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Mercedes Yanora
Saint Joseph's University

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Saint Joseph's University

Baseball: Leading Off for Integration

African American History Seminar-471

December 14, 2012

Mercedes Yanora

The United States of America, a nation admired for its ideals of freedom, equality, and democracy, is stained with racism. Throughout all of the U.S.'s history, although today's racism is often more subtle, there has existed injustices toward African Americans. The greatest discrimination, besides slavery, was lawful segregation. Since the end of the Civil War, in 1865, African Americans faced segregation in education, work, government, transportation, sport, and so on. However, over time integration became a reality for African Americans, yet desegregation for certain aspects of American society arrived at varying time frames. The integration of major league baseball, for instance, preceded the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which marks the complete integration of civil society. Though this report is not a history of Jackie Robinson, this paper often focuses on the first African American baseball player to break the color barrier because integration occurred within the framework of his appointment to the Brooklyn Dodgers. Through focusing on Robinson's rise to the major leagues, this paper will suggest that the integration of baseball preceded the Civil Rights Act of 1964 because of economics; the impact of WWII; the black press, especially the work of Sam Lacy and Wendell Smith; the socialist press, especially the work of Lester Rodney; the Great Migration; and the success of other black athletes, while integration was originally maintained and able to flourish because of the role of Commissioner "Happy" Chandler and the effects of *Brown v Board*. This paper will also propose that the integration of basketball occurred at a later date, 1950, because economics originally supported the segregation of basketball, while the integration of football, which occurred a year earlier than baseball, was less acclaimed because the sport was less popular and organized than baseball.

African Americans have been long present in baseball's history. Although Jackie Robinson's debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers, in 1947, marks the official integration of baseball African Americans were intertwined with professional baseball during its initial years. Baseball historian,

Jules Tygiel notes that, “The formative years of baseball as professional sport coincided with the emergence of segregation as an American institution.”¹ This development reflects the 1896 infamous court decision of “separate but equal”, which was established in the *Plessy v Ferguson* Supreme Court case.² As a result, the segregated culture of civil society transcended into the developing culture of professional baseball. However, there existed no uniform policies on the admissions of African Americans into various leagues; rather regulations varied from league to league.³ For example, the National League, which was founded in 1876, wished for segregation, yet since the league was deficient of authority it was unable to implement segregation.⁴ Therefore, John Bud Fowler and not Jackie Robinson became the first African American professional baseball player in 1878.⁵

While African Americans had somewhat of a presence in the early days of organized baseball, in the words of baseball historian Jim Overmyer, “Somebody had to do the early heavy lifting.”⁶ He means to say that African American ballplayers, during the 1880s, Moses and Weldy Walker, George Stovey, John Bud Fowler, and Frank Grant to name a few, were the forerunners to desegregation.⁷ While there is not much information available on travel and sleeping arrangements, the fact that players like John Bud Fowler were often forced to move from team to team illustrates that these black men participated in a sport wrought with racism.⁸ Bill Pennington of *The New York Times* furthers this insight when he claims that African Americans,

¹ Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 12.

² *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

³ Tygiel, 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Bill Pennington, “Breaking a Barrier 60 Years Before Robinson,” *The New York Times*, (July 27, 2006), http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/27/sports/27hall.html?_r=0.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Negro League Baseball Museum, “John ‘Bud’ Fowler,” last accessed December 13, 2012, <http://www.coe.ksu.edu/nlbemuseum/history/players/fowler.html>.

like Frank Grant, were referred to as Spaniards, Portuguese, or Arabs in order to hide their true color and descent.⁹ It is not difficult to understand why some African Americans desired to conceal their color, when the racism that they experienced on the field is taken into account. For example, John Bud Fowler, a second baseman, wore wooden shin protectors to combat “violent charges” from base runners.¹⁰ Other times, white fielders purposely committed errors behind black pitchers.¹¹ Furthermore, white teammates went as far as refusing to take team pictures with black players; while exhibition games between minor and major league teams were cancelled if minor league teams signed a black player.¹² Therefore, black players, before the days of the color barrier, faced a great deal of discrimination from both white teammates and opponents, yet as Overmyer asserted, these sometimes forgotten figures were the first generation to strive toward desegregation.

The color barrier flourished to life at the conclusion of the 1884 season when the American Associations’ Toledo Blue Stockings, an early baseball league team, refused to resign African American player Moses Fleetwood Walker.¹³ By July 1887, the National and American League, the minor leagues, and the International League all began to release their African American players.¹⁴ Nonetheless, it must be noted that there never existed an official ban of African Americans from organized baseball, for the color barrier was more of a gentlemen’s agreement.

Evan Weiner, a sports writer, claims that from 1890 to 1946 a color barrier existed because

⁹ Pennington.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ John Hill, “Commissioner A.B. “Happy” Chandler and the Integration of Major League Baseball: A Reassessment,” *NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* 19 (2010), 29.

¹⁴ Ibid.

coaches, managers, and owners refused to sign African American ballplayers, not because of a formal rule promulgated by organized baseball.¹⁵

Once African Americans were removed from organized baseball Negro leagues began to spring up all around the country. “The Negro leagues were a collection of professional baseball leagues made up of predominantly black teams.”¹⁶ Steve Goldman, of MLB.com, asserts that these Negro leagues often fell victim to an overpowering white ownership.¹⁷ Many of the stadiums, in which the Negro leagues played, were owned by whites; therefore, white owners, “Would take extortionate percentages of the gate in exchange for permission to play, or might not let a team play at all.”¹⁸ As a result, starting in late 1919, Andrew Foster, player-manager of the Chicago American Giants, pressed for the formation of a Negro National League, which would become the first Negro league owned by African American men.¹⁹ Foster’s dreams were realized when on February 13, 1920 the Negro National League was formed.²⁰ Other Negro leagues were the United States League, the Eastern Colored League, the American Negro League, East-West League, Negro Southern League, and the Negro American League.²¹

While exclusion from the major leagues was dismaying the Negro leagues offered a sense of black pride to African Americans.²² Baseball was such an important aspect of African American society that church services would be held earlier so that parishioners could get to the game,

¹⁵ Evan Weiner, Newsroom Jersey, “Black athletes faced a very different America before Civil Rights Act of 1964,” last modified May 26, 2010, <http://www.newjerseynewsroom.com/professional/athletes-faced-a-very-different-america-before-civil-rights-act-of-1964>.

¹⁶ “Negro League History 101,” last accessed November 25, 2012, <http://www.negroleaguebaseball.com/history101.html>.

¹⁷ Steve Goldman, Negro Leagues Legacy, “Foster made Negro League Baseball successful,” last accessed November 25, 2012, http://mlb.mlb.com/mlb/history/mlb_negro_leagues_story.jsp?story=foster_rube.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “Negro League History 101.”

²² John Lord, “Baseball in a Segregated American Society.”

“Before the first pitch.”²³ During an interview with Ken Burns, Buck O’Neil, who was a first baseman and manager in the Negro American League, stated that ballgames would start right after church, at ten in the morning, so everyone could, “Come to the ballgame looking pretty.”²⁴ Individuals also furthered a sense of community through the Negro leagues. Gus Greenlee, an African American businessman and Crawford team owner in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, contributed greatly to the Negro leagues through his financial contributions to Greenlee Field.²⁵ This field was not only the first ballpark constructed for an all black team, but it was also built in the center of Pittsburgh’s African American community; therefore, 80% of Greenlee Field’s fans did not have to pay transportation fare.²⁶ Not only did Greenlee’s financial donations provide his community with a baseball venue, but they also transformed baseball games into an affordable aspect of African American life. The Negro leagues also provided a sense of community when ballparks sponsored contests, raised money for charities, and promoted African American celebrities.²⁷ Some charity funds went toward anti-lynching campaigns while others supported African American organizations like the Elks, the United Negro College Fund, and the NAACP.²⁸ The Negro leagues bound African American communities together while promoting and benefiting the community through their alignments with charities.

A watershed moment for major league baseball was Jackie Robinson’s 1947 integration onto the Brooklyn Dodgers. Yet, like all things there was causation to this effect. This paper commences to examine the plethora of aspects that contributed to Jackie Robinson’s integration

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ken Burns, interview with Buck O’Neil, *Baseball*, 1994.

²⁵ Brian McKenna, SABR Baseball Biography Project, “Gus Greenlee,” last accessed November 25, 2012, <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/fabd8400>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ essortment: your source for knowledge, “History of the Negro Leagues Baseball,” last accessed November 25, 2012, <http://www.essortment.com/history-negro-leagues-baseball-21153.html>.

²⁸ Ibid.

into modern baseball. It is practical to begin by exploring perhaps the most significant factor of integration, economics.

Brian Goff, an Economics professor at Western Kentucky University, asserts that the drive toward integration was economically charged, in his work, “Racial Integration as an Innovation.” General managers, like Branch Ricky of the Brooklyn Dodgers, realized that by accumulating African American talent more games would be won, resulting in success and additional revenues.²⁹ He further argues that Ricky’s entrepreneurial decision to integrate Robinson led to further integration by other National League teams.³⁰ Goff claims that other National League teams were required to recruit black players in order to contend with the talent and revenue that the Brooklyn Dodgers now possessed.³¹ Consequently, since Ricky managed a National League team and not an American League team, leading to an initial absence of multiple African Americans in the American League, the American League possessed a slower pace of integration.³²

John Rossi, a professor of History at La Salle University, exemplifies the extent of black talent that Goff’s article mentions, in his work, “Blacks in Major League Baseball: The Experience of the First Generation, 1947-61.” Rossi notes that Robinson attracted immense crowds.³³ It is no surprise that other teams, National League and American League alike, understood that black players would ensure greater crowds, resulting in more profit. Therefore, integration served as a means to gain more crowds while also benefiting the team with black talent. Rossi illustrates the degree of talent that African American players provided by citing that

²⁹ Brian Goff, Robert McCormick, & Robert Tollison, “Racial Integration as an Innovation: Empirical Evidence from Sports Leagues,” *The American Economic Review* 92 (2002): 26.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ John Rossi, “Blacks in Major League Baseball: The Experience of the First Generation, 1947-61,” *The international journal of the history of sport* 13 (1996): 398.

thirty-five Negro leaguers were brought up to the major leagues between 1947-53.³⁴ Of these thirty-five, thirteen of them were at one point All-Stars, while six of them reached the Hall of Fame.³⁵ Rossi also remarks that during the 1951 season, five teams placed African Americans in key positions and all five of these teams finished in the first division.³⁶ Rossi furthers Goff's claim that the National League was more receptive of blacks than the American League, when Rossi asserts that the National League dominated the American League, from the 1950s to the early 1970s, because of its greater acceptance of black players.³⁷ For example, the National League won the 1955, 1957, 1959, and 1960 World Series, while by the end of the 1950s the National League had won nine out of fifteen All Star games.³⁸ Both Goff and Rossi demonstrate that the National League possessed more of an advantage over the American League because the National League realized that not only would it financially benefit from integration, but also from the talent that African Americans provided their newly integrated teams.

Another origin of baseball's integration was international in nature. During WWII, which America participated in from December of 1941 to September of 1945, thousands of African Americans served under the American flag.³⁹ According to John Hill, an assistant professor of History at Warner University, many of these African American servicemen promoted, "The 'Double-V' campaign: victory over Nazism abroad and victory over racial discrimination at home."⁴⁰ As put in the words of Elmer Ferguson of the Miami Herald, "Those who were good enough to fight and die by the side of whites are plenty good enough to play by the side of

³⁴ Ibid, 399.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, 400.

³⁷ Ibid, 402.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Hill, 30.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

whites.”⁴¹ Also, Rossi notes that Americans began to loath the racism that Nazi Germany disseminated throughout the European continent.⁴² As a result, the hatred of Nazi Germany’s Jewish racism brought to light America’s own glaring racism toward African Americans.⁴³

In relation to the above concept was the impact and successes of African American athletes prior to Jackie Robinson. Tygiel claims that the 1930s witnessed immense athletic achievement under African Americans Jesse Owens, the track star of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, and Joe Louis, the world heavyweight boxing champion.⁴⁴ Jesse Owens’ triumph during the Olympics and Adolf Hitler’s “alleged snubbing” of the victorious black man brought the race issue to light back in the U.S.⁴⁵ Tygiel poses the question, “If Americans could cheer the efforts of Joe Louis and Jesse Owens, why should they object to blacks in baseball?”⁴⁶ However, “The arousal of public awareness” to integration could not be achieved through the victories of Owens and Louis alone, integration also required the power of the press.

Joe Marren, a journalism instructor, advocates that there existed, “Three distinct newspaper segments” during the fight for baseball’s integration, in his article, “The Press and the Modern Integration of Baseball.”⁴⁷ The first of these segments was black newspaper publications: *The Pittsburgh Courier*; *Baltimore Afro-American*; *The People’s Voice of Harlem*; *The Chicago Defender*; *The Wave Newspaper Group*; *The Philadelphia Tribune*; and *The Amsterdam News*, many of which promoted the “Double-V” campaign.⁴⁸ Prominent black press writers were Wendell Smith, Sam Lacy, Joe Bostic, Frank Young, Chester Washington, Dr. Rollo Wilson,

⁴¹ Elmer Ferguson, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, November 3, 1945.

⁴² Rossi, 397.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Tygiel, 35.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Joe Marren, “The Press and the Modern Integration of Baseball,” *The New York Sociologist* 3 (2008): 29.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Dan Burley, and Ed Harris.⁴⁹ Another integral component of the press was *The Daily Worker*, a socialist publication.⁵⁰ Its most prominent writers were Lester Rodney and Bill Mardo.⁵¹ The last segment was the pro-integration faction of the white press, which, although minute in numbers, was represented by writers from *The Washington Post* and *The New York Daily*: Westbrook Pegler, Shirley Povich, and Jimmy Powers.⁵²

The first of these groups, starting in the 1920s, to call for integration was the black press, which was followed by the socialist press in the 1930s, while a few members of the white press began their campaign during or after WWII.⁵³ The socialist oriented paper, *The Daily Worker* aligned itself with the black press on the issue of baseball's integration.⁵⁴ However, pro-capitalism/pro-U.S. and anti-socialism/anti-Soviet sentiments were felt by a majority of Americans during much of the twentieth century, resulting in an alienation of anything socialist and/or communist. As a result, black writers, like Wendell Smith of the *Pittsburgh Courier* wrote, "the Communists did more to delay the entrance of Negroes in big league baseball than any other single factor."⁵⁵ The reason Smith made this accusation was because of the nature of capitalism versus communism/socialism. Since the black and socialist presses, according to Marren, were deemed as one in the same, many white team owners continued to view blacks as outsiders, especially because the capitalist-oriented owners felt threatened by a possible black/socialist coalition.⁵⁶ However, as will be seen further on, although the black press did not necessarily desire assistance from the socialist press, socialist writers, like Lester Rodney, would successful contribute to baseball's integration.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid, 30.

⁵³ Ibid, 42.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 30.

⁵⁵ Wendell Smith, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, August 23, 1947.

⁵⁶ Marren, 30.

Although the black press was an imperative factor in the integration of Jackie Robinson, it at times received criticism from fellow African Americans, while also indirectly contributing to the white propaganda of pro-segregation newspapers. As previously mentioned, the Negro leagues, which were ran and employed by African Americans, provided a sense of black pride and a majority of their income to their African American communities.⁵⁷ As a result of integration, employment of ballplayers, umpires, stadium staff, announcers, and trainers were reduced, which led to the eventual demise of the Negro leagues in 1951.⁵⁸ Consequently, it is no surprise that Effa Manley, owner of the Newark Eagles, a Negro league team, “Blamed the black press for her organizations demise.”⁵⁹ Another perceived flaw of the black press was when Sam Lacy of *The Washington Tribune* and *Baltimore Afro-American* wrote, “I am reluctant to say that we haven’t a single man in the ranks of colored baseball who could step into the major league uniform and disport himself after the fashion of a big leaguer.”⁶⁰ President of the New York Yankees, Larry McPhail, and the non-sympathetic factions of the white press used Lacy’s rhetorical plunder as fuel against the battle of integration.⁶¹

Although the black press experienced some setbacks, as seen with its alliance with *The Daily Worker* and Lacy’s ill-thought remark, it gained unification and clout during the Jake Powell incident. According to *The New York Times* writer Chris Lamb, Jake Powell of the New York Yankees claimed, during his 1938 season, that on his off time he, “Cracked niggers over the head with his nightstick.”⁶² As a result, he was suspended from playtime for ten days; this was the first

⁵⁷ Ibid, 31.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Tygiel, 84.

⁶¹ Marren, 35.

⁶² Chris Lamb, “Public Slur in 1938 Laid Bare a Game’s Racism,” *The New York Times*, last modified July 27, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/27/sports/baseball/27powell.html>.

time that a major league player was punished for a racist remark.⁶³ Yet, this was not enough for the black press. African American journalists called for their readers to boycott Yankees' games and Yankees' radio sportscasts.⁶⁴ Not only did the power of the black press, during the Jake Powell incident, result in an apology from the Yankees to the African American community, but it also provided more momentum toward integration and more unification within the black community.⁶⁵

The pro-integration factions of the white press entered the battle later than the black and socialist presses because of white indifference, rather than white hostility, toward integration.⁶⁶ However, the mainstream white press reacted unfavorably toward its "carpet-bagger" peers. Ed Danforth, of *The Atlanta Journal*, wrote, "The only menace to peace between the races is the carpet-bagger white press and agitators in the Negro press who capitalize on racial issues to exploit themselves."⁶⁷ Thus, the white press often deemed the pro-integration, be it white or black, press as creating racial tensions where none existed, in order to fulfill its own aims. Not only did the white press contradict integration-gearred publications, but it also offered its readers four fundamental reasons against integration. The four pillars of segregation were as follows: African Americans were not ready for the major leagues; African Americans possessed no minor league experience; African Americans would receive much "backlash" from fans and southern players; and African Americans would not be allowed to participate in the spring training sites located in the Jim Crow South.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Marren, 30.

⁶⁷ Ed Danforth, cited in *The Chicago Defender*, November 3, 1945.

⁶⁸ Marren, 34-35.

Once the mainstream white press realized that its attempts to impede integration were futile, with the integration of Jackie Robinson in April of 1947, it morphed its rhetoric in a way that championed white owners as “emancipators” of African American ballplayers.⁶⁹ The white press often justified Branch Ricky’s choice to integrate because he was combating the corruption and greed of the poorly run Negro leagues.⁷⁰ Therefore, since the white press deemed that corrupt racketeers owned the Negro leagues white managers like Ricky were saviors to black ballplayers. This assertion, by the white press, is important because it illustrates the racist assumption that even though African Americans gained the right to play with white ballplayers, this right was warranted at the hands of superior whites.

While the press served as a force to integrating baseball, the actual writers also paved the path toward integration. Jonathan Mayo, a senior writer for MLB.com, asserts that Wendell Smith and Sam Lacy, “Not only covered the integration of professional baseball in 1946, they played a major role in forcing its occurrence,” in his article, “Writers Lacy, Smith played big role in baseball integration.”⁷¹ Wendell Smith wrote for the *Pittsburgh Courier* while Sam Lacy wrote for the *Washington Tribune* and then the *Baltimore Afro-American*, each of these papers were popular components of the black press.⁷² Mayo states that Smith and Lacy possessed twin strategies: pressuring team owners to integrate and attempting to gain favor with the white press, in hopes that the white press would align with the black press and promote integration.⁷³

Smith and Lacy, like many other writers, contributed to integration through their written campaigning, yet Mayo states that these two men surpassed mere writing by their active

⁶⁹ Ibid, 41.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Jonathan Mayo, Negro Leagues Legacy, “Writers Lacy, Smith played big role in baseball integration,” last accessed November 25, 2012, http://mlb.mlb.com/mlb/history/mlb_negro_leagues_story.jsp?story=lacysmith.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

involvement in the fight to integrate. Mayo notes that Smith once polled National League players and managers on the issue of integration; surprisingly enough, seventy-five percent favored integration, twenty percent opposed, and five percent offered no opinion.⁷⁴ Smith attempted to present these findings to major league owners, yet they offered him no response.⁷⁵ In 1945, both Smith and Lacy agreed that Robinson was the best choice for integration because he, “Was the most suitable player. He had played against white competition, was a college guy.”⁷⁶ As a result, during that same year, Smith met with Branch Ricky and convinced him to contemplate Robinson as a possible choice for integration.⁷⁷

Once Jackie Robinson was integrated, Smith and Lacy continued their active roles by searching for proper housing, for Robinson, during the Dodger’s spring training.⁷⁸ The Brooklyn Dodgers moved from Daytona Beach to Sanford, Florida and finally to Cuba for spring training because Cuba was the only area that would allow all members of the team to reside in the same hotel.⁷⁹ Although the accommodations in Cuba were not ideal, Smith and Lacy ensured Robinson equal living arrangements. Smith and Lacy’s efforts, through the printed press and through crucial meetings with Ricky, contributed immensely to the integration of Robinson.

Another individual of the press who exceeded mere writing was Lester Rodney of, *The Daily Worker*. Jeremy Schaap’s *ESPN* commentary, “Rodney pushed for MLB integration,” illustrates the prominent role that Rodney, a white male and socialist, played in the crusade for integration.⁸⁰ Rodney’s written work was characterized by its challenging nature toward then baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis, its celebration of black athletes, and its

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Jeremy Schaap, “Rodney pushed for MLB integration,” *ESPN Outside The Lines*, last modified May 3, 2010, <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/otl/news/story?id=4943434>.

inclusion of both white and black ballplayers in his sports section.⁸¹ Yet, Rodney surpassed his written assaults on Landis by conducting rallies and attaining one to two million signatures in a petition to end segregation.⁸² Rodney's determination to eradicate segregation demonstrates that there existed white individuals who strove toward the realization of an integrated major league.

Now that the role of the press and its influential writers has been fully analyzed, it is necessary to focus on another source of integration: the Great Migration. The Great Migration, which started around WWI, occurred in many phases. However, Hill focuses on the WWII stage of the Great Migration. He notes that because of the need for domestic labor, during WWII, many African Americans migrated from south to north in order to be closer to northern defense plants.⁸³ Tygiel furthers Hill's claim when he states, "The African American population in the industrialized North increased by fifty percent in the 1940s."⁸⁴ As a result, since no major league franchises existed in the South, a greater proportion of African Americans than ever before were now in close proximity to major league teams.⁸⁵ Therefore, the Great Migration, during the WWII era, produced a more abundant African American population in northern cities, resulting in an even greater presence of black talent near major league franchises. Also, the greater presence of African Americans, fans and players alike, provided more of an economic prospect toward integration; as previously discussed economic profit was a major cause of integration.

As previously mentioned, economics, the press, the Great Migration, WWII, and the success of other African American athletes led to the integration of Jackie Robinson. Yet, it is significant to examine how Commissioner "Happy" Chandler and the Supreme Court case of *Brown v Board* provided integration with legitimacy and acceleration. John Hill's article, "Commissioner

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Hill, 30.

⁸⁴ Jules Tygiel, 105.

⁸⁵ Hill, 30.

A. B. "Happy" Chandler and the Integration of Major League Baseball: A Reassessment" asserts that while Chandler played a role in the desegregation of baseball, this role was much minor than Chandler and his supporters acclaimed. Chandler, the major league baseball commissioner from 1945-51, was a Kentucky senator at the time of his appointment to commissioner.⁸⁶ Hill states that Chandler held a moderate view on race relations and civil rights; as seen with his refusal to desegregate Kentucky's colleges and his lack of support for anti lynching laws, yet he welcomed the abolition of the poll tax.⁸⁷ As a result, many newspapers, like the *Brooklyn PM*, asserted that the owners chose a, "Southerner because the ever-darkening shadow of democracy (as worn by the Negro ballplayer) is indeed threatening to make a right out of a palpable and obvious wrong."⁸⁸ In other words, Chandler was chosen because many of the owners held the conviction that as a southerner he would not challenge the racial barrier. However, Hill contradicts this assumption when he states that Chandler's racial views held no value to his appointment, rather the owners desired to align themselves with federal officials, which as previously mentioned Chandler was at that time a senator.⁸⁹

Hill argues that Chandler's role regarding integration was not as powerful as his supporters claim because Chandler's statements on integration were never consistent.⁹⁰ For example, at a news conference in Chicago, where mostly whites were present, Chandler appeared to dance around the question of integration when he stated, "They may want to play in their own leagues and then meet the major league champion in a playoff game. Many Negro players make more money playing in their own leagues than major league players do."⁹¹ However, when the

⁸⁶ Ibid, 33.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 34.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Pittsburgh Courier, a major black newspaper, interviewed Chandler that very same week, on the matter of integration, he replied, “If a black boy can make it on Okinawa and Guadalcanal, hell, he can make it in baseball.”⁹² Not only did Chandler appeal to a black audience, but he also appealed to WWII and how it would serve as a cause of integration.

On hearing of Jackie Robinson’s integration onto the Brooklyn Dodgers, the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported that on March 22, 1947 Chandler stated, “Well, I am glad to hear that. Yes, sir, it's nice to know that everything is working out okay and that they're getting a fair chance. That's the way it should be. That's the American way.”⁹³ This statement, according to Hill, commenced Chandler’s role in the “integration drama.”⁹⁴ According to Chandler, in 1947, Branch Ricky sought his approval before integrating Jackie Robinson.⁹⁵ If this were true, without Chandler integration would not have occurred till much later. However, Hill denounces Chandler’s claim by citing that there exists no evidence of the meeting and further more Ricky never alluded to it, nor did Chandler mention it until 1965.⁹⁶ Additionally, Ricky was known to act “unilaterally”; therefore, he would never have sought Chandler’s permission.⁹⁷

Although Hill contradicts Chandler’s foremost claim to desegregation, Hill does admit that Chandler assisted in the success of Jackie Robinson’s integration. For example, on an April 22, 1947 game against the Philadelphia Phillies, who were managed by Ben Chapman, Jackie Robinson received a torrent of racial slurs throughout the entire game.⁹⁸ Ben Chapman, originally from Alabama, encouraged his players to ridicule Robinson, “To see if he could take

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, 36.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 37.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 38.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 39.

it.”⁹⁹ However, Chandler reacted to the animosity by contacting the Phillies general manager, Herb Pennock, and threatening disciplinary measures against the team and their, “Un-American remarks.”¹⁰⁰ Another instance where Chandler supported Robinson was during the attempted players’ strike in May of 1947.¹⁰¹ At the time, a rumor was floating around that the St. Louis Cardinals desired a players’ strike against the integration of Robinson.¹⁰² Ford Frick, the president of the National League, proclaimed that the league would defend Robinson and suspend any players that participated in the strike.¹⁰³ Chandler supported Frick’s actions; therefore, according to Hill, Robinson’s integration was protected by two of baseball’s most prominent men.¹⁰⁴ Although Chandler’s claim of catalyzing the process of integration is highly exaggerated, his protection of Robinson from the tirade of the Phillies and subsequent teams and his support against the possible players’ strike illustrated that an authoritative figure upheld integration; as a result, Chandler did serve a role, not in establishing integration, but in maintaining its legitimacy.

“Happy” Chandler’s support of Jackie Robinson’s integration assisted in the overall solidification of baseball’s integration. However, Rossi suggests that the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v Board* not only strengthened the integration of baseball, but also accelerated its pace.¹⁰⁵ *Brown v Board*, which ruled against the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas in 1954, declared that the segregation of public schools was unconstitutional.¹⁰⁶ Not only did this ruling end educational segregation, but it also served as an end to the “separate but equal” clause that

⁹⁹ Ibid, 40.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 41.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Rossi, 399.

¹⁰⁶ National Archives, “Teaching With Documents: Documents Related to *Brown v Board of Education*, last accessed December 3, 2012, <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/brown-v-board/>.

resulted from the earlier *Plessy v Ferguson* case.¹⁰⁷ Thus, Rossi proposes that although African Americans, since Robinson's 1947 integration, contributed and participated in every World Series, except the 1950 World Series, the flow of integration was, "Painfully slow until around 1954."¹⁰⁸ He even states that there existed an unspoken quota system, of black players, between baseball's executives.¹⁰⁹ This "racial tokenism" was extremely evident in 1953 when only twenty out of four hundred major league ballplayers were black.¹¹⁰ It was also apparent that a "racial tokenism" was prevailing because only eight out of sixteen major league teams were integrated after the 1953 season.¹¹¹ Although the integration of baseball occurred before civil society, it would not be fully integrated until the 1959 integration of Pumpsie Green onto the Boston Red Sox.¹¹² Yet, Rossi claims that the unanimous approval by the Supreme Court for the integration of schools, in 1954, further legitimized baseball's integration and facilitated its pace.¹¹³ For example, in 1954 alone four major league teams integrated, while by 1959 the rest would follow suit.¹¹⁴ The eradication of an actual law, especially by such an authoritative judicial force, the Supreme Court, added more legitimacy to the desegregation of the unofficial color barrier. Therefore, while this paper states that the integration of baseball occurred before the integration of civil society, it also accepts that victorious moments in civil society's integration complimented the ongoing process of baseball's integration.

Thus far, this paper has suggested that the integration of baseball occurred because of WWII, the Great Migration, the press, the success of other African American athletes, and most

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Rossi, 399.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ David Marasco, The Diamond Angle, "Baseball Integration Timeline," last accessed December 5, 2012, <http://www.thediamondangle.com/marasco/negleg/timeline.html>.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

importantly economics. While all the above factors contributed to Jackie Robinson's rise to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, economic profit was the strongest influence toward integration. Yet, if profit played such an integral role in the integration of major league baseball why did other sports, like basketball, not also integrate as early as 1947? Also, another remarkable development of integration, that must be explored, was the integration of football. This sport integrated before baseball, yet why is this fact less known or acknowledged? This paper commences the examination of the various reasons why basketball lagged behind in the fight for integration and why football's integration was less prominent, in the annals of African American history, than baseball's integration.

Before discussing the progression of basketball's integration, it is necessary to address the congruencies between the history of African Americans in both baseball and basketball. John Bonacorsi's video presentation, "Integration of the National Basketball Association," illustrates these fundamental similarities. Like organized baseball, African Americans participated in professional basketball leagues, the National Basketball League and the Basketball Association of America for example, before the formation of what many today know as the National Basketball Association.¹¹⁵ Before the creation of the National Basketball Association, as early as 1902 "Black Five" teams began to form in churches, social clubs, and YMCAs across the country.¹¹⁶ These "Black Five" teams were complimentary to the Negro league baseball teams. "Black Five" teams, like the basketball team the Harlem Globetrotters, possessed a playing style that was flashy while also possessing the ability to beat all white teams; this too mirrored the

¹¹⁵ John Bonacorsi, Slideshare, "Integration of the National Basketball Association," last modified May 28, 2007, <http://www.slideshare.net/jbonacorsi/integration-of-the-nba#btnNext>.

¹¹⁶ NBA Forum, "Black Fives: The Story of Integration in Pro Basketball," last modified October 30, 2010, <http://www.insidehoops.com/forum/showthread.php?t=191985>.

playing style and ability of the Negro leagues of baseball.¹¹⁷ Thus, both baseball and basketball had a presence of blacks before the establishment of an unofficial color barrier, yet once this barrier was established, African American baseball and basketball players participated in all black leagues.

In 1949, the Basketball Association of America and the National Basketball League merged to create the National Basketball Association.¹¹⁸ Bonacorsi suggests that African American involvement in WWII was a crucial step toward the integration of basketball.¹¹⁹ Like baseball, African American participation in the armed services, like the all black air-force unit known as The Tuskegee Airmen, resulted in a call for freedom to play side by side with whites on the basketball court.¹²⁰ In April of 1950, Charles “Chuck” Cooper was the first African American drafted to the National Basketball Association.¹²¹ It is worthy to note that the Boston Celtics drafted Cooper, for this development contrasted with the integration of baseball because the Boston Red Sox were the last team to integrate in 1959.¹²² Although Cooper is regarded as the first African American drafted by a National Basketball Association team, Nat “Sweetwater” Clifton was the first African American to sign with a National Basketball Association team, in May of 1950, while Earl Llyod was the first African American to actually play a National Basketball Association game, on October 31, 1950.¹²³

Even though basketball integrated only three years after baseball it is essential to offer an analysis to why profit did not accelerate the pace of basketball’s integration. Norris Johnson and

¹¹⁷ Bonacorsi.

¹¹⁸ Sue Goodwin, "1940-1949," *American Cultural History*, Lone Star College-Kingwood Library, last modified July 2009, <http://www.wappskc.lonestar.edu/popculture/decade40.html>.

¹¹⁹ Bonacorsi.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Marasco.

¹²³ Bonacorsi.

David Marple's article, "Racial Discrimination in Professional Basketball: An Empirical Test," provides many factors that impeded the process of integration. Johnson and Marple suggest that in order to appease its white fan bases and alumni, the majority groups that attended college basketball games, collegiate teams either had all white teams or majority white teams, thus ensuring that tickets were purchased.¹²⁴ Not only does this point present evidence for the slower pace of integration, but it also suggests that profit at times acted against integration. While this evidence focuses on college basketball it is probable that it was also applicable to the NBA. Johnson and Marple's study also asserts that a number of professional basketball franchises existed in the south, unlike the major league baseball franchises of the north; therefore, the southern "norm" of viewing African Americans as inferior or unworthy of playing on the same court as whites was rampant.¹²⁵ They further claim that not only did southern blacks face more discrimination than they would in the north, but also many blacks were "economically depressed", resulting in less of an economic impact to integrate because blacks could not afford to purchase tickets to basketball games.¹²⁶ As a result, a team was less likely to integrate African American players because there were less African American crowds to appease.

The integration of professional football occurred along a different trajectory than the integration of baseball and basketball. While the role of African Americans in football possessed some similarities to baseball and basketball, there were fundamental differences. Mark Newgent's article, "The integration, segregation, and reintegration of pro-football," places African American players in three distinct time frames: integration, segregation, and reintegration. According to Newgent, African Americans participated in professional football

¹²⁴ Norris Johnson and David Marple, "Racial Discrimination in Professional Basketball: An Empirical Test," *Sociological Focus* 6 (1973): 8.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

since its earliest days, as seen with Charles Follis' signing with the Shelby Athletic club in 1904.¹²⁷ The initial stages of professional football and baseball both incorporated blacks, yet it is remarkable to note that by 1904 baseball's color barrier had been already established for fourteen years, while blacks were just beginning to participate in professional football. Yet, the National Football League, the premier football league of today, wasn't established until September 17, 1920.¹²⁸ Yet, blacks stars like Joe Lillard and Fritz Pollard participated during the dawn of the National Football League.¹²⁹

How was it that football was still integrated at this time, but baseball was at the prime of its segregation? Newgent suggests that at professional football's birth, right before the century, the sport wasn't as popular as major league baseball, boxing, and even college football.¹³⁰ As a result, team owners purchased African American players because their talent attracted vast crowds.¹³¹ This contrasts with baseball's development because the use of black football players to attract crowds occurred before a football color barrier was established, while employing black baseball players to draw crowds occurred after the baseball color barrier was disbanded. Another reason integration was able to thrive for so long was that professional football, even the National Football League, was originally "loosely organized" and lacked official rules.¹³² Both the early days of baseball and football were characterized by a lack of organization and authority, which contributed to the presence of African American players in the initial days of both sports.¹³³ Yet, it appears that baseball was able to organize and establish uniform rules at a faster pace than

¹²⁷ Mark Newgent, "The integration, segregation, and reintegration of pro-football," last modified June 16, 2009, <http://www.examiner.com/article/the-integration-segregation-and-reintegration-of-pro-football>.

¹²⁸ Pro Football Hall of Fame, "NFL founded in Canton," last accessed December 6, 2012, <http://www.profootballhof.com/history/2005/1/1/nfl-founded-in-canton/>.

¹²⁹ Newgent.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

football, resulting in segregation occurring earlier; for professional baseball began in 1871 and the color barrier was established in 1890, while professional football commenced in 1893, but didn't establish its color barrier until 1934.¹³⁴ The relationship between football's original lack of popularity and its unorganized nature allowed for a presence of black players to persist until 1934.

Newgent proposes multiple reasons for the segregation of football in 1934. For example, owners refused to hire black players after 1934 because during the Great Depression it was considered "bad business" for the National Football League to employ African American men, with such high salaries, when white men were out of jobs.¹³⁵ Another catalyst to football's segregation was the role of the Washington Redskin's owner and president, George Preston Marshall. According to Newgent, "It was under Marshall's stewardship, entrepreneurial acumen, and flair for showmanship that the National Football League began to prosper and create profits for the owners."¹³⁶ Marshall, a "southern-born racist" and founder of the first southern football franchise, assisted in the National Football League's success; therefore, many team managers and owners were subdued into accepting the color barrier that Marshall gladly acknowledged.¹³⁷ As a result, football entered its second stage, which Newgent cites as segregation, in 1934. It should be noted that this color barrier, like professional baseball, was not an official act of legislation, but a "gentlemen's agreement."¹³⁸

An overarching cause of integration for baseball and basketball was also present in football's re-integration: WWII. As this paper previously mentioned, WWII served as a springboard for

¹³⁴ John Lindell, Just Sports, "When Did Pro Football Begin?" last accessed December 6, 2012, <http://www.blogsports.net/content/football-trivia/when-did-pro-football-begin>.

¹³⁵ Newgent.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

integration because African Americans, and their pro-integration allies, claimed that if they were good enough to fight for the U.S. they were good enough to play for its sports teams.¹³⁹ In 1946, The Cleveland Rams relocated to Los Angeles with two black players on their roster, Woody Strode and Kenny Washington.¹⁴⁰ While Newgent suggests that these men were not standout football players, they did attract enormous African American crowds, resulting in raised profits.¹⁴¹ Consequently, other teams followed suit and the pace of re-integration quickened. Yet, talent was also a factor for integration. As Newgent puts it, African Americans offered a competitive edge to the game and, “Were just plain better than their white counterparts.”¹⁴²

Professional football re-integrated in 1946, yet this integration is far less known than the integration of baseball. The integration of Jackie Robinson, in 1947, is often celebrated as one of the first major steps in the long journey toward racial equality. However, Newgent claims that football was a game made for television.¹⁴³ It is arguable that baseball was originally more popular than football, and even basketball, because the features of baseball were more appropriate for the radio. Football and basketball, due to their fast paced nature and constant movement were not as easy to follow over the radio. Consequently, before the advent of television baseball accumulated more of a following because many Americans owned at least one radio. However, during the 1950s, when television became more of a household item, the popularity of football increased.¹⁴⁴ Now Americans were able to watch and follow the fast moving sport of football from their homes; football’s visibility increased its popularity. While professional football integrated before baseball it was less celebrated because the sport was less

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

popular than baseball. Yet, football gained more of a following once its leagues were better organized, which occurred as a result of the creation of the American Conference and the National Conference in 1950, and once television became more of a household commodity.¹⁴⁵

All three sports, baseball, basketball, and football, share fundamental roots in regards to integration. Yet, baseball was able to integrate before basketball because profit at times supported segregation and the racist attitudes of basketball franchises located in the south. Although baseball integrated before basketball, the rate of basketball's integration has surpassed the pace of baseball's integration because as of 2009, 71.9% of professional basketball players were black¹⁴⁶, while as of 2012 only 8.05% of baseball players were black.¹⁴⁷ Football not only experienced a shorter period of segregation than baseball, but it also integrated a year before baseball. Like baseball, football owners and managers realized the talent and profit that black players could provide, yet the integration of football was less celebrated because it was not as popular or organized as baseball at the time. It must be noted that football not only beat baseball to integration, but as of 2010 football continues to surpass baseball in regards to integration because 67% of all football players were black, while only 8.05% of baseball players were black.¹⁴⁸

The integration of baseball, by Jackie Robinson in April of 1947, was a triumphant moment during the fight for African American integration and equality. It is a conundrum that a professional sport would integrate before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which led to the integration of restaurants, buses, stores, and etc. Yet, the forces of economics, WWII, the press,

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Black Enterprise, "NBA Decoded: Have Black Athletes Killed the White All-Star?" last modified March 28, 2012, <http://www.blackenterprise.com/money/decoded/nba-decoded-have-black-athletes-killed-the-white-all-star/>.

¹⁴⁷ Bob Nightengale, "Number of African-American baseball players dips again," *USA Today*, last modified April 16, 2012, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/baseball/story/2012-04-15/baseball-jackie-robinson/54302108/1>.

¹⁴⁸ Bob Wolfley, "Considering the NFL in black and white numbers," *Journal Sentinel*, last modified September 16, 2011, <http://www.jsonline.com/blogs/sports/129967143.html>.

the Great Migration, and other African American athletes all contributed to the pinnacle moment of Jackie Robinson's integration. Additionally, once baseball's integration was achieved, the support that Commissioner "Happy" Chandler offered Jackie Robinson allowed for the legitimization of integration, while *Brown v Board*, in 1954, accelerated the acceptance and pace of integration throughout major league baseball. Although profit was an essential source to baseball's integration it delayed the integration of professional basketball. Yet, profit, as seen with baseball, facilitated the integration of the less popular sport of football. While the integration of baseball possessed multifaceted causes, one thing is certain, all of these factors played a crucial role in transforming "America's pastime" into a sport that encompassed the American ideal of equality.

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