

It is All in the Game: Jackie Robinson and the Initial Newspaper Coverage of his Integration of
Baseball

George Grella in *Baseball and the American Dream*, relays the cultural importance of baseball in America quoting “Even in cold climates we know that if Opening Day has come, spring cannot be far behind ... because its long season extends to fall, baseball not only introduces the fine weather but also holds off the forces of death, darkness, and sterility until its World Series is over.”¹ Baseball for Americans is seen as something tied closely into American culture.² For Jackie Robinson in his opening year with the Brooklyn Dodgers, it seemed that was the one thing he was trying to achieve, being understood by the country.

Robinson was the first African American signed into the Major Leagues in 1945 and played his first game in 1947 for the Brooklyn Dodgers.³ He was signed by Branch Rickey, who was president of the Dodgers and a man that was trying to help with the integration of baseball.⁴ This research paper examines how the signing of Robinson and his crossing of the color line in Major League Baseball was initially covered in newspaper outlets and in what ways. I hypothesize that Robinson’s entry into the Major League will be covered through newspaper

¹George Grella, “Baseball and the American Dream,” *The Massachusetts Review* 16, no 3 (1972): pg 551-552.

²For more information on baseball in relation to American culture see: George Grella, “Baseball and the American Dream,” *The Massachusetts Review* 16, no 3. (1972) or Sharon Bohn Gmelch, *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 4 (2002): 1208-211.

³Lyle Spatz, *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America: The 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers* (Bison Original, 2012)

⁴United States Government, Library of Congress, *Breaking the Color Line: 1940 to 1946*, Library of Congress

outlets throughout the use of derogatory language and racism. Robinson's legacy is primarily one of a positive light but I hypothesize that the initial reactions state otherwise.

To understand the impact of Robinson's entry into Major League Baseball and how the media initially covered the story, one must first understand the historical context of this event, including the timeline and significance of the key players in it. Among the most important was Branch Rickey, who had begun his work with the Dodgers in 1942.⁵ Rickey had wanted to start integrating baseball from when he experienced discrimination of not allowing African Americans in the stands of the Cardinals stadium where he had previously worked.⁶ This ties in where the interest in Robinson enters, player number two. Rickey wanted someone who would be talented enough to play but also had the personality to be "subjected to hostility and insults."⁷ Dan W. Dodson, a sociologist, wrote "The Integration of Negroes in Baseball" in October of 1954, nine years after Robinson's entry.⁸ Dodson brought up a key idea of why Robinson was chosen to become the first player to enter the MLB. Robinson was seen as the best fit African American to be the front runner in this process due to his past experiences.⁹ Robinson had played with and against whites before and Rickey saw that he would perform best under these racial pressures.¹⁰ He also had attended college and UCLA and was a well educated and experienced

⁵United States Government, Library of Congress, Breaking the Color Line: 1940 to 1946, Library of Congress

⁶United States Government, Library of Congress, Breaking the Color Line: 1940 to 1946, Library of Congress

⁷United States Government, Library of Congress, Breaking the Color Line: 1940 to 1946, Library of Congress

⁸Dan W. Dodson, "The Integration of Negroes in Baseball," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 68, no. 2. (1954):

⁹Spatz, *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America*, pg 9.

¹⁰Dodson, "The Integration of Negroes in Baseball," pg 78.

man.¹¹ These traits about Robinson made him the perfect candidate to be in this position. In contrast to looking at Robinson's entry based purely off of his athletic merit, Rickey's focus was tailored to find someone that would be able to fill this position based off of mainly their personal characteristics in opposition to mainly athletic abilities. From the *New York Age*, on November 3, 1945 Robinson was discussed with language such as "Athlete and level-headed person that he is reputed to be, he should be a success."¹² This attests to Robinson's reputation and his personality of being looked at as the perfect person to handle this incredibly high tension position.

Another key aspect mapped out by Dodson was the climate of America at the time, basically stating that America was in a race war. There were essentially three main humps at the time that were causing this race problem in baseball. The players, the owners and the sports writers, which will be together, player three. Dodson then explains how very quickly these things needed to be changed if the integration of baseball would be possible.¹³

Todd Burroughs, who wrote about this topic in 1990, relayed this same message in his article, "Black Press Led Way for Robinson's Entry into Major Leagues."¹⁴ Exemplifying what the impact that newspapers had on the public was and how news was written to the country and baseball fans as a whole. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, an African American newspaper outlet at the time, was on the forefront of this idea of changing the climate relating towards the integration of

¹¹Dodson, "The Integration of Negroes in Baseball," pg 78.

¹²Thomas Aiello, "The Robinson Interregnum: The Black Press Responds to the Signing of Jackie Robinson, October 23, 1945-March 1, 1946," February 9, 2017, <https://www.readex.com/readex-report/robinson-interregnum-black-press-responds-signing-jackie-robinson-october-23-1945>. (accessed April 9, 2020).

¹³Dodson, "The Integration of Negroes in Baseball,"

¹⁴Todd Burroughs, "Black Press Led Way for Robinson's Entry into Major Leagues," ProQuest. *New Pittsburgh Courier*, March 22, 1997, <https://umw.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.umw.idm.oclc.org/docview/367942599?accountid=12299>. (accessed April 4, 2020).

baseball and the breaking of the color line.¹⁵ “There have been a whole lot of changes in the thinking of Americans on the questions of color, creed and national origin in the past decade and those who are living mentally in 1927 and physically in 1947 are daily finding their predictions about race relations not coming true.”¹⁶

The climate in America was changing and Robinson was entering the MLB at what seemed to be the perfect time. Chris Lamb wrote “Conspiracy of Silence of Sportswriters and the Long Campaign to Desegregate Baseball” in 2012.¹⁷ Lamb laid out the events that led up to this change and why this was able to happen. One major event discussed that happened prior to Robinson’s entry was World War II ending in 1945. Lamb discusses the Double V Campaign and its effects on Americans.¹⁸ The idea that if African Americans were fighting for the United States then they deserved the right to play here as well.¹⁹ This adds insight into how the climate in America was changing and Americans were becoming more acceptive of these ideas. The idea that if African Americans were risking their lives overseas and then trying to be “Americans” here was greatly disputed at the time that Robinson was breaking the color line and should be considered in the research of how these newspapers were reacting to it.

Robinson was signed with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1945 but played on their minor league team the Montreal Royals for two years until being introduced onto the Dodgers in 1947.

¹⁵For more information on the Pittsburgh Courier see: "America's Best Weekly: 100 Years of the Pittsburgh Courier." *New Pittsburgh Courier*, Feb, 2011, City Edition.

¹⁶Todd Burroughs, Black Press Led the Way for Robinson’s Entry into Major Leagues, <https://umw.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.umw.idm.oclc.org/docview/367942599?accountid=12299> (accessed April 4, 2020).

¹⁷Chris Lamb, *Conspiracy of Silence : Sportswriters and the Long Campaign to Desegregate Baseball* (ProQuest, 2012)

¹⁸For more information on the Double V Campaign see, "The Black Press: Soldiers without Swords," *Ethnic Studies Review* 21, (Apr 30, 1998): 127.

¹⁹Lamb, *Conspiracy of Silence*, pg 159.

²⁰ During the time between playing for the Royals and the Dodgers there was a lot of news coverage of Robinson.²¹ He was written about by columnist John Crosby as, “The blackest black man, as well as one of the handsomest, I ever saw.”²² Following his success in his first season with the Royals and winning the Little World Series, language varied within the newspapers with lines exemplifying praise with undermining racial ties for example Sam Maltin, for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, on October 12th, 1946 wrote, “It was probably the only day in history that a black man ran from a white mob with love instead of hate on his mind.”²³ The wording of this is interesting to analyze to see how Robinson was being praised but also infers that there were still underlying tones hinting towards racism within the headline.

The idea of sports journalism playing a key part in the integration process of baseball is covered greatly by historians in this field. Cyrus Saataz wrote an article in 2015, “Sports Journalists as Gatekeepers of Cultural and Social Movements.” Basically stating that sports journalism plays an integral part of significant news events of cultural significance.²⁴ This idea of sports journalism cannot be ignored in the research of Robinson breaking the color line through its cultural significance. *The Defender*, an African American news source, published lines such as, “They are bringing a new era of social justice into a game that is so much a part of the

²⁰Spatz, *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America*, pg 10-11.

²¹To see a photograph of Robinson in a Dodgers uniform see; Sandberg, Bob, photographer. Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers, posed and ready to swing. , 1954. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/97518921/>.

²²Spatz, *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America*, pg 10.

²³Spatz, *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America*, pg 10.

²⁴Cyrus A. Saataz, “Sports Journalists as the Gatekeepers of Cultural and Social Movements: A Comparative Analysis of the Media's Coverage of Jackie Robinson, Jason Collins, and Michael Sam,” San Diego State University (2015).

American culture and tradition.”²⁵ The signing of Robinson cannot be seen as simply a change in the Major Leagues but a change to American traditions and through newspapers publishing lines such as these show how the public was interpreting sporting events. Reactions of many other African American newspaper outlets also followed the signing of Robinson closely.²⁶ Another newspaper outlet, *The AFRO*, was also an African American newspaper outlet at the time and it was sending out a narrative to the African American community that was unlike any other.²⁷ This narrative they sent out was crucial to what would happen with Robinson and his success in the MLB.

For example, the response from the African American community was overwhelmingly positive. Newspaper sports columns were sending out the message of the importance of African Americans behaving responsibly at games.²⁸ Burroughs included from *The AFRO*, “let us not boo when he is hit intentionally or walked intentionally by the pitcher. It is all in the game.”²⁹

²⁵Todd Burroughs, *Black Press Led the Way for Robinson’s Entry into Major Leagues*, <https://umw.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.umw.idm.oclc.org/docview/367942599?accountid=12299> (accessed April 4, 2020).

²⁶Todd Burroughs, *Black Press Led the Way for Robinson’s Entry into Major Leagues*, <https://umw.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.umw.idm.oclc.org/docview/367942599?accountid=12299> (accessed April 4, 2020).

²⁷For more information on *The Afro* and *The Defender*, African American Newspapers, see; “The Defender: How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America.” *Publishers Weekly*, *Gale Literature Resource Center* (accessed April 13, 2020). https://link-gale-com.umw.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A434792816/LitRC?u=viva_mwc&sid=LitRC&xid=4232b1c2. or Jessica Anderson, “John H. Murphy III, Publisher of Afro Newspaper, Dies.” *McClatchy - Tribune Business News*, Oct 17, 2010. <https://umw.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.umw.idm.oclc.org/docview/758766793?accountid=12299>.

²⁸Dodson, “The Integration of Negroes in Baseball,” pg 80.

²⁹Todd Burroughs, *Black Press Led the Way for Robinson’s Entry into Major Leagues*, <https://umw.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.umw.idm.oclc.org/docview/367942599?accountid=12299> (accessed April 4, 2020).

This idea that Robinson was a “guinea pig in baseball's racial experiment” was just that.³⁰ Not only was the press focused on Robinson himself but it was focused on the African American community as a whole following Robinson’s signing and the experiment that was the breaking of the color line.

Another common message was being sent throughout *The Defender*, *The AFRO* and *The Pittsburgh Courier* in newsprint to the African American community, stated in the *Pittsburgh Courier* from its editor William G. Nunn, “Remember...today for Negro America, whose symbol is Jackie Robinson... is on trial! Mr. Rickey opened the door, and Jackie’s foot is in! Whether he meets the latest challenge will depend on how you act... whether you take it ‘in stride’ or you make fools of yourselves.”³¹ Robinson was looked upon as a test subject in baseball's experiment.³² This reveals that there was some kind of anxiety coming from the African American community regarding acceptance and should be considered in the research of this topic. This can only be truly understood through the coverage from newspaper sources from the time which otherwise could be missed.

Robinson however was doing his part on the field to help his emergence into the Major League. Robinson in his 1947 opening season was changing the lives and ideals of his teammates.³³ Patrick Henry in “Jackie Robinson Athlete and American Par Excellence” discusses

³⁰Lamb, *Conspiracy of Silence*, pg 284.

³¹Todd Burroughs, *Black Press Led the Way for Robinson’s Entry into Major Leagues*, <https://umw.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.umw.idm.oclc.org/docview/367942599?accountid=12299> (accessed April 4, 2020).

³²Jules Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*. 25th anniversary ed., expanded ed. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³³To see a photograph of the 1947 Dodgers Team see; Spatz, *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America*, pg 1.

how the worse the crowd was to Robinson, the closer their team became.³⁴ The 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers team was the first racially integrated team in the MLB and the perfect subject for the breaking of the color line.³⁵ Lyle Spatz brings forth a fact that because of Robinson this team set single game attendance records and skyrocketed product advertisements.³⁶

Headlines from April 19th, 1945 in the *Pittsburgh Courier* ranged from “Jackie Scores Winning Run” to “Robbies Bunt Turns Tide” to “Jackie Romps Home from Second Base as 26,000 Cheer.”³⁷ African American presses generally covered Robinson positively, usually never using the color of his skin. Clearly the most famous headlines discussed Robinson’s achievements and rarely his downfalls. However other newspapers were not as positive. Surprisingly not only towards Robinson, but the president of the Dodgers, Rickey. In 1945 at the signing of Robinson, Rickey at a MLB owners meeting was said to have ruined baseball by the owners of teams.³⁸ Rickey was referred to as the “John Brown” of baseball,³⁹ nicknamed “el cheapo.”⁴⁰ By the *Peoples Source* on November 3, 1945, Rickey was discussed with such language as being named “a carpetbagger and a niggerr lover.”⁴¹ The press relating towards the

³⁴Patrick Henry, “Jackie Robinson: Athlete and American Par Excellence,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* 73, no 2. (1997):

³⁵Spatz, *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America*, pg 62.

³⁶Spatz, *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America*, pg 298.

³⁷Microfilm frame of front page of Pittsburgh Courier Washington Edition. Pennsylvania Pittsburgh, 1972. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/97521180/>.

³⁸Dodson, “The Integration of Negroes in Baseball,” pg 76.

³⁹Todd Burroughs, Black Press Led the Way for Robinson’s Entry into Major Leagues, <https://umw.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.umw.idm.oclc.org/docview/367942599?accountid=12299> (accessed April 4, 2020).

⁴⁰Dodson, “The Integration of Negroes in Baseball,” pg 76.

⁴¹Thomas Aiello, The Robinson Interregnum: The Black Press Responds to the Signing of Jackie Robinson, October 23, 1945-March 1, 1946, <https://www.readex.com/readex-report/robinson-interregnum-black-press-responds-signing-jackie-robinson-october-23-1945>. (accessed April 9, 2020)

signing of Robinson varied in language used and whom they attacked. The attack from news sources focused on Rickey is one that seems to be left out of the narrative of Robinson's story and is intriguing to see why white headliners would rather attack Rickey than Robinson who was seen as the "other" in this situation.

Robinson was still however subject to his own abuse on the field. Between his opening season in 1947 and his final season in 1954 he was hit by pitches a whopping sixty-five times in his career.⁴² Robinson was able to overcome the racism he was put through. He achieved Rookie of the Year honors in 1947, which is a very high honor in Major League Baseball.⁴³ He batted .297, scored 125 runs, and led the league in 29 stolen bases.⁴⁴ In Robinson's rookie season, the Brooklyn Dodgers would also make it to the World Series, but fall to the Yankees after taking them to seven games.⁴⁵

The duo of Robinson and Rickey had an immense impact on the Dodgers organization, however, an even greater impact on society. Robinson is thought to have changed the lives of African Americans drastically and the coverage of newspapers following his emergence in the Major League is the first to attest to that. Andrew O'Toole, historian, wrote in his book *The Best Man Plays* in 2003, "The experience of blacks... as a country evolved to a truer representation of promises it was founded upon."⁴⁶

To truly understand the significance of Robinson breaking the color line it takes looking into the first initial reactions of newspaper outlets to gain a fuller perspective of this. Throughout

⁴²Henry, "Jackie Robinson: Athlete and American Par Excellence,"

⁴³Spatz, *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America*, pg 327.

⁴⁴Spatz, *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America*, pg 327.

⁴⁵Spatz, *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America*, pg 305.

⁴⁶Andrew O'Toole, *The Best Man Plays: Major League Baseball and the Black Athlete, 1901-2002* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2003)

this research it has shown that without Branch Rickey, Robinson would not have had the chance to achieve this.⁴⁷ Without the African American newspaper coverage of Robinson's emergence into the Major League and their narrative of persuading the community to accept him no matter what happens, again this would not have happened.⁴⁸ Throughout the study of the initial reactions of various newspaper sources, there is one prevalent answer to the previously stated hypothesis. The initial newspaper coverage was actually overwhelmingly positive towards Robinson. Was this due to his personality, his achievements, or a combination of both? Through this research it leads to one answer.

Robinson being the person he was, coming into the Major League at the specific time he did following World War II, and the role of Branch Rickey, created a special combination of traits that led newspapers to react to him the way they did. The trifecta of these three things were unstoppable. As a result of this combination and reactions Robinson was able to break the color line and excel as the first African American in the Major League and had the support of thousands behind him. Though the initial hypothesis stated in this paper was not one hundred percent correct, through this research many many more questions have been answered.

⁴⁷Dodson, "The Integration of Negroes in Baseball," pg 75.

⁴⁸Dodson, "The Integration of Negroes in Baseball," pg 80.

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During the American Revolution, the townspeople of Sharon made cannonballs and cannons for the Continental Army at a local foundry. In front of the Sharon Public Library stands a statue of Deborah Sampson, Sharon's town heroine. Sampson disguised herself as a man to fight in the Revolutionary War. 16.1% of all households were made up of individuals and 7.5% had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 2.82 people and the average family size was 3.17 people. Sharon is in Massachusetts' 4th congressional district, and is currently represented in the U.S. House of Representatives by Joseph P. Kennedy III and in the U.S. Senate by Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey. Education. by Sharon Bohn Gmelch (Author), George Gmelch (Author). 4.2 out of 5 stars 10 ratings. See all formats and editions Hide other formats and editions. Then you can start reading Kindle books on your smartphone, tablet, or computer - no Kindle device required. Apple. Android. Sharon Bohn Gmelch is Professor of Anthropology at the University of San Francisco and Roger Thayer Stone Professor of Anthropology at Union College. Her books include *Nan: The Life of an Irish Travelling Woman*; *Tinkers and Travellers: Ireland's Nomads*; *The Tlingit Encounter with Photography*; and, with George Gmelch, *Tasting the Good Life: Wine Tourism in the Napa Valley* (IUP, 2011). George Gmelch is Professor of Anthropology at the University of San Francisco and Union College. *Baseball as America*. National Baseball Hall of Fame Museum and Library, at the American Museum of Natural History, New York. March 16-August 18, 2002, traveling exhibition. *Baseball as America: Seeing Ourselves through Our National Game*. National Baseball Hall of Fame. Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2002. 330 pp. Discover the world's research. 19+ million members. 135+ million publications. by Sharon Bohn Gmelch. 3.61 Rating details. 38 ratings 3 reviews. Gmelch (anthropology, Union College) collects 27 essays on global tourism, written by North American and international scholars in anthropology, sociology, history, geography, and folklore. The essays are organized by themes of tourism and the tourist experience, marketing culture and identity, when tourists and locals meet, and the impact and implications of tourism. Alth Gmelch (anthropology, Union College) collects 27 essays on global tourism, written by North American and international scholars in anthropology, social Hence, the American dream and the «American tragedy» are found to be interrelated in overviews of those writers who are concerned to be Founding Fathers of American literature on the whole. Despite such a long literary discussion of the Dream we would like to concentrate on the first quarter of the twentieth century when on the one hand the idea was at the height of its fame and on the other hand, literature had already predicted and shown its collapse. Among the prophets of the failure of the ideology were three outstanding writers T. Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald and J. London who unwittingly