

EDITED BY **AMY BASS**

# IN THE GAME



**RACE,  
IDENTITY, AND  
SPORTS  
IN THE  
TWENTIETH  
CENTURY**

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Race, Identity, and Sports  
in the Twentieth Century

Edited by Amy Bass

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**IN THE GAME**



# INTRODUCTION

## “No Compromise with Slavery! No Union with Slaveholders,” or “Who was the *Last* Team to Integrate?”

*Amy Bass*

The student, as I remember, had what could only be described as a wry smile on his face when he asked the question. He already knew the answer. “Professor Bass, who was the *last* team to integrate?”

A good question? Well, not for discussion purposes. Not if you want your class to interact with the texts and each other. Too cut and dried for any kind of real pedagogical use, I surmised.

*Who was the last team to integrate?*

A good question? Well, its answer, I have to admit, does have a substantial context in terms of civil rights, immigration, integration, busing, basketball and, yes, the 1918 World Series.

*Who was the last team to integrate?*

I answer the question, failing to mention that it technically should be *what* was the last team to integrate. My answer, as always, is accompanied by the fact that they actually gave Jackie Robinson a tryout before Branch Rickey ever did.

*Who was the last team to integrate?*

The Boston Red Sox. Some twelve years after Robinson stepped up to the major league plate. But. . . .

There is always a “but” to the answer to the question that is always asked during my lecture about Jackie Robinson’s historic breaking of a color line that had existed in major league baseball for well over half a century. That lecture, which uses Jules Tygiel’s exceedingly readable and immensely teachable *Baseball’s Great Experiment* as its main source, is not part of the upper-division seminar that I occasionally offer entitled “Race, Sport, and Society.” Rather, it is part of my post–World War II lecture in the U.S. Survey (Reconstruction to Present) that I teach on a fairly regular rotation. I find that Robinson’s debut and Branch Rickey’s push to make the Brooklyn Dodgers the team that would transform baseball’s color line are among the best ways to teach the visible rise of civil rights movements in the immediate postwar period, and the role of culture in it. It is not *sports* history. It’s history.

There are many, many (many) burdens—well-known burdens—that come along with being a Red Sox fan (and, for clarification, I am not from Boston, but rather Richmond, Massachusetts, a small town outside of Pittsfield that has recently taken ownership of inventing the game from Cooperstown—and no, I am not being defensive). But as a cultural historian who has spent a lot of time writing about race and sports and civil rights, the drain of being a fan can be almost unbearable. The first time the question was posed in my class—*Who was the last team to integrate?*—the student knew why the question would plague me. During office hours, he had seen the 1986 World Series banner that I boldly displayed in my graduate student space at a large university on, yes, Long Island, not too far from Shea Stadium (but far enough for me), and not that much farther from that place in the Bronx where rumors have it that a local team plays baseball rather well. So, with his Yankees hat turned into “rally” position, he eagerly awaited my anguish, not necessarily knowing the degree to which it stirred my own memories of sitting in Fenway during Game 3, 1986, and watching Oil Can Boyd futilely try to change history.

*Who was the last team to integrate?*

The answer is complex. While the Boston Red Sox did not bring Elijah “Pumpsie” Green on board until 1959, technically they tried (well, “*tried*” is likely not the right word—I used to say “tried” but then Howard Bryant’s wonderful book, *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston*, changed my mind on employing that particular verb to describe the Red Sox’s integration efforts) to integrate before anyone else.

In 1945, Red Sox General Manager Eddie Collins came under fire from Boston city councilor Isadore Muchnick, who wanted Collins to take the lead in the push to integrate baseball. Collins pleaded innocence to charges that Boston had prevented black players from trying out in the past, claiming that for the duration of his tenure with the team, he had “never had a

single request for a tryout by a colored applicant.”<sup>1</sup> However, Muchnick continued his quest, at one point threatening Collins that if an integrated tryout did not occur in Boston, he would block the required unanimous City Council vote for the team to play on Sundays. Further weight landed on Collins’ shoulders when *Boston Record* columnist Dave Egan, reiterating the charge that black columnists such as Wendell Smith and Sam Lacy had been leading in the black press, began a campaign urging both of Boston’s baseball teams—the Red Sox and the (now Atlanta) Braves—to consider Boston’s historical responsibility to equality and to do the right thing. Between Muchnick’s unyielding pressure and Egan’s hype, the Red Sox agreed to be the first major league baseball team in the twentieth century to hold an integrated tryout.<sup>2</sup>

On April 14, 1945, Marvin Williams, Sam Jethroe, and, indeed, Jackie Robinson arrived at Fenway Park for their tryout, only to find it delayed for two days because of the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. When the tryout finally took place, few are sure what exactly happened. Many versions of what went down that day still circle history, largely because few folks deemed it worthy of their attention. According to Bryant, the relatively confirmed course of events include the fact that the team itself was not there. Manager (and former Red Sox great) Joe Cronin had given the players the day off because the season was beginning the next day in New York. Former Red Sox outfielder Hugh Duffy oversaw the tryout, while Cronin sat and watched. The *Boston Record* reported that Robinson did well and impressed Cronin, while others claimed that Cronin barely looked at the field. At the conclusion of the tryout, Collins told the trio they would hear from him soon. None did.<sup>3</sup>

Much more, of course, has been whispered about what occurred in Fenway Park that day. While Robinson, for one, generally refused to discuss it, *Boston Globe* reporter Clif Keane lent the tryout what Bryant calls “its historical significance.” Keane claims that he heard someone shout from the stands, “Get those niggers off the field.”<sup>4</sup> While many have been credited with the affront, most conclusions point toward Red Sox owner Tom Yawkey (of Yawkey’s Way, the street outside of Fenway where I have purchased countless hats, shirts, beers, and so on).

As we know, and as Tygiel details, as a member of the Montreal Royals, the Brooklyn Dodgers’ farm team, Jackie Robinson enjoyed a stunning summer season in 1946, making a name for himself in the small venues of America’s favorite pastime. He went on to his major league debut in 1947, and was named Rookie of the Year. Sam Jethroe went to the Boston Braves in 1950, integrating Boston baseball, but not the Red Sox, and replicated Robinson’s feat by taking the Rookie of the Year title. Having declined to sign either player, Red Sox management went back to work against integration. Tom

Yawkey, for example, served on a committee formed by baseball owners to study integration. On August 27, 1946, the committee submitted its notorious conclusions, which were apparently so distasteful that readers were asked to destroy their copies when finished. The tried and tired reasons were presented up front: baseball was being used by activists, Negro Leagues players did not have the skills to be competitive in the majors and did not know the game well enough, the contractual obligations players had to the Negro Leagues had to be observed. The real reason, of course, was made more subtly: Major league baseball profited from segregation. Integration meant, for example, that the Negro Leagues would no longer rent their parks from the majors. And it meant that more African Americans would come to major league games, isolating white fans and thus lowering the value of teams in major urban areas.

*Who was the last team to integrate?*

The Boston Red Sox. And not only did they decline to sign Robinson, in 1949 they shunned the advice of the general manager of their AA team in Alabama, the Birmingham Barons, that a star on the Birmingham Black Barons could be acquired for a mere \$5,000. The team's scout, Larry Woodall—a Texan—could not fit the kid into his schedule. "I'm not going to waste my time," he said, "waiting on a bunch of niggers."<sup>5</sup> Thus, just as the Red Sox passed on Jackie Robinson, the team missed out on Willie Mays.

Say hey, indeed.

By the time the Red Sox called up Pumpsie Green from the minors in 1959, some 128 years after William Lloyd Garrison (who declared my title quote) opened the *Liberator* offices in what is now Government Center in Boston, Mays was a standout on the Giants, Robinson was retired, stars such as Hank Aaron, Ernie Banks, and Frank Robinson were shining for their teams, and journalists Lacy and Smith had confirmed in the black press that the Red Sox were a racist club. Rosters changed dramatically in terms of who played the game in the decades that followed World War II, and while the battle for racial integration moved toward center stage in the United States for a variety of reasons, it was perhaps most dramatically imagined in its initial stages on baseball diamonds. The Red Sox, however, kept their eyes closed to the cornucopia of talent that descended from the legacy of the Negro Leagues.

Rather than consider the impact that the refusal to integrate has had on the team's record, in Boston it was the "Curse of the Bambino" that had allegedly plagued Fenway Park, preventing the ultimate victory from ever gracing the likes of some of the game's greatest individual players—Ted Williams, Jimmy Collins, Duffy Lewis, Tris Speaker, Jim Rice, Carl Yastrzemski, Carlton Fisk, Jimmie Foxx, Bobby Doerr, Dom DiMaggio, and so on. Of course, the history of the Curse is completely convoluted. The short

story? In 1920, less than two years after a World Series victory, Red Sox owner Harry Frazee needed cash to finance his girlfriend's play, so he sold Babe Ruth's contract to the Yankees. The real-er story? According to Yankees chronicler Glenn Stout, the "tidy package known as 'the Curse of the Bambino'" is grossly misrepresented, piling undue blame on Frazee, who was actually an astute businessman, and removing it from the "shenanigans elsewhere in the American League" that actually cost Boston the Babe.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless, the conclusion of the legend of the Curse is that the Yankees have gone on to an unmentionable number of championship seasons and the Red Sox—well, it took a while. But the legend of the Curse, which dutifully followed the Red Sox into the twenty-first century (it is apparently, as one insightful—ugh—Yankee fan in the stands pointed out on a poster in 1999, Y2K compliant), serves as a sort of Boston sports fan's version of claiming that the Confederate flag stands for "states rights," largely masking the impact that history might have had on the team. Few sports fans claim to have a better understanding of history than those in Boston. Yet Red Sox fans, as Howard Bryant summarizes, are "often frustrated by history but rarely by the people . . . who made the history."<sup>7</sup> We know, but do not often discuss, that many black stars over the course of the past several decades have ensured, contractually, that they never have to play for the home team in Boston. And those who sit in the visitors' dugout at Fenway Park claim a special satisfaction in victory. "I used to love to play the Red Sox, just to beat them," admitted former Yankee Willie Randolph. " . . . As a black player, the Red Sox brought out that little something in all of us."<sup>8</sup>

As Bryant succinctly understands, "the Red Sox more than other franchises have always found themselves linked with the larger Boston story of abolition, opportunity, politics, and clannish insularity."<sup>9</sup> Bottom line? It ain't easy being a Red Sox fan. Yet hope springs eternal, and one now has hope that under the watchful eye of Robinson's retired #42, which resides next to the retired numbers of great Red Sox players on the right field façade in Fenway, things are different. In February 2002, a new ownership group took over the Red Sox, and with it what president and CEO Larry Lucchino calls the team's "undeniable legacy of racial intolerance." For the first time, the team directly confronted its history, beginning a series of outreach programs into black Boston. The team started, equipped, and sponsors, for example, a 16-team Boston church league that fields 500 teenage players. According to principal owner John Henry, the effort has been a deliberate and terribly self-conscious one: "I think we have to make a statement not just in baseball but in our community that diversity is an issue that hasn't been fully addressed in the past and certainly has to be fully addressed," he says. "I think it's important what your actions are. That will

really define the franchise going forward.”<sup>10</sup> In a conversation with Henry, Howard Bryant found his perspective to be a refreshing one. “What John Henry wanted to know wasn’t if the Red Sox live in racism’s shadow, for he knows his new franchise most certainly does,” Bryant recalls. “With that recognition, he stood already quantum leaps ahead of his predecessors, who often seemed to believe that forceful, impassioned denial could somehow alter the facts.”<sup>11</sup>

The Red Sox that I fell in love with from my home in the far western reaches of Massachusetts was the same team that Bryant, who grew up in Dorchester, cheered for: Jim Rice, Freddy Lynn, Dewey Evans, El Tiante, Yaz, the Spaceman. I have never left them, loving Marty Barrett as a teenager (I was a girl and he was, like, *so cute*), and thinking that Mo Vaughan, Tom Gordon, Oil Can Boyd, and Nomar Garciaparra held keys to modern salvation, or at least could bring home a World Series ring.

And now that time has arrived: the coveted championship flag was raised in Boston on Opening Day of the 2005 season—the first time Boston had seen it in 86 years. Did Henry’s efforts have an effect? Did the Curse end, as New York and Boston newspapers alike determined, when the Red Sox came back from a 0–3 deficit—the only team ever to do so in baseball history—to win the 2004 pennant, defeating the Yankees in the House that Ruth Built in Game 7? Did it happen, as many believe, on August 31, 2004, when Manny Ramirez pounded a foul ball past the Pesky Pole in Fenway and hit 16-year-old Lee Gavin, who lives with his family in Babe Ruth’s former house in Sudbury, in the mouth and knocked out two of his teeth, making him THE KID WHO BROKE THE CURSE in his high school? Did it happen, as my friend Sarah speculated, when Alex Rodriguez slapped the ball out of Bronson Arroyo’s hand in a feeble attempt to make it to first base in Game 6? Or did we have to wait until 11:38 pm on October 27, 2004, in St. Louis, when Keith Foulke gently tossed the ball to Doug Mientkiewicz and, well, it was done?

As the Red Sox Nation, as we now call ourselves in an interesting construction of inclusiveness that maintains age-old regional borders while acknowledging the global diaspora of fandom, assembled at Fenway Park for the first game of the 2004 World Series, fan paraphernalia—posters, banners, buttons, and shirts—emblazoned with the phrase “WE BELIEVE” solidified how being a Red Sox fan is, indeed, a faith-based occupation. It is one that even goes beyond life on earth, evidenced by those in Boston who placed balloons and pennants on the graves of their grandfathers and grandmothers, uncles and aunts, telling them what had happened—that *it* had finally happened.

But perhaps more important to consider when wondering when the Curse went away are the cheers of “PAPI-PAPI-PAPI” that filled the stadium

of the faithful of this mismatched band of, in the words of hirsute outfielder Johnny Damon, “idiots.” Throughout the Series, it was clear to the country: David “Papi” Ortiz, named Most Valuable Player of the American League Championship Series, was loved in Boston. Ramirez, named Most Valuable Player of the World Series, was loved in Boston. And with those chants, and with fond memories of George Scott, it is possible that the Curse lifted in a way that members of the Nation were not even aware of.

It can be a problem when our personal and professional lives collide. Liking a movie with characters derived from the minstrel stage. Liking a Mel Gibson movie. Being a Red Sox fan when you have just told your undergraduates that they were the last team to desegregate and you know why Mo Vaughan or Jim Rice often hated playing there. Those of us who think about the power structures and cultural legacies of ideas of race know well the personal liabilities of such knowledge. It magnifies things in your daily routine that many people do not deal with, whether when admitting that “your” team has a history more racist than most or when watching the African American actor in the “buddy” role die first and realizing that you still like the movie.

Discussing sports can, in particular, be a liability, but that is what those who signed onto this project agreed to do. It is territory where many have tried and failed—or perhaps flailed—from a variety of different perspectives. Marge Schott. Jimmy the Greek. Sir Roger Bannister. Al Campanis. Rush Limbaugh.

Ahhhhh, Rush. What a week it was. When ESPN announced in July 2003 that Limbaugh would join its *NFL Countdown* show as “the voice of the fan and to spark debate on the show,” I do not think I was alone in thinking *which fan is that?* ESPN, for its part, seemed pleased with its choice. “Rush is a great communicator and a fan’s fan,” said ESPN executive vice president Mark Shapiro. “His acute sense of what’s on the minds of his listeners combined with his ability to entertain and serve as a lightning rod for lively discussion makes him the perfect fit for this new role.” Limbaugh, too, appeared enthusiastic about his transition to television—especially sports television. “I am a big fan of the NFL and now I get to do what every football fan would love to do,” he stated at the press conference that announced his new role. “I get to take my observations from the living room couch to the ESPN studios and talk football with the best journalists and players in the business.”<sup>12</sup>

He lasted, as we all know, approximately one month because of those revered observations. “RUSH SACKS SELF,” screamed the *New York Post*



on October 2, 2003, in its announcement that Limbaugh “resigned” from his post at ESPN after accusations of racism. Those charges emerged, of course, in regard to his on-air comments about Philadelphia quarterback Donovan McNabb: During the network’s “Sunday NFL Countdown” show before an Eagles/Bills game, Limbaugh said, “The media has been very desirous that a black quarterback do well. There is a little hope invested in McNabb, and he got a lot of credit . . . that he didn’t deserve.”<sup>13</sup> The uproar that followed was expected by everyone except Limbaugh. “My comments this past Sunday were directed at the media and were not racially motivated,” he stated in his own defense. “. . . I love ‘NFL Sunday Countdown’ and do not want to be a distraction to the great work done by all who work on it.”<sup>14</sup> Limbaugh’s defense, then, read as a sacrifice for the good of the show, rather than an apology for an unquestionably racist analysis of football. McNabb, for one, understood this, disregarding any kind of statement from Limbaugh. “An apology would do no good because he obviously thought about it before he said it,” McNabb pointed out. “It’s somewhat shocking to hear that on national TV from him. It’s not something that I can sit here and say won’t bother me.”<sup>15</sup>

Conversely, the statement itself, it seems, did not bother Limbaugh, who felt that the entire episode was “a mountain out of a molehill.”<sup>16</sup> And in a way, he was right: Why was there so much of an uproar that Rush Limbaugh had made racist remarks in a national forum? Who, we must ask, was *surprised* that he could be perceived as racist? Certainly not those who felt compelled to create a petition to boycott ESPN “due to hiring of Rush Limbaugh.” Those who signed the online document—before, mind you, Limbaugh waxed poetic on McNabb—committed to “refrain from watching, listening to, logging on to, reading, or gaining any information directly from ESPN, ESPN Radio, ESPN.com, ESPN Magazine, and all other ESPN affiliates (including ABC Sports) until ESPN terminates the contract of Rush Limbaugh. . . .” And why, pray tell, did the undersigned feel the need for such a petition? Because, in the words of the petition, they understood that

Mr. Limbaugh continues to discharge venomous, vindictive, inaccurate, and erroneous statements daily against anything and everything that he has a dislike for. Giving a man such as him an additional forum unrelated to his purported expertise only serves to further insult and anger millions of football fans, and undermines the legitimate professionals in this field, all of whom are more qualified. . . . Most of all, the mere selection of such a controversial political figure for a sports show indicates that ESPN does not value its audience, or at least highly underestimates the intelligence of much of its audience. As a commercial enterprise, ESPN stands to lose significant amounts of money for such a bizarre hiring that alienates half of its consumers. While



this one move does reflect badly on the whole organization of ESPN, the company can still salvage some respect and integrity by releasing Mr. Limbaugh of his Sunday Night Countdown duties immediately.<sup>17</sup>

Limbaugh's resignation from ESPN was followed by accusations that he illegally used prescription painkillers. This latter episode made famous OxyContin and Wilma Cline—Limbaugh's maid and alleged drug supplier—and thus overshadowed the McNabb/ESPN debacle, destining his words to join the many of what are considered anomalous misfires regarding race in the sports world. However, Rush's "Jimmy the Greek" moment held a particularly disturbing vein that we should not let vanish from public record: his defense that he had been forced to resign for speaking *truth*. As the clamor regarding his McNabb remarks began to grow, Limbaugh's explanation for the uproar became more disturbing than the initial comment itself. "There's no racism here; there's no racist intent whatsoever," Limbaugh insisted. "This has become the tempest that it is because I *must have been right about something*. If I wasn't right, there wouldn't be this cacophony of outrage that has sprung up in the sportswriter community."<sup>18</sup>

According to this line of reasoning, any dialogue regarding issues of race within the sports world is, first, to be commended as brave and, second, must yield truth as measured by the reaction/attention to it. Is that why sports remains a rarely touched realm within the broad and brave field of cultural studies? It is not that no one writes about sports in a meaningful way. Some of the best contemporary writers on race, including Robin D. G. Kelley, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Michael Eric Dyson, and Gerald Early, have devoted essays in this manner, making obvious the bountiful intellectual fodder to be found in sports topics. In 1997, an issue of *Social Text* devoted itself to sports, producing a wide variety of smart pieces that probed pertinent issues—particularly, perhaps, race—into which sports provides windows. Edited by Toby Miller, author of the compelling *Sportsex*,<sup>19</sup> the issue determined that what could be called "the politics of sport" created "a key component of nationalism and discrimination, as well as an integral part of everyday oppositional culture."<sup>20</sup> This issue of *Social Text*, while not completely unique, represents a rare attempt by a diverse collection of scholars to pull so-called sports history out of its relatively isolated intellectual location, understanding the way in which this mass cultural format—which sport categorically is—provides an incredibly fertile ground to examine the always complex nature of racial operations, as well as demonstrating how the relationship between sports and race work as an umbrella over other critical themes of cultural projects, particularly—but not limited to—gender, sexuality, transnationalism, postcolonialism, and national identity.<sup>21</sup>

As always, the roots of such an examination lie with C. L. R. James. In his decisive analysis of cricket, *Beyond a Boundary*, which I have used elsewhere in a similar manner, James illustrates how sport subsists as a fundamental model for other forms of social existence.<sup>22</sup> His oft-cited query—"What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?"—demonstrates the need to take sports away from those who best know it—and perhaps only it—and hand it over to those who ask different questions with an alternative charge. It is an attempt, in part, to push forward a paradigmatic shift in a cultural study of sport, impart an interdisciplinary gaze in an accessible manner, and probe the cardinal questions deeply embedded in cultural studies, in general, and on race, often most broadly defined, in particular. As well, this charge seeks to examine the historical, ideological, and cultural imperatives contained within sport, firmly situating it as a significant, if not commanding, element of studies that engage with ideas of racial identity, hopefully embodying a pioneering way of looking not only at sports and popular culture, but the examination of race and ethnicity writ large.

With James' worthy influence clearly in sight, then, the following essays attempt to encompass a new arena of study for those who focus their work on ideas of race, ethnicity, and nation, incorporating not only the more standard scholarly research articles, but also more reflective pieces that encompass intellectual insight, observation, and personal memoir. Together, these essays demonstrate the increasingly transnational reach of sports culture, allowing thought-provoking perspectives on race to be considered without cordoning off ideas of culture, gender, nation, globality, class, and so on, possibly serving as a springboard that will connect studies of the ever-important subject of sports with those who have serious concern about and interest in ideas of race and identity. Again, these writers plunge into waters in which many—whether Jimmy or Al or Rush—have drowned before. They also acknowledge that there are few who do not think about race and sports in terms of being *fans* of some sort. But these essays are not merely about people's hobbies, which has often been the case when academics who do not normally write about sports take the time to do so. These are not professors who box in their spare time. Rather, those whose work follows took frameworks that they excel in—immigration history, post-colonialism, African American aesthetics, gender constructions—and applied them to sports, stretching their own intellectual centers of attention to an arena that saturates our daily lives, whether fans or not.

In the first section, entitled "Heroes," we begin with Matthew Frye Jacobson. Jacobson's innovations in immigration history have contributed greatly to the study of race, nation, and ethnicity, and one of his greatest skills throughout his previous works has been his ability to find where race

exists in our cultural worlds and reveal just how powerful that existence is. Jacobson has demonstrated throughout his scholarship the multitude of lines that are crossed at all levels and in all aspects of American society in terms of race and ethnicity, thoughtfully and persuasively revealing how race works as both a social and cultural construction, and the numerous—and very real—consequences that follow. Here, he has applied his abilities to baseball, with a particularly personal focus on Dick “Richie” Allen, the focal point for his boyhood love of the game. In “‘Richie’ Allen, Whitey’s Ways, and Me: A Political Education in the 1960s,” Jacobson shows how the athlete battles—literally—against those who watch the game, own the game, and play the game. His soul-baring take on how Allen’s career has been constructed demonstrates how—in similar fashion to C. L. R. James—what goes on in baseball quite often has nothing to do with baseball, and reveals much about the impact racialized perception can have on sport, nation, and a kid watching in Colorado.

Like Jacobson, Theresa Runstedtler also focuses on an individual, Joe Louis, not only challenging the popular mythos surrounding Louis, but also investigating his iconography to explore larger questions about the relationships among race, gender, and resistance. Rather than engage in the familiar scenario of Louis as the savior of American democracy, in “In Sports the Best Man Wins: How Joe Louis Whupped Jim Crow,” Runstedtler considers Louis in the role of “Race Man.” Examining the public commentary regarding Louis’s successes, both in and out of the ring, in a variety of sources—from blues songs to political cartoons—Runstedtler locates Louis within the 1930s context of the “New Negro,” a trend of engendering blackness—dignity, strength, defiance, nationalism, and so on—as a particularly male construction. Her analysis of the “Brown Bomber,” which she offers with great detail regarding some of Louis’s most important bouts, demonstrates how, as African Americans from all walks of economic life critiqued a lack of social justice by using discursive strategies that promoted black male ascendancy, broadly conceived popular ideas of racial progress became increasingly intertwined with the redemption of patriarchal black manhood. This engendering of blackness, then, is another reason why sporting men have become icons of the black community.

The next section moves from the figure of the athlete to the ideas that envelop those who watch the game—“Fans.” Grant Farred, a scholar of postcolonialism, and especially of James, leads off, pondering ideas of how the athlete is received by the nation. When asked to join this project, Farred’s immediate response was to write about soccer (which he insists, despite living in Durham, North Carolina, on calling “football”) and, more specifically, soccer in Argentina, because he finds it to be the most significant and public roundtable for any conversation about race and identity. In

his piece “Race and Silence in Argentine Football,” Farred focuses on soccer star Juan Sebastian Veron, not as a sports hero in the manner of Jacobson and Runstedler, but rather as a way to explore the manner in which Argentina has manipulated racial perceptions of the self. According to Farred, Argentina has, indeed, denied the existence of blackness, while simultaneously elevating a decidedly black athlete, in order to put on its most modern (read: European) face, creating a stage that formally denies color while its people, conversely, push it toward a postcolonial state more in line with both its neighbors and Europe. As such, it is with a soccer star—Veron—that Argentina begins to understand the demand for acknowledging color, regardless of its self-identity that refuses to do so.

Jen Scanlon and Michael Arthur approach cricket in a similar style, from the perspectives of both ardent fan and scholar, investigating what they consider to be the stark reality of contemporary West Indian cricket, a sport that once provided colonial subjects with hope of liberation through their dexterity on the pitch. Their examination forces the question of what it means to be Caribbean or West Indian in the postcolonial moment, and what role cricket plays within such struggle of identity. Theirs, then, is a call for what they consider to be a new cricket, one that considers the particulars of a historical moment that is not cultivated by ideas of national identity or anti-British attitudes, but rather speaks to a broader understanding of island life in postcolonial society and maintains its necessity in creating a sense of belonging for people of the Caribbean as a whole.

For Tony Clark, the idea of belonging is central to his article about the use of “Indian” mascots by teams and fans, and their perpetuation by mainstream media. Clark situates the use of these so-called Indian representations as definitively racist, a seemingly easy argument to make, but goes further to explore how these active symbols stifle the creation of useful or respectful narratives regarding Indigenous Peoples in American society. Via the various media channels that reproduce them, mascots, whether an Atlanta Brave or Chief Wahoo, come to speak for the people they allegedly represent, removing any kind of voice from the people themselves. With this, the ability of American Indians to engage in society as United States citizens is suppressed, as well as any kind of autonomy they might have as sovereign nations within an empire, removing the actual people for the sake of the image created by athletic teams and their fans.

Beginning the section entitled “Aesthetics,” Joel Dinerstein’s take on 1970s football culture, “Backfield in Motion: The Transformation of the NFL by Black Culture,” extends his own broader work on black aesthetics and movement. Dinerstein, whose award-winning book *Swinging the Machine* focused on how music and dance in the interwar “machine age” aided an increasingly urban and technologically advanced society deal with

modernity, examines the black aesthetic in the academically oft-neglected world of football. While basketball has consumed the public's attention for the past few decades regarding the dominance of black style and substance, Dinerstein, focusing on the 1970s, demonstrates how black culture transformed football, providing what he considers to be paradigms of "aesthetic excellence." Locating these innovations in the style and performance of football in this era, Dinerstein does more than merely demonstrate that black cultural traditions find their way into a mainstream and decidedly American culture: He begins to unpack how this path is forged, by whom, and to what consequence for those that created the style, those that imitated it, and those that co-opted it into a global flow.

In a different vein, Latin American historian Eric Zolov focuses on the Mexico City Olympic Games in 1968, paying particular attention to how the host country celebrated its own alleged transcendence of racial and political conflicts in order to fully embrace its role as the first "developing" nation to serve as host. To do so, Zolov examines what we would now call "the look of the Games." At the Athens Olympics in 2004, the look was defined by Barcelona architect Santiago Calatrava, mixing ideas of antiquity and modernity in stark white architecture and red clay grounds. In Sydney in 2000, it meant the melding of an aboriginal past with a metropolitan future, symbolized most dramatically by Cathy Freeman's emotional lighting of the Olympic cauldron. For his part, Zolov examines the generally overlooked "Cultural Olympics" that accompanies the sporting program of each Olympic Games as well as the colors, pageantry, and imagery that Mexico put forth during its two-week stint as global host. In 1968, the Mexican Olympic Organizing Committee utilized a program of colors, pageantry, art, and imagery designed to erase Mexico's tired stereotype of being "lazy," as well as to mask the domestic contradictions of a repressive authoritarian regime—whose harshness became public with the massacre of student protesters of the eve of the Opening Ceremony. With the cultural agenda of the Olympics in 1968, two contradictory versions of Mexico were to come together—one that portrayed the nation as one of folk culture and tradition, and another that portrayed Mexico as a bastion of modernity, a nation with a future. Zolov uses this dualistic sensibility to explore the problematics of channeling domestic criticism, on one hand, and managing national reputations on a global stage, on the other, making clear the limitations of strategies of aesthetic containment in silencing civil struggle and reshaping foreign opinion.

While both Dinerstein and Zolov deal with ideas of modernity and aesthetics in sports, in the last section, "Futures," Tracie Church Guzzio demonstrates where a viable window lies into the postmodern, postindustrial moment of basketball. Using the oeuvre of novelist John Edgar Wideman,

Guzzio investigates the long-standing representations of black masculinity and physicality, focusing specifically on Wideman's autobiographical work *Hoop Roots*. In *Hoop Roots*, Wideman argues that sports can be viewed as a form of resistant expression, one that both addresses and contests black male stereotypes and reveals the instability of such cultural constructions, as well as a critical African American source of unity and celebration. As such, according to Guzzio, Wideman, a writer, professor, Rhodes scholar, and basketball player, argues for a different image of the black male via basketball, one that contests and re-creates commonly accepted views of black masculinity while maintaining connections to the racial past and providing space for a contemporary moment in which negative imagery can be deconstructed, but never forgotten.

Carlo Rotella, however, leads in a bit of a different direction. According to Rotella, whose celebrated work has ranged from surveys of urban literature to afternoons with heavyweight boxer Larry Holmes, an eagerness to make sports be "about race" constrains our access to the full range of what sports can mean. Academics and many journalists often treat boxing, in particular, as racial drama. The examples are obvious, whether one begins with Johnson versus Jeffries or Louis versus Schmeling. But Rotella provocatively argues that portraying boxing in this manner is a reductionist effort, one that throttles other meanings made available by the complex theater of the ring. To make his point, Rotella recasts the last great black-white heavyweight title bout of the twentieth century: Larry Holmes versus Gerry Cooney, 1982, a fight that brought together two very different fighting styles at cultural center stage within a context orchestrated by master showmen (including Don King) and media organs enthralled with the bout's many parallels to *Rocky*. With his examination of this fight and its historical moment, Rotella leaves us with perhaps the next step in a critical examination of this thing we call sports.

To have writers of this caliber assemble in one place makes working on such a project an absolute pleasure, so a great deal of thanks goes to each and every one of them for their attention to the project, their timeliness in facing some serious deadlines, and their generosity in their advice and support to me. Many of these contributors have served as mentors to me in the past, and to have them as colleagues on such a project has been an absolute delight. As well, thanks to Rachel Buff and Michel Willard, who provided critical feedback at a very early stage, and Brendan O'Malley, whose support, detailed and constructive criticism, and shared devotion to

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## Notes

1. Quoted in Howard Bryant, *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 29.
2. Bryant, 24–28.
3. Bryant, 30–31.
4. Bryant, 32.
5. Quoted in Bryant, 1.
6. Glenn Stout, “When the Yankees Nearly Moved to Boston,” ESPN.com, July 18, 2002, accessed on July 6, 2004. For a detailed explanation as to how Babe Ruth ended up in New York, see Stout, *Yankees Century: 100 Years of New York Yankees Baseball* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002). For the impact of the Curse through the decades in Boston, see Dan Shaughnessy, *The Curse of the Bambino* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).
7. Bryant, 23.
8. Quoted in Bryant, xii.
9. Bryant, xi.
10. Juan Williams, “The Boston Red Sox and Racism,” *Morning Addition*, National Public Radio, October 11, 2002, accessed at <http://www.npr.org/programs.morning/features/2002/oct/redsox/>, April 17, 2004.
11. Bryant, xiii.
12. ESPN.com, July 14, 2003; accessed October 3, 2003.
13. Quoted in Todd Venezia, “Rush Sacks Self,” *The New York Post*, October 2, 2003, 17.
14. Venezia, “Rush Sacks Self.”
15. Quoted in Venezia, “Rush Sacks Self.”
16. Quoted in Venezia, “Rush Sacks Self.”
17. <http://www.petitiononline.com/no2espn/petition.html>, accessed October 3, 2003. The petition was written by David August and hosted by PetitionOnline, which provides petitions for public advocacy free of charge. At the time it was accessed, the signatures on August’s petition totaled 3,220, most with extensive commentary.
18. Quoted in Venezia, “Rush Sacks Self,” emphasis mine.
19. See Toby Miller, *Sportsex* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).
20. “The Politics of Sport,” *Social Text* 50 (Spring 1997).

21. Another collection in this vein is John Bloom and Michael Willard, *Sports Matters: Race, Recreation, and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).
22. See Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympic Games and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).



# **PART I:**

# **HEROES**

# ONE

## “Richie” Allen, Whitey’s Ways, and Me: A Political Education in the 1960s

*Matthew Frye Jacobson*

I wouldn’t say that I hate Whitey, but deep down in my heart, I just can’t stand Whitey’s ways, man.

—*Dick Allen, Ebony, 1970*

“Disrespect” would be a euphemism. Dick Allen was unanimously renamed “Richie” in 1960 by a white press wholly indifferent to the young ballplayer’s protestations that everyone from his mother on down had always called him “Dick.” Later, when Allen finally did insist upon his rightful name after several years of patiently accepting what he thought a vaguely racist diminutive, the press variously ignored his request, spitefully granted it (“Dick ‘Don’t Call Me Richie’ Allen”), or—worse—depicted the “name-change” as an emblem of Allen’s unstable character (as in: “in mid-career he became, adamantly, ‘Dick.’” *Sports Illustrated* referred to this as Allen’s “first name sensitivity.”)<sup>1</sup> Fans in Philadelphia delighted in throwing objects at Allen—pennies, chicken bones, batteries, bolts, half pints—and when he took to wearing a batting helmet in the field, the press

intimated that he needed the protection because he was bad with a glove. Allen twice appeared on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*: once in 1970 under the heading “Baseball in Turmoil” (a reference to Curt Flood’s challenge to baseball’s reserve clause, but Allen was the sport’s better poster boy for “turmoil”), and once in 1972, smoking what remains the only cigarette in the history of *SI* covers.

Nor has Allen’s treatment mellowed over the years. The current entry for Allen on BaseballLibrary.com (“The Stories behind the Stats”) begins this way: “Talented, controversial, charming, and abusive, Allen put in 15 major league seasons, hitting prodigious homers and paying prodigious fines. He was praised as a money player and condemned as a loafer.” The site does duly note Allen’s Rookie of the Year season in 1964 and his MVP season in 1972; but its overall flavor tends fairly decisively toward “loafer” rather than “money player.” (The account of his stellar rookie season opens on the odd—but for Allen, familiar—note, “He made 41 errors at third base. . . .”)<sup>2</sup> *Total Baseball*, the baseball encyclopedia, ranks Allen as the eighty-eighth best player of all time in an entry that begins, “Dick Allen feuded with writers, fans, managers, and teammates, earned many suspensions and behaved and fielded erratically.”<sup>3</sup>

In American political life, the phrase “Black Power” will always bring to mind Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Party, and other black radicals who came to prominence in the latter half of the 1960s. In the too-clever parlance of ’60s- and ’70s-era baseball writing, however, its appropriation conjured figures like Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, Frank Robinson, and Richie Allen—the 1.5 generation of baseball’s integration after Jackie Robinson had broken the color bar, black sluggers whose speed and playing style and might were transforming the national pastime. (Absent its black stars, Hank Aaron points out, the National League’s stand-out player of the 1960s would have been *Ron Santo*.)<sup>4</sup>

But the two meanings of “black power” were not unrelated, as Dick Allen’s career demonstrates perhaps better than most. The social drama of the Civil Rights movement constituted the inescapable context within which black ballplayers of this generation were understood and measured in the white media—most often, if tacitly, located along an imagined political spectrum of “good” and “bad” Negroes (Willie Mays at one end of the spectrum, Richie Allen, Bob Gibson, and Dock Ellis at the other). “If [Allen] had been white,” writes Gibson, “he would have been considered merely a free spirit. As a black man who did as he pleased and guarded his privacy, he was instead regarded as a trouble-maker.”<sup>5</sup> It is only in the context of the wider political and social world of the 1960s, not of the club-

house and diamond, that one can comprehend Allen's becoming "a dart-board for the press," in Pirate outfielder Willie Stargell's phrase.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the sports page served as a site of oblique but significant social commentary on the racial questions of the day (indeed it was in relation to the sports page that whites seem to have first acknowledged and accepted that there might even be such a thing as a "white press"). It is not just that the world of Orval Faubus, Martin Luther King, Jr., Strom Thurmond, and Malcolm X supplied the cues for writing about a figure like Richie Allen, but also, contrariwise, that commentary on the likes of Allen—or Muhammad Ali or Cookie Gilchrist or Lew Alcindor—was by its very nature a genre of *political* writing whose significations reached beyond the diamond, the ring, or the gridiron, to the roiling racial world of a nation in unrest.

By the time Allen's autobiography appeared in 1989, vernacular political discourse was better equipped to deal with the experience of someone "enormously talented and black in a game run by white owners, executives, and managers," as one reviewer put it.<sup>7</sup> Across the arc of his career in Philadelphia, however, from 1964 to 1969, the *political* truths of the sports world were grasped and analyzed chiefly by athletes and writers on the black side of the color line, and only very occasionally by a white commentator like Robert Lipsyte or Jack Olsen. Most often, black analyses of how race mattered—along with black protestations that race did matter—were simply folded into white power's already-scripted tale of the "bad Negro," as when Cookie Gilchrist mounted a boycott of the AFL's 1964 All-Star Game in Jim Crow New Orleans, when Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their gloved fists on the dais in Mexico City in 1968, or when Dick Allen or Frank Robinson raised the issue of Major League Baseball's racist hiring practices. Bad boys all. By suggesting that race had anything to do with his image as "the bad boy of baseball," in other words, a figure like Allen could only *prove* himself the "bad boy of baseball."

This essay is not primarily about Dick Allen, but—quite deliberately—about *Richie* Allen, a creation of the white press, a negative icon of the Civil Rights era, "just about the premier bad boy in sports."<sup>8</sup> It is also about Richie Allen as a persona who—against the odds, one has to conclude—became a positive icon to me, a white kid growing up in the suburban setting of Boulder, Colorado. The sports pages of this era constituted my political education. I was six years old and just beginning to pay attention to baseball during Allen's phenomenal rookie year. If "black power" signified anything to me at age nine, around the time when the term entered political parlance, it signified Allen's towering home run to straightaway center in the All-Star Game in Anaheim. But by age ten, always hungry for another story, another AP wire photo, another stat on Allen, I could not help but notice that most of what I found was some brand of vilification.