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A LONG WAYS FROM BROOKLYN: BASEBALL'S INTEGRATION IN THE
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(A succinct summary of the thesis not to exceed 300 words.)

During the years 1947 through 1957 significant events on baseball fields directed the path Americans took in the civil rights movement. A significant number of texts have been published on the integration of baseball but little research has been conducted on baseball's integration in the Midwest. Jackie Robinson is credited with breaking baseball's color barrier by first appearing in a Brooklyn Dodgers' uniform on April 15, 1947. Robinson's debut received media coverage in the Midwestern states of Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma. These same newspapers also covered the African-American ball players who integrated semi-pro and minor league teams in the Midwest. This thesis is directed by the research question of how baseball's integration was covered by the press at regional and national levels.

Keywords:

Baseball Integration, Major League Baseball, Negro League Baseball, minor league baseball, Denver Post Tournament, National Baseball Tournament, National Baseball Congress, World Series, Kansas City Monarchs, Bismarck Churchills, Birmingham Black Barons, Topeka Owls, Oklahoma City Indians, Texas League, Western Association, Tulsa Oilers, and Omaha Cardinals.

A LONG WAYS FROM BROOKLYN:

BASEBALL'S INTEGRATION IN THE MIDWEST

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Introduction

Baseball and journalism are two American institutions. They are interwoven in the social fabric of American society; each played a profound role in furthering race relations and the Civil Rights Movement in modern America. This unique story involves the games played by men and the press coverage of those games during a crucial period in state and national history over the course of three decades —the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s – and how the integration of baseball hastened the further desegregation in the United State.

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first black baseball player to don a Major League uniform in the twentieth century. Robinson’s debut was documented on the pages of the *Daily Oklahoman*, the *Wichita Beacon*, the *Tulsa Daily World*, the *Topeka Daily Capital*, and the *Denver Post*. Robinson may have been the first African-American in the Major Leagues, but literally thousands of miles to the west of Brooklyn, New York, black baseball pioneers, before and after Robinson, made lasting contributions to the sport they loved. There is not one single argument or conclusion to be made about how the Midwest press coverage of African-American ball players in the following pages. Rather the stories shared are meant to preserve the individual legacies of the players and sports writers and to educate readers on an unfamiliar group of athletes allowing them to draw their own conclusions and opinions of this era of baseball and baseball writing.

For every Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist like Arthur Daley, there are hundreds of local and regional journalists like B.A. Bridgewater, whose contributions to the first

draft of that history are not remembered by posterity. Thus, the story of the media coverage of civil rights in relation to the integration of professional baseball is one that deserves the attention of scholars. In this thesis, original research will add to the overall historiography of race, baseball, and mass media in the United States, and is intertwined with secondary sources to develop an historical landscape for baseball and journalism from 1934 through 1955.

This paper is divided into eight chapters. The first, “I’m My Own Boss While I’m Barnstorming,” provides a foundation for understanding the division of white and black baseball prior to Robinson’s debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. During this period, white and black ball players, including the legendary Satchel Paige, faced each other in out-of-season barnstorming games, exhibition games, and local baseball tournaments in locations such as Wichita, Kansas, and Denver, Colorado. The media coverage of these two tournaments in the *Wichita Beacon* and *Denver Post* are not only filled with racially driven phrases that illustrate the social zeitgeist of the time, they also document the early economic success of integrated games, which contributed to the events of 1947.

Chapter Two, “As Different as Ham and Sauerkraut” is focused on the debuts of Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby and the ways in which these players’ 1947 seasons were covered by the New York press, the black press, and Midwestern newspapers. Included in the accounts of Robinson’s and Doby’s debut seasons are personal narratives of each player, their teammates, and opponents. These accounts were retrieved from period newspapers and magazines as well as retrospective interviews and oral history collections.

Chapter Three, “The Last Season of Shadow Ball” dissects the last significant season of segregated Negro League baseball. The 1948 baseball season pitted a veteran Kansas City (Missouri) Monarchs squad led by manager Buck O’Neil against a young Willie Mays and the Birmingham (Alabama) Black Barons in a best-of-eight championship series of the Negro American League. The rosters of the 1948 Negro professional ball clubs were littered with future major league talent; it was the last time this would be the case in Negro baseball. The pages of the *Kansas City Call* served as a profound source for the 1948 baseball season.

“You’ve Got 10 of My Best Men,” the fourth chapter, tells the story of the 1951 Topeka (Kansas) Owls. The Owls, a member of the Class C Western Association minor league, were integrated by African Americans Milt Bohannon and Solly Drake. The primary research used in this section includes the reporting by the *Topeka Daily Capital’s* Dick Snider. Drake eventually make it to the major leagues, but before that, along with Bohannon, he integrated a minor league team, which ceased operations three seasons later.

Chapter Five, “Don’t Let Anybody Know They Hit Your Weak Spot,” documents the press coverage and historical significance of the 1952 and 1953 Texas League seasons. Dave Hoskins integrated the Texas League in 1952 with the Dallas (Texas) Eagles, which was quickly followed by the debut of Greason with the Oklahoma City (Oklahoma) Indians. At the beginning of the 1953 season, three of the eight Texas League teams began the season with African-American players, and the coverage by local newspapers document the challenges of the integration process. This chapter

highlights the sports reporting of Teddy Bridgewater for the *Tulsa Daily World* and the *Daily Oklahoman's* John Cronley.

The year 1954, the primary focus of Chapter Six, “I Wouldn’t Trade Mays for Two Musials,” played a dramatic role in the evolution of baseball and the evolution of black ball players. National and local press coverage is utilized to place the 1954 Major League season in the appropriate historical perspective. In 1954, the long reign of the New York Yankees ended when the Cleveland Indians took the American League pennant, while the long-suffering Giants managed to overcome the Brooklyn Dodgers. Other Major League teams integrated their squads during this important season. This chapter features an analytical look at Midwestern newspapers with regard to the sports coverage of the 1954 Major League season. An analysis of headlines for multiple newspapers was conducted to reveal how each paper depicted African-American ball players during the season.

Chapter Seven, “They Couldn’t Stay for Dinner,” discusses the 1955 American Association season, a season that saw several former African-American Major Leaguers demoted to the Triple-A level. The documentation of the season includes a profile of the Omaha Cardinal’s Tom Alston, who integrated the Omaha squad after playing for its parent club, the St. Louis Cardinals, in 1954.

The final chapter, “No One Remembers Who Wrote about Eisenhower ...” presents an overall evaluation of the media coverage of baseball during the tumultuous years from 1930 to 1960. This chapter contains several quotes and writing samples from

the national, local, daily, weekly, and black sports writers who covered America's pastime.

Notably, this text includes several examples of racist and offensive passages. Terms which could be considered offensive include, but are not limited to, "Negro" "Nigger" and "Colored." Most of these terms appearing in the text are direct quotes from newspapers or headlines, which at the time was more socially acceptable than today. The necessary exception to this practice occurs in referring to the teams, coaches, and players who made up the Negro National and Negro American leagues. After all, one of the key elements of this story is that there was a point when newspapers in America quit referring to Willie Mays, and his peers, as "negro ball players" and just considered them baseball players in their respective stories and headlines. This transition took place during a time when baseball was no longer played by lily-white teams and by teams playing shadow ball, a transition during which sports writers politicked for baseball integration and citizens sued for integrated schools.

Before Robinson took a single at bat at Ebbets Field, Paige took the field with white players at Wichita's Lawrence-Dumont Stadium. After Robinson's debut, Greason toed the rubber at Oklahoma City's Holland Park, Drake took swings at the plate at Owls Park in Topeka, and Alston played games in both Busch Stadium in St. Louis and Omaha's Johnny Rosenblatt Stadium. Regardless of the year or locations each of these and other African-American players found themselves playing and integrated baseball a long ways from Brooklyn.

Chapter One

“I’m My Own Boss While I’m Barnstorming.”

Years before Jackie Robinson became a household name in Brooklyn, LeRoy “Satchel” Paige was making a name for himself by barnstorming across the country. From 1934 to 1937, Paige played beside and against white ball players. During the years the same period, Paige played in Denver, Colorado; Bismarck, North Dakota; and Wichita, Kansas. The games played in these three cities and the press coverage sheds light on a key factor that led to the integration of Major League Baseball in 1947: Games featuring black and white ball players lined the pockets of tournament directors and team owners. Even during the Depression-ridden years of 1934–1937, paying baseball fans spent what little discretionary income they had on games pitting blacks and whites played against each other.

Paige, a native of Mobile, Alabama, first pitched professionally in 1926 with the Chattanooga (Tennessee) White Sox, a lower-level, segregated Negro League squad. By 1933, he was already considered a “gun for hire” and one of the most gifted pitchers at any level of baseball. In his own words, Paige described his hurling prowess, “It got so I could nip frosting off a cake with my fast ball.”¹ If there was one item that Paige truly appreciated, it was the almighty dollar. He quickly became a player who baseball owners realized was a significant attraction at the gate. As Negro League historian Robert Peterson wrote, “Paige’s drawing power was the difference between red and black ink on

¹ Larry Tye, *Satchel: The Life and Times of an American Legend*, (New York, Random House, 2010), 27.

the ledgers of marginal Negro clubs.”² Neil Churchill, a car salesman and owner of a semi-pro team in Bismarck, North Dakota, offered Paige a significant amount of money to come West during the summer of 1933 and integrate the white semi-pro baseball team in North Dakota. Paige accepted the offer and had an immediate impact on the success of the 1933 squad. Before signing Paige, Bismarck had a record of 24-12; after picking up Paige, the team finished 14-0-3. As sport journalist Tom Dunkel noted, Paige “Pitched in twelve of those seventeen games, winning six of seven starts.”³ The highlight of the season for Paige came in an August 13 start against rival Jamestown, a game in which the Bismarck nine won 3-2, with Paige collecting strikeouts against “an astonishing eighteen batters.”⁴

The next major Midwestern city where Paige dominated the sports headlines was Denver. The Colorado city was the home of a semi-pro baseball tournament established by the *Denver Post* in 1915. The 1934 *Denver Post* Tournament, also known as the Little World Series, featured a House of David squad featuring Paige and African-American catcher Cy Perkins. Paige had been having a successful season in 1934 in the Negro League ranks. While statistics from the Negro League were always sketchy at best (an issue that is addressed later at length), his numbers in 1934 in Negro League games included 14 wins, 2 losses, 144 strikeouts, and 26 walks.⁵ Paige and Perkins were the

² Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White: A History of Legendary Black Players and All-Black Professional Teams* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970), 131.

³ Tom Dunkel, *Color Blind: The Forgotten Team That Broke Baseball's Color Line*, (New York, Grove Press, 2013), 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

only black players on an all-white, House of David team, a team known for its long hair and beards and referred to as the “Whiskers” in multiple headlines in the *Post*.⁶

In cities and towns west of the Mississippi, semi-pro teams dominated the baseball scene during the 1930s. At the time, the only western major league city was St. Louis, home of the National League Cardinals and American League Browns. Therefore, cities in Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Colorado featured semi-pro teams that were sponsored and organized, for the most part, by local businesses and industries. Jim Klima explained how owners of big businesses and small mom-and-pop companies each recognized benefits of company teams. Klima wrote, “A winning baseball team created company pride, which of course led to higher productivity.”⁷ The biggest gates for these company teams pitted games against barnstorming teams like the House of David squad or the Kansas City Monarchs, a Negro League team. Both of these teams would travel to Denver in 1934 to play in what, at that time, was the most prodigious semi-pro tournament in the country.

On August 1, 1934, the *Denver Post* previewed the first day’s schedule for the double-elimination tournament by announcing the feature game with the following headline: “Kansas City Monarchs and Greely Advertisers in Feature Tilt at 8:30 Tonight.”⁸ The 1934 Monarchs roster was dominated by a “Who’s Who” of Negro ball players that included pitchers Chet Brewer, Charles Wilber “Bullet” Rogan, and Sam Crawford. All three often played the field as well, but the *Post* explained that it was their

⁶ “Large Crowd Sees Whiskers Defeat Eason Oilers, 6 to 1,” *Denver Post*, August 7, 1934.

⁷ John Klima, *Willie’s Boys: The 1948 Birmingham Black Barons, the Last Negro World Series, and the Making of a Baseball Legend*, (Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2009), 19.

⁸ “Kansas City Monarchs and Greely Advertisers in Feature Tilt at 8:30 Tonight.” *Denver Post*, August 1, 1934.

roles as mound men that made the Monarchs early favorites to win the tournament. The *Post* pontificated, “Pitching wins tournaments and that’s what the Monarchs have.”⁹ The same article claiming the Monarchs as favorites also exemplifies the way in which sports pages covered African-American players at that time. The Monarchs opponent (a squad from Greely, Colorado) was expected to feature their own black player. The *Post* previewed the “likely” starting pitcher for Greely by specifying his race, “Pistol Pete Albright pride of Five Points and...local Negro hurler” toed the rubber for the Advertisers.¹⁰ The Monarchs started their tournament with a 12-1 pounding of Albright and the Greely Advertisers, although Albright represented his race and local ball players well with 15 strikeouts and by driving in Greely’s only run.¹¹

Leonard Cahn of the *Post* was gracious with his description of both Albright’s pitching performance and the overall talents of the Monarchs nine. Cahn wrote, “Pistol Pete Albright, long the pride of Five Points also covered himself with glory in chucking them against his colored brethren.”¹² Albright’s mound work was decent, but it took a back seat to the hurling of Monarchs starter Chester Brewer. In the words of Cahn, “Chester Brewer, a big strapping right hander with an arm of steel and a sweet delivery, toyed with the Spudders.”¹³ Brewer finished the game with nineteen strikeouts while giving up just six hits to the Advertisers. In addition to the two pitching performances, the story of the game was the speed and base-running ability of the Monarchs players. The Monarchs took advantage of the Greely catcher – stealing bases at will. Cahn

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Greely Advertisers Downed By Colored Club, Score 12 to 1,” *Denver Post*, August 2, 1934.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

described the Monarchs exploits on the base paths, “They ran the bases like scared rabbits and capitalized on the weakness of Greely’s catching.”¹⁴ In his final assessment of the game and of the talent composing the Kansas City roster, Cahn was not shy with his approval or subtle in ensuring that the *Post* readers were clear that the Monarchs were comprised of African-American talent. “These colored lads, representing the finest ebony talent in the land, have a Ball Club!”¹⁵ The Monarchs continued to play well in the tournament, while Greely would finish with one win before being eliminated after the third game.¹⁶

The House of David opened its tournament with a 16-0 win over the Denver Italian Bakery followed by a win over the Eason Oilers, a company team from Oklahoma. The *Post* previewed the House of David’s star “Negro” pitcher by claiming that Paige was, “One of the outstanding hurlers in the Negro National League is said to be as fast as anybody in baseball. Yes, and that includes the fireball flingers in the big leagues, too.”¹⁷ Paige lived up to the pre-tournament hype by leading the Whiskered Warriors to a 6-1 victory. Cahn described Paige as “gangling and loose-jointed with a magic fireball, which claimed 14 strikeout victims, a hesitation delivery and a bagful of mound shenanigans.”¹⁸ On August 8, 1934, Paige dazzled 6,314 area baseball fans with another solid outing against the Humble Oilers, an oil company team from Texas. Paige threw a complete

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Pistol Pete Albright would earn the win (in relief) for the Greely team in its lone victory of the tournament an 8 to 7 decision over the team from Sydney, Nebraska. Leonard Cahn would described the performance by the local African-American hurler, “Pistol Pete Albright took the bull by the horns and won himself a ball game,” “Greely Advertisers Upset Sidney, Neb., By 8 to 7 Score,” *Denver Post*, August, 6, 1934.

¹⁷ “Large Crowd See Whiskers Defeat Eason Oilers, 6 to 1,” *Denver Post*, August 7, 1934.

¹⁸ Ibid.

game, 4-0 shutout, over the Texas squad, earning him the moniker “the Chocolate Whizbang” from the *Post*’s Cahn.¹⁹ Paige struck out a total of seventeen humble batsmen and, according to Cahn, stifled the Texas team with a heavy dose of “his famous black magic.”²⁰ After three games in the tournament, Paige had amassed thirty-two strikeouts over nineteen innings pitched and finished the contest against the Humble Oilers with a string of sixteen innings of scoreless ball intact.

The match-up everyone wanted to see took place on August 10 when the House of David faced the Kansas City Monarchs. Both teams entered the game with undefeated tournament marks. More than 11,000 fans attended the game which the *Post* covered the following day with the following headline: HOUSE OF DAVID DEFEATS MONARCHS, 2-1: RECORD CROWD SEES PAIGE HURL HIS THIRD VICTORY IN FIVE DAYS. Leonard Cahn exclaimed that Paige’s 2 to 1 decision over Chet Brewer and the Monarchs was witnessed by the “largest crowd in the twelve-year history of Merchant’s Park,” and that the game was “the standout of standouts in the nineteen-year history of the Little World Series.”²¹ Paige would be held out of the House of David’s 8-2 win over the Humble Oilers in the team’s next contest as they were saving him for the championship game and a possible rematch against the Monarchs. That match-up would come to fruition in the tournament’s title game played on August 14. However, Paige would not take the mound in the 2-0 victory by the House of David team. Walter Judge wrote the final tournament article for the *Post* and informed his readers that Paige and the

¹⁹ “Satchel Paige Hurls Whiskers to 4-0 Shutout Over Texans,” *Denver Post*, August 9, 1934.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ “House of David Defeats Monarch, 2-1: Record Crowd Sees Paige Hurl His Third Victory In Five Days,” *Denver Post*, August 11 1934.

rest of the House of David baseball team shared the first place prize money totaling \$6,400.²²

Despite the success of the House of David team and the record number of fans who bought tickets for the games involving the integrated team, a policy on mixed-race teams was formulated and implemented shortly following the tournament. According to author Tom Dunkel the policy stated, “Henceforth, black teams were welcome at the Denver Post Tournament, but only one such team per year. In addition, beginning in 1935, teams had to be either all-black or all-white. No more mixing of the races.”²³

Following the *Denver Post* Tournament, Paige spent the rest of the fall and winter of 1934 on the road barnstorming facing a team of All-Stars led by Major League great Dizzy Dean. Dean was one of many white baseball players who understood that playing in offseason barnstorming games increased their finances. Negro League owners and players survived on receipts from the gates in small barnstorming towns. As Janet Bruce explained in her history of the Kansas City Monarchs, “When the Monarchs barnstormed against local teams, they could expect at least 53 percent of the gate and hoped for as much as 80 or 90 percent.”²⁴ The Monarchs and owner J. L. Wilkinson found it easier to draw crowds in Midwestern communities than it was in their own hometown of Kansas City. Bruce wrote that barnstorming games “were played in rural communities, where competition for the entertainment dollar was not so fierce,” and that Wilkinson once

²² The Kansas City Monarchs would collect \$4,800 which represented the runner-up money. Both prizes were record amounts for the tournament to date. “House of David Wins Post Tournament Title: Kansas City Monarchs Lose Championship Game, 2 to 0,” *Denver Post*, August 14, 1934.

²³ Dunkel, 124.

²⁴ Janet Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball*, (Lawrence, Kan., University Press of Kansas, 1985), 60.

stated that “colored players were better attractions through the sticks and the cactus.”²⁵

Former Kansas City Monarch George Giles recalled the playing environment that barnstorming Negro teams would come across. Giles claimed, “Sometimes out in western Kansas they’d make the ballpark the day we got in town – some pasture.”²⁶ The former Monarch also commented on the rustic amenities on the road or sometimes complete lack of amenities. According to Giles, “I remember once in Colby, Kansas, we set tubs of water out in the sun to get them warm so we could take a bath.”²⁷

White Major League players like Dizzy Dean and, in later years, Bob Feller, began to understand the drawing power of Paige. As a gate attraction, fellow Negro League star Monte Irvin once described Paige’s fan appeal, “They would advertise him all over town when he was coming. People came from miles around to see him. He was the biggest name in the game. He was like Babe Ruth.”²⁸ The exact number of barnstorming games in which Paige participated has been lost in the pages of small town newspapers and undocumented games involving only black squads, but Thomas Bartle claimed that between 1901 to 1962, approximately 1,494²⁹ “Hungry Ball” games were scheduled.³⁰ Dean understood not only was Paige a draw at the gate but also Paige’s talent on the pitcher’s mound rivaled those of any Major League hurler. Dean once predicted, “If Old Satchel and I played together, we’d clinch the pennant mathematically

²⁵ Bruce, 74.

²⁶ Martha Jo Black and Chuck Schoffner. *Joe Black: More Than a Dodger* (Chicago, Academy Chicago Publishers, 2015), 104.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁸ Dixon, 11.

²⁹ Thomas Barthel, *Baseball Barnstorming and Exhibition Games, 1901-1962: A History of Off-Season Major League Play*, (Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 3.

³⁰ “Hungry Ball,” was a term used primarily by African-American players during the era of barnstorming games. Tye, 81.

by the Fourth of July and go fishin' until the World Series. Between us, we'd win sixty games."³¹ When Dean and Paige faced each other in a game, it was expected that fans witnessed pitching greatness firsthand. Bill Veeck remembered watching an exhibition game between the two greats. Veeck described a 1-0, thirteen-inning win by Paige's all-black team over Dean's all-white squad as being "The greatest pitchers' battle I have ever seen."³²

In 1935, Paige returned to Bismarck and once again play for the Churchill nine. This team went on to have one of the best win-loss records of any semipro team in the decade of the 1930s and to go on to win the first-ever National Baseball Tournament, held in Wichita, Kansas. The Bismarck team was so talented that a member of a traveling squad of American League All-Stars expressed, "I knew there were a lot of good Negroes in baseball. I just didn't know they were all in Bismarck."³³

Ray "Hap" Dumont brought a national semi-pro tournament to Wichita in 1935, a tournament that he expected "to outdo the Denver Post tourney in terms of both size and sizzle."³⁴ The first tournament featured thirty-two teams playing in a double-elimination bracket over two weeks. Dumont wanted a diverse group of teams, and he wanted the best semi-pro teams in the nation to participate. Thus, Dumont invited Satchel Paige and the integrated team from Bismarck to Wichita. To secure their attendance, Dumont paid "\$1,000 to get Churchill to bring his team and his crowd-pleasing pitcher."³⁵ Bismarck's

³¹ Ibid., 95.

³² Paul Dickson, *Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick* (New York, Walker Publishing Company, 2012), 45

³³ Dunkel, 120.

³⁴ Ibid., 132

³⁵ Ibid., 187

team was the main drawing card. The *Wichita Beacon* advertised the ball team from the north as “The greatest semi-pro club in the country.”³⁶ The same article hyping the Bismarck squad also pointed out the diverse dynamics of the squad: “They have a mixed team, six of the players being colored and nine of them coming from professional organized leagues.”³⁷ The overall field of the 1935 tournament in Wichita was diverse. The tournament featured an all-Japanese team from Stockton, California, and an all-Indian team from Wewoka, Oklahoma. Bismarck was the only integrated team in the field of thirty-two teams, but there were four all-black teams: the Austin (Texas) Centennials, San Angelo (Texas) Shepherders, Monroe (Louisiana) Monarchs and Memphis (Tennessee) Red Sox.

Paige’s integrated squad made its debut on the third day of the tournament, with a 6-4 win over the all-black club from Monroe, Louisiana.³⁸ Paige, “the King of pitchers,”³⁹ struck out sixteen Monroe batters “and thus established a new high for the national tournament in strikeouts.”⁴⁰ *Beacon* sports editor Jack Copeland wrote about Paige’s Wichita debut in his August 16 column “Looking ‘Em Over.” He referred to Paige as a “loose-jointed Negro star who is supposed to be a combination of the Dean brothers and Carl Hubbell.”⁴¹ He added that “Brother Paige,” according to Major League scouts, “would be a cinch to star in the big show if he were only white.”⁴² Bismarck went

³⁶ “Bismarck Boasts Fast Club For National Meet,” *Wichita Beacon*, August 4, 1935.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ The Monroe Colored Monarchs would be eliminated from the tournament after two straight losses as would the all-Japanese team from Stockton, California.

³⁹ “Satchel’ Paige Makes Debut in National Baseball Tournament Here Tonight: Record Crowd is Expected For Third Day of Tourney,” *Wichita Beacon*, August 15, 1935.

⁴⁰ “Paige Hurls Club to First Victory,” *Wichita Beacon*, August 16, 1935.

⁴¹ “Looking ‘Em Over,” *Wichita Beacon*, August 16, 1935.

⁴² *Ibid.*

on to win the tournament in Wichita easily and Paige, “the elongated colored star,”⁴³ had one of his best *documented* two week periods of his baseball career. Negro baseball legend Buck O’Neil described the efforts of Paige in the National Baseball Tournament. O’Neil remembered, “Satchel was blazing in Wichita, winning all four of his games and striking out sixty batters. I was lucky enough to see him beat the Duncan boys 5-2, striking out fourteen along the way. That seemed like a routine game for him.”⁴⁴

Running parallel to the success of the 1934 Denver Post Tournament, the 1935 National Baseball Tournament in Wichita saw fans flock to the gates to watch the black baseball stars play as “Bismarck games accounted for about 60 percent of the tournament gate.”⁴⁵ Yet, just like the tournament to the northwest, the Wichita tournament changed its policy on participation by black players. Later, the tournament that became the National Baseball Congress World Series (which completed its eighty-first tournament in 2015) banned integrated and all-black teams. That ban ended in 1945, when “the governing body for semi-professional baseball announced that it would allow Negro and mixed teams winning state titles to participate in its national championship.”⁴⁶

There is no question that Satchel Paige’s play in Bismarck, Denver, Wichita, and scores of other locations assisted in the eventual integration of Major League Baseball. As one of his biographers concluded, “His playing days in Bismarck would constitute not just a defining chapter in a storied baseball career, but a critical link on a chain stretching

⁴³ “Satchel Again Wins Battle: Cards Up to Game of Giants: Bismarck Undefeated After Fine Mound Duel,” *Wichita Beacon*, August 24, 1935.

⁴⁴ Buck O’Neil with Steve Wulf and David Conrads, *I Was Right On Time: My Journey From The Negro Leagues to the Majors*, (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996), 56.

⁴⁵ Dunkel, 209.

⁴⁶ Jules Tygel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 91.

from Bud Fowler to Jackie Robinson.”⁴⁷ Paige, however, was not the only variable player working in the 1930s for integration of baseball. Author Jules Tygel explained that while Paige was having success on the field there were two groups off the field who lobbied for the integration of baseball. According to Tygel, “Two groups that emerged in the late 1930s provided this impetus: a small coterie of black sportswriters and the Communist Party, one of the few groups concerned with civil rights issues during the Depression years.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Tye, 80.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

Chapter Two “As Different as Ham and Sauerkraut”

On August 30, 1934, the *Sporting News*, a publication seen by many baseball historians as an opponent of integration, published a letter to the editor from Robert L. Larkin of West Somerville, Massachusetts. Larkin made the case, not long after Satchel Paige had led the House of David team to a Denver Post Tournament championship, Negro players should be allowed to play major league baseball. Larkin established in his letter the business reasons for allowing blacks to play in the major league cities of New York, Chicago and Philadelphia, “Baseball can use colored ball player to advantage. He, and he alone, can draw his people to the ball parks.”¹ Larkin insisted that a black player would have the same positive impact at the gate as Jewish baseball stars had earlier, “The colored man is no different in this respect from the Jewish race. His people will pay to see him play, that’s a certainty.”² Larkin concluded his appeal by noting, “The sooner that professional baseball realizes this, the sooner they will find themselves richer in material and richer in respect to gate receipts.”³

The *Sporting News* was one of the few mainstream white-owned newspapers that published articles in favor of the integration of baseball. Black newspapers like Chicago’s *The Defender* and Baltimore’s *Afro-American* along with newspapers published by the American Communist Party, the *Daily Worker* and the *Voice*, were an example of the print media spearheading a movement for integration in organized baseball. Fay Young,

¹ Letter to the Editor, *Sporting News*, August 30, 1934.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

who worked for the *Defender* was the first sports editor employed by a black newspaper. Young became symbolic of how readers felt about *The Defender*, the largest black newspaper in the '30s. One *Defender* subscriber shared the impact the newspaper had on society and the civil rights movement, "The newspaper carries with it messages, dreams, and hopes and plans. They weren't just selling a newspaper. They were informing the people of a better world."⁴ Lest Rodney, the sports editor of the *Daily Worker*, according to Jules Tygel, "Unrelentingly attacked the baseball establishment," and ran headlines such as "CHANCE TO SEE GREAT JIM CROW COLORED STARS," when advertising Negro League ball games.⁵ The *Daily Worker* also played a profound role in pressuring the Pittsburgh Pirates to conduct a tryout for a group of colored players that included a young Negro League catcher, Roy Campanella. However, that tryout never took place. Despite the facts, black and Communist Party newspapers were promoting integration, not all Negro League players were supportive of that effort. Negro League star Buck Leonard once discussed the issue of integration with a *Daily Worker* reporter. Leonard stated, "We're going to leave that to you all to discuss. We're out here to play ball. We're not out here to demonstrate or anything like that."⁶

By 1947, two influential baseball men agreed with the economic rationale Larkin outlined in his letter to the *Sporting News*. Those two people were a part of the baseball

⁴ Ethan Michaeli. *The Defender: How The Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America; From the Age of the Pullman Porters to the Age of Obama*, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), 122. The Communist Party worked to achieve integration in other avenues as well. The Communists' assisted in forming the Congress of Industrial Organizations, picketed at New York Yankees games, and pressured all three New York team owners after the passage of Quinn-Ives Act in New York. The Quinn-Ives Act banned discrimination in hiring in New York. The Communist Party then put added pressure on Branch Rickey to integrate the Dodgers.

⁵ Tygel, 37.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

establishment, two men who were considered as rebels and outsiders. Branch Rickey and Bill Veeck had visions for the game that alienated their peers, especially by their position on baseball integration and the signing of Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby in the National League and American League respectively.

The baseball establishment often denied the existence of an official agreement to deny African American baseball players the opportunity to play in the major leagues. Yet, as baseball historian Charles DeMotte concluded, “During the years 1942 to 1943, Minor League clubs were eager to sign black ballplayers, but knew that Commissioner (Kennesaw Mountain) Landis would block their efforts.”⁷ Landis often pointed the finger at team owners and managers for the absence of black baseball players, and they pointed the finger right back at him. Pete Reisler stressed, “While officially there was never a boycott against the entry of Negro players into organized baseball, everyone the least bit conversant with the situation knew there was a close-knitted understanding among the owners to keep the sepia superbras on their own side of the Jim Crow fence.”⁸ Regardless, of whether the barrier was a result of an official policy or a back-room deal – it was a barrier that did exist until 1946 and it existed until after the death of Commissioner Landis.

The color barrier in baseball was something that baseball management attempted to justify or defend in print. Race had long been an issue to players, especially those from the South. Even rumors of race played a part in how players perceived each other.

⁷ Charles DeMotte, *Baseball & The American Society: How a Game Reflects the American Experience*, (San Diego, Cognella Academic Publishing, 2014), 154.

⁸ Jim Reisler, *Black Writers/Black Baseball: An Anthology of Articles from Black Sportswriters Who Covered the Negro Leagues*, Revised Edition (Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Company, 2007), 95.

Baseball Hall of Famer Ty Cobb, was once asked by a reporter the reason for refusing to room with Babe Ruth on an All-Star tour, Cobb responded, “I’ve never bedded down with a nigger, and I’m not going to start now.”⁹ Former Brooklyn Dodgers manager Burleigh Grimes once stated integration in baseball would “never happen as long as there are segregated trains and restaurants.”¹⁰ Cy Slapnicka, a scout for the Cleveland Indians was not very subtle in a concession he made shortly after watching the black stars of the Bismarck Churchills and Kansas City Monarchs play, “We wish we could find a chemical to bleach some of those colored boys. We could take some of those players up to the majors and win a pennant with ‘em.”¹¹ A young Joe Black, who would later play for the Brooklyn Dodgers, once recalled how he felt when a scout told him he had Major League talent, but not the correct skin color for the Majors. Black reported a baseball scout told him, “Sure, you’re a good player . . . but don’t you understand? Colored guys don’t play baseball.”¹² Black summarized his feeling after hearing those words. “A left hook to my jaw by Joe Louis or a bullet into my body would not have pained me more than those words.”¹³

There was a significant amount of pressure placed on baseball’s infrastructure to integrate, but until Rickey signed Jackie Robinson to a minor league deal in the 1945, offseason the pressure had gone unheeded. An area of academic research documented from several perspectives is the question of why Robinson was selected as the player by

⁹ Jerome Holtzman, *No Cheering In The Press Box* (New York., Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1973), 54.

¹⁰ Chris Lamb, *Conspiracy of Silence: Sportwriters And The Long Campaign To Desegregate Baseball*, (Lincoln, Neb., University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 99.

¹¹ Dunkel, 200.

¹² Black, 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 34.

Rickey in order to break the color barrier. There were after all several other options, including Satchel Paige. Two major differences between Robinson and Paige were their age, and also Robinson was a position player. The real turning point in the decision came down to their individual personalities. According to Larry Tye, “Jackie had the table manners whites like, Satchel was rough-hewn and ungovernable.”¹⁴ Tye also added in his biography on Paige that Veeck had considered signing Paige before Doby “but he had worried that Satchel’s advanced age and roguish reputation would let baseball’s old guard muddy the waters by charging that his interest in black players was promotional and mercenary.”¹⁵ When it came to comparing Robinson to Doby, personalities once again served as benchmarks used to measure the two men. According to Pete Reisler, Doby and Robinson both were “pioneers; both of them are clean-cut fellows. Good, young men. Yet, they are as different as ham and sauerkraut, when it comes to personalities.”¹⁶

In 1947, there were 1,769 daily newspapers in the United States, and on the sports pages of those papers the major league debuts of Robinson and Doby were documented in headlines, game reports, and columns.¹⁷ Most of the articles that appeared in the papers in the Midwest came from reports provided by the Associated Press. Yet, the feelings of the sports editors in papers often reflected either support for integration or racist feelings against blacks and whites sharing a ball field. For example, the *Houston Chronicle* ran the following headline previewing Robinsons’ debut, “Jackie Robinson Certain He Can Go In Big Loop.”¹⁸ In this AP article, Robinson provides insight into the pressure he was

¹⁴ Tye, 181.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁶ Reisler, 181.

¹⁷ Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff. *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*. (New York: Knopf, 2006), 31.

¹⁸ “Jackie Robinson Certain He Can Go in Big Loop,” *Houston Chronicle*, April 11, 1947.

feeling before the game, “I am on the spot and I know it.”¹⁹ A second feature in the *Chronicle* after Robinson’s hitless debut for the Dodgers, described further the complexities of being the first black player on an all-white team. Robinson claimed, “It is not a question of the players getting along with me. I will be on the spot to see if I can get along with them.”²⁰

B.A. Bridgewater, a distinguished sports writer for the *Tulsa Daily World* wrote a daily column featured on the main sports page titled, “Telling the World of Sports.” Bridgewater’s writing will help provide a foundation of source material in a later chapter on integration on Tulsa’s minor league team. Yet, a telling sign of perhaps some of the racial bias on the subject of integration was the fact that not one of Bridgewater’s columns in 1947 featured Robinson as the central focus. The *Daily World* provided a complimentary adjective in its otherwise neutral headline announcing Robinson’s debut. On April 11, 1947, the following headline appeared on the Daily World’s sports page: “Robinson Gets Chance With Brooklyn: Brilliant Negro Infielder First to Reach Majors.”²¹ Most newspapers don’t list names of staff members giving credit or attribution to the editing of headlines, but the writer of this headline – similar to several other examples to come – followed the common practice of labeling Robinson as a Negro. The Tulsa newspaper’s neighbor, Oklahoma City’s the *Daily Oklahoman*. also undertook this practice, In this newspapers coverage of Robinson’s debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers the editors of the *Daily Oklahoman* included the following phrase in its AP story, “The

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Robinson Fails To Hit, But Drives In 3 Runs,” *Houston Chronicle*, April 12, 1947.

²¹ “Robinson Gets Chance With Brooklyn: Brilliant Negro Infielder First to Reach Majors,” *Tulsa Daily World*, April 11, 1947.

Negro in three previous attempts had done no better than hit into a double play, roll to shortstop and loft an easy fly to left.”²²

A much different range of press coverage concerning Robinson’s debut was found in the black press in the Midwest. Two of the most prominent black newspapers in 1947 were the *Call* out of Kansas City and the *Omaha Star* in Omaha, Nebraska. An Associated Negro Press story ran in the *Call* on May 30, 1947, featuring an early assessment of Robinson’s play by Dodgers’ manager Burt Shotton. Shotton, a fill-in manager for the suspended Leo Durocher, called Robinson a “bright boy” and claimed that his budding Negro star, “Hits well and he’s fast. He can score for you.”²³ Shotton also expressed the issue at hand for Robinson facing the challenge of being the player selected to integrate Major League Baseball. According to Shotton, “He’ll make the grade if he’s given a fair chance. But he’s under terrific pressure from all sides.”²⁴ In a June 13, 1947, edition of the *Call*, the paper gave credit to Robinson for the economic impact seen at the gate. According to the article in *The Call*, Branch Rickey was “Most happy at Robinson’s ticket window batting average in drawing large numbers of curious whites and loyal Negro fans who are setting crowd records at Dodger games.”²⁵

The *Omaha Star* was more celebratory about Robinson than most white papers. On April 9, 1947, in an article “Decorum Due on Robinson,” the editors of the *Star*, left very little doubt on the significance of Robinson breaking the color barrier in baseball.

²² “Dodgers Squeeze Past Braves, 5-3: Reiser Double Sends in Tying and Winning Runs,” *Daily Oklahoman*, April 14, 1947.

²³ “Dodger Boss Speaks of Jackie Robinson: Shotton Calls Him Team’s Bright Spot,” *The Call*, May 30, 1947.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ “Bulging Crowd at Dodgers’ Games Attributed to Presence of Jackie,” *The Call*, June 13, 1947.

The sport's edition told readers, "Mr. Robinson is definitely an all-around athlete and is an encouragement to our young boys as well as a credit to our race."²⁶ In the following week's edition, Charles Roper compared Jackie Robinson to Negro boxing legend Joe Louis, "the Brown Bomber." Roper wrote, "More educated and just as clean living as Louis according to all reports, Robinson as the first Negro in organized ball now is in a sport where he can blaze the same kind of trail for our people."²⁷ Roper also sang the praises of Robinson in an article that described the failed attempt made by members of the St. Louis Cardinals to boycott a game against the Brooklyn Dodgers and their sepi first baseman. In a May 16, 1947, article Roper quoted the National League President Ford Frick. Frick stated, "The Brooklyn first baseman whose intelligence and degree of education are far beyond that of the average ball player has behaved himself in an exemplary manner."²⁸

Historian Chris Lamb in his book *Conspiracy of Silence: Sportswriters and The Long Campaign To Desegregate Baseball*, poignantly described the difference between how black newspapers and America's mainstream dailies covered the debut of Jackie Robinson. According to Lamb, "Unlike mainstream newspapers that said little after the initial story, black newspapers played up the story on their front pages and on their sports pages for weeks."²⁹ Not all of the accounts in black newspapers were overwhelmingly positive. The *Defender* did celebrate Robinson's debut with "with a strip of photographs of Robinson across the front page and a full page inside," but it also featured a stinging

²⁶ "Decorum Due on Robinson," *Omaha Star*, April 9, 1947.

²⁷ "Robinson is Seen Emulating Lewis: New Dodger Is Expected to Overcome Racial Obstacles in Majors," *Omaha Star*, April 18, 1947.

²⁸ "National League Averts Strike of Cardinals Against Robinson's Presence in Baseball: Frick, Breadon, Together Squash Anti-Negro Action," *Omaha Star*, May 16, 1947.

²⁹ Lamb, 289.

shot at Rickey made by Fay Young in his column, “Rickey is no Abraham Lincoln or Franklin D. Roosevelt, and we won’t accept him as the dictator of Negro baseball.”³⁰

Lamb also provided a quality example of writing that had racial undertones. Lamb’s book provided a quote from a column written by Al Parsley that appeared in a copy of the *Sporting News*, “Robinson is definitely dark. His color is the hue of ebony. By no means can he ever be called a brown bomber or a chocolate soldier.”³¹

The second African American player to appear in a Major League Baseball game, and perhaps the most often overlooked, was Larry Doby, who integrated the Cleveland Indians. And just as Doby was overlooked so too was the owner of the Indians, Bill Veeck. However, the story of these two men is deserving of the attention that was granted to Rickey and Robinson. Unfortunately, their names did not appear on the pages of Midwest newspapers nearly as frequent as did the two Dodgers. Doby himself explained the lack of newspaper coverage of his debut and his career when compared to Jackie Robinson. According to Doby, “You didn’t hear much about what I was going through because the media didn’t want to repeat the same story. ‘I heard ‘nigger’ so many times in the outfield that I thought it was my middle name.”³² The black newspaper published in Kansas City did, however, provide some coverage of Doby’s debut. In a July 11, 1947, article with the headline, “Larry Doby Take Place With Cleveland Indians: Scouts Say He Has All Attributes of Great Ball Player,” the thought process that Veeck took to integrate his Cleveland roster was explained in the owners own words. Veeck stated in the article, “I don’t think any man who has the ability should be barred from major league

³⁰ Michaeli, 275.

³¹ Ibid., 296.

³² Paul Dickson, 129.

baseball on account of his color. The entrance of Negroes into both major leagues is not only inevitable, it is here.”³³

A significant article in terms of column inches was published in the July 16, 1947, edition of the *Sporting News* about Doby’s signing and his debut with the Indians. Veeck explained in that article the significance of Robinson’s behavior and success with the Dodgers impacting his decision to integrate the American League with the Indians. Veeck was quoted, “Robinson has proved to be a real big leaguer, so I wanted to get the best available Negro boy while the getting was good.”³⁴ Veeck also gave credit to President Harry Truman’s goal of integrating the military after World War II and later issuing Executive Order 9981, in 1948, which led to the desegregation of the U.S. armed forces, as a plausible example of why integration of baseball could and must succeed. Columnist Oscar V. Ruhle quoted the Cleveland owner, “I am operating under the belief that the war advanced us in regards to racial tolerance.” When Doby made his debut with the Indians, Satchel Paige was once again passed over for a roster spot on a Major League squad as were other talented prospects like Monte Irvin.

Like Robinson, Doby had his doubters. Former Major League star Rogers Hornsby was not impressed with Veeck’s signing of Doby. In a collection of oral histories from former Major League players Hornsby offered the following opinion, “Bill Veeck did the Negro race no favor[s] when he signed Larry Doby to a Cleveland contract. If he were white he couldn’t be considered good enough to play with a semi-pro

³³ “Larry Doby Take Place With Cleveland Indians: Scouts Say He Has All Attributes of Great Ball Player,” *The Call*, July 11, 1947.

³⁴ “Daredevil Doby Put On Display as First Negro in American League,” *The Sporting News*, July 16, 1947.

club.”³⁵ Doby was the first African American player to move straight from Negro League Baseball into the Major League Baseball without playing in the minors, and one of only six to do so. Doby felt that his overall playing experience, though difficult, was better because he did not have to play in minor league towns with white players – in front of white fans – in the fashion that Jackie Robinson had to do while playing with the Montreal Royals. Doby shared, “I look at myself as more fortunate than Jack. If I had gone through hell in the minors, then I’d have to go through it again in the majors. Once was enough!”³⁶ Doby’s teammate, Al Rosen, clarified that the general atmosphere at games were often not pleasant for Doby. and recalled, “He went through a lot those early years with us. I saw a great deal of prejudice toward him, and Doby didn’t do anything to exacerbate it. I always said that Doby had a tougher time than Jackie.”³⁷

Before Robinson and Doby made their respective debuts – even for several years to follow – professional baseball, “Was steeped – perhaps a better word would be pickled – in tradition.”³⁸ Although it would take time for some of the traditions of baseball to change with the times, the all mighty dollar helped change some of those traditions; while the addition of African American ball players assisted in new traditions being formed. Players, coaches and front office personnel of the generation of Robinson and Doby were best at describing how old barriers were broken. Baseball Historian Roger Kahn shared one of the reasons why Rickey was so confident that his grand plan for integration would

³⁵ Rick Swaine, *The Integration of Major League Baseball: A Team by Team History* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Co, 2009), 69.

³⁶ Joseph Thomas Moore, *Larry Doby: The Struggle of the American League’s First Black Player* (New York, Dover Publications, 1988), 47.

³⁷ Bill Madden, *1954 The Year Willie May and the First Generation of Black Superstars Changed Major League Baseball Forever*, (Boston, MA, Da Capo Press, 2014), 151.

³⁸ Peterson, 175.

work. Kahn quotes Rickey, “Ballplayers love money. They love World Series checks. When they see how good this colored boy is, when they realize he can get them into the World Series, they’ll force me to make him a Dodger.”³⁹ Not only did players quickly come to terms with the talent of Robinson, so too did the ticket-buying baseball fans. All National League baseball owners reaped rewards from Robinson’s play. In Robinson’s first season in Major League Baseball drew 1,735,356, fans to ball games in which the Dodgers played, “Which was some 35,000 more than the paid total at Ebbets Field,” for Dodger home games.⁴⁰ Superstars from the era each had memories from integration era and often were not shy with those memories whether they were positive or negative and regardless of whether racial bias was apparent in their recollections. St. Louis Cardinal and member of the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame admitted the difficulty that existed when the game integrated. Musial shared with Kahn some of the racial bickering that took place in the first integrated Cardinal-Dodger contests, “First of all, everybody has racial feelings. We don’t admit it. We aren’t proud of it. But it’s there.”⁴¹ New York Yankee legend Mickey Mantle, an Oklahoma native, explained how his background affected his take on integration. “You have to remember, growing up in Oklahoma, I scarcely saw a black man. I knew I wanted to play major league ball, but it didn’t seem at the time that what Jackie Robinson had done was going to make much difference in my life.”⁴²

³⁹ Roger Kahn, *The Era 1947-1957: When the Yankees, the Giants, and the Dodgers Ruled the World*. (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 33.

⁴⁰ Attendance Figures from Red Barber, *1947 When All Hell Broke Loose In Baseball*, (New York, De Capo Press, 1982), 290.

⁴¹ Kahn, 56.

⁴² Allen Barra, *Mickey and Willie: Mantle and Mays, the Parallel Lives of Baseball’s Golden Age*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2013), 67.

The fact that Robinson's and Doby's baseball debuts influenced the sport and society is undeniable, but it is also undeniable that it took several more years for their debuts to impact professional baseball and society at large on all levels. However, the consequences quickly affected Negro League Baseball. Once Major League Baseball owners saw the economic impact that black ball players had on the game, it became quite clear to Negro League owners that their way of doing business would never be the same. Professional baseball in the Negro League ranks would never be the same after the 1948 season and its demise was ordained.

Chapter Three **“The Last Season of Shadow Ball”**

Jackie Robinson’s signing with the Brooklyn Dodgers served as a precursor to two large-scale trends in professional baseball. Once Robinson proved he could play at the Major League level, the door to major league baseball opened to other gifted African American athletes and the doors to professional Negro League were closed and locked forever. Prior to signing with the Dodgers, Robinson had been playing with the Kansas City Monarchs, one of the top Negro League organizations, and the Monarchs received no compensation for losing Robinson to Brooklyn. This fact is also evidence of some issues that caused the Negro Leagues to have a constant revolving door of teams, owners, and players.

Historian Robert Peterson serves as the gatekeeper to the history of Negro League baseball and has written one of the most authoritative histories of black baseball titled *Only The Ball Was White*. It is difficult to pinpoint the beginning of black baseball history, but Peterson suggested that “It must have been in the early 1880s, perhaps even in the late Seventies.”¹ Peterson also described the structural problems with which early Negro Leagues dealt, “Leagues were born and died within a single season, franchises were often shifted from city to city in the middle of the summer, and a number of teams had a brief fling at glory in the sun of big-time Negro baseball before returning to the scrubby obscurity of semipro lots.”² Owners of some of the first black baseball teams had

¹ Peterson, 34.

² Ibid., 80.

connections to the shady side of business dealings including the numbers racket. The mainstream press rarely covered Negro League baseball games, with the exception of annual East-West All-Star games. Early attempts by the press to cover Negro League games often exemplified the level of esteem, or lack of, that sportswriters had for black baseball. Peterson summarized that even in black newspapers like the Chicago's *Defender* sports writers did not give travelling Negro League teams the proper attention they deserved as reporters always referred to black teams as semipro, even when they were playing 200 games a year, as some of them did about the time of World War I."³ Peterson also concluded that coverage in the papers was not much better as the most successful early Negro team the Cuban Giants were referred in newspapers as "darkies" and the "Celeron Chocolates."⁴

The earliest glimpse that the Negro League baseball could succeed at a high level came in the year 1924. At that time the two strongest organized leagues for black baseball teams were the Negro National League and the Eastern Colored League. These two affiliations had a total of sixteen teams and had the champions of their leagues face each other in the first Negro League World Series. The Negro National League had eight teams representing Midwest and Southern cities. Two teams in the league, the Kansas City Monarchs and Birmingham Black Barons will be highlighted during the discussion of the 1948 Negro League season, however, in 1924 the more successful of the two were the Monarchs. Kansas City won the Negro National League with a record of 55-22 representing a winning percentage of .714, finishing ahead of the Chicago American

³ Ibid., 63.

⁴ Ibid., 51.

Giants who finished second with a record of 49-24.⁵ The Monarchs were led that season by Bullet Rogan and Hurley McNair who combined to hit 14 home runs and drive in 101 runs in 1924.⁶ The Monarchs opponent in the 1924 World Series were the Hillsdale (Pa.) Daises, (also referred to as the Philadelphia Giants) who won the Eastern Colored League title with a record of 47-22. The Daises outpaced the second place Baltimore Black Sox, who finished with a record of 30-19.⁷ The Daises were led offensively in 1924 by Judy Johnson and Clint Thomas who combined to hit 13 home runs and drove in 102 runs.⁸ The 1924 Negro League World Series was schedule to be a ten game series that was played in four different cities. Games 1 and 2 were played in Philadelphia with the two teams splitting both games. Games 3 and 4 were played in a neutral stadium in Baltimore. Game 3 finished in a 6-6 tie after being called in the 13th inning due to darkness and Hillsdale won Game 4, 4-3. Games 5-7 were played in Kansas City with the Monarchs winning two of three. The series finished with three games in Chicago with Kansas City shutting out Hillsdale 5-0 in Game 10 to win the series five game to four.

After the 1924 Negro World Series the Kansas City Monarchs went on to become the class of the Negro League clubs. Initially, the Monarchs were well known as a barnstorming team, a solid gate attraction when playing Negro League teams on the road. They were also the first team to use portable lights for night games, and of course would be the team where the legendary Satchel Paige and the young Jackie Robinson applied their baseball skills. Former Monarchs' player and manager Buck O'Neil once

⁵ Peterson, Negro National League Records, 258.

⁶ Rogan and McNair hitting statistics, www.baseballreference.com., accessed January 8, 2015.

⁷ Eastern Colored League Records, Peterson, 259.

⁸ Johnson and Thomas hitting statistics, www.baseballreference.com., accessed October 16, 2015.

summarized the reason that the Monarchs were so successful against teams made up of former and current white professionals in barnstorming games played in small hamlets, big cities, and tournaments, like the *Denver Post* and Wichita's National Baseball Congress. According to O'Neil, "We won the majority of those games – not because we were better. The major league ballplayers couldn't afford to twist an ankle. We wanted to prove that major leaguers were not superior, and that Negro Leaguers were not inferior. So we'd stretch that single into a double."⁹ The Kansas City Monarchs became such a household name across the country that African American youth looked at the Monarchs in the same awe that young whites looked at the New York Yankees. Former Monarch Jessee Williams explained the significance of the Monarchs in the lives of a young Negro player's dreams, "It was the ambition of every black boy to be a Monarch, just as it was for every white boy to become a Yankee. That was the tradition back then. You didn't play ball till you became a Monarch."¹⁰ When the Negro Leagues reached their peak black baseball as a business, "was the third-largest black industry, behind black insurance and cosmetics."¹¹ Despite all the success that the Monarchs had in the Kansas City community and on the road, by the end of 1947, what little attention was given to the Negro League team by black newspapers was shifted to Robinson and the other black Major League players.

Peterson effectively summarized the significance of the 1947 Major League Season and the impact that it had on the business of Negro League Baseball. Peterson

⁹ Barthel, 4.

¹⁰ Janet Bruce, 40.

¹¹ Steve Jacobson, *Carrying Jackie's Torch: The Players Who Integrated Baseball – and America*, (Chicago, Lawrence Hill Books, 2007), 12.

wrote, “For the Negro leagues, the season of 1947 was like the first of trickling pebbles of an avalanche to come.”¹² At first, the 1947 Major League season had very little impact on the Negro League Season of the same year. By 1947 in terms of teams, the Negro National League consisted of just six teams. The Eastern Colored League had been replaced by the six-team Negro American League. Official records and standings are not available for either League in 1947, but the New York Cubans represented the National League in the World Series, defeating the American League representative, the Cleveland Buckeyes four games to one. Over the course of that 1947 season, Peterson claimed that attendance at Negro League games remained strong: “crowds of 12,000-15,000 were not uncommon at Negro National and Negro American League games.”¹³ He augmented his claim that business was still good for Negro League clubs because, “Six of the sixteen Negroes who were in organized baseball that year were youngsters without previous professional experience, and most of the Negro clubs still had their top stars.”¹⁴ He also argued that a trend, however, that would impact future Negro League business had already started in 1947 as the “Negro press’ interest in how the black players in organized baseball were faring overshadowed their coverage of the Negro leagues.”¹⁵ This list of players consisted of Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby, but also included Roy Campanella and Dan Bankhead.

In May 1948, the Kansas City Monarchs were scheduled to open the season against the Cleveland Buckeyes. By that time, six African American players had made

¹² Peterson, 201.

¹³ Ibid., 197.

¹⁴ Ibid., 201.

¹⁵ Ibid., 197.

their Major League debuts. Two of those six players, Hank Thompson and Willard Brown, had received chances to play in Major League Baseball, but were going to be on the Monarch's roster when the 1948 season opened. On August 6, 1947, legendary black reporter Sam Lacey in his column *Looking 'Em Over*, featured Thompson and Brown in the *Baltimore Afro-American*. St. Louis Browns manager Muddy Ruel provided Lacey with a scouting report on Hank Thompson, "Thommy is the more versatile. He can hit to all fields, can drag the ball and looks to be rather fast from the plate."¹⁶ Ruel also provided a scouting report for the power-hitting Brown, "Willard is the bigger of the two and has the greater power. He figures to be the more valuable man to use at the moment because we don't have the long ball hitter every team needs."¹⁷

Thompson and Brown made their Major League debuts with the St. Louis Browns in July 1947 to become the third and fourth respective Negro ball players in the majors. Ruel would follow Burt Shotton and Lou Boudreau as baseball men with the chance to manage a roster including an African-American player. Ruel shared with Lacey his feelings about the additions of Thompson and Brown to the St. Louis squad, "I don't propose to prejudice any ballplayer who comes to me. That's how I hope to become a successful manager and that's how I intend to be able to live with myself."¹⁸ Although at face value, Ruel welcomed his two new players with open arms, the two Browns players did not have the success that Robinson and Doby had. Brown hit just .179 in 21 games,

¹⁶ Reisler, 22

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

while Thompson fared slightly better hitting .256 in 27 games with the St. Louis American League Club.¹⁹

Thompson and Brown, were quickly released by St. Louis and were two veterans on a 1948 Monarchs' roster that also featured a pair of young infielders and future Major League players Curt Roberts and Gene Baker. The *Call* previewed the Monarchs season opener and described the Monarchs as "Roster filled with long ball clouters," and "Staffed with deft ball handlers said to display amazing versatility in fielding and in tossing the old apple."²⁰ In front of close to 15,000 fans the Monarchs opened the 1948 season with a 5-4 victory over Cleveland as Kansas City turned three double plays.²¹ Thompson and Brown combined for five hits in eight at bats in the season opener and Monarchs would go on to sweep the Cleveland squad in the six game season opening series.²² Kansas City opened the 1948 campaign with twelve wins in its first 16 games; while they were doing so the Birmingham Black Barons were off to an impressive fifteen and seven start behind a talented seventeen year-old by the name of Willie Mays.

The Birmingham Black Barons first fielded a team in 1920, but in 1948 the Black Barons featured a roster rivaled by few. At the core of that roster was Mays, who at the age of 17 was already showing early signs of having Hall of Fame type talent, which led the *Birmingham World* to refer to Mays as the, "sparkplug of the ginger-skinned Barons."²³ Birmingham in 1948 was far more segregated than the home of the Monarchs.

¹⁹ Thompson and Brown hitting statistics, www.baseballreference.com., accessed November 18, 2015.

²⁰ "Monarchs To Make Debut Versus Buckeyes," *The Call*, May 7, 1948.

²¹ Game scores and attendance figures, "K.C. Beat Cleveland Before Near 15,000: Monarchs Beat Buckeyes 4-2," *The Call*, May 21, 1948.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Klima, 193.

While the *Birmingham World* was covering the Black Barons that kind of coverage rarely found its way onto the pages of the news, Birmingham's mainstream newspaper for whites was, "staff-generated stories rarely quoted Negroes or featured photographs of them."²⁴ Also when Birmingham's minor league team (the white) Barons played home games "Black fans were admitted only into the distant right field bleachers, which acquired two distasteful nicknames, the 'Coal Bin,' and 'Crow's Nest.'"²⁵

Mays was a rookie for the Black Barons in 1948, but so was a young man from Atlanta, Georgia, Bill Greason. Greason discussed the issue of segregation in Alabama, as being a reason that the Black Baron players cherished the opportunity to compete in games on the road. According to Greason, "We always felt we were going to be scouted, that our best chance to be seen was on the road instead of Birmingham because of the segregation."²⁶ While the Black Barons had young talent in Mays and Greason, they also had a pair of veteran infielders in Artie Wilson and Piper Davis. The Black Barons and Monarchs met for the first time in 1948 in early June. Later in his life, Bill Greason summarized the feelings existing between the two teams bonded by a game and their skin color. Greason recalled, "Black ballplayers, we typically stuck together. We didn't dislike the Monarchs."²⁷ In much the same tone, years later, Buck O'Neil reminisced on how Willard Brown's failed attempt to survive in the majors spearheaded the big season of production the slugger had with Kansas City. O'Neil reflected, "Willard was bitter, you can believe that. He knew that at twenty-eight he'd never get another crack at the big

²⁴ Roberts, 306.

²⁵ Klima, 71.

²⁶ Klima, 105.

²⁷ Ibid., 82.

leagues.”²⁸ On June 11, 1948, the *Call*, briefly reported the results of the Monarchs being swept in a double-header: “They lost a twin-bill and first place in the Negro American league standings as the hard hitting Birmingham Black Barons, who defeated them 4-3 in the opener, and 5-4 in the nightcap.”²⁹ The two teams would meet again in August this time with the Monarchs sweeping two games by scores of 6 to 2 and 1 to 0.³⁰ Artie Wilson and Willie Mays led the Black Barons into the Negro World Series. Wilson led the league in hitting with a batting average of .428. Mays’ offensive numbers were far from mind blowing with just 16 official hits on the season, but his defensive play and spirit sparked the Black Barons. Brown led the league in home runs. However, even before Negro American League playoff series was over, which Birmingham won four games to three, sports writers and owners were already predicting the end of Negro League baseball.³¹

One of the owners, who publicly began sharing the opinion that the days for Negro League Baseball could be numbered, was the Newark Eagles’ Effa Manley. In an article picked up by the *Call* on September 10, 1948, Manley claimed, “This will be the last year for the Eagles the way things are looking now. We just can’t keep bucking the financial reverses and keep the team intact.”³² Manley claimed the Eagles were experiencing “Smaller and smaller gates and our income has dwindled to the point where it is impossible to continue to maintain the club.”³³ In the following week’s edition of the

²⁸ O’Neil, 183.

²⁹ “Birmingham Defeats Monarchs in Twin Bill: Barons Capture 1st Place,” *The Call*, June 11, 1948.

³⁰ “*Sport Light*,” *The Call*, August 6, 1948.

³¹ The Black Barons would move on to face the Homestead Grays in the final Negro World Series ever played, which the Grays won in five games.

³² “May Be Last Year For Newark Eagles,” *The Call*, September 10, 1948.

³³ *Ibid.*

Call, sports columnist John L. Johnson wrote that owners of Negro League clubs needed to change the way they did business and to quit crying over sour grapes about players in the past being lost without financial compensation. Johnson wrote, “If the owners of Negro clubs are going to take it sitting down and merely bemoan the fact, without making progress with their own teams, then they might as well call the wagon.”³⁴

Despite the on-field success of Willard Brown and Artie Wilson in Negro League games in 1948, the Monarchs and Black Barons, like the rest of the Negro League teams, saw a dramatic dip in game attendance. As Robert Peterson concluded, “The Negro league teams did well to draw 2,000 in 1948. Crowds as low as 700 were registered in big-league parks, and it was soon evident that Negro baseball no longer had the economic base for major-league pretensions.”³⁵ The Newark Eagles folded after the 1948 season as would the New York Black Yankees. Their defection meant the end of the Negro National League with its remaining teams to be incorporated into a larger two-division version of the Negro American League. This also meant the official end of the Negro World Series. Major League teams eventually did start a practice of purchasing from Negro League owners the rights to young talent, but while Major League owners were buying the best young talent the Negro Leagues had to offer, they were also signing young black talent before Negro League owners could; leaving rosters filled with over-the-hill ball players. Young African American baseball talents also started to choose playing baseball in college over signing with Negro League teams. Future Hall of Famer Bob Gibson is an example of talent who decided to turn down a contract offer from the

³⁴ “Sport Light,” *The Call*, September 17, 1948.

³⁵ Peterson, 202.

Kansas City Monarchs to play ball at Creighton University. When his playing days were completed in Birmingham, Mays contract with the Black Barons was purchased by the New York Giants for \$15,000. It would be the highest amount paid to a Negro League team.³⁶

Although appreciative of the integration of baseball, two former Kansas City Monarchs Lou Johnson and Buck O'Neil each expressed some bitterness in regards to the collapse of the Negro Leagues. Johnson accused Rickey and white owners of only bringing in black players because of the power of gate receipts. According to Johnson, "In the first place, the only reason they signed Jackie was the money the black teams was making on Sunday."³⁷ O'Neil suggested the loss of Negro baseball had far reaching impact. As O'Neil recalled, "Not only did black business die, other black businesses did, too, the ones that were dependent on black baseball and black entertainment."³⁸

Although the year 1948 spelled the doom of Negro League Baseball, the number of African-American players with Major League clubs continued to increase and the United States witnessed another American institution begin the process of integration. On July 9, 1948, President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981 which declared, "There shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services regardless of race."³⁹

³⁶ The \$15,000 paid by the New York Giants matched the amount paid by the Brooklyn Dodgers for Don Bankhead and for what the Boston Red Sox paid for the rights to Piper Davis. Peterson, 203.

³⁷ Klima, 146.

³⁸ O'Neil, 197.

³⁹ William Lee Miller, *Two Americans: Truman, Eisenhower And A Dangerous World*, (New York, Albert A. Knopf, 2012), 328.

Chapter Four **“You’ve Got 10 of My Best Men”**

Author William Lee Miller wrote about the significance of World War II on the civil rights movement by concluding, the movement “did not begin with the Great Court decision or the Montgomery bus boycott; its roots were in the war.”¹ The Communist Party and the black press both played key roles in the slow integration of baseball, but another factor in the larger movement of social integration had its roots in the armed forces. Jackie Robinson was just one of many Negro League and Major League players who served in the armed forces during World War II and a brief documentation of African-American soldiers’ participation in the war is warranted.

There are two key factors in understanding how World War II impacted baseball and the process of integration. The first factor was that Major League baseball was played during the war. Whether Major League Baseball would be played at all while American servicemen fought in Europe and the Pacific was a topic of debate. On April 15, 1942, Gallup conducted a poll asking interviewees, “Do you think that professional sports should be continued during the war, or should they be stopped until after the war?”² Of the people who responded, sixty-six percent replied that professional sports “should be continued,” while twenty-four percent replied professional sports “should be stopped.”³ Fortunately for baseball owners, President Roosevelt agreed with the majority that professional sports should continue and allowed games to be played. Major League owners had a window in which it would have made economic sense to integrate baseball.

¹ Miller, *Two Americans: Truman, Eisenhower And A Dangerous World*, (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 2012), 318.

² George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971; Volume One 1935-1948*. (New York, Random House, 1972), 330.

³ *Ibid.*, 330.

Major League superstars the likes of Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams and Bob Feller donned military uniforms and left their Major League jerseys behind. While Negro League players like Monte Irvin and Willard Brown also served in the military, the Negro Leagues still had high-level players left on their rosters. These players could have been used as replacement players at the Major League level, however, the professional ranks relied on inferior white talent that included players with one arm, Pete Gray, and a players as young as 15-years of age, Joe Nuxhall. The door to Major League baseball continued to be closed until Robinson's debut in 1947.

While that door to the Major Leagues remained closed to African Americans, the Negro Leagues prospered during the war years. With many whites were in uniform, African Americans found themselves with increased job opportunities. Martha Jo Black and Curt Schoffner, the authors of *Joe Black: More Than a Dodger*, stressed, "The war years turned out to be years of prosperity for Negro league baseball. Black Americans looked for entertainment and war industries provided jobs, so they had the money to spend."⁴ Despite the economic success some African Americans enjoyed on the home front, African American service men still has to deal with segregation abroad. Joe Black, a pitcher for the Negro League's Newark Eagles served in a military where, "Blacks were shuttled into their own units, usually commanded by white officers. They had their own barracks, recreational facilities, and post exchanges, in most cases inferior to those used by white soldiers."⁵ It has been well documented that a large number of Major League players who served during World War II did little more than play baseball for their

⁴ Black, 97.

⁵ Ibid., 127.

respective military units. In *Playing for Their Nation: Baseball and the American Military during World War II*, historian Steven Bullock notes, “The majority of Major League players, however, because of their status as national icons, served in domestic or secure overseas locales where their officers usually allowed them to remain on the playing field and out of harm’s way.”⁶ However, Black was just one example of African-American servicemen who had to play on all-black teams during his military service. These black ball clubs played against service teams with all-white rosters. During World War II attempts to integrate the military did take place. For instance, the navy is often credited with being more progressive in integration than the army. Historian William Lee Miller suggested, “The navy was to move, during the war, from being the most intransigent branch of the armed services to being more nearly integrated than any other branch.”⁷ President Harry Truman officially moved to integrate the military with Executive Order 9981 in July 1948, partially on his own political ideals, but also because of political pressure placed on him by returning African-American GI’s. Both Black and Schoffner concluded, “The war years had exposed the nation’s hypocrisy in race relations – blacks fighting for freedoms [which] they were denied at home.”⁸

By 1951, only twelve Negro ball players had played in a Major League Baseball game. Despite the pressure of African-American veterans and different members of the press, integration was moving at a deliberate pace in both military circles and in organized baseball. One minor league team that suited up its first Negro ballplayer in

⁶ Steven R. Bullock, *Playing for Their Nation: Baseball and the American Military during World War II* (Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 35.

⁷ Miller, 320.

⁸ Black, 144.

1951 was the Topeka Owls. Two players, Solly Drake and Milt Bohannion, integrated the Owls roster and one of those finished the season due to being drafted for military service. Topeka first hosted a professional minor league team in 1886 as the Topeka Capitals fielded a squad in the Western League. Between 1886 and 1958, Topeka bounced back and forth between the Western Association and the Western League changing leadership and monikers often. Topeka had a team play in the Western League or the Western Association under nine different names including the Senators (1924), Savages (1916), and the Kaws (1911). Topeka's most successful team was the Topeka Owls, who from 1939-1954 played in the Western Association. In 1951, the Western Association was a Class C league, one of the lower level minor league organizations, and the Owls had a working agreement with the Chicago Cubs.

According to census data for Shawnee County in 1950, the county had an African American population of 7,386.⁹ The majority of these citizens resided in Topeka and for the most part lived in integrated neighborhoods, but according to historian Thomas Cox, had their own business center in Topeka. Cox wrote in his book *Blacks in Topeka Kansas 1865-1915: A Social History*, about the African American center that existed in Topeka, "The most important enclave adjoined the black business district on the first three blocks of Kansas Avenue, Jackson Street, and Quincy Street in the Second Ward. This was the hub of the black community's active social and business life."¹⁰ This black hub was still present in Topeka when Drake and Bohannion suited up for the Owls. Topeka had also fielded all-black baseball teams, including the 1898 Topeka Mascots and later the more

⁹ Kansas Statistical Abstract 2004, Policy Research Institute, The University of Kansas.

¹⁰ Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka Kansas 1865-1915: A Social History*, (Baton Rouge, LA, Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 82.

famous sepia squad, the Topeka Giants. Yet, until 1951, there is no record that black and white players ever played on the same professional baseball team in Topeka.

On April 1, 1951, *Topeka Daily Capital* Sports Editor Dick Snider wrote a feature story previewing spring training for the Cubs lower minor league affiliates including the Topeka Owls. Seventeen players were already assigned to the Owls roster, which opened practice in Carthage, Missouri. The Owls shared training facilities with the Owls minor league affiliates located in Sioux Falls (South Dakota.), Janesville (Wisconsin) and Carthage.¹¹ The manager of the Owls was Butch Nieman, who finally coached an Owls roster that included four players from the previous 1950 Topeka roster, a fact that Snider attributed as “Good evidence of the rejuvenation of the Owls brought about by the working agreement with the Cubs.”¹² During the previous 1950 baseball season the Owls were not affiliated with any major league franchise.

Snider avoided referencing Drake and Bohannon’s race in his first article about the 1951 Owls, but in his second story about Topeka’s minor league team he designated the two players as the “Squad’s Negro members.”¹³ Bohannon’s performance in the early workouts served as the center of attention for Snider’s analysis of the Owls first practices. Snider wrote, “Bohannon put in an early bid for a permanent berth by connecting on several whistling line drives.”¹⁴ Snider also reported that Bohannon, who had served primarily in a utility role the previous season for the Cubs Class D Wisconsin State League teams in Janesville, “Worked at second and short during the team’s first

¹¹ “Owls to Leave Today for Spring Training: Neimann to Start Practice Drills at Carthage Monday,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 1, 1951.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ “Owls Bats Boom, Niemann Pleased as Drills Open,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 4, 1951.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

workout,” and that manager Neiman had “Plans to give Bohannion a trial at shortstop during the spring.”¹⁵

Snider did not limit his praise to Bohannion as he also wrote of Drake’s early exploits from the first spring workouts. In his regular sports column, “Capitalizing on Sports,” Snider described a long ball hit by Drake and prognosticated where that ball might have landed had the workout taken place in Topeka’s Owls Ball Park. In Snider’s words, “When Solly Drake blasted one drive into the right field forest that one would have been in the petunia patch in Topeka.”¹⁶ In an April 5, story Snider documented that the two African American players were not only displaying their slugging prowess early in spring training, but were also showing flashes of brilliance with the glove. According to the sports editor, “Solly Drake and Milt Bohannion the Owls Negro Twosome, continued to field and both continued to hit the ball on the nose. Drake, an outfielder, repeated his feat of Tuesday when he rapped two pitches far into the trees beyond right field.”¹⁷ Snider also surmised, “Bohannion is easily the most versatile player in the camp, he worked out at second base, shortstop and catcher in a recent practice.”¹⁸

Snider was not the only person singing the praises of the two black additions to the Owls’ lineup. Matty Mattullis, manager of the Chicago Cubs’ minor league affiliate in Janesville, raved about the playing ability of Bohannion. Bohannion and Bill Beery, played for Janesville during the 1950 season. Snider reported a conversation that Mattullis had with Topeka manager Neiman, “You’ve got 10 of my best men. One of

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “Capitalizing on Sports,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 4, 1951.

¹⁷ “Tomicki Bat Hums as Owls Shine in Three-Hour Drill: Drake, Bohannion Impressive As Niemann Drives Club Hard,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 5, 1951.

¹⁸ Ibid.

them is Beery, and the other nine are Bohannion, who can play anywhere and do a good job of it.”¹⁹ Drake continued his hot hitting in a 14-8 win over Carthage on April 16, Drake went 2-for-4 at the plate with a double and three runs driven in.²⁰ The following day in a 12-3 blasting of the Sioux Falls squad; Snider reported: “Solly Drake, rookie outfielder from Little Rock, led the Owls at the plate with four singles in six trips.”²¹ Snider described Drake’s play against Sioux Falls, a game where he went 4-for-6 at the plate, “The Negro flychaser has now hit safely in nine of his 15 times at bat, and has played sparkling ball in the field.”²²

The Owls broke spring camp on April 26, and were scheduled to open the 1951 baseball season on April 19. Richard Kluger described the environment in which Drake, Bohannion and the rest of the Owls squad would play. Kluger suggested, “Whatever else it was in 1951, Topeka was also a Jim Crow town. It had been one as long as anyone could remember.”²³ Kluger also explained that the environment in Topeka was not all that much different from what many African-American ball players might find playing in similar sized southern towns. Kluger wrote that in Topeka, “There was one colored hotel, the Dunbar, and all the rest were for whites. Almost no restaurants downtown served colored customers.”²⁴ It is also notable that in the year 1951 Topeka still had a segregated

¹⁹ “Capitalizing on Sports,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 18, 1951.

²⁰ “Owls Beat Carthage 14-8,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, “April 17, 1951.

²¹ “Owls Romp Past Sioux Falls 12-3,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 19, 1951.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History Of Brown V. Board of Education And Black America's Struggle For Equality*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 375.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 375.

education system at the elementary school level as the community included “eighteen elementary schools for whites and four for blacks.”²⁵

The Western Association in 1951 featured seven of the eight league teams with working agreements with major league clubs, the only independent team was in Enid, Oklahoma, and was reported as being “well financed.”²⁶ The Owls lost their season opener 5-3 to the St. Joseph Cardinals, a farm club for the St. Louis Cardinals. In that contest Solly Drake went hitless in five at bats.²⁷ An early theme, that plagued the entire 1951 Western Association season, began to play out in early May, as their home opener scheduled for May 1, was washed out. Rainouts were a major issue that Western Association team owners dealt with over the course of the 1951 campaign. When the Owls finally played their first home contest, a 9-1 victory at Owls Ball Park, Drake’s hot hitting exhibition season did not transfer to the early regular season as he went hitless in four at bats.²⁸

Drake found his hitting stride at the plate in a three game series against the Joplin Miners, a New York Yankees affiliate. Drake collected five hits, two triples, and three RBI in the three-game series. Two wins against the Miners gave the Owls a record of 3-2 after five games.²⁹ Drake would find a different way to make headline news as the Owls got set to open a series against the Enid Buffaloes. On Sunday May 6, 1951, the Owls defeated Enid, behind the newly drafted Solly Drake. Drake was not drafted by a Major

²⁵ Ibid., 375.

²⁶ “Owls Romp Past Sioux Falls 12-3,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 19, 1951.

²⁷ “St. Joseph Ruins Owls Opener, 5-3,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 30, 1951.

²⁸ “Dean Chains St. Joe on Four Hitter: 11-Hit Owl Spree Nets 9-1 Victory,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 3, 1951.

²⁹ “Owls Pin Joplin As Chief Twirls Six Hitter, 8-3,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 6, 1951.

League Baseball club, but by the United States Army. The *Daily Capital* reported, “Solly Drake, the Owls fine rookie rightfielder, [sic] celebrated Sunday night, even tho [sic] he probably didn’t feel like it . . . Solly received his induction notice Sunday morning, but then went out and collected three singles in four trips to the plate against Enid.”³⁰ Drake’s draft notification came from his draft board in Little Rock, Arkansas, with his induction scheduled for June 1.³¹ The Owls swept the three-game series against Enid to build a four-game win streak. In a May 12, double header Drake’s hot hitting continued. The May 12, sports page of the *Daily Capital*, reported that “Drake was the night’s hitting hero with four hits in seven trips.”³² The *Daily Capital* also on May 12, ran for the first time a column of individual statistics for the Topeka Owls. The stats were under the header, “HOW OWLS HIT, PITCH,” and included a stat line for Solly Drake which listed him as hitting .383 with three triples and seven RBI. Milt Bohannon’s stats were quite meager compared to Drake’s as the utility man had a batting average of .125 with just two extra base hits and one RBI.³³

The draft status of Drake again became big news on May 18. Drake missed the Owls 7-3 victory over the Fort Smith (Arkansas) Indians, as he had returned to Little Rock to attend a hearing on his draft status. As reported by the *Daily Capital*, “For the first time this year, Owl manager Butch Nieman moved into the outfield as Milt Bohannon took over at first base. He (Nieman) replaced Solly Drake in right. Drake was

³⁰ “Drake Gets Draft Notice, ‘Celebrates’ Against Enid,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 7, 1951.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² “Owls Lose Finale, Win Opener 7-2: Adamertz Goes Route; Gains First Victory,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 12, 1951.

³³ Stat Lines, “How Owls Hit, Pitch,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 12, 1951.

in Little Rock checking on his draft status.”³⁴ With Drake absent from the team, Bohannon continued to see an increase in his playing time and took advantage of the start at first base, by going 2-for-4 at the plate in the Owls win. Drake returned to the lineup on May 19, in a 5-0 shutout of Fort Smith, a game in which he went 1-for-4 at the plate.³⁵ Upon Drake’s return to the lineup the Owls became red-hot. In a 13-2 Topeka win on May 23 against St. Joseph, Drake scored three runs, getting on base with two extra base hits, while player-manager Nieman hit his eighth home run of the season.³⁶ Drake had a three-hit game in win over Joplin on May 25, and then on May 28, he extended an eight game hitting streak when he “rapped his first-inning double.”³⁷ By the end of May, Drake’s batting average reached .367, and he collected five doubles and four triples. In the meantime, Bohannon improved his batting average over a hundred points to .286 and had three total extra base hits.³⁸ Drake’s hitting streak reached 12 games before it was snapped in a 4-1 loss to Salina on June 2. The loss also snapped Topeka’s six game-win streak.³⁹

The Owls and Drake opened the month of July with a bang, knocking off Joplin 7-5. Drake’s best game of the season was documented in the game story about the win over the Miners, “Drake was No. 1 in the hit parade with a double, triple, and one home run in five trips.”⁴⁰ The highlights from the July 1 game ended up being one of the bright

³⁴ “Dean Notches Fourth As Owls Trip Indians: Six-hit Chore Paces Flock To 7-3 Victory,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 18, 1951.

³⁵ “Hickman Hurls Topekans Past Indians, 5-0,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 20, 1951.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ “Chief All Set In Case Plate Should ‘Jump,’” *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 29, 1951.

³⁸ “How Owls Hit, Pitch,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 29, 1951.

³⁹ “Salina Snaps Owls’ Victory String at Six with 4-1 win: Drake’s Batting Spree Ends; Series Final Slated Tonight,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, June 3, 1951.

⁴⁰ “Owls Whip Joplin, 7 to 5: Hickman Allows Five Hits,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 2, 1951.

spots for the Owls, as Mother Nature negatively impacted the Owls and the rest of the Western Association. Rain hit the communities of the Class C minor league and caused flooding in Topeka. On July 12, two stories in the *Daily Capital* documented the Kansas River flood in Topeka and the impact of the flood had on the Owls caused by a dike failure in North Topeka when the Kansas River crested at a record 32.8 feet.⁴¹ As a result of the oppressive rains five Owls' contests were cancelled during a six-day period.⁴² The Topeka squad left town on July 12 and headed to Hutchinson, Kansas, to face the Elks, however, getting to Hutchinson was an adventure as the team bus was stranded overnight near Salina for more than 12 hours. Manager Butch Nieman described the events, "Every hour or so during the night we would have to back up the bus a little to keep it out of the rising water." He concluded, "We were all right, but man we sure could have used some food."⁴³ The following day in his column "Capitalizing on Sports," Dick Snider described the damage to the Owls Ball Park. Snider noted the ball field, "Has everything but a diving board," as "Water is now over the outfield fences and has completely covered concession stands, office and clubhouse."⁴⁴ Team equipment was damaged or lost in the flooding and with the loss of gate receipts due to cancellations of games Owls management organized a meeting to discuss extending the season.

With the field at Owls Ball Park unplayable a four game series against Salina was moved to McPherson, Kansas. When that series kicked off with a July 15 double header, Drake exploded at the plate. As reported, "Solly Drake chipped in another circuit clout

⁴¹ "Flood Breaks North Topeka Dike: Kaw and Tributaries Drive Thousands from Homes," *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 12, 1951.

⁴² "Owls Balked by Rain; Off On Road Trip," *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 12, 1951.

⁴³ "Floods Strand Owls: Game with Elks Slated Tonight," *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 13, 1951.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

and drove home three runs” and “slammed out seven straight hits in the two games.”⁴⁵ The Owls lost two more games in McPherson and then dropped three straight games on the road to the St. Joseph Cardinals. The team discovered on July 18, where its home games would be played. According to the reports, “The Topeka Owls are no longer orphans of the flood,” as team management arranged for the next set of home games to be played at Highland Park Field and in nearby Holton, Kansas.⁴⁶ The Owls defeated the Hutchinson Elks 13-4 in the contest played at Highland Park and dropped an 8-2 decision to the Elks the following day in Holton. On July 25, the *Daily Capital* reported that the owners of the Western Association had voted to not extend the regular season in order to make up lost games. According to the report, “Most of the opposition came from second division cities. Owners there said the teams were not drawing well and that extension of the season would just mean an extension of financial loss.”⁴⁷

Drake’s big season with the Owls was cut short on August 19, as he played his final game before reporting for military duty. Dick Snider told readers, “Owl fans gave popular Solly Drake a very solid send-off to the Army Thursday night.”⁴⁸ Nieman hit his twenty-third home run of the season – a grand slam – in the Owls 8-6 win over Joplin. Yet, the big story was the fact the Owls were losing their “leading hitter and the league-leader in triples,” after Drake received his induction notice.⁴⁹ Drake had one hit and

⁴⁵ “Owls Split Marathon Scraps: Topeka Pokes 19 Hits; Wind Opener 17-14,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 16, 1951.

⁴⁶ “Owls Get Green Light, Plan Use Highland Park Field,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 18, 1951.

⁴⁷ “Club Owners Refuse to Extend Western Association Schedule,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 25, 1951.

⁴⁸ “Nieman Raps Four Run Homer, Fuels Owls Win: Flock Shades Joplin, 8-6 to Pad Lead,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 20, 1951.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

scored two runs as fans showed their support by passing the hat and collecting “\$191.51 for the Owls’ standout rookie.”⁵⁰

What perhaps is most telling about Drake’s baseball experience in Topeka was the way it was covered by Snider in a feature story published on August 22. Snider wrote about Drake being part of the integration process in Topeka, “He was part of a sort of experiment in Topeka baseball. So he was viewed with considerable interest.”⁵¹ While his column avoided any racial undertones, there is no doubt that Snider understood the significance of being a player of color had in Drake’s success. Snider described Drake as, “A quiet, unassuming and highly intelligent Negro youngster,” who “Made it clear he wanted just one thing in the league, a chance to make good strictly on his merits as a ball player.”⁵² Snider added that he, like several others in the Topeka and baseball community, “wondered how he’d stand up under the added load he’d have to carry because of the ridiculous ‘line’ sometimes attached to color.”⁵³ In Snider’s feature, Drake shared his feelings about the Western Association and its member cities. Drake is quoted, “This league is full of handicaps for me, and you know what I mean by that. But the important thing is that I’m playing baseball.”⁵⁴ The slugging outfielder also commented on some of the negative behaviors he witnessed at ball games, in regards to fans commenting about his race. Drake stated, “Sure, sometimes I get mad at what they say and do. But most of the time I’m amazed that grown people could act the way some of them do and say what they say.”⁵⁵ Drake was moving from baseball to the army, both

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “Solly Makes Grade, Both On and Off Playing Field,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 22, 1951.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

which still had mechanizations controlled by powerful white men, and facing the challenges of integration. If Drake was concerned by his future military service, it did not show in Sniders article. According to Drake, he saw military service as, “Just another job that I have to do. In one way I hate to leave here, but in another I feel sort of proud to be going.”⁵⁶

Drake’s playing career in Topeka was short, but it was impactful. Drake was named a member of the Western Association All-Star team; however, at the time the Western Association did not play an actual All-Star Game. His offensive production helped the Owls win the regular season title and helped Butch Nieman earn League honors as Manager of the Year. Snider discussed Nieman’s challenge of coaching two black players in 1951, “They said Nieman wouldn’t take to the idea of using Negro ball players . . . if he didn’t like the idea he kept it to himself, and Solly Drake and Milt Bohannon have been key men in the pennant drive.”⁵⁷ One other piece of evidence that proved that Drake was seen favorably by his white teammates appeared when his teammates awarded him a full share of the championship bonus of \$800, despite leaving the team a couple of weeks early.⁵⁸

The flood waters in the Midwest cancelled the 1951 Western Association Playoffs series between Topeka and St. Joseph, and Salina and Joplin, as well as the ensuing Championship Series.⁵⁹ However, although challenges to integration still existed in organized baseball, no one could stop the impending flood of momentum of integration at

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “Nieman Named Loop’s Top Pilot,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 2, 1951.

⁵⁸ “Flood Conditions Force Cancellation of Playoffs,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 6, 1951.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

the minor league level as will further be evidenced in the 1952 and 1953 Texas League seasons.

Just months before Drake began hitting home runs for the Topeka Owls in 1951, the first steps of a long legal process changing the lives of African Americans began to play out in Topeka. On February 28, 1951, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed suit on behalf of Topeka resident, Oliver Brown, and others, in an attempt to force the Topeka School Board to allow his African American daughter to attend an all-white elementary school. Brown's case upon conclusion in Kansas Courts was included with four other similar cases eventually being heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court's ruling was not announced until May 1954, a month in which former Negro Leaguer Willie Mays made headlines in New York City.

Chapter Five

“Don’t Let Anybody Know They Hit Your Weak Spot”

The Texas League was one league in professional baseball that ceased operations during World War II. The league re-opened for business in 1946 with eight teams primarily located in Texas and Oklahoma. After Jackie Robinson’s signing in 1945 with the Montreal Royals, Alvin Gardner, who later served as president of the Texas League, went on record with the following statement, “I’m positive you’ll never see any Negro player on any of the teams in organized baseball in the South as long as the Jim Crow laws are in force.”¹ Multiple communities that housed Texas League ball clubs had a history of race issues. Two such cities, Houston and Tulsa each had been sites of race riots earlier in the century. On August 23, 1917, a riot, involving an all-black military unit broke out near Houston, a riot which, “Lasted roughly three hours, and involved shootouts between the soldiers and members of the Houston police, members of other military units stationed in the city, and armed civilians.”² All told the riot claimed the lives of twenty people including four blacks and sixteen whites.

Four years later a race riot took place in Greenwood, a black business district in Tulsas. On May 31 and June 1, 1921, a riot took place between members of the black and white communities that reportedly did \$1.5 million worth of property damage. A white citizen described the damage, “everything has been destroyed except the earth on which the town was built. I guess that if there had been any way to set fire to the soil, it would

¹ Red Barber, *1947 When All Hell Broke Loose In Baseball*, (New York, De Capo Press, 1982), 52.

² Fred L. McGhee, *Two Texas Riots*, (Austin, Texas: Fidelitas Publishing, 2012) 40.

be gone too.”³ The depth of racial prejudice in the Texas League before baseball’s integration was so deep that it impacted the way Major League owners decided to do business and where owners sent their young black talent. For example, when Bill Veeck signed Larry Doby to play for the Cleveland Indians, he knew that if Doby failed to measure up to Major League standards finding a place for him to play would be difficult for the Indians, which demonstrates how complex the racial issue remained. As Veeck biographer Paul Dickson documented, Veeck, “knew that if Doby did not make the cut, he could not send him down to either of his top two farm teams in Baltimore or Oklahoma City, and to send him lower in the Indians farm system would be tantamount to giving up on him.”⁴ Yet, by the spring of 1952 one Texas League club proved Gardner wrong suiting up a Negro pitcher. Just one year later, six African-American players played for three Texas League clubs. While these ball players played ball in the Texas League Jim Crow continued in Dixie.

One of the African-American players who assisted in integrating the Texas League was pitcher Bill Greason, who played on the 1948 Birmingham Black Baron team featuring Willie Mays. Greason discussed the types of crowds and their hostile behavior towards the black players in the Texas League in 1952 and 1953. Greason later reflected, “With all the rejection we had to suffer, you had to learn to laugh and keep going. Don’t let anybody know they hit your weak spot. Just keep going as if you didn’t hear it, and try to make your enemy your friend. If you perform well enough, they’ll come to your side.”⁵

³ James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: America’s Worst Race Riot and Its Legacy*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 110.

⁴ Dickson, 137.

⁵ James S Hirsch. *Willie Mays: The Life The Legend* (New York, Scribner, 2010), 53.

Integrating the Texas League was not an easy process as dramatized by Greason's early career.

The process was so difficult that the first black player signed by a Texas League team never even played an inning or took an at-bat in a Texas League contest. The Dallas Eagles were the first team in the Texas League to sign an African-American player, Ray Neil, a former player for the Negro League's Indianapolis Clowns. Neil was a middle infielder with a lifetime .197 batting average in five seasons of Negro Professional Baseball.⁶ On March 19, 1952, the thirty-one-year-old Neil was released by Dallas and a different black player broke the Texas League color barrier later in the season.⁷

The legendary Satchel Paige was once reported to have had a conversation with Hank Greenberg, who was then a general manager in the Majors, about young African American baseball talent. The conversation between the two men included a discussion about a man who Paige believed had real potential. According to baseball historian Joseph Wancho, Paige relayed to Greenberg, "You better sign this boy. He can hit. I know 'cause I never could get him out easy."⁸ The player Paige described was Dave Hoskins.

Hoskins pitched three seasons with the Negro League's Homestead Grays before being signed by Bill Veeck and the Cleveland Indians. Once signed by the Indians he played minor league ball for the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Jets and the Wilkes-Barre

⁶ Neil's batting average, www.baseballreference.com, accessed November 12, 2015.

⁷ Neil's release date, David King and Tom Kayser, *The Texas League Baseball Almanac* (Charleston, Sc., History Press, 2014), 15.

⁸ Joseph Wancho, *Pitching to the Pennant: 1954 Cleveland Indians*, (Lincoln, Neb., University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 52.

(Pennsylvania) Indians before being promoted to the Double-A Dallas Eagles. On April 14, 1952, Hoskins made his Texas League debut by giving up “two runs and eight hits in Dallas’s 4-2 victory over Tulsa.”⁹ Three months later Hoskins would be joined in the Texas League by Greason. Greason made his debut on July 31, 1952 with the Oklahoma City Indians, a non-affiliated team. Sports editor John Cronley announced the expected debut of Greason in the July 31, 1952, edition of the *Daily Oklahoman*. Cronley wrote, “Negro right hander, former Marine Greason will match pitches with the Sports’ 12-game winner Joe Budney.”¹⁰ Cronley also wrote about Greason’s debut both in his post-game story the next day and also in his regular sports column “Once Over Lightly.” On August 3, Cronley writing about the Indians 6-4 win over Shreveport stated, “With speedy Bill Greason making an auspicious debut as the first Negro ever to wear an Oklahoma City Indians uniform, and with Joe Frazier hitting safely in his 22nd straight game, the Warriors posted their second victory in a row over Shreveport.”¹¹

In his column Cronley did not mention hostilities directed towards Greason from the Oklahoma City crowd. In fact, Cronley wrote a rather glowing description of the game, “Few ballplayers will ever be on a larger, warmer spot than was Greason when he was called on for his debut.”¹² He went on to describe Greason’s pitching performance as “Workmanlike,” and wrote that he “bottled up hard hitting Shreveport.”¹³ Cronley could not keep himself from comparing Greason’s mound presence with Hoskins, who by

⁹ King and Kayser, 23.

¹⁰ “Injuns Jab Shreveport Behind Atchley, 3-1: Greason Debut Is Due Tonight Against Sports,” *Daily Oklahoman*, July 31, 1952.

¹¹ “Warriors Vault Into Third By Ripping Shreveport, 6-4: Greason Winner in First Start Before Season’s Largest Crowd,” *Daily Oklahoman*, August 1, 1952.

¹² “Once Over Lightly,” *Daily Oklahoman*, August 3, 1952.

¹³ Ibid.

August 3, had already recorded 16 wins for Dallas. Cronley concluded Greason possessed “more stuff than Hoskins,” and Greason was “Swifter than Hoskins and had a much more deceptive delivery.”¹⁴ Also included in Cronley’s in-depth look at Greason were observations made by both Greason’s teammates and opponents. Oklahoma City catcher and Greason’s battery mate Danny Baich claimed, “He knows what he’s doing on every pitch. That low, sharp curve is really effective.”¹⁵ Baich continued to describe Greason’s pitching arsenal, “Fast ball is always doing something. He began tiring a little in the sixth, but remember he still had enough to strike out the side in the seventh.”¹⁶ Shreveport slugger Grant Dunlap also was impressed with Greason’s fast ball, “Every fast ball he threw me was alive and doing something.”¹⁷

History was made on August 2, 1952, when Dallas and Oklahoma City played the first game of a double-header. In that game Hoskins and Greason both started on the mound – the first time two African American pitchers faced each other in a Texas League ball game. The start was Greason’s second in four nights. He struck out two batters and gave up four base-on-balls in a 3-2 win over Dallas. Hoskins took the loss giving up two walks, while striking out one.¹⁸ After his win against Dallas, Greason jumped out to a 7-1 start with Oklahoma City. Greason’s baseball resume included a three-hitter against the Houston Buffs a performance in which Greason struck out eight and was described as being a “Nonchalant Negro ace” in a complete game victory.¹⁹ Greason followed that performance by striking out six while blanking Fort Worth 5-0, an outing in which

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ “Injuns, Dallas Split Twinbill,” *Daily Oklahoman*, August 4, 1952.

¹⁹ “Greason Hurls Three-Hitter As Tribe Blanks Buffs 3-0,” *Daily Oklahoman*, August 19, 1952.

Cronley claimed Greason was sporting a “Bewilderish assortment” of pitches that “Hand-cuffed,” Fort Worth, as the Indians’ ace whirled through a performance which was not far from perfection.”²⁰

Greason lead the Indians out of the Texas League’s second division, all the way to a playoff spot. Greason and the Indians clinched a tie for the playoffs by defeating Johnny Vander Meer and the Tulsa Oilers, a game in which the *Daily Oklahoman* described as a, “Brilliant a mound match as has been staged here City Negro ace Bill Greason shaded foxy old Johnny Vander Meer, 2-1, in an action packed melee which had a Dixie Series flavor.”²¹ In the final weekend of the Texas League regular season Hoskins pitched against Oklahoma City and earned his twenty-second win of the season by defeating the Indians 6-1.²² With the win Dallas clinched the Texas League regular season title and a semi-final playoff game against Oklahoma City who finished the regular season in fourth place.

The *Daily Oklahoman* previewed the playoff series, a series which witnessed both Greason and Hoskins square off for the second time. Cronley wrote of the challenge of defeating the heavily favored Eagles and Hoskins, “Oklahoma City will hope to beat that impossible array with Greason, who might have won 25 games had he been with the club all year.”²³ Hoskins, who went 5-2 against the Indians during the regular season was pictured on the front of the sports page along with Greason. The expected pitching duel

²⁰ “Greason Pitches Injuns Back Into First Division,” *Daily Oklahoman*, August 27, 1952.

²¹ “Warriors Clinch Tie for Playoff Berth by Spitting With Tulsans: Greason Wins Nightcap, 2-1 After Oilers Snare Day Tilt,” *Daily Oklahoman*, September 4, 1952.

²² “Eagles’ 13-Hit Attack Humbles Warriors, 6-1: Hoskins Hurls Six-Hitter for 22nd Victory,” *Daily Oklahoman*, September 6, 1952.

²³ “Warriors, Eagles to Open Playoff Tonight At Dallas: Greason, Hoskins Assigned Starting Roles for Big Clash,” *Daily Oklahoman*, September 9, 1952.

between the two did not materialize as the Eagles outscored the Indians 11-6 in a slugfest, which Greason exited before recording an out in the second inning. Cronley wrote about Game 1 played in Dallas, “The expected pitchers’ dream match turned into a hitting nightmare before 10,702 partisan fans here Tuesday night.”²⁴ Oklahoma City won the second and third games of the series before Greason pitched again in Game 4. Greason proceeded to strike out eight batters finishing the game with “flying colors for his first win of the series behind,” a “thundering home run attack.”²⁵ Dave Hoskins got the win in Game 5 behind a 16-hit Eagle attack, but Oklahoma City won Game 6 and advanced to the Texas League Series Championship to face Shreveport. Shreveport eventually won the Championship in five games, as Greason struggled in his two brief appearances in the series. Greason fought back spasms in the series, but he along with Hoskins proved that African American ball players could compete, if not dominate, in the Texas League. Greason finished the season starting 10 games and posted “a 9-1 record with a 2.14 ERA in ten starts for the Indians.”²⁶ Hoskins led the league with 22 wins and a 2.12 ERA.²⁷

When the 1953 Texas League season was set to start in April, the Tulsa Oilers, an affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds, planned to join Dallas and Oklahoma City as teams sporting rosters with African-American players. The *Tulsa Daily World* previewed the season and the debut of Charles “Chuck” Harmon in its’ April 4, 1953 edition. The *Daily World* reported, “For the first time in Tulsa’s history, a negro boy will be in the lineup. He is Charles Harmon, who gets the call at first base. He has some hitting ability, good

²⁴ “Eagles Unleash Power, Rip Warriors, 11-6 in Opener: Greason Lifted Early Because of Wildness; Hoskins Hangs On,” *Daily Oklahoman*, September 10, 1952.

²⁵ “Indians Pound Dallas, 6-4, Grab 3-1 Edge in Playoffs: Homers By Burns, Damato, Lind Back Up Greason’s Mound Job,” *Daily Oklahoman*, September 15, 1952.

²⁶ King, 150.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

speed, but only fair defense.”²⁸ Tulsa’s opponent in the season opener, Oklahoma City, still had Greason on the roster, but he was also joined by Carl “Lonnie” Summers, who the *Daily World* advertised as a “husky Negro.”²⁹ Harmon played a significant role in Tulsa’s 2-0 victory over Oklahoma City in the season opener, as reported in the *Daily World*, “Charles Harmon, first Negro ever to compete in Oiler history, spanked home the Oiler runs in the third . . . with a single over second.”³⁰ Tulsa added a second black ball player later in the month of April as the *Daily World* reported in a story with the following headline: “*Oilers Sign Negro Shocker for Infield*” in the April 24, edition. In the un-bylined article, it was announced the “Tulsa Oilers yesterday signed Benjamin (Honey) Lott, a 26-year-old Negro third baseman formally in the Chicago White Sox system.”³¹ The story continued by putting the Lott signing in league and social perspective, “The Oilers now have two Negroes on the squad – as does Oklahoma City and Dallas. The other one is Charles Harmon, riding the bench at present with a leg injury.”³²

Prior to the signing, the Oilers faced the Dallas Eagles. The Dallas Eagles had two African-American players on its roster, but missing from the roster was Dave Hoskins, who had been promoted to Cleveland, joining Larry Doby and Satchel Paige on the Indians roster. Now on the Eagles roster was the former St. Louis Brown, Willard Brown and the Negro slugger Buzz Clarkson. In the April 23 victory against Tulsa, “Both Dallas Negro players,” homered in the contest as Clarkson hit a two-run shot, and Brown hit “A

²⁸ “Oilers Open with Indians Tonight,” *Tulsa Daily World*, April 4, 1953.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ “Verhly Tosses 2-Hitter at Tribe: Harmon Drives Both Runs Home in 2-0 Triumph,” *Tulsa Daily World*, April 10, 1953.

³¹ “Oilers Sign Negro Socker for Infield,” *Tulsa Daily World*, April 24, 1953.

³² *Ibid.*

solo four-master.”³³ John Cronley in his regular column for the *Daily Oklahoman* wrote a feature story on the pair of Dallas sluggers. In that feature he quoted Dallas manager Dutch Meyer, who described Buzz Clarkson as, “Quite a ballplayer.”³⁴ Cronley suggested pitchers were already struggling with Clarkson early in the season. He noted, “Already pitchers are trying all sorts of things in an effort to get him out. He digs in and crowds the plate hard, holding a big bat as it were a toothpick.”³⁵ The author also predicted Clarkson, “Very easily could be the first serious threat to the Texas league home run record since James Robert Lemon pounded out 39 four baggers for the 126 games here in 1950.”³⁶

As the 1953 baseball calendar moved to May, the headlines in the Texas league revolved around Oklahoma City’s 1952 savior Bill Greason. Greason struggled early and often during the opening of the ’53 Texas League season. As the *Daily Oklahoman* bluntly reported on May 2, Greason’s pitching performance had “been unsteady lately.”³⁷ Pitching on May 6, Greason lost to the San Antonio Missions 6-1 in “an all-Negro pitching duel,” between Greason and Harry Wilson.³⁸ The post-game analysis explained “Wilson cooled off the red hot Oklahoma batters with a four-hit job,” and “Greason the sensation of the Texas League last season, allowed only four hits before he was lifted in favor of Mike Gazella in the sixth, but all the runs were charged against him It was his third start without a win.”³⁹ San Antonio and Oklahoma City faced off again on May 9, with Wilson and Greason confronting each other on the mound once more. The Indians

³³ “Eagles Knock Off Oilers Twice, Leap from 6th to 5th,” *Tulsa Daily World*, April 23, 1953.

³⁴ “Once Over Lightly,” *Daily Oklahoman*, April 15, 1953.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ “Houston Rallies to Saddle Warriors, 6-5,” *Daily Oklahoman*, May 2, 1953.

³⁸ “Missions Flip Tribe, Kellert to Join Club: Wilson Whips Greason 6-1; Indians Return Home Tonight,” *Daily Oklahoman*, May 6, 1953.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

came out victors in the second match-up 10-5 as John Cronley wrote, “Greason again slightly wild and handicapped by leakage at shortstop,” benefited from eight “Warrior two-baggers.”⁴⁰ It was Greason’s first victory of the season and his poor performance became the subject of Cronley’s May 21 column. He started the column by singing Greason’s praises much the way he did in 1952, as he wrote, “Nine short months ago the Oklahoma City right hander could do no wrong,” and “Uncorked more pitching ability than had been displayed by any newcomer in quite some time.”⁴¹ Cronley continued by addressing the Greason’s struggles in 1953, but asking the question, “What happened this spring to the beleaguered chunker, who has yet to last as many as seven innings in his first seven efforts?”⁴² After starting the Indians season with a record of 1-4 on the mound, Cronley wrote that Greason had been “unable to beg, borrow, or steal a win streak, and has run into grief of about every description,” and “so far in 1953 the slightest incident – walk, boot, wild pitch, or grooved pitch – either beats him or leads him toward disaster.”⁴³ Cronley finished by telling his loyal Oklahoma City readers not to despair. He suggested the tide for Greason would change due to “hot weather and continued hard work for Bill Greason, in regular four-day rotation. This is when the best in all pitchers asserts itself.”⁴⁴

In June, both Charlie Harmon and Bill Greason became hot for their respective teams. Despite being referred to as “Charlie,” “Charley,” “Charles,” and “Chuck” in multiple news outlets, by the end of the season everybody in the Texas League was aware

⁴⁰ “Indians Massacre San Antonio, 10-5,” *Daily Oklahoman*, May 10, 1953.

⁴¹ “Once Over Lightly,” *Daily Oklahoman*, May 21, 1953.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

of Harmon. John Turner wrote of Harmon's offensive exploits in an 11-9 Tulsa win over Houston: "Charlie Harmon then rolled out his siege-gun and blasted a double off the centerfield wall 381 feet away."⁴⁵ On July 8, 1953, sports editor B.A. Bridgewater concluded that Harmon was the Oilers' "find" of the season and explained, "Charlie had hit safely in all but one of his team's last 38 games."⁴⁶ In the meantime Greason did eventually start stringing together wins as the temperatures in Oklahoma and Texas began to spike. On August 4, Cronley wrote that Greason all season had been, "confronting the sophomore whammy," but that his win loss record was also reflective of his teammates as he predicted, the hurler "would be flirting with the 20 win mark today if he were pitching for the Eagles or Shreveport."⁴⁷ After a streak of nine straight wins on the mound, Cronley wrote, "The Injuns' regard Greason as the best mound operator in the league and the No 1 Major League pitching prospect is echoed by most of the other clubs."⁴⁸

Bill Greason finished with a league-high 16 wins despite his early season struggles. Chuck Harmon finished with an impressive .311 batting average. Willard Brown hit 23 home runs and drove in 108 RBIs for the Dallas Eagles, while teammate Buzz Clarkson hit 18 homers and scored 91 runs in 1953.⁴⁹ These four players proved that African- American players could thrive and survive in the Texas League even in a hostile atmosphere. Greason recalled the crowds he played in front of and the players he played with in Oklahoma and the Texas League, "They used the n-word like drinking

⁴⁵ "Oiler Siege Guns Straffe Buffs 11-9: Sweep of Series Lifts Tulsa Into First Division," *Tulsa Daily World*, June 19, 1953.

⁴⁶ "Telling The World of Sports," *Tulsa Daily World*, July 8, 1953.

⁴⁷ "Once Over Lightly," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 4, 1953.

⁴⁸ "Once Over Lightly," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 27, 1953.

⁴⁹ Greason, Harmon, Brown and Clarkson stats from 1953 Texas League found on www.baseballreference.com.

water. The players killed those guys in the locker room. The fans killed them during the game. It was horrible and I saw it happen to a lot of young black players.”⁵⁰ Yet, in 1952 and in 1953 at least one more professional baseball minor league was integrated.

⁵⁰ Klima, 268.

Chapter Six “I Wouldn’t Trade Mays for Two Musials”

Forty African-American players were signed to Major League contracts and were on the rosters when spring training opened in 1954. The one black player garnering the majority of headlines was Willie Mays. Mays, the former member of the Negro League’s Birmingham Black Barons made his Major League debut in 1951. At the time, “Mays was only the seventeenth black player to reach the majors; twelve teams, three quarters of the league, remained white.”¹ Mays helped the New York Giants to the World Series in 1951, but in the spring of 1952 he was drafted into the U.S. Army. The Giants’ management, New York baseball fans, and baseball reporters, all had high expectations for the return of the slugger. The *Sporting News* ran a feature on Mays’ return in its February 24, 1954 edition. Writer Joe King explained that after the Giants appeared in the 1951 World Series their entire world changed when Mays received his draft notice. King wrote, “When the fabulous young man left to play ball for the Army, May 26, 1952, the Giants had just swept three from the Dodgers and were in first place. Immediately after Willie withdrew, they dropped three in Philadelphia, and were not heard from since.”² King also summarized the success Mays had for the New York Giants not only on the field, but also at the box office. According to King, “The unknown colored boy came up with the gift of great fielding. He also had the knack of making the hard catches look easy, which amounts to showmanship, and which surely adds a buck to the value at the

¹ James S Hirsch. *Willie Mays: The Life The Legend* (New York, Scribner, 2010), 103.

² “Willie Changes Giants’ Gloom Into Grins: New Spirit On Club as Mays Marches Back From Army,” *Sporting News*, “February 24, 1954.

box office.”³ The major question about Mays’ return to baseball was whether his military service have an adverse impact on his abilities at the plate and in the field. As King suggested, “Now that he is coming back, they are saying he may not hit. Nobody doubts his fielding excellence.”⁴

Mays wasn’t the only African American player making headlines during the spring. The *Sporting News* also wrote about Pittsburgh second baseman Curtis Roberts, the “first Negro to appear on the Pittsburgh roster.”⁵ In the same March 3, 1954 edition of the *Sporting News* that mentioned Roberts, a lengthy article written by Dan Daniel featured Elston Howard of the New York Yankees. Daniel’s feature exposed some of the racial bias that still appeared in covering black ball players by describing Howard’s living arrangements during spring training. Daniel wrote, “Howard boards in town with the family of Bob Williams, a negro cobbler. Elston is a negro himself, the first of his race to appear in a Yankee training camp.”⁶ Daniel explained that Howard was being exposed to “racial restrictions and segregation,” but the slugger was more focused on his, “desire of making good, the desire to stick with the world’s champions, the ambition to be the first Negro to step to the plate in Yankee Stadium.”⁷ Both Howard and Yankees’ manager Casey Stengel commented on race and baseball in the story. Each quote is evidence that social progress had improved in baseball since the debuts of Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby. In fact, 1954 was the first season in which Doby was able to stay with Cleveland Indian teammate in spring training. According to Howard, who like Mays, served in the

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Only Two Buc Jobs Filled; 64 Battle for Other Posts,” *Sporting News* March 3, 1954.

⁶ “Howard Learns Anyone Can ‘Get Along’ in Yankee Camp: Negro Confident He Will Make Grade,” *Sporting News*, March 3, 1954.

⁷ Ibid.

army in 1951 and 1952, “I am race conscious. Sure. But I hope it isn’t to a point at which it would handicap me in baseball.” With Opening Day just a few weeks away, Stengel had this to say about a ball player’s race in 1954, “I believe that nobody looks at a player’s color any more. It’s what you have and how you put it out, not if you are black or white or red.”⁸ However, Howard did not make the Yankees roster in 1954 and would have to wait until 1955 to break the Yankee’s color barrier. The final African American player to receive his own headline in the *Sporting News* during Spring Training was the “slender 23-year old Negro Shortstop,” for the Chicago Cubs, Ernie Banks.⁹ Sports writer Edgar Muzel provided the following scouting report on Banks, “It’s his bat that assures him of future stardom, though he also does an excellent job afield.”¹⁰ Banks would be the last African American player to appear in the Majors making the jump straight from the Negro Leagues. Cubs Personnel Director Wid Matthews had this to say about Banks in the Muzel article, “He’s got plenty of moxie. They won’t drive him out of there even if he does crowd the plate.”¹¹ The most entertaining description of Banks in the story came from Chicago Cubs Catcher Clyde McCullough, “You know that kid throws his bat at the ball like Jack Dempsey used to throw a punch.”¹²

When teams broke their Arizona and Florida spring camps, twenty-seven of the forty African-American players who started in spring training made Opening Day rosters. No one realized that by the season’s end, it would be the first time both World Series rosters included African-American players. An obvious transition was occurring both on

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “Bang-Up Batting Labels Banks as Cubs Rookie Star: Shortstop Shows Ability to Rap Breaking Stuff,” *Sporting News*, March 24, 1954.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

the field and on sports pages as fewer and fewer sports writers felt the need to use the word “Negro” to describe black athletes, although some writers continued the practice of both Dan Daniels and Edgar Munzel.

When it comes to researching the 1954 baseball season, two of the principal resources are the *New York Times* and *The Sporting News*. The *New York Times* in the 1950s had one of the largest circulations of any newspaper in the United States, and in the 1950s, the *Sporting News* was still considered the Bible of baseball news. The New York Giants and their returning superstar started with a 4-3 Opening Day victory over the hated Brooklyn Dodgers. A crowd of 32,397 attending the game, who witnessed Mays hit a home run in the Giants win. Sportswriter John Drebing in the *Times* described Mays’ Opening Day performance, “He blasted one of Carl Erskine’s deliveries deep into the upper left-field stand for an eye-filling circuit smash of more than 400 feet.”¹³ The *Sporting News* also offered up a glowing account of Mays’ Opening Day home run in the publication’s regular column, “HATS OFF.” In the April 21, 1954 edition Willie Mays was the first of five African Americans to be honored in the “HATS OFF” column.¹⁴ Writer Joe King wrote about the Mays’ absence from the teams and his home run against the Dodgers: “Leo Durocher and the New York Giants waited almost two years to reclaim Willie Mays from the army and it was worth it. The Say-Hey Kid paid them off with a prodigious homer to beat Brooklyn and start the turnstile clicking for a new gate attraction in the very first game.”¹⁵ In the King column, Mays was referred to as a “young

¹³ “Mays Blow In 6th Downs Brooks, 4-3,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1954.

¹⁴ Hank Thompson, Bob Trice, Brooks Lawrence and Larry Doby were the other four African American players featured in the “HATS OFF” Column.

¹⁵ “HATS OFF...! WILLIE MAYS,” *Sporting News*, April 21, 1954.

Alabama Negro,” yet he gave Mays credit for the Giants win and the large Opening Day gate, “That prodigious opening day blow of his put the club back in the chips after last year’s collapse and loss of faith by the fans.”¹⁶ By May 9, Mays had hit five home runs and the Giants were ready to start a winning streak. The Giants streak would reach five games on May 13, when the Giants knocked off the Chicago Cubs 6-3. All six of the Giants runs were scored on home runs. Mays hit one while African American teammates Hank Thompson and Monte Irvin joined the hit parade. Irvin hit two circuit clouts in the win. Later in the month, Mays had a huge offensive performance in a 5-4 win over Philadelphia. John Drebinge’s account of the game provided a glowing assessment of Mays’ play, which included homes runs in the seventh and eighth innings. Drebinge wrote, “Willie Mays put on a one-man show tonight as the Giants downed the Phillies in series finale, 5 to 4.”¹⁷ To wrap up May, the Giants defeated Jackie Robinson and the Dodgers behind a “blistering 18 hit attack,” which included home runs by Mays and Irvin.¹⁸ Very seldom in 1954 did John Drebinge, the main baseball beat writer for the *Times*, specifically point out Mays’ race.

The author conducted research in three Midwestern newspapers, the *Daily Oklahoman*, the *Denver Post*, and *Omaha World Herald* to establish patterns of practice in covering African-American ball players in 1954. Editions of these newspapers from June through August show how much coverage was given to African-American players and to assess if there were changes made by editorial staffs and writers in how they covered Major League players based on their race. The *Daily Oklahoman* for instance,

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “Polo Grounders Rally To Win, 5-4,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1954.

¹⁸ “Giants Rout Dodgers For Sixth in Row Before 38,758,” *New York Times*, May 29, 1954.

published eight articles with African-American ball players specifically named in the headlines. Willie Mays was the most often mentioned player in *Daily Oklahoman* during that period. Mays was mentioned in four headlines, while Larry Doby was mentioned twice. Jackie Robinson and Monte Irvin each received notice once. In not one of the eight headlines were any of the ball players referenced as being “Negro” ball players. Only one sports column was written in these three months featuring any of these players. On July 13, 1954, in his column “Once Over Lightly,” John Cronley wrote, “Mays is just about the biggest thing to hit the majors since DiMaggio,” and also, “despite his youth and comparatively short big league career Willie is carrying the load as if it were a feather.”¹⁹ Race was not mentioned in regards to Mays in Cronley’s column, which is quite different than how Cronley described Bill Greason while covering the Oklahoma City Indians in 1952 and 1953.

The *Omaha World Herald* featured eighteen articles with headlines featuring African-American ball players. One of those headlines, “Mays Drives 2 Home Runs as Giants Win,” came on June 22, 1954, and covered the Giants 8-5 win over the St. Louis Cardinals. The *World Herald* also ran a picture of Mays to go along with the story. Two games later Mays hit his twenty-third home run of the season, a home run that the Associated Press story in the *World Herald* described as “a terrific bolt into the upper left field stands.”²⁰ None of the headlines in the *World Herald* recognized these ball players by their color. However, one of the articles which appeared under the headline “Doby’s Triple Gives Indians 4-1 Triumph,” made reference to Larry Doby as being a “Negro

¹⁹ “Once Over Lightly,” *Daily Oklahoman*, July 13, 1954.

²⁰ “Mays Hits 23d Clout in 2-1 Win,” *Omaha World Herald*, June 25, 1954.

outfielder” who had reached the one hundred mark in runs driven in for the fourth time in his sixth Major League Seasons.²¹

The *Denver Post* supported integration with its coverage of African-American ball players. The *Post* featured fourteen articles featuring black ball players. Eight of those fourteen were articles featuring Mays and the New York Giants. One article, published in August 18, 1954, was quite complimentary of the performances in 1954 by black players. Jack Cranberry, a *Post* sportswriter, wrote, “As the major league races move down the homestretch one cannot help but note the part the Negro ball player has had in the battle.”²² Cranberry’s article complemented the play of Milwaukee’s Bill Bruton and Hank Aaron. He also concluded, “Should the Cleveland Indians go on to win the American league pennant, if it is generally agreed the man most responsible will be the great Negro outfielder, Larry Doby.”²³ Cranberry also asserted that if you combined the African-American players, who played regularly on one roster that the final roster would “form a formidable club.”²⁴

Arthur Daley, the award winning columnist for the *New York Times*, wrote on June 23, 1954, about the success of the New York Giants in the National League. In his column “Sports of The Times,” Daley noted, “The Giants have been operating on a hero-a-day basis as if they’d stolen the plot form a demented Hollywood Script Writer.”²⁵ Two days later, Daley featured the other success story of 1954, the Cleveland Indians and their African American slugger Larry Doby. Daley shared his opinion on the winnings ways of

²¹ “Doby’s Triple Gives Indians 4-1 Triumph,” *Omaha World Herald*, August 22, 1954.

²² “Second Guess: Negro Ball Players Proving Outstanding,” *Denver Post*, August 18, 1954.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ “Sports of The Times,” *New York Times*, June 23, 1954.

the Cleveland nine, “The Lake Erie braves once formed one of the friendliest tribes. They were harmless. They had the bravery of squaws. They like to pretend they were ferocious warriors.”²⁶ Daley continued describing the Indians as, “cruel and ferocious and warlike as the Iroquois or the Sioux.”²⁷ Doby was in the midst of career season in 1954 and he was featured in the *Sporting News* column “HATS OFF,” on August 4, 1954. Sports columnist Writer Hal Lebovitz lauded Doby’s high batting average – especially his average at Yankee Stadium, “Any time any rival batsman comes into Yankee Stadium and hits .500, he deserves a deep bow and a doff of the chapeau. So we raise the sun-burned skimmer to Larry Eugene Doby, Indians fine center fielder who accomplished this feat.”²⁸ Doby hit three home run in an August series on the road against the Yankees. Cleveland won 112 games in 1954 and Doby finished the season with 32 home runs and 126 RBIs to lead the American League.²⁹ The Indians won the American League pennant by eight games over the New York Yankees. It was the last Yankees squad to feature an all-white roster as Elston Howard made his debut in 1955. Indians’ third baseman Al Rosen described the changes to the baseball landscape in 1954 as well as in the American League standings. According to Rosen “the Yankees were the white supremacists of the baseball world and, until 1954, had dominated that world.”³⁰ The Indians opponent in the 1954 World Series would be none other than the New York Giants.

Joe King provided one of the best accounts of the Giants season and the success of Mays in a July 7, 1954, article for the *Sporting News*. King wrote, “The Say-Hey Kid

²⁶ “Sports of The Times,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1954.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Hats Off...! Larry Doby,” *Sporting News*, August 4, 1954.

²⁹ Doby’s statistics, www.baseballreference.com.

³⁰ Madden, 233.

of the Giants with dramatic, fantastic feats, make it appear as if baseball were waiting all these years for him to catch up with it.”³¹ King continued to lay praise on the Army veteran Mays, “The kid has color and showmanship, which few possess, especially in the big sluggers in the league at this time.”³² King concluded that it was obvious what the difference was in the 1953 and 1954 versions of the Giants – it was the impact Mays had on the team as he was, “the difference in lifting the otherwise leaderless Giants into the raging fire-eaters they have become this year.”³³ King wasn’t the only individual praising Mays’ play. The *Wichita Beacon* published a five-part series written by Joe Biechler starting on June 29, 1954. In the first of the five-part series, Giants’ manager Leo Durocher made this bold claim while comparing Mays to St. Louis Cardinals star Stan Musial, “I wouldn’t trade him for two Musials.”³⁴

In King’s flattering article about Mays he avoided referring to Mays as a “Negro ball player.” Even though sports writers were using the term Negro less and less in print – it still happened. Sometimes, when reading those articles, it appears to a modern reader that sports writers of that bygone era appeared insensitive or even “racist,” but those expressions were in the common lexicon of 1950s America and the authors were simply reflecting typical racial stereotypes. In an August 25, 1954, edition of the *Sporting News*, John C. Hoffman described the Chicago Cubs Gene Baker and Ernie Banks as “two colored boys,” who, “have been a bulwark on defense.”³⁵ Two other similar examples are

³¹ “Crowds Thrill to Mays’ Great Play In Clutch: Dramatic Negro Star Turned Giants From Sad Trailers Into Raging Fire-Eaters,” *Sporting News*, July 7, 1954.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “Says Willie Best Player in 25 Years,” *Wichita Beacon*, June 29, 1954.

³⁵ “Banks and Baker Bright Spots in Dismal Showing of Bruins,” *Sporting News*, August 25, 1954.

when a writer referred to Monte Irvin as a “lean, mahogany Buddha,”³⁶ and *Time* magazine described Mays in July as “a cinnamon-tinted young man.”³⁷

All told the rosters of the Indians (seven) and the Giants (three) featured ten players who would not have been allowed to play in Major League Baseball before Robinson’s debut in 1947. It was the first time in the history of the World Series that African-American players were represented on both rosters. The Giants swept the Indians in four games, but the social impact of the series was far more significant than the series record. Giants’ star Monte Irvin shared his recollections of that team later in life and the social barriers that he felt never really existed for the club. According to Irvin, “That was the way we were as a team. We didn’t have any race issues...blacks and whites – we all got along as one. We never thought a thing about it.”³⁸ Rick Swaine, a respected baseball author, described the shifting landscape and colors of baseball rosters in 1954, “Five of eight teams in the American League fielded all-white rosters for most of the 1954 campaign, while the Phillies were the only National League squad without at least one black player in a significant role.”³⁹

By the end of the 1954 season a total of 47 African -American players or Latino players with dark skin had appeared in Major League games. The black press had all but quit covering Negro League contests. The mainstream press was more sensitive in its overall coverage of African-American ball players. Yet, there were still all-white rosters

³⁶ Hirsch, *Willie Mays*, 93.

³⁷ Barra, 208.

³⁸ Madden, 220.

³⁹ Swaine, 189.

represented in the Majors and, as some African-American players would find out, playing and staying in Major League Baseball were two different things all together.

Chapter Seven “They Couldn’t Stay For Dinner”

One of the four Major League teams to integrate in 1954 was the St. Louis Cardinals. The Cardinals in 1954 represented the most western Major League team and were the sixth National League franchise to integrate their roster. On April 13, 1954, Tom Alston made his Major League debut and was the first African-American ball player to suit up for the historic Cardinals franchise. Alston’s story is one that well represents a theme in the history of professional baseball’s integration. He is a member of a group of African-American ball players who were sent to the minors to continue their baseball careers after playing in Major League ball parks. A. S. Doc Young of the *Chicago Defender* wrote a headline catching article on August 21, 1954, *They Came for a Short Visit and Couldn’t Stay for Dinner*. The article reviewed the careers of former players who were looking for second chances to apply their baseball skills at the highest level of baseball. Jim Reisler, referred to Young’s article in his book *Black Writers/Black Baseball: An Anthology of Articles from Black Sportswriters Who Covered the Negro Leagues*. Reisler summarized Young’s article, which featured, “players (who) couldn’t stay for dinner, a lucrative major-league career.”¹ After a rollercoaster 1954 season, Alston was one of a handful of players toiling in the minors hoping for an invitation back to the dinner table.

¹ Jim Reisler, *Black Writers/Black Baseball: An Anthology of Articles from Black Sportswriters Who Covered the Negro Leagues*, Revised Edition (Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Company, 2007), 184.

Thomas Edison Alston was born in Greensboro, North Carolina and by 1954 was one of the most hyped young baseball players in America.² In 1953, Alston tore up pitching in the Triple-A Pacific Coast League with the San Diego Padres. The slugging first baseman finished the 1953 season with 23 home runs and 101 RBIs.³ Coming off his best season as a professional, Alston was acquired by the St. Louis Cardinals for two players and \$100,000 in cash. Fredrick G. Lieb in the March 17, 1954, *Sporting News* wrote a feature about Alston which included the thoughts of St. Louis manager Eddie Stanky. Stanky, the former Brooklyn teammate of Jackie Robinson, had this to say about his young African-American slugger, “He’s been in pro ball only little over a season and a half, but he already is an accomplished first baseman. I think we have a real ball player in this colored boy.”⁴ Stanky added, “I’ll tell you this about Alston; he will get every opportunity here to show what he has, and to remain with the team.”⁵ Lieb also had kind words to describe the young Alston, “The young Negro towers six-feet-five, but his stature as a player is becoming more impressive than his height.”⁶ In the *Sporting News* article, Alston shared admiration for Stanky’s former teammate and the man who changed how young African Americans felt about baseball. Alston recalled, “I was 17 years old when Jackie first joined the Dodgers in 1947. Ever since I could hold a ball I’ve been crazy about baseball, and I figured if Robinson could get into the big league, well, the doors were opened, and maybe someday I could get in.”⁷ The new Cardinal

² Alston’s birth information, www.baseballreference.com., accessed February 8, 2016.

³ Alston’s 1953 statistics, www.baseballreference.com, accessed February 8, 2016.

⁴ “Six-Foot-Five Tom Alston Gains Stature as Redbird: First Sacker From San Diego Likely to Stick With Cards as Bilko’s Sub,” *Sporting News*, March 17, 1954.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

concluded, “I have a wholesome respect for Jackie Robinson, and I think he did a tremendous job, not only for colored ball players, but our race.”⁸

The most circulated black newspaper in St. Louis, the *St. Louis Argus*, provided extensive coverage of Alston’s early season performance with the Cardinals. Alston batted fifth in the Cardinals Opening Day lineup, sandwiched between third baseman Ray Jablonski and shortstop Alex Grammas. The *Argus* headline for the summary of the game titled, *Alston Off To Slow Start With Red Birds*. According to the non-bylined story, “Tom Alston got off to a bad start as he went hitless in four trips to the plate and committed one error.”⁹ The Cardinals lost the season opener 13-4 to the Chicago Cubs. The Cubs African-American middle infield combo of Gene Baker and Ernie Banks combined for three hits, three runs scored, and four runs driven in. Despite Alston’s slow start, columnist Arthur (Devil) Kirk suggested that his future in St. Louis was bright and that he could permanently supplant Steve Bilko as the Cardinals’ primary first baseman. Kirk wrote, “Alston is a very clever lad around his position, and with his crowd appeal, will go a long way in St. Louis.”¹⁰ Kirk placed special emphasis on Alston’s defensive prowess, “His fielding is something of grace to watch as he is like a seasoned ballet dancer around the bases.”¹¹ In regards to the possibility of Alston replacing Bilko as the everyday first baseman Kirk wrote, “Many of the fans white and colored left the park after both games stating that Bilko can pick up his glove and leave now.”¹²

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “Alston Off To Slow Start With Red Birds,” *St. Louis Argus*, April 16, 1954.

¹⁰ “Breaking The Tape,” *St. Louis Argus*, April 16, 1954.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Alston started the season going hitless in his first nine at bats before hitting a home run for his first Major League hit. Both the *Sporting News* and the *Argus* wrote about Alston's first home run in the majors. According to the *Sporting News*, "The giant Negro first baseman who cost more than \$125,000 in cash and players, broke in bashfully, but finally he homered in his tenth time at bat for his first major league hit."¹³ In his column, *Breaking The Tape*, Kirk described Alston's home run, "Tom Alston finally broke into the hit column and how he did, in Chicago he slammed out his first big league hit a home run."¹⁴ Alston struggled at the plate early and often in his debut season. Before being demoted to the minors on July 2, his batting average was just .246 and he hit just three more home runs. The *Argus* announced Alston's demotion with the headline, *Alston Sent To Minors By Red Birds*. The article claimed, "Alston who has suffered a terrific batting slump during the past months was unable to pull out of it."¹⁵ The *Sporting News* also published a short story about Alston's demotion. In the article the Cardinals General Manager Dick Meyer had this to offer concerning the demotion, "Alston wasn't ready . . . Eddie and I still have a very high regard for Alston as a prospect, but frankly, with our pitching so poor, we need all the punch we can get into our batting order right now."¹⁶ Alston finished the 1954 season playing for the Rochester Red Wings of the International League. Alston's move to the minors took place not long after the Cleveland Indians sent African-American players Luke Easter and Dave Hoskins to their minor league affiliates.

¹³ "Redbirds Buffeted as Hurlers Run Into Storm of Base-Hits: Pitching Is Better Than It's Shown, Stanky Insists," *Sporting News*, April 28, 1954.

¹⁴ "Breaking The Tape," *St. Louis Argus*, April 23, 1954.

¹⁵ "Alston Sent To Minors By Red Birds," *St. Louis Argus*, July 2, 1954.

¹⁶ "Alston Follows Luna to Rochester," *Sporting News*, July 14, 1954.

The *Argus* ran a spring training story in March 1955 describing the struggles Alston had with the Cardinals in 1954 and summarizing his chances of breaking camp with the Cardinals when the team left for Opening Day. On March 11, Howard R. Woofs wrote, “Alston, playing under the banner of the ‘first negro in a Red Bird uniform’ last year, seemed at time overly anxious to make good.”¹⁷ Woods concluded that the odds were not in favor of making Stanky’s big league club. According to Woods, “Alston, who went back to the minors before the season ended, finds himself today in practically the same spot as when he left.”¹⁸ In the following week’s edition of the *Argus*, Woods elaborate more fully about the first base battle that was taking place between Alston and Joe Cunningham. When handicapping which player could win the starting job at first base Woods stated: “Alston, by far, is the better fielder and defense player, but to date, Cunningham has the edge at the plate.”¹⁹ Woods’ article concluded that manager Stanky could split time at first base between the two players. Woods continued to offer a scouting report on Alston claiming that the young African-American first baseman was, “colorful and fast,” and “his nine-foot reach is used to great advantage and his long loose frame moves swiftly around the bases.”²⁰ Alston’s defensive prowess was not be enough to earn the starting first base job with St. Louis. Stanky and the Cardinals decided instead to send him outright to the minors and move future Hall of Famer Stan Musial from the outfield to first base for the 1955 season.

¹⁷ “Alston, Lawrence Face Test in ’55,” *St. Louis Argus*, March 11, 1955.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ “Stanky Considering Alternating Cunningham, Alston at 1st Base,” *St. Louis Argus*, March 18, 1955.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Alston began his 1955 season playing for the Omaha Cardinals in the six-team American Association. It was the first season the St. Louis Cardinals had their Triple-A affiliate in Omaha. Expectations for the Omaha Cardinals were low as writers around the league predicted Omaha to finish last in a preseason poll.²¹ Alston was not the only African-American player in the American Association season as he made the six-team circuit with the Cardinals. After more than 400 games played in the Majors, former Cleveland Indian Luke Easter suited up for the Charleston Senators. Easter's Cleveland teammate during parts of 1953 and 1954, pitcher Dave Hoskins, pitched twenty-three times for the Indianapolis Indians. Easter and Hoskins joined a strong contingent of players, both black and white, who were looking to return to the Major Leagues by having productive seasons in the minors. Omaha started the season on the road and Alston did not join the club until May 13. The *Omaha World Herald* announced on May 12 that Alston was driving himself to Omaha and "the newly acquired first baseman will be put on a night train to Denver and will join the team in time for Friday's game."²² Alston made his debut in an 8-5 loss to the Denver Bears. Alston started at first base and collected one hit in four trips to the plate. Not only did the game story in the *World Herald* not mention anything about Alston's race, he was not mentioned at all in the account of the team's loss.²³ Alston had a huge offensive game in the finale of the series played on May 15. Alston finished the game with four hits and a home run in a 6-5 loss to

²¹ "Louisville Scribes' Choice: Omaha Picked for 6th Spot," *Omaha World Herald*, April 14, 1955.

²² "Cards lose 3rd in Row to Sox, 6-2, Fall Two Behind Millers," *Omaha World Herald*, May 12, 1955.

²³ "Omaha Team Drops 8-5 Game to Denver," *Omaha World Herald*, May 14, 1955.

the Bears. As Robert Phipps reported, Alston “rested on first base awaiting the blow that would have fetched him home with the tying run.”²⁴

The *World Herald* did not use Alston’s road debut as headline material, however, Omaha’s black newspaper, the *Omaha Star*, took great pride in publishing a feature story announcing that Alston had integrated Omaha’s Triple-A club. According to the *Star*, “Big Tom Alston, six feet, five inch first baseman, will make his Omaha debut Monday night when the Omaha Cardinals open a week’s home stand with contests against St. Paul and Minneapolis.”²⁵ The *Star* also pointed out that when Alston made his first plate appearance it would fulfill, “a promise made by Gussie Busch, that everything ‘possible will be done to see that Omaha has a Negro player of good ability on that clubs.”²⁶ Alston’s first game in Omaha came in a 7-0 shutout victory over the St. Paul Saints. “Tall Tom Alston,” drove in two runs in the win with a “double into the wrong field,” according to Phipps’ game story.²⁷ Phipps did take more notice of Alston’s role in integrating his club in his May 17 article pointing out the welcome that Alston received by the fans, “There is no question of Tom Alston’s popularity with Omaha crowds.”²⁸ The *Omaha Star* went a little more over-the-top with its assessment of Alston’s debut exclaiming, “If an election had been held in Omaha Monday night following the local debut of Tom Alston the unanimous nomination – as the be-boppers would say of the president of the greatest would have been bestowed on Tall Tom.”²⁹ On May 22, Alston

²⁴ “Denver Bears Edge Omaha in 6-5 Game,” *Omaha World Herald*, May 16, 1955.

²⁵ “Omaha ‘Cards’ Receive First Negro: Alston in Omaha Debut,” *Omaha Star*, Monday,” May 13, 1955.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “Cards Send Saints Marching Out, 7 to 0,” *Omaha World Herald*, May 17, 1955.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ “Alston – President of the “Greatest”: Makes Hit in Debut as Cardinal,” *Omaha Star*, May 20, 1955.

slugged another home run in a loss and Phipps summed up the opposing team's analysis of Alston's early offensive production, "managers have been trying to catalog the man without much success."³⁰

Alston was not the only African-American slugger rediscovering his power stroke in the early 1955 American Association season. The former Cleveland Indian Easter was also off to a solid start. An article from the Associated Negro Press (ANP), which ran in the *Omaha Star* on June 3, 1955, featuring the on-the-field exploits of Easter. The article focused on the fact that Easter had resorted to a new solution to help him see the ball better. According to the ANP release, "Easter has resorted to glasses to help him return to the big time."³¹ By the end of May, Easter had "hit 10 home runs" and "drove in 37 tallies," for the Charleston Senators.³² While the author of the story wanted to give credit for Easter's powers to the addition of the eye glasses, Easter refuted that fact in the story. According to Easter, "I've been having head aches [*sic*] this year, probably from eye strain. The glasses helped the head aches, but they didn't help my batting."³³ The Charleston slugger did, however, express the hopes for a continued offensive success might lead to return to the dinner table in the Majors. According to the story, "Easter said he felt some major league club will beckon if he hit about 35 home runs with Charleston."³⁴ Easter and the Senators squared off with Omaha on June 5, with the Cardinals sweeping a double header by scores of 9-1 and 6-5 to extend a seven-game win-streak. According to Phipps' account in the *World Herald*, "Big Luke Easter showed

³⁰ "Four-Run 1st Inning Beats Omahans, 6-3," *Omaha World Herald*, May 23, 1955.

³¹ "Easter Slugging Ball In AA," *Omaha Star*, June 3, 1955.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

the Omaha fans his best power in the second game. His home run struck the light tower in centerfield, a good four hundred feet away.”³⁵ Easter finished five short of the 35 home runs he referred to in the ANP article and finished the season with 102 RBI for the squad in Charleston. However, he was not recalled to the majors to finish out the 1955 season.³⁶

New York Giants star Monte Irvin was demoted to Triple-A Minneapolis. Irvin by 1955 had already played in parts of six Major League seasons. Yet, the aging star found himself plying his trade in a city that teammate Willie Mays once played in. Irvin wrote about his demotion in his memoir, *Nice Guys Finish First*. According to Irvin, he was told he would play in Minneapolis by manager Leo Durocher, “We want you to stay here where you can get a chance to play every day. Then if you swing the bat a little better, we’ll bring you back.”³⁷ Irvin did swing the bat well while in Minneapolis, hitting at an average of .352 with 14 home runs. Irvine described his stint with the Millers in 1955, “I was still making the same money at Minneapolis that I had been making with the Giants. It was disappointing to be sent down, but I didn’t get down in spirit.”³⁸ Irvin helped lead Minneapolis to the American Association championship and had a chance to return to the Majors in 1956 with the Chicago Cubs.

Alston’s season with the Omaha Cardinals included a couple of incidents that created headlines. The first took place in July when Alston was forced to move from first base to third base. The Cardinals found themselves short-handed at the hot corner before a July 1 game against Irvin’s Minneapolis Millers. According to Robert Phipps, “Alston

³⁵ “Cards Take 7th Win by Rapping Senators,” Omaha World Herald, June 6, 1955.

³⁶ Easter Stats from Biography page, www.baseballreference.com.

³⁷ Monte Irvin with James A. Riley, *Nice Guys Finish First*, (New York, Carroll & Graf Publishers Inc., 1996), 189.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

was given a workout,” just prior to Omaha’s 11-7 win over the Millers.³⁹ In his debut at third base, “Alston smacked a triple in the fourth,” and “Made three clean plays at third in three attempts, although one runner beat out his throw to first.”⁴⁰ The second unique headline came a month later when Alston was injured in a 7-4 win over Toledo on August 3. Once again Phipps wrote about the game, “A late hop by a ball hit by Harry Hanebrink clipped Omaha’s Tom Alston in the forehead in the fourth inning.”⁴¹ After being hit, “Alston was stunned momentarily, spinning twice then dropping to his knees.”⁴² Phipps announced in his article that, “the first baseman was carried off on a stretcher and later taken to St. Catherine’s Hospital for X-Rays and observation. He apparently was not badly injured.”⁴³ Alston missed just the remainder of that game, and only suffered a headache as a result of being struck in the head. Alston finished with 36 extra base hits and a batting average of .274 with Omaha in 1955.⁴⁴ He helped lead the Omaha Cardinals to the championship series of the American Association, but were swept in four games by Minneapolis. Alston was called up after the conclusion of American Association season and appeared in 13 games for the St. Louis Cardinals. Alston had only one hit in eight official at bats during those September games.⁴⁵

Jim Riesler, when discussing Doc Young’s article, *They Came for a Short Visit and Couldn’t Stay for Dinner*, concluded that Alston was one of five African American

³⁹ “9,450 See Cardinals Smash Millers, 11-7,” *Omaha World Herald*, July 2, 1955.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ “Cards Knock Sox From Lead With 7-4 Victory Before 5, 388,” *Omaha World Herald*, August 3, 1955.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Alston’s 1955 statistics from biography page on www.baseballreference.com.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

players that he considered in the “failed-to-hit class.”⁴⁶ Alston’s hitting numbers can be used as evidence to support that weak hitting was the reason that Alston did not acquire a permanent seat at the dinner table. If the *Omaha World Herald* and *Omaha Star* are indicative of the newspapers in their minor league communities, then the press were supportive of former Major Leaguers in their quest to return to bigger ball parks and greener pastures.

⁴⁶ Riesler, 185.

Chapter Eight

“No One Remembers Who Wrote About Eisenhower and Civil Rights”

The print press documented the stories of Satchel Paige, Jackie Robinson, Larry Doby, Willie Mays, Buck O’Neil, Willard Brown, Solly Drake, Milt Bohannon, Dave Hoskins, Bill Greason, Charlie Harmon, Tom Alston, Luke Easter, and Monte Irvin, and their roles in the integration of baseball. Similarly, the print press published the story of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown vs Board of Education* and the roles that Thurgood Marshall, Earl Warren, and Dwight Eisenhower played in the reversal of *Plessey* and the doctrine of “separate but equal” as it applied to public schools. These stories are just a limited sample of tales about African-American ball players in different parts of the country, and of the other cases that were combined with the struggle in *Brown*. From 1947-1955, newspapers were still at the peak of their importance in providing information to the public. It was not long before radio and television replaced the print as the primary recorder of historical related events that shaped American society.

Former American League President William Harridge once concluded, “Newspaper publicity made baseball.”¹ Author James Lowen, also suggested that “Journalism has been called the ‘first draft of history.’”² Both of those quotes helped inspire the research in order to complete the story found in the previous pages. The

¹ Paul Dickson, *Bill Veeck: Baseball’s Greatest Maverick* (New York, Walker Publishing Company, 2012), 28.

² James W. Loewen. *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*. (New York: Touchstone, 2005), 212.

inspiration for this chapter and its title came from Maury Allen, the former *New York Post* writer who summarized the importance of mid-twentieth-century baseball beat writers. According to Allen, “The names that you knew if you were a newspaper reader in those days, were the sportswriters’ names. Nobody knew who wrote about Eisenhower or the civil rights movement, or the space race.”³ Another *New York Post* columnist wrote about the issue of race relations five years before Robinson broke the color barrier in baseball. Stanley Frank believed the color line represented, “A large stick of dynamite with a fuse suddenly ignited by a smoldering fire of public agitation. It is an issue too vital to ignore and too hot to handle without asbestos gloves and a fireproof shield of realism.”⁴ How then did these trends in baseball as covered in the print media contribute to the expansion of the Civil Rights Movement that dominated the American cultural, political, and social scene in the 1950s and 1960s?

Satchel Paige was the first African American professional baseball player to garner headlines in the nation’s newspapers. Yes, he made headlines in the *Denver Post* and *Wichita Beacon* when he appeared in those communities, but those are only small samples of the news Paige was making during his barnstorming days. Americans of all ages discovered from the print media Paige’s unique talents. Paige’s biographer Larry Tye summarized the impact Paige’s personality and abilities had with the press. Tye wrote, “Headline writers gave him top billing now even when he lost, and reporters had to turn to their dictionaries for fresh superlatives and metaphors such as this from the June 10, 1933, *Courier*: “Satchell presided on the mound for the Craws’ ‘like a learned

³ Dennis D’Agostino, *Keepers of The Game: When the Baseball Beat was the Best Job on the Paper* (Washington, D.C., Potomac Books, 2013), 80.

⁴ Lamb, 194.

jurist on the bench.”⁵ There is also no doubt that had Paige been white, he would have received even more coverage of his exploits. Still, by word of mouth many Americans, black and white, flocked to watch him play. Tye concluded, “Were he white, Satchel, a virtual quotation machine, surely would have been cited regularly or at least occasionally by white journalists.”⁶ Paige’s legend grew as big as it did partially because of the structure of the black press during his career. The black press was not as well funded as their white counterparts with larger circulations and advertisers. Tye summarized how that structure impacted Paige’s legacy: “The shoestring black press relied on word of mouth, which begged for interpretation and, yes, exaggeration, especially coming out of the mouth of a princely storyteller and self-promoter like Satchel.”⁷

The differences in how Paige and Willie Mays were covered by newspapers are noticeable to the casual reader as well to the professional historian. There is almost a three-decade gap between Paige’s early barnstorming days and when Mays appeared in the 1954 World Series for the New York Giants. Both players still had to deal with how their race was described in print, for instance, Paige being referred to as the “chocolate whizbang,” and Mays as “cinnamon colored.” When Mays was at his peak, however, his name was found at the top of newspapers all across the country, but the same did not apply to the ageless Satchel Paige. James S. Hirsch quoted a story from the *Washington Post* in his book *Willie Mays: The Life The Legend*. The *Post* in 1954 exclaimed, “It’s hard to pick up a paper these days (unless you start with Page 1 or the comics) without having the name of Willie Mays hit you in the face. Willie is easily the most publicized

⁵ Tye, 65.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 243.

athlete since Jackie Robinson.”⁸ Further evidence of the evolution of the coverage of race in the printed press are found in reports by the *St. Louis Argus* and the *Sporting News*. In a March 18, 1955, edition of the *Argus* a story appeared with information about a change in publication practice by the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*. The *Argus* reported, “The *St. Louis Globe – Democrat* has stopped labeling persons in its news columns by race, unless the information is necessary to the content of the story.”⁹ The editorial staff for the *St. Louis* black newspaper would go on in the article to praise the *Globe-Democrat* for the new policy stating, “The new approach . . . is indicative of the newspaper’s forward and progressive policy to democratic principles of the community.”¹⁰ The *Sporting News*, which barely recognized black ball players during Paige’s barnstorming days once published, “There is not a single Negro player with major league possibilities.”¹¹ Yet, by 1958 it was writing flowery articles about the “Say Hey Kid.” Hirsch also provided in his biography of Mays the following excerpt from the *Sporting News* which said of Mays, “He actually registers belligerence towards a simple grounder directed his way. He handles it like a Panzer sortie sweeping a flank. It’s an enemy; it’s got to be wiped out.”¹²

Black newspapers like the *St. Louis Argus*, the *Omaha Star*, the *Oklahoma Eagle*, and the *Kansas City Call* each served as treasure troves of research on the African American baseball players of the 1940s and 1950s. Understanding the operation of black newspapers and their role in the integration process is essential to piecing together the historiography of integration, baseball, and civil rights in America. From the beginning of

⁸ Hirsch, *Willie Mays*, 180.

⁹ “Globe Democrat Drops Race Label In Stories,” *St. Louis Argus*, March 18, 1955.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Roberts, 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 206.

their operation, sports coverage in black newspapers was always sub par compared to coverage in mainstream white newspapers. Black newspapers did not have the financial resources to send reporters to cover many games. Not having a personal presence at the game often led to inaccurate baseball statistics. However, black newspapers still played a role in the growth of the Negro League Baseball historian Janet Bruce explained, “Despite the lack of accurate statistics in the sports pages, the black press gave the teams exposure far beyond their hometowns. With a conglomeration of hyperbole, tongue-in-cheek humor, and endless similes, sportswriters . . . made the Negro leaguers heroes across the nation.”¹³ Another key role of the black press was that it did spearhead integration by pressuring white baseball owners to integrate the Major Leagues. However, once integration took place, black newspapers quickly turned their backs on Negro League Baseball. Authors Phil Dixon and Patrick J. Hannigan explained, “As more and more players reached the majors, the black press, which had played such an important role in promoting the game before integration, began devoting less and less attention to the league.”¹⁴

John Klima’s book *Willie’s Boys: The 1948 Birmingham Black Barons, the Last Negro World Series, and the Making of a Baseball Legend* provided extensive information focused on the 1948 Negro League season. Klima explained that even just barely a year after Robinson’s debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers that newspapers like the *Birmingham World* were hurting Negro League Baseball with their extensive coverage of Robinson. Klima wrote: “In the pages of the *Birmingham World*, the city’s black

¹³ Bruce, 55.

¹⁴ Dixon, 318.

newspaper, the exploits of Robinson, Roy Campanella, and Don Newcombe hundreds of miles away were gaining more coverage than the local Black Barons.”¹⁵ An interesting article written by Luis Virgil Overbea was printed in the *Oklahoma Eagle* on May 27, 1954, which expressed concern for the increasing trend of black newspapers limiting their coverage of Negro League Baseball. According to the article, “Although reams of copy are being written about the Negro ball players in minor and major leagues, very little is seeping forward about the Negro American League, the loop that gave these players their basic training.”¹⁶ Overbea was very forward thinking in his article as he predicted a possible end to Negro League Baseball as a result of declining interest by fans as a result of lost coverage by newspapers and the integration of the Major Leagues. He wrote, “Today fans are asking what’s happening in Negro baseball. If they can’t find out tomorrow, they may be saying who cares.”¹⁷

Connecting the dots between Jackie Robinson and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is not all that difficult. Robinson’s 1947 debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers was not the start of the twentieth century’s civil rights movement, but it is an important link. One author had this to say about the game’s integration. “The story of the desegregation of baseball is part of the larger narrative of the campaign for racial equality in the years preceding and immediately following World War II.”¹⁸ A major impact of Robinson breaking the color barrier in baseball was that it made race an issue covered more frequently in mainstream newspapers. Gene Roberts made the argument that black newspapers “for

¹⁵ Klima, 21.

¹⁶ “What’s Happening in Negro Baseball,” *Oklahoma Eagle*, May 27, 1954.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lamb, 17.

virtually all of their history into the 1950s, they had the race story all to themselves.”¹⁹ Mainstream newspapers began to pay more attention to race issues once Jackie Robinson made his debut. In many newspapers across the country, Robinson’s photo was the first picture of an African American printed on their pages. Jesse Butler, who wrote for both the *Cleveland Call and Post*, had this to say about Robinson and his impact on society, “His liberalism and giving Negroes a chance to show their real ability as major leaguers helped spear-head the attack on racial discrimination and segregation in this country.”²⁰ Baseball legend Red Barber, himself a Southerner, helped explain that Robinson’s debut and its coverage by baseball writers also impacted how race was covered. Barber wrote in his memoirs, “Baseball writers are human beings, swayed by emotions and memories.”²¹ Emotions and memories were not often included in stories written about race by news beat writers. Columnists often wrote with more emotion than the average news reporter, but in mainstream newspapers columns about race were far less prevalent before Robinson’s debut and the Supreme Court’s ruling on *Brown*. The late David Halberstam, who in the 1950s was a print journalist, shared the impact of the *Brown* decision and the impact it had on journalists covering race issues. Halberstam believed, “Because of *Brown*, reporters for the national press, print and now television, felt emboldened to cover stories of racial prejudice.”²² Civil Rights leader and U.S. Congressman John Lewis explained the role the press had on the civil rights movement, “If it hadn’t been for

¹⁹ Roberts, 13.

²⁰ Dickson, 173.

²¹ Barber, 279.

²² David Halberstam, *The Fifties*, (New York, NY, Random House, 1993), 424.

the media – the print media and television – the civil right movement would have been like a bird without wings, a choir without a song.”²³

For those who played the games on the field, and for those who led the marches and made the speeches, the order of events in social history is not lost on them.

Biographer Larry Tye made sure the timeline of civil rights events was clear for his readers by stressing that the debut of, “Robinson still came nine years before the Supreme Court acknowledged that racially separate schools were unlikely to be equal, and a full decade before Rosa Park’s refusal to yield her seat on a Montgomery bus to a white passenger launched the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King, Jr., was just sixteen when Jackie Robinson was packing his bat and glove for the trip to Montreal.”²⁴ Larry Doby, the man who integrated the American League, shared this reflective thought, “We did this without someone writing a bill; this was before civil rights legislation, before Dr. King, before (Brown vs.) Board of Education.”²⁵ Dodgers’ catcher Roy Campanella noted, “All I know is we were the first ones on the trains, we were the first one down South not to go around the back of a restaurant, first one in the hotels. We were like the teachers of the whole integration thing.”²⁶ Martin Luther King, a month before his assassination, is reported to have shared the following observation in a conversation with former Dodgers’ pitcher Don Newcombe, “Don, you and Jackie and Roy will never know how easy you made it do my job.”²⁷

²³ Roberts, 407.

²⁴ Tye, 188.

²⁵ Jacobson, 29.

²⁶ Tye, 189.

²⁷ Hirsch, *Willie Mays*, 227.

Jules Tygel and Judith Testa best summarized baseball's impact on integration and the civil right movement. According to Tygel, "For civil rights advocates the baseball experience offered a model of peaceful transition through militant confrontation, economic pressure, and moral suasion."²⁸ Testa concluded in the grand scheme of the movement baseball's integration was a small social change, however, "Such changes may have been a mouse gnawing at the mountain of racism, but they were a start, and the start had been made in major league baseball."²⁹

²⁸ Tygel, 9.

²⁹ Judith Testa, *Sal Maglie: Baseball's Demon Barber*, (DeKalb, Ill., Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 100.

Epilogue

In July 1959 twelve years after the Brooklyn Dodgers integrated Major League Baseball, Pumpsie Green made his Major League debut with the Boston Red Sox. Boston represented the last of the original sixteen organizations to suit up an African-American ball player. The twelve years between the debuts of Jackie Robinson and Green were tumultuous times on and off the baseball diamond for race relations in the United States. School administrators and politicians for years faced challenges of peaceful integration of schools, lunch counters and all facets of American life. Integration was not a smooth process and its struggles put places like Little Rock, Arkansas, Greensboro, North Carolina, and Oxford, Mississippi on the front pages of national newspapers. After Robinson became the first African-American to play in the Major Leagues, other African Americans began adding their names to a list of important firsts in baseball. Don Newcombe was the first African-American to win the Cy Young Award in 1956. Buck O'Neil in 1962 was hired by the Chicago Cubs to be the first African American coach in the Major Leagues. A year later, Elston Howard was the first African American to win the American League Most Valuable Player award. The Cleveland Indians hired Frank Robinson in 1975 to be the league's first African American manager, and in 1992 Cito Gaston became the first African-American manager to win a World Series title. Yet, before any of these men could enjoy their careers in baseball, others like those featured in this account had to open and pave the paths for their participation.

Satchel Paige – After all of his years spent barnstorming across the United States, Paige finally got the opportunity to throw in the Major Leagues with the Cleveland Indians in

1948. He made a total of 179 appearances in major league games, his last coming in a 1965 appearance with the Kansas City Athletics.

Jackie Robinson – Robinson was named the Rookie of the Year after his 1947 season, and won the National League MVP award in 1949. He played in parts of ten seasons with the Brooklyn Dodgers before retiring in 1956. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962. On April 15, 1997 all of Major League Baseball's 30 teams retired the Robinson's No. 42 jersey. Now each year on April 15, all Major League players wear No. 42 in each game.

Larry Doby – Doby's career high for home runs was 32, which he did twice in the 1952 and 1954 seasons. During Cleveland's World Series Champions season in 1954, He finished second in the American League MVP voting. He finished his career with the Chicago White Sox in 1959. After a career with 253 major league home runs, Doby would briefly manage the White Sox and was inducted in the Hall of Fame in 1998 by the Veterans Committee.

Willie Mays – Mays' Hall of Fame career spanned parts of twenty-two seasons. In 1956 Mays became the first "30-30" player with 36 home runs and 40 stolen bases. He twice finished as the National League MVP winner in 1954 and 1965. His playing career ended in 1973 as a member of the New York Mets.

Solly Drake – After playing with the Topeka Owls in 1951 and completing his military service, Drake returned to professional baseball in 1954 playing with the Des Moines (Iowa) Bruins, an affiliate of the Chicago Cubs. Drake suffered a dislocated ankle and broken leg in 1955, but a year later made his Major League debut with the Cubs. He

played in a total of 141 games with the Los Angeles Dodgers, Philadelphia Phillies, and the Cubs.

Milt Bohannon – Bohannon played in a total of 67 games with the 1951 Topeka Owls. He played three seasons with the Class C Duluth-Superior White Sox from 1956-1958. His most productive professional season came in 1957 when he finished with a .270 batting average and hit 11 doubles for Duluth-Superior. His baseball career fell short of the Major Leagues.

Bill Greason – Greason, Willie Mays' teammate in Birmingham, was promoted to Triple-A Columbus after his two seasons playing in Oklahoma City. He made his Major League debut with the St. Louis Cardinals in 1954. He pitched in just three games, making two starts, and losing one contest with St. Louis. Greason returned to the Texas League in 1955 and 1956 playing with Houston. His career finished with four seasons in Rochester with the Cardinals Triple-A affiliate. His combined record as a professional pitcher was 85-67.

Dave Hoskins – Hoskins, the first African American to play in the Texas League, was promoted to the Cleveland Indians in 1953. He started eight games on the mound for the Tribe and made a total of 40 appearances. His Major League Record with the Indians was 9-4. After his brief stint with the Indians, Hoskins spent parts of six more seasons toiling in the minors while looking to regain a seat at the proverbial dinner table. His playing career came to an end in 1960 when he made three starts with the Montreal Royals, a Los Angeles Dodgers' affiliate.

Chuck Harmon – Following his 1953 season with the Tulsa Oilers, Harmon made his debut with the Cincinnati Reds in 1954. His batting average with the Reds in 1954 was .238 and he finished the season with 12 extra base hits. Harmon played in a total of 289 Major League Games with the Cardinals, Phillies, and Reds.

Elston Howard – Howard hit 10 home runs in his 1955 rookie season with the New York Yankees. He went on to have a successful 14-year playing career in the majors. Howard hit a career high 28 home runs during his MVP season of 1963. He was a member of four World Championship teams. After his playing career, Howard became the first African American coach in the American League, coaching first base for the Yankees.

Ernie Banks – Banks was the last Negro League Baseball player to make the jump from the Negro Leagues straight to the Major Leagues. He finished second in the National League Rookie of the Year voting in 1954, behind winner Hank Aaron. Banks had a career year in 1958, hitting 47 home runs and driving in 129 runs in his first back-to-back NL MVP seasons. Banks was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1977.

Tom Alston – Alston never did live up to his potential as a great slugger for the Cardinals. He played in parts of four seasons with St. Louis, but retired after appearing in just nine game in the 1957 season. He finished with four career Major League home runs and a batting average of .244.

Luke Easter – Easter never made it back with a Major League club after his 1955 season with the Charleston Senators. Easter hit 93 home runs in parts of six Major League seasons with the Cleveland Indians. He finished his career playing four seasons with the

Orioles' Triple-A affiliate, the Rochester Red Wings. Easter finished with a total of 269 minor league home runs.

Buck O'Neil – O'Neil spent eight seasons as manager of the Kansas City Monarchs. He was a mentor and guiding force behind the careers of several African-American ball players. He worked as a scout in Major League Baseball and became the first African-American Major League coach in 1962 with the Chicago Cubs. He was an ambassador his entire life for baseball and Negro League baseball. In 2006, a controversy erupted when O'Neil was denied induction to the Baseball Hall of Fame by a special Veteran's Committee designed to correct historic injustices to players, managers, and front office members of Negro League baseball. A total of 17 Negro League figures were selected in 2006 including Effa Manley, the former owner of the Newark Eagles, representing the first woman elected to the Hall of Fame over Buck O'Neil.

Monte Irvin – Irvin hit 93 career home runs in parts of eight Major League seasons. After his 1955 demotion to the Minneapolis Millers, Irvin would play one season with the Chicago Cubs. Irvin drove in 50 runs and hit 5 home runs in 111 games played with the Cubs in 1956. Irvin worked as a scout for the New York Mets in 1967 and 1968. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1973. ¹

¹ All player statistics found in the epilogue are from individual player pages at www.baseballreference.com, accessed February 26, 2106.

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