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Arthur "Rube" Foster was the founder of the first Negro National League and part of a Renaissance generation of African Americans in the 1920s. He sought to organize black talent in order to empower and energize the African American community.

*Courtesy of National Baseball Hall of Fame.*

The Negro Leagues:  
*The Dilemma of Myopia*

*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*

— PROVERBS 29:18

FROM, WILLIAM RHODEN,  
FORTY MILLION DOLLAR  
SLAVES (NY: CROWN, 2006).

IF THE JOCKEY SYNDROME EVICTED African American athletes from integrated major-league sports, Negro Leagues offered a home. As blacks were phased out of integrated sports through legislation, intimidation, and coercion, they relied on a sports world of their own. Ironically, the suffocating humiliation of colored-only and white-only was the best thing that happened to the still-developing community of African Americans only a generation or two out of slavery. Segregation forced African Americans into a spirit of cooperation and nudged them toward a useful, if hazy, concept of "unity" predicated as much on survival as on true kinship. Segregation forced African Americans into a spirit of interdependence that celebrated the particle of existence that mainstream society attacked: their humanity.

Pushed to the margins of society by de facto segregation and Jim Crow laws, scorned as "outside others" and left to their own devices, African Americans built a range of businesses: banks, salons, hotels,

restaurants, and theaters. In 1904, Robert Motts opened the Peking Theater on Chicago's South Side. Motts's theater grew out of black frustration with having to patronize "white" theaters through the back doors.

Arthur "Rube" Foster's Negro National League established a parallel world of baseball in the black community. Foster, known as "the Father of Black Baseball," was part of a Renaissance generation of African Americans in the 1920s who sought to redefine, celebrate, and make sense of the African American presence in the United States. Black poets wrote their poems, black singers sang their songs, black artists made their art. Foster used his baseball league as a canvas to express a new physical art form, which by the end of the century African American athletes would show off for the whole world.

Foster founded his Negro National League (NNL) in 1920. This universe of black baseball was run by African Americans and was largely dependent on an African American fan base, though it appealed to a cross-section of fans who appreciated the fast-paced, daredevil, "Africanized" style of play that became the league's resonating, rousing signature. Foster knew baseball like no other man—black or white. He had been a star pitcher, an innovative manager, a stern but generally benevolent team owner, and now was the driving force behind a groundbreaking league.

Historian John B. Holway has called Foster one of the most impressive figures in baseball history. He describes him as a combination of Christy Mathewson, one of baseball's great pitchers; John McGraw, the great manager of the Yankees' first dynasty; Connie Mack, a founder of the American League; and Kenesaw Mountain Landis, Supreme Court justice and baseball's first commissioner.

Yet Rube Foster has become a mere footnote in the epic story of sports integration in which Jackie Robinson is a central character.

In some ways, however, Foster is an even more significant figure than Robinson. Foster used black resources to build a baseball league that nurtured talents like Robinson while establishing an economically viable alternative to Major League Baseball. Robinson became a symbol of the process of integration, a process that ultimately enriched white institutions while weakening and in many cases destroying black institutions. White America determined the pattern of integration; the white power structure chose blacks who made whites feel comfortable, who more or less accepted the vagaries of racism. This was the Jackie Robinson model of how an integration-worthy African-American behaved: taking abuse, turning the other cheek, tying oneself in knots, holding one's tongue, never showing anger, waiting for racist sensibilities to smolder and die out—if your spirit didn't die first. This model was hardly progress for black athletes. It was, in fact, a reversal of the paradigm for black involvement in sports that Foster and others had created out of a hard necessity.

Foster represents a significant—and rare—departure from the pioneering tradition that defined—and, to a large extent, still defines—the journey of African American athletes. The history of the black athlete is often presented as a history of “pioneering”: Tom Molineaux went from slavery in Virginia to boxing celebrity in England. Moses Fleetwood Walker became the first African American to play major-league baseball. Isaac Murphy glamorized the stature of the jockey in thoroughbred horse racing. Jack Johnson became the first African American heavyweight champion. Jackie Robinson desegregated Major League Baseball. Althea Gibson became the first African American to win a major tennis tournament. Tiger Woods won the Masters golf tournament.

Foster was also a pioneer, but not in the same way. His innovation wasn't being the first black in a white-defined institution. He was a

man of clear, resolute, and uncompromising vision: He wanted a professional league of black baseball that was owned, organized, managed, and played by African Americans.

Foster was not a dreamer; he was a shrewd, determined businessman with superior organizational skills. His Negro National League marked one of the last times that African Americans controlled their own major-league sports organizations. His Negro National League also offered a glimpse of what an African American community could achieve by effectively nationalizing its athletic gold. The lasting genius of Foster's legacy is that he was able to organize African Americans, to unite and move them as a group toward a collective goal.

Foster's vision extended beyond forming a league for the sake of simply playing baseball. He wanted to "unite those who seemingly could not be united." Foster was trying to prove that this could be done, but it would take a super effort to solve the perplexing question of why Negroes appear to unite with anybody and everybody but will not unite with themselves.

As early as 1906, Foster saw the need to organize black baseball. In the seminal days of the labor movement in the United States, he saw ballplayers—black and white—as a specialized labor force. He knew that integration with Major League Baseball was inevitable. When integration came, Foster wanted the Negro League he envisioned to have a monopoly on the commodity that Major League Baseball would desperately need: black ballplayers. His league, with players coming from all sections of the country, rural and urban, would have a corner on the market.

He wanted his league to be so competitive, so well run, that when the national pastime was integrated, the NNL would be in a position to dictate rather than be dictated to. His theory was that the league's strongest teams would be absorbed intact, not picked apart like a carcass by so many buzzards.

Foster realized that the black-owned monopoly on black muscle he envisioned could not be accomplished using the working model of the day for black teams—barnstorming. This method lacked focus, and was subject to the control of white booking agents. In barnstorming, teams scoured the countryside, playing hit-or-miss exhibitions against woefully inconsistent competition, from local neighborhood teams to white major leaguers looking to make some extra money on the side.

Foster grew up in this barnstorming tradition. He was born in Calvert, Texas, in 1879, a year after fellow Texan Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight champion. Foster's father was a Methodist preacher, and like many African Americans, the elder Foster saw participation in sports as a sinful indulgence. At the time, the attitude of many earnest, hardworking African Americans toward sports was that it led to nothing constructive and that, as an enterprise played for the pleasure of white people, it was degrading to blacks. Yet, by the time he was thirteen, the younger Foster was a train-hopping baseball vagabond.

His mother died in 1899. When his father remarried and moved, baseball became a sanctuary and an obsession for Foster. Like Johnson, Foster lived the rough-and-tumble life. He became the baseball equivalent of the itinerant bluesman, a teenage troubadour who traversed the country, hopping trains, catching freights to this game or that. The essence of Foster's character is revealed in his response to an invitation from Frank Leland, the African American owner of the Leland Giants in Chicago. The owner, in his telegram, warned Foster that with the Giants he would be playing against the best (white) baseball teams in the area. Foster replied, "If you play the best clubs in the land, white clubs, as you say, it will be a case of Greek meeting Greek. I fear nobody."

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Foster moved to Chicago at seventeen, stayed for a year, then moved to Michigan to play semi-pro baseball. By 1902, he found his way east,

where black baseball was thriving. He pitched for the Cuban X Giants in New York City. And even though baseball was rigidly segregated, John McGraw, manager of the Giants, asked Foster to tutor Christy Mathewson, his young right-hander. In 1903, Foster went to Philadelphia and played with the Philadelphia Giants, where the first baseman was none other than Jack Johnson. In 1906, after a dispute over pay with the team and after seeing players undervalued and disrespected by booking agents, Foster left Philadelphia and vowed that he would no longer accept racial abuse or meager salaries from men who booked the games. He returned to Chicago to manage the Leland Giants, taking several Philadelphia Giant teammates with him. He became Leland's team secretary-treasurer and negotiated shrewdly with mostly white booking agents, thereby drastically increasing percentages of the gate for Giants players.

Ultimately Foster came to realize that barnstorming, for all of its charm and short-term benefits, was choking the life out of black baseball. Barnstorming was a losing proposition for black teams, which were at the mercy of white booking agents. The booking agents were the liaisons between black teams and the white baseball owners of the stadiums in which they played. Agents like Nat Strong and Ed Gottlieb, and later Abe Saperstein, could make or break teams simply by determining who played where and when. Foster was determined to break this choke-hold of agents acting as conduits between the white power structure and black owners. Foster realized that if total self-sufficiency was ever to be achieved, black teams had to reduce their dependence on booking agents. The only way to purge baseball of the network of powerful white booking agents who determined where teams played and which teams received the more lucrative dates was to form a league. The only way to do that was to organize. Writing for the *Indianapolis Freeman* in 1906, Foster wrote of black baseball:

Organization is its only hope. With the proper organization, patterned after the men who have made baseball a success, we will, in three years, be rated as other leagues are rated. We have the players and it could not be a failure, as the same territory is traveled now by all clubs, with no organization or money. It would give us a rating and standing in the daily papers which would create an interest and we could then let the best clubs in our organization play for the world's championship with other clubs of their leagues.

Foster ended by saying, "It would be a crime for the Negro who has such an abundance of talent in such a progressive age to sit idly by and see his race forever doomed to America's greatest and foremost sport."

If the Negro National League was going to corner the market, blacks would have to seize control of their resource: black players. Foster recognized by 1920, and probably earlier, that the emerging battle with the booking agents—the Strongs, Gottliebs, and Sapersteins—was a battle for control of the raw resource of an emerging industry. The battle over control of black athletic muscle would be a consistent underlying theme for the duration of the century. This was a battle African Americans would be hard-pressed to win, because they didn't know such a battle was being fought. Indeed, the African American community—and this would be its imprimatur during the next several decades—willingly turned black muscle over to whites, initially in the name of integration, ultimately for want of a dollar.

As word spread about Foster's plan to organize a black baseball league, there were attempts by the white-run Eastern League of Colored Baseball to buy Foster out. Nat Strong, the white founder of the Eastern League and one of the earliest and most powerful booking agents, offered to provide Foster, then president of the Chicago

American Giants, with a team of his own and the opportunity to play in a \$100,000 stadium if he cast his lot with the Eastern League of Colored Baseball. Sol White, a player, manager, and chronicler of early black baseball, wrote of Strong that "there is not a man in the country who has made as much money from colored ball playing as Nat Strong, and yet he is the least interested in its welfare."

Foster turned down Strong's offer. He fought Strong to a draw; his mastery at booking, achieved during years of booking games in Philadelphia and in Chicago as Leland's secretary, prevented Strong from controlling all of big-time African American baseball. Foster's fight was one of principle. Dave Malarcher, one of Foster's baseball confidants and the man who succeeded Foster as manager of the Giants, recalled that Foster turned down numerous opportunities to play in white semi-pro leagues because he felt he was needed in black baseball:

Foster had had an opportunity to leave Negro baseball, and go into white semi-pro baseball because he was the leading drawing card outside of the major leagues back in those days when he was pitching. But Rube told me he refused to go because he knew that all we had to do was to keep on developing Negro baseball, keep it up to a high standard, and the time would come when the white leagues would have to admit us. The thing for us to do, he said, was to keep on developing, so that when that time did come, we would be able to measure up.

Foster realized that the strength of the black league wasn't just that it was packed with quality players who were otherwise denied a shot, but that it had also developed a distinct, though hard to define, Africanized style of playing baseball. This style was characterized by exciting, daring base running, spikes-first slides into second base, and

bunting for base hits. Foster's league became a showcase of this black style of ball, distinguished by nonstop rhythm.

Foster launched his league in December of 1920. He invited eight owners of the strongest black teams to Kansas City for an inaugural meeting that would result in the formation of Foster's Negro National League. Although he did not want white ownership, one white owner, J. L. Wilkinson, who owned the Kansas City Monarchs, was part of the founding group. Wilkinson had strong Midwestern connections that were crucial if the new league was to move forward. This meeting in Kansas City showed Foster at his organizational best. To the amazement of the owners gathered, Foster had already secured a charter of incorporation for the league. The group of owners agreed that each team would have its own stadium to nullify dependence on the whims of major-league owners and booking agents who served their interests. This, however, turned out to be an overly ambitious plan that never materialized. They also agreed on high-minded bylaws that outlawed "raiding" of players on one team by owners of another.

In an odd way, considering the racist times, black players before the formation of the NNL were much freer to move around and jump teams than their counterparts in the majors, who were bound and kept in their place by a Reserve Clause. And it was that very clause, which bound players to a team for life, that Foster adopted from Major League Baseball. Foster realized that this was one case where unchecked "freedom" did not serve the best interest of his burgeoning baseball league—it's questionable whether this tactic was necessary to the league or just an owner's reflexive instinct for control. Ironically, whether done for the league's survival or to amass power, this was the same form of "slavery" or "bondage" Curt Flood would oppose fifty years later when he challenged the Reserve Clause.

Whether because of the racial river they followed or Foster's personal habits (he did not smoke, drink, or carouse), the owners added a morals clause in the charter that levied fines for ungentlemanly con-

duct on or off the field. Later, Foster would kick one of his star players off the team for breaking curfew.

The new black league showcased the unique style of black baseball in the context of an organized league. Each city had a team to cheer, stars to identify with, and a pennant race to follow. And now profits were made by black entrepreneurs, and no longer solely by white hands.

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Foster wasn't the first black entrepreneur to try to organize black baseball. Attempts to organize black teams into leagues began at least as early as 1887, the year blacks were banned from baseball by way of so many "gentlemen's agreements." The League of Colored Baseball Players was born and quickly died. In 1906 the International League of Independent Baseball Clubs was formed and included two white teams. In 1910, Major R. Jackson, a former manager of the Chicago Unions, and Beauregard F. Mosely, a black lawyer, businessman, and executive with the Leland Giants, called a meeting of black baseball officials to form a National Negro Baseball League of America. They were reacting to the ongoing backlash against African Americans and a desire for self-help and racial pride. The league never materialized.

Why did Foster's league take root and blossom when the others failed? Much of Foster's success had to do with the turbulence of the times, his relentless drive, and an emerging African American consciousness. America had witnessed steadily mounting violent white backlash against aggressive black demands for first-class citizenship. The demand for Civil Rights was escalated by the talk of democracy that led up to World War I. By the end of 1919, the Ku Klux Klan had become a virulent force in the United States and set the tone for a climate of violence and intimidation against blacks, Japanese, Roman Catholics, Jews, and all foreign-born persons. Blacks in particular were

under attack as never before—physically and psychologically—by whites who blamed African Americans for an increasing range of post-World War I woes ranging from high unemployment to encroachment on economic and social space.

In a manifestation of fear and jealousy that undergirds the Jockey Syndrome, increasing numbers of whites felt resentment at what they perceived as blacks' advances in gaining social ground. The mere existence and proximity of African Americans infuriated many whites. The attitude is reflected by the comments of a theater manager in Chicago who was asked to explain why African Americans were prevented from buying theater tickets on the main floor of one of Chicago's premier playhouses. The manager said that it was not the "conduct of the Negroes [that] was objectionable, but their mere presence."

This attitude explained the subtle discrimination behind the new black ghettos in the North as well as the ironclad segregation of the South.

A succession of riots beginning in the first decade of the 1900s saw outbreaks of white mob violence and terrorism as a means of keeping blacks in their place and out of economic and social competition with whites. As we've seen, when Foster's friend Jack Johnson defended his heavyweight boxing title against Jim Jeffries in 1910, roving crowds of white vigilantes rioted, killing and beating African Americans.

By 1919 the violence directed at African Americans had reached genocidal proportions. Indeed, it was the bloodiest year of racial violence the United States had seen since emancipation. The harmony, sacrifice, and national unity that marked the previous war years dissolved into bitter disillusionment amid tight competition between blacks and whites for resources in the North—and into the resumption of Jim Crow's violent reign in the South. Black soldiers coming back from the war with higher expectations of better treatment were met instead by redoubled efforts to relegate blacks to pre-war status on the bottom rung of society's ladder.

Lynch mobs murdered seventy-eight African Americans in 1919; black soldiers returning from duty were not exempt. In fact, the soldiers in uniforms with rifles incited fear among whites that this black subservient underclass was now armed and dangerous. Of the seventy-eight lynchings in 1919, ten victims were war veterans, some of whom were lynched in their uniforms.

On July 27, 1919, tension in Chicago exploded into a bloody ten-day race riot after a black teenager drowned while swimming, apparently under attack from a white mob. What distinguished this bloody race war from previous black-white clashes was the aggressive nature of black resistance to white violence: Blacks fought back. Rube Foster embodied this aggressive new attitude. He was the model of the emerging "New Negro," a phrase coined in 1919 by young black radicals as a way of distinguishing themselves from the traditional, accommodating black leadership.

The New Negro fought back. Now the shedding of black blood meant the shedding of white blood. White mobs descending on black neighborhoods in Chicago were met with force. The new black attitude was encapsulated by the Claude McKay poem "If We Must Die," which contained the couplet,

*Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack,  
Pressed to the wall, dying but fighting back!*

Foster's Negro National League created a universe in which the black presence was accepted, nurtured, and celebrated. The league became a base of power for African Americans in the rapidly growing industry of baseball. The six-team league, in addition to creating excitement, created employment and gave black newspapers teams to cover. The black press played a pivotal role in the formation of the league: Two reporters helped draw up the founding constitution.

The black press supported the league by giving teams coverage, writing up accounts of home games, and profiling the league's star players.

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If Rube Foster was the Negro National League's greatest strength, he was also its weakness. Foster attended to every single detail of the league he created. As manager, he ordered team uniforms and he bought equipment. In the dugout for his team, the Chicago American Giants, Foster called nearly every pitch and orchestrated every key play. As commissioner, he settled disputes—including those involving his own Chicago Giants, often in favor of the other team. Foster sent his own players to weaker teams in order to maintain competitive balance in the league. He earned a substantial amount of money—he took a percentage of the gross of each gate—but he poured much of his own money into shaky franchises and guaranteed hotel bills for teams stranded on the road. Foster was the benevolent dictator of his league. Though he was criticized for his domineering, heavy-handed management style, even his harshest critics conceded that without his unique ways, black baseball would have remained in the wild, risky, barnstorming wilderness. When he threatened to leave in the face of mounting criticism in 1926, Foster was given an overwhelming vote of confidence by owners.

His unyielding dream, though, was to see the elimination of racial barriers that blocked the entry of blacks into major-league baseball. Foster's vision was to see entire black franchises admitted, as well as individual players.

In 1926, Foster met with Ban Johnson, the American League president, and John McGraw, the legendary manager of the New York Yankees, to discuss plans for his American Giants to play big-league teams that visited Chicago on their off days. Commissioner Kenesaw

Landis apparently killed the idea and dealt "a crushing blow to Foster's already fragile psychological condition."

Years later, Foster's son speculated that the emotional straw that really broke his father's spirit was not so much the pressure of keeping teams of African Americans together and fending off attacks from booking agents. What broke his spirit was that meeting with McGraw and Johnson. His son suspected that during the meeting Foster had proposed some form of merger between his Negro League and Major League Baseball, and that McGraw apparently told Foster that the time was not right for an African American presence in Major League Baseball. The realization that his league would remain indefinitely estranged may have broken Foster's will. The world of black baseball would never become joined with the larger world of white baseball. Foster feared that white ball would take what it needed, then crush black ball to pieces and watch it die.

By December of 1926, the pressure of holding together the fragile world of black baseball had cracked Rube Foster's battle-hardened armor. Six stress-filled years of being the heart, soul, and uncompromising guiding light of Negro League baseball had become too much for Foster to bear. He conceded as much in an article for the *Chicago Defender* when he wrote: "Of times I have felt that the task was hopeless. I felt ready to give up. The strain placed upon me has proved great, almost beyond endurance."

There were signs of instability as early as 1924, when friends told Foster to take a break. He took a vacation, but there was no relief. There was no distinction for Foster between baseball and his life; the two were intertwined.

Then, thirteen days before Christmas, 1926, Foster broke down. George Sweatt, the Giants' veteran outfielder, heard a loud commotion coming from Foster's downstairs apartment. He heard Sarah Foster, Rube's wife, shout, "Oh no, don't do that!" Sweatt ran down-

stairs and knocked on the door. Sarah, flustered and panic-stricken, said, "There's something wrong with Rube, he's just going crazy down there. I'm going to have to call the law."

Sarah called the Chicago police to the Fosters' apartment building on Michigan Avenue. Several officers were needed to subdue the six-foot-two, 240-pound Foster. After a violent struggle, the legendary pitcher, manager, and founder was put in a police wagon and taken away. After a weeklong diagnosis, Foster was declared mentally incompetent and committed to the state asylum at Kankakee, Illinois. His friends came to visit him, but when there came an opportunity for his release, his wife refused to sign him out. He remained committed until his death on December 12, 1930, at the age of fifty-one.

Historians trace the demise of Negro League baseball to the desegregation of modern Major League Baseball, beginning with the arrival of Jackie Robinson in 1947. But the demise of black baseball began that December afternoon in Chicago, twenty-one years earlier, when Rube Foster suffered a nervous breakdown. Without Foster to push every button, plug every hole, whip and intimidate, the Negro National League floundered and finally died in 1932. The remaining owners lacked Foster's vision, drive, and commitment to black baseball, as well as his business instincts, his tenacity, and his presence.

Foster's death created a vacuum in vision and leadership within black baseball that would never be filled as fully and as completely as he had filled it.

Other people in other sports have tried. Bob Douglas formed the Harlem Rens, the first full-salaried professional African-American basketball team, in 1923. Douglas's Rens were a model of organization. The Rens competed against white professional teams, and even won the first World Professional Basketball championship in 1939. The Rens became the first black-owned team to join the National Basketball League in 1948, but they were not asked to join the

National Basketball Association. Without a strong league in which to sustain itself—a black base of power—the Rens could not contend with an ocean of prejudice, and dissolved in 1949.

Fritz Pollard, the great Brown University All-American, and the first African American head coach in the National Football League, reacted to pro football's exclusion of black athletes by forming two all-black barnstorming teams. Without the sustaining force of an African American league, however, Pollard's two teams, and other semi-pro teams, died.

A new Negro Baseball League was formed in 1933 by Gus Greenlee, who was the opposite of Foster. Foster was a baseball man. He knew the game and loved it. Mostly, though, he knew the business of the game from top to bottom. Greenlee, however, was hardly washed in baseball tradition; he was the numbers king of Pittsburgh, a gambler. The Negro Baseball League that Greenlee founded in 1932 is the league most people have in mind when they speak of "Negro Leagues." Unlike Foster, the new wave of owners lacked vision. More than that, they lacked the dawn-to-dusk commitment required to make black baseball truly succeed.

There were good ideas here and there, but none that was connected to a collective vision or philosophy of self-sufficiency. Greenlee, for example, built his own stadium, as did Alex Pompey, the flamboyant owner of the New York Black Yankees, to avoid paying exorbitant rental fees to Major League Baseball owners. But these owners were the exception. Most black owners rented from major-league teams as part of an exchange that paid rich dividends for the major-league team owners.

Although there were African American banks, Negro League teams did not have the same access to capital as the white major leagues. The black-owned banks that did exist lent money to institutions only for life-and-death survival. Baseball, and sports in general, was considered

incidental to the larger aspects of African American survival and so did not qualify.

Without clear goals and strong-willed leaders, black baseball couldn't purge outside influences. In fact, most of the owners depended on revenue from barnstorming and accepted the existence of booking agents as a fact of life. The presence of white booking agents who monopolized black baseball in Rube Foster's era continued. Cumberland Posey, owner of the Homestead Grays, referred to Abe Saperstein, the Chicago-based sports agent, as "a symbol of those who are attempting to edge into professional Negro athletics and to eventually control them." Greenlee, owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, had a series of clashes with Nat Strong over who should control black baseball. Greenlee said he understood why Strong opposed a black baseball league, but noted that "he fought the idea with every weapon at his command."

There were high points, such as Greenlee's creation of an East-West All-Star game. This annual game, held in Chicago's Comiskey Park, became the centerpiece of the new Negro League. The East-West Game became the black social event of the summer.

But the all-star game could not protect Negro League baseball from the coming invasion, not that black owners even saw an invasion coming. Integration, inside and outside of sports, was seen—or at least sold by so-called Black Leaders—as the panacea. Even an avowed activist like Audley "Queen Mother" Moore, a Civil Rights worker and black nationalist, was taken in. Moore was a hero to many residents of Harlem, where she worked with Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican-born black nationalist leader, and his Back to Africa movement. She was also an advocate of reparations for slavery, tenants' rights, and education for the poor. Her outrage over the suffering of blacks in America led to years of political action. "They not only called us Negroes, they made us Negroes," she once said, "things that don't know where they came

from and don't even care that they don't know. Negro is a state of mind, and they massacred our minds."

Moore fought to get black players into the majors. She organized a committee that launched a campaign to integrate baseball. By the end of the 1940s, Moore realized the blunder that had been made in blindly pushing for integration. "But when I look back on that struggle now, that was because I was fighting, I was a communist, but I didn't have my right mind. Now remember—I was a Negro," she recalled in an interview.

I've been a Negro and I know the condition of the Negro mind. A Negro follows, he's incapable of scrutiny, he's incapable of analyzing and he's incapable of perception. A Negro is functioning with a European mind, a European mentality. So he's not himself, so he doesn't know what's good for him and what's harmful for him and he'll do most anything. If people are going, he'll go, and this is the way the Negro is.

Had I not been a Negro, I would have fought to get our teams in the big leagues. But what I did was kill the teams. We had teams. I found that out later. When our teams played in the communities throughout the country our communities were ablaze with activity—our hotels, we had hotels and all, we used to have taxis, shoeshine boys, old women selling candies and peanuts and everything. There was activities; our youngsters [had] something to aspire to. There was activities right? Well, honey, now you have a Negro or ten Negroes or twenty Negroes there, but the white man gets all the gate; he gets all the receipts from the ball[game], the profits. I would have fought to put our teams in. That's a qualitative difference.

Between 1943 and 1946, black baseball was more popular than ever. Owners, content to be kings of their own tiny hills, were blinded by

short-term gain. Without a tenacious, dictatorial, Fosterian presence to manage resources, the two black leagues—the Negro National League and the Negro American League—never found a way to operate in a manner that ensured that black baseball would have a viable future. The owners did not see the integration armies lining up on the horizon and had no coherent plan of action for how to face the onslaught that was about to take place.

An onslaught led by Branch Rickey.

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By the late 1940s, Major League Baseball was hungry for new blood, fresh blood. Black blood. Negro League owners had failed to grasp the implications of Major League Baseball's manpower shortage, its slumping attendance, and its desperate need for new talent, which the black leagues held in abundance.

In the lore and legend of baseball integration, Rickey, like Robinson, has become a legend of mythic proportions. There are all manner of stories about Rickey, schools of thought about who he was, and debate about whether his motives were social or economic.

The reality is that Rickey was a baseball man; he was also a shark. The Brooklyn Dodgers' board of directors quietly authorized Rickey to go after the most lucrative pool of untapped talent: the Negro Leagues. Rickey knew that players—black, white, and brown—were the lifeblood of any league, of any team. As the United States braced for World War II, and major-league owners fretted over how they would keep players, Rickey began recruiting players from Cuba. Rickey was fair and Rickey was a barracuda—but he was a barracuda first.

Rickey exploited a psychological soft spot within the African American community—the desire to “measure up”—that made the invasion go infinitely smoother. In his years of scouting Negro League teams, he became intimately familiar with the athletic ability of black players—and with something far more essential. He became familiar

with the sense of longing, the burden of proof, that haunted many of them. Rickey understood how desperately black players wanted to play in the major leagues and, more significantly, how desperately the national black community, with a hunger for access to the mainstream, wanted black players to play and succeed in the white man's game. Indeed, this element of black life—this hunger to succeed—was the commodity Rickey was after when he campaigned to integrate Major League Baseball at the behest of the Dodgers' directors.

Major League Baseball, with Rickey as its point man, masterfully used the black community's Civil Rights fervor to keep owners from aggressively standing in the way of "integration." Rickey exploited the integrationist leanings of the black community to crush opposition. When J. L. Wilkinson, the white owner of the Kansas City Monarchs, resisted, Rickey effectively shouted him down. Rickey said Wilkinson was not Frederick Douglass. Rickey and Wilkinson exchanged charges and countercharges of carpetbagging. A tug-of-war ensued over using black muscle for white gain.

Black baseball owners could not agree on a strategy. The owners were torn between wanting integration and wanting to remain a viable business. These latter-day owners of Negro League baseball mistakenly felt that they would be involved—in a profitable way—with the "integration" process. Some felt that their teams might be purchased and incorporated into the Major League Baseball minor-league system.

That was not part of the plan, however. The treatment of the Negro Leagues was brutal and disrespectful.

The Negro Leagues were invaded for talent much as Africa was invaded for human labor. In each case, invading forces received inside help to facilitate the trade. Negro League baseball became the first supplier of black players to Major League Baseball, as Rube Foster had anticipated. How baseball went about acquiring black players was not what Foster had in mind.

Some owners eagerly sold players; others watched helplessly as players were signed and snatched away, their biggest stars snapped up and absorbed into white baseball with no compensation for the team. Worse, there was no respect for the leagues that had produced Jackie Robinson, Satchel Paige, and other great players. Rickey brazenly snatched Robinson from the Kansas City Monarchs, saying, "There is no Negro League as such as far as I'm concerned." Rickey said that black baseball was under the control of "rackets," referring to the several Eastern owners with gambling associations. Rickey insisted that Negro Leagues "are not leagues and have no right to expect organized baseball to respect them."

This was a corruption of Foster's dream. From everything we know of Foster, he would not have allowed Rickey and the others simply to barrel in and snap up whomever they pleased without compensation or respect. Foster wouldn't have hesitated to use any means at his disposal to keep his league viable, even if he had to ruthlessly exploit the opposition of the major-league owners who were against integration.

Baseball was unofficially integrated in 1945 when Robinson signed a contract with Montreal. (Interestingly, three of the greatest landmarks of African American sports history took place outside the United States, a testament to this country's racist response to the emergence of black sports figures: Tom Molineaux fought for the boxing championship in England; Jack Johnson won the championship in Australia; and Jackie Robinson integrated baseball in Canada.) In 1947, Robinson's contract was purchased by the Dodgers. Just one year later, in 1948, the black leagues were in shambles. Many of the Negro League owners, so engrossed in the period of prosperity, never saw what hit them until it was too late. Effa Manley, the co-owner of the Newark Eagles, said, "Our troubles started after Jackie Robinson joined the Dodgers." Manley, who was white but often passed for a fair-skinned African American, said, "[Black fans] are stupid and

gullible in believing that Rickey has any interest in Negro players other than the clicking of his turnstiles.”

But Manley was the naïve one in another sense. This normally shrewd woman thought that integration would help black leagues. In 1946 she said, “If our men made good in the majors, fans all over the country would want to see the teams that they came from. Just as Joe Louis made other Negro fighters popular, so would Negro big-league stars increase interest in other Negro players.” Manley also felt that if the Negro Leagues disappeared, the flow of black players into the major leagues would disappear. She did not conceive of Major League Baseball teams developing black players in their own minor-league system, because so many of the minor-league teams were located in the South.

Manley was wrong. She had put too much emphasis on merely having players in the major leagues and not enough weight on negotiating an appropriate role for the Negro Leagues in the integration process. Black participation in ownership was demolished for decades to come.

Unlike Rube Foster, who had worked tirelessly—until his death, in fact, despite being institutionalized—to keep black baseball efficient and organized, the new owners lacked the combination of vision and dedication required to fight, much less win, a war for black resources—human gold.

In a scathing critique of Negro League baseball, the late Sam Lacy, writing in Baltimore's *Afro-American* newspaper, said that since Robinson signed with white baseball, “Colored baseball has been acting after the fashion of a mongrel puppy licking at the heels of a prospective master. The years that were spent by friends of the sport [the writers] in an effort to straighten out colored baseball went for naught until Branch Rickey reached into the ranks and took out one of its young stars. When that happened, but not until then, colored baseball operators began to see the implications.”

Wendell Smith, writing in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, said,

Organized baseball has practiced a vicious policy of discrimination against Negro players, and in so doing made it possible for the segregated Negro leagues to flourish and prosper. While wallowing in the mire of segregation and discrimination, the owners of Negro League baseball were the beneficiaries of that vicious system and they benefited greatly. So much so, that the gold blinded them and they are now firmly caught in their own trap.

Still, before the major leagues fully took the measure of black baseball and became energized by the influx of new players and the exciting new dimension that black players brought to their clubs, the Negro Leagues functioned as Rube Foster envisioned—as a minor-league system for Major League Baseball, albeit without official designation. It was a situation that was not sustainable in the long run without some kind of negotiated formal arrangement.

The final blow for the Negro Leagues came in 1951 when the Southern-based network of minor-league baseball teams was desegregated. Now the major leagues had no use for the Negro Leagues, and they slowly died. Major League Baseball had no use for any competing leagues, and was not interested in allowing African Americans to sit collectively at the ownership table. By the 1960s, black baseball was effectively dead; Major League Baseball had prevailed.

Historians and journalists would spend the next thirty years sifting through the ruins of Negro League baseball, finding survivors, reconstructing records, and establishing a segregated wing of the Baseball Hall of Fame. Foster was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1981. But the deed—and the damage—was done, and a pattern was set: A black institution was dead, while a white institution grew richer and stronger. This was the end result of integration.

For all of its apparent benefits to white society, segregation had severe drawbacks for whites. The first was that it unified African Americans and helped consolidate their power.

Henry A. Scomp said that segregation was leading to a "decline in white influence over blacks, which could only result in a growth of racial friction—unless of course segregation was carried to its logical extreme of geographical separation."

Segregation helped maintain a social order, but created a fear that, removed from the gaze of whites, African Americans would become free of the spell of white supremacy. In an 1891 pamphlet, William Cabell Bruce, a Baltimore lawyer, wrote that most Southern Negroes still remained "under the spell of the conscious mastery" of the whites. He warned, however, that the process of segregation was creating a situation where the Negro, increasingly isolated from "the direct influence of the whites," would become "more and more aggressive." In white minds, the danger in allowing blacks to be off on their own, unto themselves, was that it allowed them to withdraw completely "into separate communities, beyond the reach of effective white surveillance."

In an 1899 article, Phillip Alexander Bruce wrote that disenfranchisement meant that Negroes were "no longer a menace to organized government, but they continue not the less to be a menace to the moral well-being of the communities in which they live." He said the "whites no longer exercised a beneficial influence over the blacks now that they were concentrated in separate enclaves."

Many of those who shared the belief in African American biological doom, "wanted some modification of racial separation to guarantee a greater degree of white control."

Integration of the major leagues effected just this result. It pulled black athletes back into the mainstream, but in a way that kept them on the periphery of real power, safely within sight.

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The life and death of black baseball is symbolized by the lives of Rube Foster and Jackie Robinson. Foster built black baseball and Robinson, inadvertently, helped tear it down. Like Foster, Robinson was a pioneer. Although a generation and different approaches separated them, the two men represented the same general ideals: integration and empowerment. But Robinson did not realize the complex effects of segregation on black and white communities, and failed to balance the goals of integration and empowerment. In the end, he achieved one without the other.

Rube Foster came out of a political ideology of building strong black-controlled economic, political, and social institutions that could empower the black community from within. His ultimate goal was not to keep black and white baseball segregated, but to integrate an entire black-owned team into Major League Baseball in order to preserve community and continuity. Robinson represented a tradition that emphasized the necessity of achieving full integration "and the eradication of all barriers to equality within the United States." Each man essentially gave his life for the cause of initiating an African American presence in Major League Baseball. Foster died at age fifty-one in 1930; Robinson died at fifty-three in 1972.

Robinson was criticized by many African Americans for seeming to represent the white interests that helped kill Negro League baseball. The impression was reinforced in 1949 when he testified against Paul Robeson, a man who in 1949 told a gathering at the Paris Peace Conference that "it is unthinkable that American Negroes would go to war on behalf of those who have oppressed us for generations . . . against a country which in one generation has raised our people to full human dignity of mankind."

The House Un-American Activities Committee subsequently asked

a number of prominent African Americans to refute Robeson's statement. Robinson, the Symbol of Integration, was the prized speaker. Robinson told the committee that Robeson did not speak for the American Negro. He said that Robeson's claim that Negroes would not fight against Russia "sounded silly."

Near the end of his life, however, Robinson admitted that he had been naïve in 1949. In his 1972 autobiography, he wrote:

In those days I had much more faith in the ultimate justice of the American white man than I have today. I would reject such an invitation if offered now. I have grown wiser and closer to the painful truths about America's destructiveness and I do have increased respect for Paul Robeson who, over a span of twenty years, sacrificed himself, his career and the wealth and comfort he once enjoyed because, I believe, he was sincerely trying to help his people.

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Fifty-nine years from Jackie Robinson's debut and seventy-six years after Rube Foster's death, black athletes today represent a majority in professional football and basketball and a smaller but significant number in Major League Baseball. Yet, decades after the demise of Negro Leagues, African Americans are largely excluded from the managerial hierarchy of baseball in particular and professional sports in general.

By the beginning of the 2006 Major League Baseball season, four of thirty big league managers were African American. There were no African American owners. The most alarming statistic is that the percentage of black baseball players in the majors had dropped to 9 percent. They are largely excluded from ownership, which creates a domino effect. As sports became a multibillion-dollar global enterprise, African Americans were largely shut out—shut out of front-

office positions, presidencies, vice presidencies, and a wide variety of positions that flow into sports. "America's destructiveness," in Robinson's phrase, had worked its magic on what was once a thriving, black-owned industry, stealing its talent base and laying waste to its power. Foster would be appalled at how completely his dream had crumbled.