have no rights to expect organized baseball to respect them.*"<sup>56</sup>

Wilkinson refused to pursue legal means to prevent Robinson from playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers, saying: "*I am very glad to see Jackie get this chance and I'm sure he'll make good.*"<sup>57</sup> Reaction among the Negro players

was mixed, however, with many surprised that Robinson had been chosen to break the color line. Jesse Williams, whom Robinson replaced with the Monarchs, expressed this evaluation of Robinson:

*He was a good ball player, but he wasn't the best ball player we had. But he was the best for that particular role he played, being the first...to go up there and take the abuse he took. I wouldn't have taken it. If they had picked me, you possibly wouldn't have heard of Mays and Campanella and all those other fellows cause I would have gotten into a lot of trouble.*<sup>58</sup>

Robinson angered many with his attack on the Negro leagues, complaining of low salaries and poor travel conditions. Effa Manley, the owner of the Newark Eagles, rebuked him by saying that "*Jackie should attack racism that forced such treatment rather than the league that gave him his chance.*"<sup>59</sup> Most Americans saw the signing of Jackie Robinson as breaking the color line and for the Negro community it was a breakthrough for American democracy. Branch Rickey signed other Negroes to the Dodgers team. They were: Don Newcombe, Roy Campanella, Don Bankhead, John Wright, Roy Partlow, and Jim Gilliam, and Bill Veeck signed Larry Doby to the Cleveland Indians, but Rickey ignored the Negro League. The Monarch co-owner, Tom Baird, remarked bitterly,

*Rickey's acquisition of Negro baseball players reminds me of a fellow who found a rope and when he got home there was a horse on the end of it. I have been informed that Mr. Rickey is a very religious man. If such is true, it appears that his religion runs towards the almighty dollar.*<sup>60</sup>

When Satchel Paige was signed with the Cleveland Indians in 1948 he was considered a legend and the "*Old Man of Baseball*" as well as the hero of Negro baseball fans, but the loss of Satchel and the signing of Jackie Robinson signaled beginning of the end of Negro baseball.

## CHAPTER 8

### The Kansas City Monarchs

In my efforts to bring about a concise history of the Negro Leagues it is necessary to highlight certain individuals, teams, managers and locales. Because of the number of teams that were formed, played and then dissolved, it serves the purpose of clarity to use a key team that had a long and colorful history to demonstrate the vitality and potential that was ever-present in Negro baseball. That team is the Kansas City Monarchs.

The Kansas City Monarchs best exemplify Negro baseball teams in America because of its success as a team and the number of players selected, trained and groomed for the major white leagues. Following the history of the Monarchs will demonstrate the trials, hardships and racism faced by its members, both on and off the field.

There were several attempts to begin a Negro baseball league. The first occurred in 1886 and was referred to as *the Southern League of Colored Baseball*, including teams in Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, Alabama, and Tennessee. However it disintegrated almost before it began. Because of lack of finances, it was followed by the *Inter-State League* composed of teams in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania but these teams soon followed the same path of failure. In 1906, four black teams and two white teams were

established, calling themselves the *International League of Independent Professional Baseball Clubs*, but their downfall was caused by changing franchises and financial instability. Then in 1910, teams from Chicago, Louisville, New Orleans, Mobile, St. Louis, Kansas City, Missouri, Kansas City, Kansas, and Columbus, Ohio sent representatives to Chicago to form an organization of the Negro National Baseball League. They would band together under the concept of Booker T. Washington's theory of self-help. Washington felt that Negroes must patronize and support their own race. Enthusiasm by owners was thwarted by lack of financial resources, however, the organization died without ever sanctioning a game.

Because of a large influx of Negroes to large cities and the increasing popularity of baseball among Negroes from 1900 to 1925, the prosperity enjoyed by many Negroes and whites was able to support baseball and gave rise to professional teams. New York City was the center of Eastern Negro baseball, while Chicago was the hub city of the Midwest. Chicago's Negro leaders supported baseball enterprises, and during August and September many barnstorming teams converged on Chicago for a month of baseball competition. Negro baseball was a weekend diversion for steel workers, meat packers, railroad workers and other workers. The teams were subjected to exploitation by white owners, however, as the Negro teams knew little about the theories of baseball or the business side of baseball. Players were paid

according to the position they played: *Fielders received from 12 to 15 dollars a week, a pitcher might make eighteen dollars a week plus expenses.*<sup>61</sup>

Not only did Negroes suffer economic problems but also social problems plagued them. It was common for teams to arrive late at night and be unable to obtain lodging, and thus, forced to wander the streets. Although there remained a wall of segregation between Negroes and whites, nonetheless, whites came to the games and owners, writers, and fans alike recognized the talent that was displayed by Negro players. As John McGraw, manager of the white New York Giants, stated:

*If John Donaldson, a pitcher for the All Nations team were a white man or if the unwritten law of baseball didn't bar Negroes from the major leagues, I would give \$50,000 for him and think I was getting a bargain.*<sup>62</sup>

World War I changed the idea that the race problem was a Southern problem. Many blacks moved north, especially into Chicago, where hostilities developed between whites and Negroes. Baseball, thought of by many as an institution which reflected American democratic principles and offered an entry into opportunity, had to re-evaluate their ideals. In 1920 it was clear that the myth of equality did not include black Americans.

To avoid redundancy when writing about the Kansas City Monarchs is almost impossible when including the deeds of J.L. Wilkinson and the Monarchs. Previously, the role of Wilkinson in the development of the team and his personal and business accomplishments were discussed. Now more



attention will be given to the team, its players and their accomplishments, and the path it took to introduce Negroes to the major leagues.

Perhaps it is best to explain why the Monarchs called Kansas City home, what role the Monarchs had on the local Negro residents, and what were the benefits to team and town alike. Kansas City, the town where the Great Plains of America begins, was the last stop on the National Negro League's (NNL) circuit of ball games. By 1920, Kansas City had a Negro population of approximately ten percent of the city's population, but the white population insisted on rigid segregation. The Negro district was comprised of a network<sup>63</sup> of businesses, social organizations, fraternal groups, and churches. Yet this section boasted the highest rental area and the lowest residences owned privately, the illiteracy rate was ten times higher than the national average, and students left school two years earlier than their white counterparts. Less than a quarter of the businesses hired Negroes and most of those were in the meatpacking plants or personal service jobs. In this surrounding of discrimination, the life of a traveling ball player looked very good to young boys. *"It was the ambition of every young Negro boy to become a Monarch, just as it was for every white boy to become a Yankee."*<sup>64</sup>

Whether on or off the field of play, Monarch team members were required to look good and be properly dressed. Depo:tmment was the key to acceptance and acceptance was the underlying motive for the formation of the N.N.L. As Buck O'Neill would relate in his life story with the Monarchs, a good

reputation was important in the struggle for integration, "*Everyone tried to prove that they were good fellows, they were nice. We all knew that the only way to open the door--you had to be on your best behavior.*"<sup>65</sup>

As previously mentioned, the Monarchs' home town was situated at the end of the N.N.L. circuit, but it was also the end of the line for *Theater Owners Booking Association*. The Negro response to Vaudeville, South Kansas City, was a town filled with ball players, entertainers of every description, Blues, Jazz and Dixieland musical groups. Kansas City was the place to be and everything that was worthwhile was happening in the area of Eighteenth and Vine in downtown, near the YMCA where the Negro leagues came into existence in 1920. This was at times a severe handicap for ball players. The Monarch players were popular with women and it was said by Guy Davis, Manager of the Street Hotel at Eighteenth and Vine, "*Women follow a uniform--whether it's a soldier, musician or ball player, women look them up.*" Also Davis stated, "*The Monarchs might look like a baseball team, but it is a mutual admiration and sympathetic organization, with the fans/friends holding honorary membership.*"<sup>66</sup>

By 1922, the Monarchs were known for their staunch fans and large crowds at the games, but attendance began to drop off. Critics said that it would be difficult to entice Eastern teams to the edge of the plains without large crowds. Although the crowd was a 50/50 mix of white and Negro, this was primarily because the white Kansas City team, called the Blues, was so poor a team, this enhanced Monarch attendance, again. "*The fact was that most of*

*Kansas City's thirty thousand Negroes did not have the discretionary income or the leisure so they could not frequent baseball games,"* according to O'Neill.<sup>67</sup>

Local sports writers began to urge Negro civic groups to buy blocks of seats and attend games, and inducements such as Knot Hole Day and having children, fifteen years and younger, admitted free were instituted. The community responded with a Booster Club, a loose amalgam of neighborhood fans that included the 12<sup>th</sup> Street Rooters, Vine Street Rooters, 18<sup>th</sup> Street Rooters, Kansas City, Kansas Rooters, and North End Fans Association. The Boosters went on to become an integral part of community self-help activities as well as an economic motor to help drive the Monarchs ball club to success.

What began to happen in Kansas City was a social stratification among the Negro population by involvement in fund raising and backing of political figures in local politics. The Monarch team employed some rather sophisticated players who were looked upon as leaders in the Negro community. Thus, people identified with the Monarchs and they stood very well in the community. In turn, the Monarchs put on benefit games to support various organizations, including the Negro National Business League, the Red Cross, the NAACP, the Salvation Army, as well as churches, hospitals and youth organizations. Because the Negro churches in Kansas City were a primary association for most Negroes and because the ministers were the most educated and respected members of the community, their support helped to secure the Monarch's status. Oftentimes ministers would cut their Sunday sermons short

to allow time for members to make the opening of the Monarchs game.

Therefore, not only were the Monarchs a good ball club, but also they were a solidifying force in the Negro community, instituting pride, self motivation and gathering ethnic strength.

News coverage of Negro baseball games was scant, and only certain Negro newspapers hold records of games played, won or lost. Reporters said that owners did not have the business sense to realize the importance of statistics and media exposure. The Monarch baseball team was equally guilty of failing to keep accurate records.

One season the N.N.L. sent a reporter around the circuit to keep information flowing. The league attempted to enforce reporting but failed. At the end of each season, standings in the league were disputed, and statistics on individual players were near impossible to validate. Team rosters changed during the season and players not only jumped teams, but also used nicknames or aliases. Most players could not tell with any accuracy their batting averages, the amount of runs batted in, or earned run averages. Nonetheless, the Kansas City Monarchs were in existence as a viable ball team from 1920 to 1955, ranking as one of the top ball clubs in the National Negro League (N.N.L.). Beginning in 1925, the N.N.L. divided its season into two, fifty-game halves, with the winners of each season staging a playoff. Most of these playoff games were money-losers and again the Negro leagues, and especially the Monarchs, suffered because Negroes lacked the money to spend to see them play.

When the official season ended in September, the Monarchs would take to the road, "barnstorming" baseball throughout the Midwest, and challenging teams in Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Arkansas, Texas and Oklahoma. They usually played white local teams in places such as Marshall, Sedalia, Jefferson City, Joplin and Springfield, Missouri. When the Monarchs ventured further south, social customs changed and they were unable to play against white teams.

As the reputation of the Monarchs spread, whites as well as Negroes laid their money down to see the professionals play. The Monarchs would draw in excess of two thousand paying customers at each game. Because the players went off salary at the end of the regular season, barnstorming was a means to earn extra cash. The usual agreement with the Monarchs was that owners and players split 50/50. J.L. Wilkinson was adept at selecting locations for his team to eat and be housed, as well as finding "team friendly" towns. In 1926, Wilkinson bought his "parlor bus."<sup>68</sup> Team members would look upon this time period fondly, traveling with tents, cooking utensils, and fishing poles, while wetting a line during off-times. Many Monarch players would recall this as the "time of their lives."<sup>69</sup>

In 1929, Wilkinson complained of "losing a bunch of coins" and withdrew from the N.N.L. However, he fared quite well during this period because of his portable lighting system. During their non-league years, the Monarchs traveled

to eighteen states and two foreign countries playing about one hundred fifty games during their "barnstorming" period each year.

Again, about forty-five percent of their fans were white. Because of the economic hard-times of the 1930s, gimmicks were employed by Wilkinson to increase gate revenue and attendance at games. Clowning was a device used by the Monarchs to draw crowds, but, as in popular minstrel shows, their humor pandered to the white fans stereotypical ideal of the "lovable darky." It was considered degrading to players as well as the game and was eventually eliminated, but in order for teams to survive, "showboating and clowning"<sup>70</sup> was carried on, especially in rural areas.

Several teams felt baseball was secondary to earning money. The Zulu Cannibals from Louisville, Kentucky wore grass skirts and painted their faces, but the players resented the image this play-acting was creating: "*If you were a Negro, you were a clown.*"

One of Negro baseball's greatest pitchers, Leroy "Satchel" Paige, began his career with the Chattanooga Black Look Outs in 1926, and he pitched ball with more than one hundred ball teams throughout his lifetime. Paige had excellent control over the ball and coupled this with terrific speed. He would taunt the batters with suggestions that they "*bat by sound as they would not be able to see the ball.*"<sup>71</sup> Among his wind-ups and throws, he used the Model-T, Windmill, Hesitation, blooper, looper, droopers, jump ball, bee ball, nothin ball, whipsy-dipsy-do ball, and hurry-up ball. However, Paige's showmanship, rather

than his pitching skills, was what white newspapers picked up. Paige's image was in keeping with the stereotype that whites had of Negroes since the days of slavery. Nonetheless, Satchel Paige, for all of his showmanship and for what some called a lackadaisical attitude towards his teams and for failure to show up for a game on time, displayed great courage and possessed a thoughtful inner core.

An example of the Satchel Paige that was virtually unknown to everyone except a few teammates took place when Paige, Buck O'Neill, and the Monarchs were on the road barnstorming throughout the Midwest in the 1930s. In a game in Golden, Colorado against the Coors beer team, Paige overheard a racial slur directed towards him. Calling Buck O'Neill from first base, he asked that all of the outfielders be pulled to the infield. The players moved as directed. Satchel told Buck: "*Closer.*"<sup>72</sup> When Satchel Paige had struck out three batters he had gathered about the pitchers mound all of the outfield--as a display of his baseball prowess and pride. The Coors players recognized his display and enmasse, they apologized for the remarks directed at the venerable Satchel Paige.

Satchel Paige signed a contract with the Kansas City Monarchs in 1939 after a dispute with Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles over a contract, but Satchel had a sore arm from year-round pitching and a bad stomach from too much spicy Mexican food. Wilkinson assigned him to a traveling farm team called "*Satchel Paige's All Stars,*"<sup>73</sup> Paige was joined by seasoned players such

as Newt Joseph and Cool PaPa Bell, and many young players that needed training. Wilkinson said, "*They can do us some good and after all, they've made us a lot of money, we'll try to pay them back a little.*"<sup>74</sup>

This team was considered the little brother of the Monarchs, Paige made sure before hand with the Chamber of Commerce of each town, "*If the team couldn't sleep where they played or eat where they played, then they didn't play.*"<sup>75</sup> At the end of the season, Wilkinson signed Satchel Paige to pitch for the Monarchs which sealed a life-long friendship between the two.

In 1948, with the Monarchs ranks depleted, Wilkinson with failing health and fading eyesight, sold his share of the team to Baird. Tragically, the fans forgot J.L. Wilkinson. He retired to a nursing home and passed away in 1964 at the age of ninety. "*He kept Negro baseball going all those years, developed players, the majors took them all*" said Hilton Smith, "*He didn't get a dime.*"<sup>76</sup>



## CHAPTER 9

### Jackie Robinson, The Beginning

Jackie Roosevelt Robinson was born on January 31, 1919 near Cairo, Georgia to Mallie and Jerry Robinson, who were sharecroppers. Jerry Robinson left his family supposedly to find work in Texas and then send for his family. He never made it to Texas, traveling instead with another man's wife to Florida, never to return. Therefore, Mallie Robinson became the dominant figure in young Jackie's life. Mallie's brother, Burton, had served as a cook for a doctor during the First World War, and when the doctor went to California he brought Burton with him. On a visit, Burton urged Mallie to take her children and go to California. There he said, she would not have to withstand the hardships suffered in the Deep South, and she, together with her family, would find opportunities that were unthinkable in the Deep South.

Mallie Robinson sold what worldly goods she owned and on May 21, 1920 she and her children boarded a train for California. California was not paradise, nor was it the Deep South. It was segregated, but Negroes were less restricted. Mallie and her children lived with relatives for a short time. Mallie got a job as a domestic and received some welfare assistance. With the economy booming, and integrated schools, California would be the land of opportunities for the Robinson family.

They were able to purchase a small home on Pepper Street in Pasadena, becoming the first Negro family on that street. Neighbors took offense at their presence, and soon a petition was passed around in an attempt to force the family out. Sympathetic neighbors of financial means helped to defuse the situation with support for Mallie and her children, but rock throwing and petty vandalism continued and a cross was burned on their front lawn.

Although Jackie was only an average student in school, he possessed physical talents that allowed him to stand out. Often he earned pocket change when white children would pay him to play on their side in playground games. Jackie always tagged along with his older brothers, Edgar, Frank and Mack, playing football, baseball, basketball and running foot races along the streets.

Family obligations were accepted by all of the children. Jackie delivered newspapers, shined shoes, sold hot dogs and became involved in some not-so-wholesome activities such as stealing errant golf balls from a nearby golf course and selling them back, gambling with cards and dice, and taking part in petty crimes. Young Robinson ran with a gang of Negroes, Japanese, Mexican, and white boys who called themselves the "Pepper Street Gang." They were bonded together by poverty.

Robinson as a teenager had his share of run-ins with the local police. When faced with taunts and bullying because of his race, he stood his ground and earned the reputation among whites of being arrogant and "uppity".

To many young boys of this period in America, being very good at sports could become a way out of poverty. The Robinson boys excelled at various sports; Edgar at softball and bicycling, Frank was a sprinter, Mack was a fine all-around athlete, while the only girl in the family, Willa Mae, was a holder of letters earned at track, basketball, and soccer in high school. At Washington Junior High School, Jackie played football, basketball, baseball and ran track, leading his team to a championship. He entered, and won, a city ping-pong tournament. After entering Muir High School, Jackie excelled at everything athletic, but baseball was his least favorite sports. His real ambition was to become a coach.

Jackie Robinson was given a perfect example of the obstacles that lay ahead of him. Mack Robinson along with Jesse Owens, were part of the ten man team of Negro Americans chosen to compete in the 1936 Olympic Games in Germany. Mack qualified for the 200 yard sprint and won a Silver Medal, finishing second to Owens in the 200. To appease some Nazi officials, two runners, both Negro, were pulled and replaced by whites, a glaring example that, no matter how talented, Negro athletes were treated as second class citizens and no measure of achievement could overcome one's skin color.<sup>77</sup>

Robinson graduated from high school in 1937 and, at his mother's insistence, enrolled at Pasadena Junior College (P.J.C.), majoring in physical education; he was in college for one thing--to play sports. Jackie set a record of a twenty-five feet, six and one-half inch jump and led the baseball league as a

shortstop hitting .417 and stealing twenty-five bases in twenty-four games. His first taste of the big leagues came when Pasadena Junior College played the Chicago White Sox in an exhibition in March of 1938. Robinson slapped out two hits and made several dazzling plays at short. White Sox Manager Jimmy Dykes said; "*If that kid was white, I'd sign him now.*"<sup>78</sup>

Young Robinson's career was off to a good start. On the football field he was unstoppable, leading P.J.C. to eleven straight wins, running for more than one thousand yards, and scoring seventeen touchdowns. In the season finale, Robinson made the play of the game, returning a kickoff 104 yards for a touchdown. He continued his skills on the basketball courts, averaging nineteen points when teams rarely scored more than fifty points a game.

Jackie Robinson now came to the attention of the West Coast colleges. He turned down several proposals before accepting a scholarship at the University of California-Los Angeles (U.C.L.A.) upon his brother Frank's advice. Shortly after, on May 10, 1938, Frank was killed in a motorcycle accident.

Robinson was a spectacular runner for U.C.L.A., and in 1940 he had to choose between track and baseball since because of travel and practice time there was no way for him to compete in both. He decided to play baseball and return to his track efforts once the season was over.

As usual, he began the season in spectacular fashion, beating U.C.L.A. 6 to 4, banging out four hits, stealing four bases, including home, and playing errorless ball. However, when the team began to play in a higher collegiate

competition, the tables turned on Robinson; he did not hit, did not field, and did not steal. The jump from junior college to major college competition was too much for him. He had found a sport he could not play. As soon as the baseball season ended he rejoined the U.C.L.A. track team, winning the Pacific Coast league championship in broad jumping. In golf he won the P.C.C. championship, and in tennis he reached the semi-finals of the National Negro Tennis Tournament. He ruled the ping-pong tables on the U.C.L.A. campus, and Sundays he taught Bible classes. No other collegiate athlete, not even Jim Thorpe, had ever competed in so many sports with such success. Yet, *Baseball was the one sport that gave Robinson trouble.*

Robinson dropped out of UCLA, lacking several credits to graduate, because he reasoned that a Negro would fare no better in America because of a degree. Jackie Robinson, the athlete, would soon realize that he had a nationwide publicity agency: the Negro press. It would be the critical factor in determining the course of Jackie's life.

In March 1942, while awaiting his draft notice for the army, Jackie Robinson and Nate Morland were invited to try out for baseball at the Chicago White Sox's training site at Brookfield Park in Pasadena. How the two men received the tryout notice is not clear, perhaps it was by arrangement with the Communist Party's newspaper *The Daily Worker*. The White Sox were impressed with both players. Although the tryouts were not serious, nonetheless they were significant as *The Daily Worker* enjoyed a good

relationship with the Negro press and Robinson had been pegged as possibly the person to bring down the color bar. Robinson would not acknowledge this event later in his career because of his fear of Communist contamination.

Robinson was inducted into the army on April 3, 1942, completed his basic training at Fort Riley, Kansas and was assigned to a segregated unit as was the rule during World War II. He met Joe Louis while at Fort Riley, and Louis interceded on his behalf for a chance at Officers Candidate School (O.C.S.). After completing his commission, Jackie tried to join an army baseball team, but when warned of not being able to play ball in the South he declined.

His reputation as someone who stood against racism soon earned him the hatred of white officers, who sent him further south to Fort Hood, Texas, to an all-black tank battalion as a platoon leader. On July 6, 1944, Robinson boarded a bus at Camp Hood and sat next to a light skinned woman. The driver told him to move to the back of the bus. Robinson refused and the driver returned the bus to the base where Robinson was taken into custody by the military police. Robinson was charged in a general court martial. The army soon learned that Robinson had many friends in the Negro press and the case became a "*cause celebre*". Robinson's white battalion commander refused to sign the court martial papers, and Robinson was transferred to another unit whose commanding officer signed.

Even though he was acquitted of all charges, Robinson's military career was over. The army looked closely at his medical record and issued a medical

discharge with honorable conditions for a previous ankle injury. Robinson, in need of work, tried out and was accepted by the Kansas City Monarchs to play baseball, and quickly he became one of the most visible players in the Negro League.

Robinson made his first appearance with the Kansas City Monarchs on April 1, 1945 in Houston, Texas against minor-league stars. Although he did quite well fielding, his trips to the plate were dismal. A week later, he collected two hits, stole a base in the first game of a double-header against the Birmingham Black Barons.<sup>79</sup> The game account was reported in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, which published a national edition, and was read by Negroes across America. Jackie Robinson was featured, and despite his having only several weeks in the starting line-up, the Negro press had already become attached to Jackie.

Despite his success, Robinson was not happy with life in the Negro Leagues. The money, although good, was taken up with expenses on the road. He was appalled at the living conditions, detested the constant travel, found fault with playing fields and umpiring, and remained aloof from the other players.

Robinson's upbringing and college background were unique in the Negro Leagues. He had nothing in common with other players. He did not smoke or drink and frowned on some of the team's off game activities. His teammates found him standoffish and easily angered, and they were bewildered as to why

he had been selected for an earlier tryout. They felt he was not the best player on the team much less the best player in the league.

Robinson learned well from his Monarch teammates; he focused on speed and accuracy in the game. Winning an exhibition game against the Boston Braves 11-1 in mid-August, Robinson cranked out two hits, stole second base twice, third once, and completed a daring steal of home. Two weeks later, Robinson received an invitation from Branch Rickey, the Brooklyn Dodger general manager and part owner, to speak with him.

While Rickey had his scouts watching Jackie Robinson on the diamond, he was investigating Jackie's background, education, character and all aspects of his personal life. The reasons were manifold. Rickey knew that entry of Negroes into the major leagues was long overdue, but his selection process would, he felt, guarantee a winner. J.L. Wilkinson said, "*Rickey was many things to many people, flamboyant and complicated, spiritual and materialistic to a fault, vain and pious.*"<sup>80</sup> His administrative genius earned him the name "*Mahatma*", while his tight fisted nature earned him the title "*El Cheapo*".<sup>81</sup>

With Jackie Robinson, as with his other ventures, Rickey did what he did to secure a place in baseball history and earn money. The two cannot be separated. On the morning of October 23, 1945, the Dodgers' Triple A team the Montreal Royals, called a press conference to announce something that would affect baseball coast to coast. Robinson had signed a contract with Montreal, and speculation was immediate that Jackie quickly would be called up



to the majors. The real feelings of owners and players was not apparent, although the announcement was met with diplomatic courtesy. The Negro leagues were another matter, as players and owners alike recognized the ramifications of Robinson's success. The days of Negro League baseball were numbered.

After two seasons in the minors Robinson began playing in the major leagues on April 15, 1947 at Ebbets Field against the Boston Braves. Jackie became the focal point of harassment and verbal abuse by players and fans alike. Although he started off with less than spectacular results on the field, his presence alone was the catalyst that brought about the change in skin color on the field. When the Chicago Cubs came to Ebbets Field, the Cubs players voted to go on strike because of Robinson's presence on the field. Baseball Commissioner Ford Frick promised that "all strikers would be barred for life from baseball if they struck."<sup>82</sup> Thus, play on the field was maintained.

Jackie went on to become an expert base stealer and finished his first season with a .297 batting average. The Dodgers warmed towards Robinson as he helped them to gain the National League title and a spot against the New York Yankees in the World Series. Robinson went on to become an integral part of the famous "Boys of Summer."<sup>83</sup>

The period from Jackie Robinson's debut in 1947 to 1953 can best be described as one of token integration. In these seven years the major leagues added blacks at the rate of three every two years. The following is a list of first

black players on each team and their date of entry, and it is interesting to note that only half of the major league teams had integrated by the start of the 1954 season.

Jackie Robinson	April 1947	Brooklyn Dodgers
Larry Doby	April 1947	Cleveland Indians
Henry Thompson	July 1947	St. Louis Browns
Henry Thompson	July 1949	New York Giants
Sam Jethroe	April 1950	Boston Braves
Sam Harrison	July 1951	Chicago White Sox
Bob Trice	September 1953	Chicago Cubs
Curt Roberts	April 1954	Pittsburgh Pirates
Tom Alston	April 1954	St. Louis Cardinals
Nino Escalara	April 1954	Cincinnati Reds
Carlos Paula	September 1954	Washington Senators
Elston Howard	April 1955	New York Yankees
John Kennedy	April 1957	Philadelphia Phillies
Ossie Virgil	June 1958	Detroit Tigers
Pumpsie Green	July 1959	Boston Red Sox

The Brooklyn Dodgers in 1950 had four black players: Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella, Don Newcombe and Don Bankhead, and there were only a total of nine black players in the entire major leagues. The Brooklyn Dodgers then became “Black America’s”<sup>84</sup> baseball team and attendance as well as attention, diminished in the Negro League. Black America focused its attention on the Brooklyn Dodgers because of their hiring of Robinson, Don Newcombe, John Wright, Roy Campanella, Roy Partlow, Dan Bankhead, Joe Black, Jim Gilliam as players. Robinson went on to the Hall of Fame, followed by Campanella. From the book Great Time Coming, David Falkner comments on Robinson’s baseball statistics.

*For a period of five years, beginning in 1949 Jackie Robinson was at the top of his game, among the two or*

*three greatest players. He was a reminder of what baseball could be. He was a great hitter, his life time batting average was .311, but between '49 and '53 he hit .329, drive in 463 runs, scored 540, stole 115 bases, average over 500 plate appearances and was a perennial league leader in several fielding categories.<sup>85</sup>*

For as long as Robinson played ball, his teammates, coaches, owners or managers never learned of his health problems. Robinson wanted to play as long as possible, not because he loved the game that much, but rather because baseball was his livelihood and his pulpit.

In 1957, Jackie Robinson was offered fifty thousand dollars to give an exclusive interview to Look magazine, if and when he retired from the Brooklyn Dodgers team. Chock Full of Nuts company owner William Black also made Jackie an offer, a position as vice-president in charge of personnel at a salary of fifty thousand dollars a year. After attempting to contact the Dodgers management and give them his notice of retirement, E.J. Bavasi, the general manager, left Jackie a message to report to management offices the following day. Robinson declined, signed a contract with William Black, and notified Look magazine of his intention to retire and give his interview. Only then did he find out that the Dodgers had intended to trade him to the New York Giants. Dodgers management then began an assault on Robinson's loyalty, his values and questioned his motives for quitting the Dodgers even though the club had negotiated a trade.

A very significant event took place in Jackie Robinson's life after he left baseball: He received the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Springarn medal, previously awarded to individuals of prominence, such as: A. Phillip Randolph, Mary Margaret Bethune, and George Washington Carver. The award given Jackie was the first ever to an athlete.

Jackie was able to devote time to guest-speaking and fundraising for the National Urban League and the NAACP. He was a popular figure on the speaking circuit and helped to raise membership in local chapters throughout the country. Baseball had been a means of social mobility as well as financial success for him. Fame and stardom enabled him to count among his friends such notables as Thurgood Marshall and Kenneth B. Clark. They, in turn, introduced him to a young Baptist minister who gained recognition leading a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. Martin Luther King, Jr., like Jackie Robinson, was navigating uncharted waters. King would later relate to an aide: "I took Jackie Robinson as an inspiration, he made it possible for me in the first place, without him, I would never have been able to do with I did."<sup>86</sup>

With involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, Jackie became politically connected with Republicans and preached that change would come about with "the ballot and the bucks."<sup>87</sup> He began to lose favor with the Civil Rights cadre because of his Republican politics and soon became disfranchised from the black community, and often was referred to by many Blacks as an "Uncle Tom".

When John F. Kennedy was assassinated, Jackie was spotted at the race track by a reporter who then wrote an article about the lack of respect shown.

William Black fired Robinson from his position with Chock Full of Nuts Corporation, because Black maintained Robinson had not shown the proper respect for Kennedy's death. Robinson went on to head a black banking venture, a construction firm, all the while spearheading various social reform movements. Together with failing health--and the tragic loss of his first born, Jackie Jr.--Robinson began to lose his sight.

At the ceremony at Dodgers Stadium when his number was retired, Robinson stated that he "would be pleased to look over at the third-base line and see a black man as manager."<sup>88</sup> At 6:00 a.m. on October 24, 1972, Robinson had a massive heart attack at home and died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. The Reverend Jesse Jackson gave Robinson's eulogy: "Jackie was not so much a ballplayer as he was a chess player. He was the black knight and he checkmated bigotry."<sup>89</sup> James Farmer, Former Director of Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), actually found a virtue in being forgotten when he said, "One could question if what Jackie endured, would he be remembered. Being forgotten is perfectly alright, you can have an impact and then years later people won't know who you are—but your work is still done. Jackie Robinson did his work and the work lives on."<sup>90</sup>

## CHAPTER 10

### Robinson's Call to the Major Leagues

When Jackie Robinson was called up to the Brooklyn Dodgers, ball club owners began to recognize the possible benefits of integrating the major leagues. Roy Campanella, a catcher, joined Robinson in the Brooklyn Dodgers line-up and would share the field with Jackie for nine years. Roy was called from the Negro Leagues and earned the "Most Valuable Player" award in 1951, 1952, and 1953. In 1958, on an icy highway, "Campy" hit a utility pole and was left paralyzed. On May 9, 1959 at the Los Angeles Coliseum, 93,000 fans gathered to pay him homage. The crowd set an attendance record.

Henry "Hank" Aaron called Mobile, Alabama home and left there with two dollars in his pocket, two pairs of pants and two sandwiches to play baseball with the Indianapolis Clowns. Hank Aaron broke into the Boston Braves line-up on March 13, 1954 and in 1956 led the National League with a batting average of .328, 200 base hits, thirty-four doubles, and was third in slugging average at .558. "I got the idea I could play ball when I heard that Jackie Robinson had broken the color line." Hank Aaron, on April 8, 1974, in a game against the Los Angeles Dodgers, hit his 715<sup>th</sup> home run to break Babe Ruth's major league record—Aaron received numerous hate letters as he neared the 715 mark—Aaron went on to become a vice-president and director of player development

with the Atlanta Braves until his retirement in 1976. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1982.

Monte Irvin was an early leader among first generation of black players, and he was considered the best Negro League player and the one who should have been chosen to break the color barrier. He started in the Negro leagues and was in the majors for eight years. Inducted into the Hall of Fame as a Negro entrant in 1973, he batted over .300 three times, was in two World Series in 1951 and 1954 and led the league in runs batted in with 121 in 1951. He finished his career as an assistant to the baseball commissioner.

In July, 1998, Larry Doby, the second player to follow Jackie Robinson into the major leagues, was inducted into Cooperstown Hall of Fame. Doby, the first black player in the American League, was called up to the Cleveland Indians three months after Robinson. When Larry Doby arrived in the major league, he, too, was subjected to taunts and abuse and the same set of Jim Crow rules. Like Robinson, Doby had attended college and had been with the Newark Eagles for four years. Doby was the first black player to hit .300 and was the highest on the Cleveland Indians team in 1948. In 1952, he led the league in slugging with an average of .541, including 32 homers and 104 runs scored.<sup>91</sup> He later became the second black manager in the major leagues, following Frank Robinson.

## CHAPTER 11

### Total Integration of Baseball

The total integration of black players in every major league franchise finally occurred in 1959 when Elijah “Pumpsie” Green of Oakland, California was signed by the Boston Red Sox. It had been twelve years since Jackie Robinson’s first day in the majors. (Blacks were approximately fourteen percent of the leagues.)

In 1959, blacks led in nine of twelve batting categories and two of twelve pitching categories. The top five stolen base leaders were blacks—Willie Mays, Jim Gilliam, Orlando Cepeda, Tony Taylor and Vada Pinson. The first generation of black major league players had weathered many changes since Jackie Robinson’s first appearance. In 1958, the Dodgers and Giants moved to Los Angeles and San Francisco, respectively, and that year marked the first time the percentage of black players in the major leagues approximated that of blacks in the general population. On the field, the carefully selected black players compiled awesome statistics and records in an incredibly short time. In the fourteen year period from 1946 to 1959, eight of the national league rookies of the year were black. Unfortunately, these players were unwittingly being viewed as forerunners of blacks who could only hit home runs and steal bases. While the primary concern of these pioneer performers was to establish a



presence and a standard of play, the next would be concerned with issues like salary discrimination, segregation of black players by position, and the ending of the hated reserve clause.

### The Stacking Phenomenon in Baseball

In 1960, the American League began adding black players to its teams' rosters at a faster rate. Through 1971, the rate of increase was 1.4 percent per year in the American League versus a rate of 0.6 percent for the National League. The percentage of black players on National League rosters, however, remained higher than that for the American League, and in no year during this period did the National League's average percentage dip below that of the American League. The twelve year average for the National League was twenty-five percent, versus eighteen percent of the American League.

The highest black representation in the National League through 1971 was in 1967 and 1969, when it reached twenty-nine percent. The Pittsburgh Pirates had the highest individual team average, in 1967, with fifty-six percent. The highest American League figure during those years came in 1969 at twenty-four percent. The Cleveland Indians had the highest individual team average in 1965 at forty percent. The ratio of black to white players would not get much higher in the future. On September 1, 1971, the Pittsburgh Pirates fielded an all-black team against the Philadelphia Phillies; the first time that had

ever occurred. These team figures were sometimes nearly three times that of the general population, but the players were not equally apportioned among the nine positions.

Overwhelmingly, blacks were confined to the outfield, first base, and second base. In 1960, the ratio of black outfielders to black pitchers was 5.6 to 1, and in 1971, it had worsened to 6.7 to 1. Pascal and Rapping,<sup>92</sup> in their sociological study of racial discrimination in organized baseball, studied the racial composition of the leagues in 1968 and found that blacks made up fifty-three percent of outfielders, forty percent of the first basemen, thirty percent of the second basemen, twenty-six percent of short stops, fourteen percent of third basemen, twelve percent of catchers, and nine percent of pitchers. Thus black players were clearly “stacked” or limited on team roster positions. The stacking phenomenon<sup>93</sup> was originally described by black professor Harry Edwards of the University of California at Berkeley.

One theory was simply “purposeful exclusion” because blacks were thought untrustworthy in crucial positions. Another reason given was that pitchers and catchers required more pre-major league experience and interaction with coaches. Many blacks supposedly disliked spending time in minor leagues and some found it difficult to relate to white coaches, of mostly Southern background.

Outfielders, on the other hand, were expected to hit for power—a “natural” talent—steal bases and make as few catching errors as possible. Not

much coaching was needed. Still another theory brought forth was that aspiring, young black players emulated their heroes who were invariably black and more likely, were outfielders who earned large salaries.

Skin color gradations were even posited as a possible reason for the segregation of black players by position, and these observations are statistically relevant. Gerald W. Scully,<sup>94</sup> who studied and wrote about discrimination in baseball, used the five (5) skin color classification found in G. Franklin Edwards' 1959 book, The Negro Professional Class—1) very light, 2) light brown, 3) medium brown, 4) dark brown, 5) very-dark brown—and related them to a player's position. Applying these codes to a sample of 159 players in the June, 1969 issue of Ebony magazine,<sup>95</sup> Scully found the following percentages of non-outfielders:

Very light	80 percent
Light brown	67.9 percent
Medium brown	56.8 percent
Dark brown	53.5 percent
Very dark	25.0 percent

Clearly, black players were also being segregated according to skin tone.

## CHAPTER 12

### Summation

The progress made by black players since Jackie Robinson first put on a Brooklyn Dodger uniform has been outstanding. Many of the early black players such as Moses "Fleetwood" Walker, Andrew "Rube" Foster, Josh Gibson and Leroy "Satchel" Paige would hardly believe the good fortune of their modern counterparts. Baseball has been the fortunate recipient of the extraordinary efforts of blacks who excel at the game. In a short period of time, blacks have transformed a tradition-bound, patterned style of play into a more energized display of home-runs, base running and spectacular catches in the outfield.

Although many blacks continue to rank among the game's highest paid superstars, the Nation's pastime remains unappealing and uninviting at the grassroots level of black America. Attendance by blacks is lower than for other major sports. According to Simmons Market Research Bureau, it is 6.8 percent<sup>96</sup> for baseball and seventeen percent for basketball. Ironic because basketball arenas such as Detroit's Palace and Cleveland's Gund arena are in extreme suburban areas. The reasons for low baseball attendance are economic, lack of exposure to big league games and the perception that baseball is a white man's game and the ball park is a white man's park.

Organized baseball for the Nation's youth is based primarily in the suburbs and are not accessible to inner-city youth.

Although the racial barriers of old were removed long ago, more subtle forms of bigotry continue to bar blacks from the game's front office jobs. Occasionally, those standing in the door barring black progress allow their bias to show. The following incidents demonstrate racial barriers remain.

On April 6, 1987, Al Campanis, the Dodger's Vice-President for Player Personnel, told ABC's Ted Koppel on the television show "Nightline" that blacks "lack the necessities" to manage or work in the front offices of major league baseball. Dodger owner Peter O'Malley said that Campanis' job was not in jeopardy, but then fired Campanis the next day. Explaining his reversal, O'Malley said, "The comments Al made was so distant, so removed from what I believe the organization believes that it was impossible for Al to continue the responsibilities he had with us."<sup>97</sup> Yet it was Campanis who brought every black player to the majors from Robinson on. He had no racial bias on record.

Three months later, Reverend Jesse Jackson called off a possible boycott of baseball, citing this as a sign of possible progress. Then Baseball Commissioner Peter Ueberroth retained Alexander and Associates, headed by Clifford Alexander, Secretary of the Army in the Carter Administration, and sociologist Harry Edwards to study the problem.

In March of 1988, Alexander noted that of baseball's 542 new hires, 180 were black. Don Baylor of the Oakland A's sneered: "Those numbers don't

mean a thing.”<sup>98</sup> In the Spring of 1987,<sup>99</sup> Blacks held 1.9 percent of baseball’s front office jobs and Hispanics and Asians held 1.5 percent.

After Campanis, other influential baseball figures made similar remarks. In April 1988, angry University of Kentucky students forced A.B. “Happy” Chandler to apologize for saying during a trustee meeting, “You know Zimbabwe’s all Nigger now. There aren’t any whites.” Chandler who was commissioner of baseball when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947, was reported in the Miami Herald<sup>100</sup> to have said, “I did say it, I wish I hadn’t.”

In December 1992, Cincinnati Reds owner Marge Schott caused a firestorm when it was revealed she made several racially insensitive remarks, including, “I’d rather have a trained monkey working for me rather than a nigger.”<sup>101</sup> Schott too apologized.

Hopeful signs have emerged. In February 1989,<sup>102</sup> Bill White, a six time All Star who spent eighteen years as a New York Yankee announcer, was named President of the National League. In 1992, Don Baylor was appointed Manager of the expansion franchise Colorado Rockies and Dusty Baker was selected to manage the San Francisco Giants, boosting the number of black managers on the major leagues to four.

In June 1991, baseball’s bottom line in adding minorities to its front offices remained low. Of 20,032 front office positions, 302 (fifteen percent) were held by minorities and only nine percent by blacks.<sup>103</sup>

On the field, black players seem certain to continue their superior play in all of their historically assigned positions. With more black infielders, there will be more coaches and eventually more managers. This, in turn, will lead to a substantial presence in the front offices of major league clubs. Only then can it be truly said that Black Americans have achieved their hard-earned position in the nation's pastime.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup>R.H. Boyle, Sport, Mirror of American Life. Boston: Little, Brown, 1963, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup>Complete History of the Negro Leagues. Citadel Press/Card Publishing, 1995, p. 141.

<sup>3</sup>Barry D. McPherson, Ph.D., Human Kinetic Books, Champaign, Illinois, 1963, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Boyle, p. 32

<sup>6</sup>J. Olsen, The Myth of Integration in American Sport. New York: Time-Life, 1968, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin, A History of the United States. Prentice Hall, 1989, p. 322.

<sup>8</sup>Arthur Ashe, Jr., A Hard Road to Glory, Baseball. New York: Amistad, 1988, p. 66.

<sup>9</sup>Boorstin, p. 322.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Peterson, Only the Ball Was White. Oxford Press, 1970, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup>Smith Centre, Kansas, County Newspaper, July 25, 1907, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup>John B. Holway, Black Ball Stars. Meckler Books, 1977, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup>Mark Ribowsky, History of Black Baseball. Citadel Press, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup>Don Ragasin, Invisible Man. New York: Atheneum, 1984, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup>Ribowsky, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup>Holway, p. 52.



<sup>17</sup>Peterson, p. 107.

<sup>18</sup>Holway, p. 49.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Peterson, p. 76.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ribowsky, p. 114.

<sup>25</sup>Peterson, p. 61.

<sup>26</sup>Phil Dixon and Patrick J. Hannigan, The Negro Baseball Leagues Photographic History. American House, 1992, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>"Story of Negro League Baseball." The Hornbook Magazine, January/February, 1995, pp. 74-75.

<sup>31</sup>Peterson, p. 214.

<sup>32</sup>Arthur Ashe, Jr., History of African-American Athletes 1919-1946. New York: Amistad Press, pp. 22-23.

<sup>33</sup>Ashe, A Hard Road to Glory, p. 366.

<sup>34</sup>Holway, pp. 72-75

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-21.

<sup>36</sup>Kenneth L. Shropshire, In Black and White. New York University, 1996, pp. 34-37.

<sup>37</sup>Holway, pp. 118-21.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Janet Bruce, Kansas City Monarchs. University Press of Kansas, 1995, pp. 28-31.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Buck O'Neill, I Was Right on Time. University Press of Kansas, 1996, p. 28.

<sup>47</sup>Bruce, pp. 21-23.

<sup>48</sup>University of Chicago Department of Photographic Reproduction, Chicago Defender Newspaper. July 1909 to December 1960.

<sup>49</sup>Ashe, A Hard Road to Glory, pp. 27-29.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Dan Dodson, "Voices from Black Baseball." Journal of Education Sociology, October 1954.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Dan Dodson, Integration of Baseball, 1975.

<sup>55</sup>Call, January 14, 1944.

<sup>56</sup>Courier, November 3, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup>Peterson, p. 29.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ebony Magazine, July, 1948.

<sup>60</sup>Call, January 28, 1946.

<sup>61</sup>Bruce, p. 53.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Peterson, p. 61.

<sup>65</sup>O'Neil, p. 17.

<sup>66</sup>Bruce, pp. 55-57.

<sup>67</sup>O'Neil, p. 39.

<sup>68</sup>Bruce, p. 61.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>72</sup>O'Neil.

<sup>73</sup>Bruce.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>David Shirley, Satchel Paige. New York: Chelsea House, 1993, pp. 26-28.

<sup>76</sup>Bruce.

<sup>77</sup>Glenn Stout and Dick Johnson, Jackie Robinson, Between the Base Lines. San Francisco: Woodford Press, 1993. P. 47.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Arnold Rampersal, Jackie Robinson, A Biography. Alfred Knopf, 1990, p. 202.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Stout and Johnson, p. 87.

<sup>83</sup>Roger Kahn, Boys of Summer, 1971.

<sup>84</sup>Arthur Ashe, Jr., Hard Road to Glory.

<sup>85</sup>David Falkner, Great Time Coming. Simon and Schuster/Touchstone Books, 1995, p. 192.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 345.

<sup>90</sup>Falkner, p. 346.

<sup>91</sup>Ashe, Hard Road to Glory.

<sup>92</sup>Anthony Pascal and Leonard Rapping, Racial Discrimination in Organized Baseball. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1976.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Gerald W. Scully, Government and the Sports Business Discrimination: The Case of Baseball. Brookings Institute.

<sup>95</sup>Ebony Magazine, June, 1969, p. 17.

<sup>96</sup>Sports Illustrated, March 25, 1985, p. 43.

<sup>97</sup>Ashe, African-American Athletes, p. 77.

<sup>98</sup>USA Today, March 29, 1988, p. 21.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Miami Herald, April 7, 1988, p. 33.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Sports Illustrated, February, 1989, p. 51.

<sup>103</sup>Inside Sports, June, 1991, p. 12.

## References

### Books

- Ashe, Arthur R., Jr. A Hard Road to Glory, Baseball. New York: Amistad, November 1988.
- Ashe, Arthur R., Jr. The African-American Athlete in Baseball. New York: Amistad, November 1988.
- Ashe, Arthur R., Jr. History of the African-American Athlete Since 1946. New York: Amistad, November 1988.
- Ashe, Arthur R., Jr. History of the African-American Athlete 1919 to 1946. New York: Amistad, 1991.
- Bak, Richard. Turkey Stearnes and the Detroit Stars. Wayne State University Press, 1994.
- Bruce, Janet. The Kansas City Monarchs. University Press of Kansas, 1985.
- Edwards, Harry. Sociology of Sport. The Dorsey Press, 1982.
- Gargalio, Erskine and Branch Mazerowski. Branch Rickey's Little Bluebook. Macmillan, 1995.
- Holway, John B. Black Ball Stars. Meckler Books, 1988.
- Holway, John B. Black Diamonds. Meckler Books, 1989.
- Hoose, Phillip M. Necessities. New York: Random House, 1989.
- Kahn, Roger. The Boys of Summer. Signet, 1971.

- McCoy, Frank. The Negro Baseball League: A Photographic History. Black Enterprise. 1993.
- McPherson, Barry D.; Curtis, James E.; and John W. Loy. Social Significance of Sports. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books.
- Overmeyer, James. Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles, 1993.
- Peterson, Robert. Only the Ball Was White. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Plimpton, George and Glenn Stout. The Best American Sports Writing. Houghton/Mifflin, 1997.
- Rogosin, Donn. Invisible Men. New York: Atheneum, 1985.
- Rambersad, Arnold. Jackie Robinson. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1997.
- Riley, W. James. Buck Leonard. New York: Carroll and Graf, 1995.
- Shirley, David. Satchel Paige. New York/Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1993.
- Shropshire, Kenneth L. In Black and White. New York University, 1996.
- Stout, Glenn and Dick Johnson. Jackie Robinson, Between the Base Lines. Woodford Press, 1997.
- Tygiel, Jules. Baseball's Great Experiment. Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Zang, David W. Fleet Walker's Divided Heart: The Life of Baseball's First Black Major Leaguer. University of Nebraska Press, 1984.

Periodicals

American History. "Baseball's Noble Experiment." Jackie Robinson signs with Brooklyn Dodgers. March/April, 1997, pp. 32-44.

The Hornbook Magazine. "The Story of Negro League Baseball." January/February, 1995, pp. 74-75.

School Library Journal. "Playing America's Game." April, 1993, pp. 128-29.

Sports Illustrated. "The Indifference Line." The old Negro league baseball players are old and forgotten. June 18, 1990, p. 14.

Sports Illustrated. "Time Worth Remembering Negro Baseball." July 6, 1981, pp. 46-48.

Sports Illustrated. "Negro League Baseball." February 23, 1998, pp. 28-29.

Sports Illustrated. "No Place in the Shade." Reprint of 1973 article on "Cool PaPa Bell." June 20, 1994.

Time. "In Kentucky, Memories of Black Baseball." August 10, 1981, pp. 4-6.