

BASEBALL AND THE **AMERICAN DREAM**

Race, Class, Gender
and the National Pastime

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Armonk, New York
London, England

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JACKIE ROBINSON'S LEGACY

Baseball, Race, and Politics

Peter Dreier

NINETEEN NINETY-SEVEN MARKED THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF JACKIE ROBINSON'S courageous triumph over baseball's apartheid system. When Robinson took the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers on April 15, 1947, he was the first black player in modern major league baseball.

The nation commemorated the Robinson milestone in a variety of ways. Major League Baseball honored Robinson by sewing patches on all players' uniforms. Major League Baseball also retired Robinson's number—42—for all teams.¹ President Clinton appeared with Rachel Robinson at a Mets-Dodgers game at Shea Stadium to venerate her late husband. There was also a proliferation of books, plays, symposia, television movies, museum exhibits, and academic conferences about Robinson.² Robinson's hometown of Pasadena, California—which virtually ignored him during his own lifetime—finally got around to dedicating the Rose Bowl Parade in his honor.³

Robinson's own life, as well as his legacy, reflects the nation's political and ideological struggle over race relations. Robinson is more than a baseball icon. He is a symbol of America's ongoing ambivalence about race. Even the celebration of Robinson's role in integrating baseball was fraught with irony. In the midst of the fiftieth anniversary hoopla, our collective memory of this great American hero, and of this critical episode of our country's history, became entangled in current ideological wars over race and politics. The Robinson celebration paralleled an ongoing question in America's race relations: how much progress has there been—in baseball as well as in the larger society?

Thanks to Richard Rothstein, Jim Whitney and Bill Dornhoff for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Bennett Harrison, whose friendship, as well as whose passion for baseball, racial equality, and economic justice, are sorely missed.

The Basic Story

Many consider Robinson, who lived from 1919 to 1972, as America's greatest all-around athlete. He was a four-sport star athlete at UCLA, played professional football, and then played briefly in baseball's Negro Leagues. He spent his major league career (1947 to 1956) with the Brooklyn Dodgers, was chosen Rookie of the Year in 1947 and Most Valuable Player in 1949. An outstanding base runner, with a .311 lifetime batting average, he led the Dodgers to six pennants and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1962.⁴

The grandson of a slave and the son of a sharecropper, Robinson was fourteen months old in 1920 when his mother moved her five children from Cairo, Georgia, to Pasadena, a wealthy and well-planned conservative Los Angeles suburb of about 50,000 people. A 1939 Columbia University study ranked Pasadena the nation's most livable city. But during Robinson's youth, black residents, who represented a tiny proportion of the population, were treated like second-class citizens. Blacks were only allowed to swim in the municipal pool on Tuesdays (the day the water was changed) and could only use the YMCA one day a week. In its movie theaters, blacks were limited to the segregated balcony. Robinson's mother Mallie worked as a domestic. The family lived in poverty in an all-white neighborhood, where Jackie faced constant racial slurs and taunts.

When his older brother Mack returned from the 1936 Olympics in Berlin with a silver medal in track, only three people turned up to greet him at the train station. There was no hero's welcome—no ticker-tape parade, no key to the city. In fact, the only job the college-educated Mack could find was as a street sweeper and ditch digger.⁵

Ironically, Robinson's Pasadena background played a role in Dodgers general manager Branch Rickey's decision to select him out of the Negro Leagues to break the sport's color barrier—as much for his personal characteristics as for his baseball skills. He knew that if the Robinson "experiment" failed, the cause of baseball integration would be set back for many years thereafter. He could have chosen other Negro League players with greater talent or name recognition, but he wanted someone who could be what today we call a "role model." Robinson was articulate and well educated. Although born in the segregated Deep South, he lived among whites in his Pasadena neighborhood, at school, and in college, and he played on integrated sports teams. His circle of friends during his adolescence was a multiracial group called the "Pepper Street Gang."

Rickey knew that Robinson had a hot temper and strong political views. As an Army officer in World War II, Robinson was court-martialed (although later acquitted) for resisting bus segregation at Ft. Hood, Texas.⁶ Rickey calculated that Robinson could handle the emotional pressure while helping the Dodgers on the field. Robinson promised Rickey he wouldn't respond to the inevitable

verbal barbs and even physical abuse. Rickey could not count on the other team owners or most major league players (many of whom came from Southern or small town backgrounds) to support his plan. But the Robinson experiment succeeded—on the field and at the box office. Within a few years, the Dodgers hired other black players (including Don Newcombe, Roy Campanella, Joe Black, and Jim Gilliam) who helped turn the 1950s Dodgers into one of the greatest teams in baseball history.

After Robinson had established himself as a superstar, Rickey gave him the green light to unleash his temper. On the field, he fought constantly with umpires and opposing players. Off the field, he was outspoken—in speeches, interviews, and his regular newspaper column—against racial injustice. He viewed his sports celebrity as a platform from which to challenge American racism. During his playing career, he was constantly criticized for being so frank about race relations in baseball and in society. Many sportswriters and most other players—including some of his fellow black players, content simply to be playing in the majors—considered Robinson too angry and vocal.

Robinson's political views reflected the tensions of Cold War liberalism. In 1949, Rickey orchestrated Robinson's appearance before the House Committee on Un-American Activities so that he could publicly criticize Paul Robeson—the multitalented singer, actor, and left-wing political activist—who had stirred controversy by stating in a Paris speech that American blacks would not fight in a war with Russia. As expected, Robinson challenged Robeson's views. But he also seized the opportunity, a decade before the heyday of civil rights activism, to make an impassioned demand for social justice and racial integration. "I'm not fooled because I've had a chance open to very few Negro Americans," Robinson said. The press focused on Robinson's criticism of Robeson and virtually ignored his denunciation of American racism.

Shortly before his death, from the effects of diabetes and heart disease, Robinson said he regretted his remarks about Robeson. "I have grown wiser and closer to the painful truth about America's destructiveness," he acknowledged. "And I do have an increased respect for Paul Robeson, who . . . sacrificed himself, his career, and the wealth and comfort he once enjoyed because, I believe, he was sincerely trying to help his people." Indeed, his [Robinson's] increasingly pessimistic views reflected the evolution of the nation's race-relations climate.

When Robinson retired from baseball, no team offered him a position as a coach, manager, or executive. He became an executive with the Chock Full O' Nuts restaurant chain and became an advocate for integrating corporate America. He lent his name and prestige to several business ventures, including a construction company and a black-owned bank in Harlem. He got involved in these business activities primarily to help address the shortage of affordable housing and the persistent redlining against racial minorities by white-owned banks.

Both of these enterprises later fell on hard times and perhaps dimmed Robinson's confidence in black capitalism as a strategy for racial integration.

Nevertheless, Robinson's faith in free enterprise led him into several controversial political alliances. In 1960, he initially supported Senator Hubert Humphrey's campaign for president, but when John F. Kennedy won the Democratic Party nomination, Robinson shocked his black and liberal fans when he endorsed and campaigned for Richard Nixon. He also came to regret this support. He later worked as an aide to New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, the last of the major liberal Republicans who supported activist government and civil rights.

Until his death, Robinson continued speaking out. He was a constant presence on picket lines and at rallies on behalf of civil rights. He was one of the NAACP's best fund-raisers, but resigned in 1967, criticizing the organization for its failure to involve "younger, more progressive voices." He pushed major league baseball to hire blacks as managers and executives and even refused an invitation to an Old Timers game, "until I see genuine interest in breaking the barriers that deny access to managerial and front office positions."

Within a few years after his death, however, Robinson was almost a forgotten man. While baseball aficionados continued to probe Robinson's life and legacy, he was no longer a well-known figure in popular culture. The name Jackie Robinson was once used as a metaphor for pioneers who broke social barriers, but by the 1980s his currency had begun to fade. In 1990, *Sport* magazine discovered that many major league ballplayers, including some African American superstars, knew little about Robinson except that he broke baseball's color line.⁷

This void can be explained, at least in part, by the mainstream media's virtual neglect of Robinson. During the 1980s, the *New York Times* published an average of seventeen articles a year that mentioned Robinson's name, peaking in 1987 with thirty-one references. The *Washington Post* ran an average of seven articles a year that mentioned Robinson, also peaking in 1987 with twenty-one.⁸ The peak in 1987 was sparked by a controversy over racially insensitive remarks by Dodger executive (and Robinson's former teammate) Al Campanis on Ted Koppel's *Nightline* television show celebrating the fortieth anniversary of Robinson's breakthrough.⁹

From 1990 through 1996, the *New York Times* ran an average of nineteen articles with Robinson's name. As a result of the fiftieth anniversary celebration, interest dramatically peaked in 1997 with 175 references to Robinson, then fell back to eighteen in 1998. Robinson's name appeared an average of seven times a year in the *Washington Post* from 1990 through 1996, peaked at sixty-eight in 1997, then fell back to eleven in 1998.¹⁰ In 1997, almost every major newspaper and magazine in the nation featured stories about Robinson, often using the anniversary as an occasion to examine the current state of race relations in baseball and American sports in general.

The Ideological Battle over Race and Politics

The dominant race-relations metaphors of Robinson's era—integration, the melting pot, and assimilation—were unambiguous. Progressives believed in a color-blind society. In the struggle for basic civil rights, it was easy to answer: which side are you on? In contrast, today's disputes over multiculturalism, affirmative action, racial preferences, and even (in the views of some black educators and playwright August Wilson) self-segregation make the political landscape more confusing, even for progressives.

Much of the celebration of Robinson's achievement—including the movies, the news articles, and the museum exhibits—was cast in a familiar ideological mold. These commemorations focused primarily on Robinson's accomplishments as an individual pioneer. The integration of baseball was framed as an individual's triumph over adversity, a lone trailblazer who broke baseball's color line on his athletic merits, with a helping hand from Dodger executive Branch Rickey. The most extreme version of this perspective appeared in the right-wing *National Review*, which used Robinson's success to argue against government policies like affirmative action. "Government had almost nothing to do with this triumph of the competitive market," wrote Steve Sailer. "Baseball owners finally realized that the more they cared about the color of people's money, the less they could afford to care about the color of their skin."¹¹

But the true story of baseball's integration is not primarily the triumph of either individualism or enlightened capitalism. Rather, it is a political victory brought about by social protest, part and parcel of the larger struggle for civil rights and social justice. As historian Jules Tygiel explains in *Baseball's Great Experiment* (see note 4), beginning in the 1940s the Negro press, civil rights groups, the Communist Party, progressive whites, and radical politicians waged a sustained campaign to integrate baseball that involved demonstrations, boycotts, political maneuvering, and other forms of pressure that would gain greater currency the following decade.¹² This protest movement set the stage for Rickey's "experiment" and for Robinson's entrance into the major leagues. The dismantling of baseball's color line was a triumph of both a man and a movement.

Ironically, in the 1960s Robinson was often criticized by black nationalists, including Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, for being an Uncle Tom, a symbolic token. Today, some of their heirs view baseball's integration with ambivalence for its role in destroying the Negro Leagues. In his 1992 play, *Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting*, playwright Ed Schmidt gave voice to this view.¹³ It depicts a fictitious meeting called by Dodgers general manager Branch Rickey to enlist the support of boxer Joe Louis, dancer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, and actor-activist Paul Robeson for his decision to promote Jackie Robinson to the Dodgers. In the play, Robeson (correctly) predicts that integration will lure black fans

away from the Negro Leagues and threaten the livelihood of many black athletes. Robeson announces that the price for his support is for Rickey to arrange for an entire team of Negro League all-stars to be added to the majors.

The Transformation in Race Relations

In reality, most black Americans welcomed the integration of baseball, as much as they welcomed the end of separate drinking fountains. The demise of the Negro Leagues certainly destroyed the careers of many excellent black ballplayers who never made it to the majors. But this was a small price to pay to defeat Jim Crow. In today's cynical so-called post civil rights era, it is difficult to summon the excitement and fervor that greeted Robinson's achievement. It did more than change the way baseball is played and who plays it. His actions on and off the diamond helped pave the way for America to confront its racial hypocrisy. The dignity with which Robinson handled his encounters with racism among fellow players and fans, and in hotels, restaurants, trains, and other public places, drew public attention to the issue, stirred the consciences of many white Americans, and gave black Americans a tremendous boost of pride and self-confidence. Martin Luther King once told Dodgers pitcher Don Newcombe, "You'll never know what you and Jackie and Roy [Campanella] did to make it possible to do my job."

By hiring Robinson, the Dodgers earned the loyalty of millions of black Americans from across the country. But they also gained the allegiance of many white Americans—most fiercely American Jews, especially those in the immigrant and second-generation neighborhoods of America's big cities—who believed that integrating our national pastime was a critical steppingstone to tearing down many other obstacles to equal treatment.¹⁴

In fact, however, the integration of baseball proceeded very slowly after Robinson's entry into the big leagues. As late as 1953, only six of the then-sixteen major league teams had black players. It wasn't until 1959 that the last holdout, the Boston Red Sox, hired a black player. By 1997, black and Latino players were well represented on the field. Among major leaguers, 58 percent were white, 24 percent Latino, 17 percent black, and 1 percent Asian.¹⁵ Despite the overall numerical overrepresentation of blacks and Latinos on major league teams, however, there is still some evidence that discrimination persists against African American players, and to a lesser extent, Hispanic players. A study in the late 1960s demonstrated convincingly that good black hitters were not excluded, but weak black hitters were excluded in favor of weak-hitting white players. In other words, teams were more likely to favor a white over a black player to be a benchwarmer or utility man.¹⁶ A study in the early 1990s found that, in terms of both the positions they play (particularly pitcher and catcher)

and the number and size of commercial endorsements they earn, blacks and Latinos continued to face discrimination in major league baseball.¹⁷

A major league team did not hire its first black manager—Frank Robinson, who led the Cleveland Indians—until 1975. By 1997, with twenty-eight major league teams, there were only four minority managers.¹⁸ In the year when America was celebrating Jackie Robinson's achievement, there was only one black general manager in the major leagues—Bob Watson of the New York Yankees.¹⁹ Overall, the proportion of blacks in front-office jobs reached 9 percent in 1989 and remained the same in 1997. When all racial minorities are included, the figures increase to 15 percent in 1989 and 18 percent in 1997; blacks represented 4 percent of all executives and department heads in 1990 and 6 percent in 1997. With all minorities included, the figure rose from 7 percent to 11 percent.

Robinson broke into baseball when America was a segregated nation. In 1946, when he was playing for the Dodgers's farm team in Montreal, at least six African Americans were lynched in the South. Restrictive covenants were still legal, barring blacks (and Jews) from buying homes in many neighborhoods (across the country, not just in the South). There were only a handful of blacks enrolled in the nation's predominantly white colleges and universities. There were only two blacks in Congress.²⁰ No major American city had a black mayor.

Robinson's triumph took place at a time of postwar economic expansion and optimism. After World War II, America held its breath, trying to decide what kind of society it wanted to be. As the Cold War escalated, many liberals feared that America's racial hypocrisy would be used by the Soviet Union to undermine the nation's credibility among political leaders around the world. During the war and its immediate aftermath, a few brave souls challenged what sociologist Gunnar Myrdal called the "American Dilemma"—the obvious conflict between its creed of equal opportunity and the reality of racial segregation. Labor leader A. Philip Randolph threatened to organize a march on Washington during the war if President Roosevelt didn't agree to begin desegregating the military and the defense industry. Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP began the long march through the courts that ultimately led to the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, declaring school segregation unconstitutional. White southerners like Miles Horton of the Highlander Folk School, H.L. Mitchell of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, Herman Nixon of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, and a handful of others challenged Jim Crow. Former vice president Henry Wallace, running on the Progressive Party ticket for president in 1948 on a platform of abolishing segregation, forced the Democratic Party to put a moderate civil rights plank in its platform that year.²¹

In the postwar era, black Americans were moving into northern and southern cities and wanted a fair share of the nation's prosperity. But until the civil rights

movement of the 1950s and 1960s, they did not gain basic political rights, much less their fair slice of the growing economic pie. With organized labor as an occasional ally, the civil rights crusade helped many black Americans move into the economic mainstream. Many blacks gained access to good-paying jobs—in factories, government, and professional sectors—that previously had been off-limits. In unionized firms, the wage gap between black and white workers narrowed significantly.²²

Like baseball, American society—including our workplaces, political organizations and even friendships—is more racially integrated than it was in Jackie Robinson's day. But there is continuing debate about the magnitude and pace of racial progress, as reflected in a number of recent books.²³ Thanks to the civil rights revolution, America has witnessed the significant growth of the African American and Latino middle class and the dramatic decline of the overt daily terror imposed on black Americans, especially in the South. Racial minorities are now visible in positions of leadership and influence in almost every sphere of American life. There are impressive numbers of black and Latino political leaders, many of whom have garnered cross-racial support.

The number of people of color in Congress, as well as those at local and state levels of government, has grown significantly. A growing number of large, predominantly white cities have elected black and Latino mayors. Douglas Wilder of Virginia became the first black governor. Jesse Jackson ran for president. Ron Dellums became chair of the House Armed Services Committee and other blacks headed other key committees when the Democrats held the majority. Colin Powell led the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Colleges and the professions have opened up to blacks and Latinos. Thirty years ago there were hardly any people of color on Fortune 500 corporate boards, as television newscasters and daily newspaper editors, or as presidents and administrators of major colleges and hospitals. That is no longer the case. Although the glass ceiling persists, we have moved beyond symbolic tokenism.²⁴

Despite this progress, race remains a divisive issue in America. The poverty rate among black and Latino Americans is three times that of white America. Almost half of black children live in poverty. Our residential areas remain racially segregated. About two-thirds of non-Hispanic blacks live in blocks that are 60 percent or more black. Among Hispanics, 40 percent live in blocks that are 60 percent or more Hispanic. At least two out of three white Americans live in essentially all-white neighborhoods. In most major American cities, more than 70 percent of the population (and more than 80 percent in many cities) would have to move to achieve full integration.²⁵ Moreover, poor blacks and (to a lesser extent) poor Hispanics, but not poor whites, tend to live in ghettos or barrios with high concentrations of the poor.²⁶ Even when black people move to the suburbs, they are likely to live in segregated areas—not because they prefer

to do so, but because of persistent (though subtle) racial bias by banks and real estate brokers. As a result of residential segregation, our public schools are still segregated by race as well as income. Blacks and Latinos still feel the sting of discrimination in the workplace and by the police and the criminal justice system.

Robinson recognized the paradoxes of racial progress in America. "I cannot possibly believe," he wrote in his 1972 biography, *I Never Had It Made*, "that I have it made while so many black brothers and sisters are hungry, inadequately housed, insufficiently clothed, denied their dignity as they live in slums or barely exist on welfare."²⁷

The Corporatization of Baseball and America

Besides the matter of race relations, baseball has changed dramatically in other ways since Robinson's day.²⁸ Then, baseball had little competition from basketball, football, and other sports for fan loyalty. Sportswriters rarely probed players' personal lives or potential scandals, allowing athletes to become All-American heroes—just as news reporters rarely looked into the private lives of politicians and business leaders.

In Robinson's day, most players' salaries were not much higher than those of average workers. Indeed, many players lived in the same working class and middle class neighborhoods as their fans.²⁹ Subject to the feudal reserve clause, players remained with the same teams for years, binding them to local fans. Robinson played before the emergence of the players' union. In his rookie year, he earned \$5,000, the major league minimum. His salary never exceeded \$42,000—less than several white stars—even though he was undoubtedly the sport's biggest drawing card. His highest salary (in real terms) never approached the typical salary of a journeyman ballplayer today. During Robinson's last few seasons, in fact, the Dodgers sought to lower his salary. And at the end of 1956, the Dodgers traded Robinson to the rival New York Giants. This was prior to free agency, and Robinson was powerless to do anything about it. He had already planned to retire, however, so Dodger fans never had to deal with the affront of seeing Robinson in a Giants uniform.

Until the 1970s, most major league teams were owned by local businessmen. The teams were often dominated by the strong personality of owners who took a hands-on approach to their teams' affairs. They were similar in many ways to the famous newspaper publishers, who used their papers as a way to influence public affairs. Like the publishers, some baseball owners were tyrannical, while others were benevolent and public-spirited.

Today, baseball teams, like the nation's major newspapers, are no longer family businesses. They are owned by corporate conglomerates. The Dodgers, in fact, were the last family-owned team, until Peter O'Malley sold the franchise to

Australian media tycoon Rupert Murdoch in 1998.³⁰ For the corporate conglomerates that own today's baseball teams, professional sports is simply a business like any other subsidiary or product line.

The major corporate icons of postwar America—like U.S. Steel and Standard Oil—have merged into giant, often unrecognizable conglomerates. Even some of the names adorning contemporary baseball stadiums—such as 3Com Park (formerly called Candlestick Park, the home of the San Francisco Giants, and replaced by PacBell Park); Bank One Ballpark (the home of the Arizona Diamondbacks); Coors Field (the home of the Colorado Rockies); QualComm Stadium in San Diego; and Tropicana Field in Tampa Bay—reflect the corporatization of baseball. These aren't even the corporations that own the teams, but instead major businesses that pay millions to attach their names to baseball stadiums.³¹ At the start of the 1999 baseball season, teams were even floating around the idea of putting corporate logos on players' uniforms.

Like the rest of American business (but protected since the 1920s by the unique antitrust exemption), baseball owners have recently engaged in an orgy of speculation. The sale price of the Baltimore Orioles, for example, went from \$12 million in 1979, to \$70 million in 1989, to \$173 million in 1994.

Under these changed circumstances, it is no wonder that baseball today is beset by footloose teams threatening to move unless cities build tax-funded megastadiums and by tense labor-management relations that have resulted in player strikes.³² Labor relations in major league baseball reflect the overall economic transformation of the nation. By Congress granting major league teams an exemption from federal antitrust laws, players were virtually powerless.

The Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA), the players' union, changed all that. It was not inevitable that the players would share in the team owners' spiraling profits. But beginning in the 1970s, and accelerating in the past decade, the union dramatically changed baseball's labor-management situation. The union solidarity of these rugged individualists leveled the playing field between team owners and players. In 1970, the basic agreement gave the players the right to bargain collectively, including the use of agents and binding arbitration. With the support of the union, Curt Flood, an outstanding black outfielder with the St. Louis Cardinals, initially challenged the reserve clause (which kept ballplayers in bondage to their owners), after he was sold to the Phillies following the 1969 season.³³ In 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against Flood, despite acknowledging that the reserve clause was an "aberration" and an "anomaly," but it was finally overturned in 1976 after a challenge by players Andy Messersmith and Dave McNally. Since then, players have had the right to negotiate as free agents. Collective bargaining has forced owners to submit to binding arbitration of salary disputes and share their profits with the players. As a result, players' salaries, pensions, and other benefits have spiraled.

Major league players' average salaries have skyrocketed, from \$36,500 in 1973, to \$76,000 in 1977 (the first year after free agency), to \$113,500 in 1979, to \$597,000 in 1990, to \$1.2 million in 1995. But average salaries can be misleading, however, skewed by the extraordinary high incomes of a few dozen superstars. A more realistic figure is the median income—\$410,000 in 1995. That year, many ballplayers made closer to the minimum salary of \$109,000 than the huge sums paid to future Hall of Famers. Of course, even by these standards, ballplayers' incomes have grown dramatically.³⁴ Even second- and third-tier players boast high annual salaries with incredible fringe benefits.

The economics of major league baseball today reflect what some economists call the "winner take all" society.³⁵ Even among highly paid ballplayers, there is a heavily skewed pyramid, with a handful of players earning extremely high salaries, while journeymen players earn much less—and then only for a few years at most. The difference between the average major league player and the average worker, however, is that the players have a strong union, while most American workers do not.³⁶

While baseball players were enjoying the fruits of their union solidarity, most other Americans weren't so lucky. In the United States, unionized workers have higher wages, better pensions, longer vacations and maternity leaves, and better health insurance than their nonunion counterparts. Union strength, which reached a peak of 35 percent in the mid-1950s, allowed American workers to share in the postwar prosperity and join the middle class. Union pay scales even helped boost the wages of nonunion workers. Since the 1970s, however, overall union membership has steadily declined. It was down to 22 percent of the workforce in 1983 and fell to 16 percent by 1997—the lowest since the Great Depression. Omit government employees and unions represented only 11 percent of private sector workers that year. (In contrast, 37 percent of Canada's workforce was unionized).

In the past few decades, the gap between rich and poor has widened. Today, the top 1 percent of the population has a larger share of the nation's wealth than the bottom 90 percent. The richest 5 percent of the nation own 61.4 percent of total wealth and have 20.3 percent of total income. The most affluent 20 percent of Americans have 84.3 percent of all wealth and 46.8 percent of total income. Although a growing number of blacks have moved into the middle class, black homeownership rates and accumulation of wealth have lagged far behind, even when compared to whites with comparable incomes, educations, and occupations.³⁷

Corporate America is making record profits. Corporate CEOs pay themselves large salaries and bonuses, while laying off workers, reducing the wages and benefits of those who hold onto their jobs, and busting unions. The theory that the nation's overall economic growth would somehow "trickle down" to the

middle class and the poor never materialized. Since the 1970s, the majority of American workers (including many middle class white-collar and professional employees) have seen their incomes decline.³⁸ Real wages fell by 1.8 percent from 1973 to 1978, and by 9.6 percent from 1979 to 1993. A recent Census Bureau report revealed that almost one-fifth of the nation's full-time workers earn poverty-level wages. Even during President Clinton's second term, with the official unemployment rate below 5 percent, the purchasing power of the typical worker was still far below where it was twenty-five years earlier. And, the nation's poverty rate has not significantly dropped.

The vast majority of Americans of all races are on a slippery economic slope. As the middle class gets hollowed out by these widening disparities, the basic components of the American Dream—a steady job with decent pay and health benefits, homeownership, and having at least a week's paid vacation—are increasingly out of reach.

The erosion of America's labor movement is the chief reason for the declining wages and living standards of the majority of Americans as well as the nation's widening economic disparities. In the 1950s and 1960s, most American workers—or at least most white workers—believed they would work for one company their entire working lives. Union contracts and economic growth offered job security and the prospect of upward mobility (at least for their children). They could afford to buy a home and settle into a community. They, like their baseball heroes, would stay in one place.

Since the 1970s, however, the American economy has been transformed by a new set of rules and expectations. The global economy has hastened the development of footloose multinational corporations. Since the early 1970s, there has been a tremendous flight of previously high-wage (primarily manufacturing) industries from U.S. cities to locations with more "favorable" business conditions—low wages, weak or nonexistent unions, and lax environmental laws—found mainly in outlying suburbs, rural areas, and Third World countries.³⁹ All working people, including middle class professionals, now face these problems, although women, people of color, and immigrants are the most vulnerable to these pressures. Corporate mergers and downsizing have ridden roughshod over workers' lives.⁴⁰

The Robinson Legacy

The political and economic upheavals of the past few decades—particularly the end of the Cold War and the hollowing out of the middle class—have led many Americans to look backwards for an alleged "Golden Age." There is considerable nostalgia for the 1950s, as if the 1960s ushered in an era of instability and insecurity. For certain, the earlier era was more "stable." Women and African

Americans "knew their place" and the Cold War provided Americans with a clear enemy that, while threatening, was more understandable than today's Third World terrorism and interethnic wars. The Reagan era played on this sense of yearning for a simpler time. The current backlash against the gains of the feminist and civil rights movements—reflected in the rise of the Christian Right and attacks on affirmative action—reveals how today's political leaders capitalize on people's economic and social insecurities by sentimentalizing the past.

Baseball has not been immune to these trends. The Robinson anniversary came at a time when Americans, disenchanted with the corporatization of baseball, were awash in baseball nostalgia. The baby boom generation is fascinated with the sport's history. Their aging baseball cards are now big business. Since the 1980s, films like *Field of Dreams*, *Bull Durham*, *Eight Men Out*, *A League of Their Own*, and *Cobb* have reflected their nostalgia for the sport. During the 1994 baseball strike, Ken Burns's PBS documentary about the game—which emphasized the sport's traditional racism and the importance of black players—kept millions of viewers in front of their TV sets for an entire week.

The growing interest in African American history has led to a renewed interest in the Negro Leagues, where Robinson played for only a year. Although the Negro Leagues came about as a response to Jim Crow, today they are celebrated as part of the black community's struggle for dignity and self-reliance within the segregated society. These leagues served as a training ground for a generation of players who, along with Robinson, changed baseball to a more aggressive, strategic style of play. Prior to the 1980s, there was only one serious book (Robert Peterson's, *Only the Ball Was White*) about the Negro Leagues.⁴¹ Now there are several dozen. In 1972, following another wave of protest, the Baseball Hall of Fame finally began to induct great Negro League players who had been barred from major league baseball. Two decades ago, the popular film *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings*, starring Richard Pryor, Billie Dee Williams, and James Earl Jones, captured the bittersweet triumphs and tragedies of the Negro Leagues. Thanks to the Robinson celebration, there have been several documentaries and television movies about the Negro Leagues. For example, the HBO film, *The Soul of the Game*, explored how Negro League greats Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson paved the way for Robinson's achievement. August Wilson's 1990 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Fences*, set in 1957, portrays the bitterness of a former Negro League player who didn't get the opportunity to play in the majors.

There is much we can learn from history, but not if we view it through rose-colored glasses. Little is to be gained from romanticizing the "good old days" of baseball's so-called Golden Age in the 1940s and 1950s. Back then, baseball, like America, was still a caste society. Robinson, like the activists in the civil rights movement, helped to remove many barriers to racial equality. But the

progress we've made in race relations should not obscure the stalemate, if not the regression, we've made in overall economic equality.

Thanks to the civil rights movement, baseball as well as the rest of society reluctantly but steadily opened up positions in the highest-income sectors of the economy to African Americans and Latinos. A very small but highly visible number of blacks and Latinos now sit on the boards and serve as top executives of major corporations, just as a handful of blacks and Latinos now earn huge salaries playing (or serving in top management positions in) professional baseball and other sports. But these positions—for all races—represent an extremely small proportion of the nation's jobs, although their occupants own a disproportionate share of the nation's wealth.

True racial progress means more than bringing people of color into the nation's economic, political, and media power elite (the top 1 percent) or even into the professional middle class that comprises the top one-fifth of the population. Our goal should not simply be racial equality among the wealthy. It should be more wealth equality among all races. The essence of America's troubled race relations can be summarized by the following observation: corporate America has learned to live with affirmative action and laws against racial discrimination, but it steadfastly opposes policies to promote full employment, universal health care, and affordable housing for all.

There is still more to be done to assimilate people of color into the professional middle class and even into the upper class. But even if blacks, Latinos, and Asians composed their "fair share" of this top tier, it would not significantly challenge mainstream institutions or threaten the power and privilege of the corporate elite. However, full employment and decent wages, universal health coverage, and an adequate supply of affordable housing for all Americans challenge the foundation of the business elite's power and profits.

If there is one truth about race relations, it is that prejudice, bigotry, and discrimination decline when everyone has basic economic security. Economic justice is a precondition for racial justice. It is simplistic to argue that if you give people a decent and steady job, their hearts and minds will follow, but it is certainly true that full employment at decent wages makes interracial cooperation much more likely. In hard times, competition over a shrinking pie (or the crumbs from the economy's table) leads to resentment, bitterness, and racial tension. Studies show, for example, that the number of lynchings went up whenever the Southern cotton economy declined. More recently, economic hard times are correlated with increases in the murder rate, racial violence, and hate crimes. The past decade's rancor over affirmative action reflects this reality.

It isn't clear where Robinson would stand on contemporary political and social issues if he were alive today. But his willingness to speak out against exploitation and bigotry suggests that he would be dismayed by the failure of

baseball's high-salaried ballplayers, whatever their race, to engage in today's political and social struggles.

In recent years, after decades of decline, the sleeping giant of American unionism seems to be waking up, with a renewed strategy of organizing unorganized workers (especially minorities and immigrants), restoring the labor movement's political influence, and pushing for policies such as a high minimum wage and national health insurance. Indeed, many argue that today's revitalized labor movement is the new civil rights movement.

As a vice president of Chock Full o' Nuts, which had a majority of black employees, Robinson was often put in the awkward position of defending management against the union, despite his friends' insistence that he was not anti-union, and in fact sought to be an advocate for the company's employees.⁴² During his post-baseball career, when Robinson was most active in politics, labor unions were viewed as both allies and obstacles of the civil rights movement. A number of progressive unions, such as the United Auto Workers and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, were key players in the struggle for racial justice, but the mainstream of the AFL-CIO, and many individual unions, were often reluctant to admit black members or join the civil rights crusade. Even so, Martin Luther King recognized that unions and racial minorities share a common agenda. He understood that appeals to racial pride, without a larger vision of economic justice that cuts across racial divisions, are a dead end. When he was murdered in 1968, King was in Memphis to lead a demonstration of predominantly black sanitation workers who were on strike.

One of Robinson's legacies should be to remind today's high-salaried baseball players that they owe a great deal to their working-class fans. To ensure the allegiance of America's baseball fans and the general public, major leaguers and their union should be reaching out, lending their celebrity status to help other workers, not just through charity activities (such as promoting a local hospital or youth sports league), but by helping those who are organizing to improve their working and living conditions—just as the ballplayers have done.

For example, during the 1994 baseball strike, fans might have been shocked to see some St. Louis Cardinals or Chicago Cubs walking the picket lines with United Auto Workers members who were on strike against Caterpillar in nearby Peoria, Illinois. Ballplayers could show their support for the "justice for janitors" and "living wage" organizing campaigns in their cities. The MLBPA could help the hotel workers union's efforts by refusing to stay in nonunion hotels during road trips.

The union should also devote resources to help improve working conditions in other sectors of their own industry. It could set aside a small part of its large strike fund to help the ushers, ticket-takers, and other stadium employees who lose their incomes when players strike. The union could help organize their

minor league colleagues, most of whom will never reach the majors. Their pay scales and working conditions are almost as miserable today as they were a generation or two ago. The MLBPA should support the workers at Russell Mills in Alexander City, Alabama, which makes most major league uniforms. It is "one of the most anti-union companies around," explained Billy Tindle, secretary-treasurer of the Alabama AFL-CIO.⁴³ And shouldn't the game's highly paid athletes speak out against the Wilson Company's exploitation of Haitian women who, in 1994, earned \$1.07 for a ten hour day (ten cents an hour) stitching baseballs? The MLBPA has demanded that the owners "open the books" so the players can scrutinize the teams' financial conditions to show how they hide their profits with bookkeeping tricks. But the union could do more to undermine the owners' attempts to drive a wedge between the players and the nation's baseball fans by explaining that the teams don't need to raise ticket or concession prices to meet the MLBPA's terms.

One lesson of the baseball players' economic success is that the best route to upward mobility for American working people—not just miners and factory workers, but secretaries, nurses, computer programmers, sales clerks, farm workers, teachers, and others—is to join a union. We don't expect to see Albert Belle, Sammy Sosa, Randy Johnson, or Greg Maddux marching in Labor Day parades singing "Solidarity Forever." But let's recognize that these men—mostly from working class backgrounds—owe their economic gains not only to natural talent and hard work, but also to their loyalty to each other and their union.

Most ballplayers probably never heard of labor leaders like John L. Lewis, Walter Reuther, Sam Gompers, Mother Jones, and Eugene Debs, but they've learned that, as the song goes, "the union makes us strong." Until more Americans learn that lesson, our nation's living standards will continue to erode.⁴⁴ Today, the public is angry with both spoiled million-dollar players and greedy owners, just as they are fed up with elected officials and corporate tycoons, as suggested by public opinion polls revealing a dramatic decline in confidence in government and business institutions. Jackie Robinson's crusade helped move the country closer to its ideals. His legacy is also to remind us of the unfinished agenda of the civil rights revolution—a more equal society for all.

Notes

1. A few players who selected number 42 as a tribute to Robinson, including Mo Vaughn, balked at giving up the number, arguing that Robinson would be remembered better by others wearing his number than by taking it out of circulation. To compromise, then-acting commissioner Bud Selig agreed to allow active players wearing number 42 to keep it for the rest of their careers.

2. Spike Lee intended to make a feature-length bio-pic about Robinson, starring Denzel Washington, but could not raise the funding.

3. In fact, the Rose Bowl Parade in Robinson's honor took place on January 1, 1998. The 1997 parade only featured a float in Robinson's honor, which was sponsored by a Los Angeles-based Jewish organization (the Museum of Tolerance), and not any organization based in Pasadena itself.

4. Major sources regarding Robinson include the following: Joseph Dorinson and Joram Warmund, eds., *Jackie Robinson: Race, Sports, and the American Dream* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1998); David Falkner, *Great Time Coming: The Life of Jackie Robinson From Baseball to Birmingham* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Harvey Frommer, *Rickey & Robinson: The Men Who Broke Baseball's Color Barrier* (New York: Macmillan, 1982); Larry Moffi and Jonathan Kronstadt, *Crossing the Line: Black Major Leaguers, 1947-1959* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994); Carl E. Prince, *Brooklyn's Dodgers: The Bums, the Borough, and the Best of Baseball* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); Rachel Robinson, *Jackie Robinson: An Intimate Portrait* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996); Sharon Robinson, *Stealing Home: An Intimate Family Portrait by the Daughter of Jackie Robinson* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996); Jules Tygiel, ed., *The Jackie Robinson Reader* (New York: Dutton, 1997); and Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, expanded edition [Original edition published in 1983]). I have benefited, in particular, from conversations and correspondence with Jules Tygiel.

5. The day after President Bill Clinton joined Rachel Robinson at Shea Stadium during an April 15 Mets-Dodgers game to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary, the *New York Times* ran a long story and two photos on the front page. In contrast, the daily paper in Robinson's hometown, the *Pasadena Star-News*, relegated the story to its sports page and ran an article from the Associated Press wire service.

The *Star-News's* treatment reflects the troubled relationship between the city and its most famous resident. "If my mother and brother and sister weren't living in Pasadena," Jackie Robinson said after his playing days were over, "I would never go back. I've always felt like an intruder there—even in school. People in Pasadena were less understanding in some ways than southerners and they were more openly hostile."

In his lifetime, Jackie was never asked to serve as Grand Marshal of Pasadena's annual Tournament of Roses parade and Rose Bowl game. Pasadena's northwest neighborhood, now the heart of the city's black community, has a community center, park, and post office named after Robinson, but there is no street or school named after the city's most famous resident and, more important, Pasadena's public school system does not incorporate Robinson's life into its curriculum. There is a small plaque on the sidewalk on Pepper Street, identifying where Robinson lived as a young boy. But there is no Jackie Robinson museum where young people can learn about Robinson's upbringing, athletic exploits, or his odyssey as a sports pioneer and civil rights activist. In contrast, Baltimore turned Babe Ruth's boyhood home into a museum. The recent national hoopla over Robinson embarrassed Pasadena into erecting a statue of Jackie and Mack Robinson in front of City Hall. For many of Robinson's friends and family, however, the city's efforts are too late to redress its past mistreatment.

6. In 1944, eleven years before Rosa Parks sparked the Montgomery bus boycott, Robinson (a lieutenant in the Army) was court martialed for insisting that Fort Hood, Texas, adhere to Army orders to desegregate buses.

7. William Ladson, "Jackie Robinson Remembered," *Sport* 43, no. 1 (January 1990): 38-40.

8. Yearly newspaper references to Robinson are taken from the Nexus-Lexis database.

9. On April 6, 1987, Koppel invited Campanis, along with sportswriter Roger Kahn (author of *The Boys of Summer*) to discuss Robinson's career and his legacy to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of Robinson's breakthrough. Campanis had been Robinson's closest friend when they were teammates on the Dodgers's minor league club in Montreal. Asked about the lack of a significant number of blacks in baseball's management level, Campanis said that "they may not have some of the necessities to be, let's say, a field manager or, perhaps, a general manager." He also said, "Why are black people not good swimmers? Because they don't have the buoyancy." These remarks cost Campanis his job as the Dodgers's vice president of player personnel. They also sparked a short-lived controversy over the shortage of African Americans in baseball's management echelons.

10. Other major daily newspapers followed a similar pattern. For example, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* ran no stories mentioning Robinson from 1990 through 1993, two in 1994, three in both 1995 and 1996, twenty-one in 1997, and seven in 1998. *USA Today* averaged eight Robinson citations from 1990 through 1997, increased to seventy-seven in 1997, and fell back to eleven in 1998. The *Miami Herald* ran no stories with Robinson's name in 1990 and 1991, one in 1992, none in 1993 and 1994, two in both 1995 and 1996, six in 1997, and none in 1998. The *Boston Globe* averaged five mentions of Robinson from 1990 through 1996, peaked at thirty-seven in 1997, and fell to nine in 1998.

11. Steve Sailer, "How Jackie Robinson Desegregated America," *National Review*, April 8, 1996, 42-44.

12. In the early 1940s, for example, New York Congressman Vito Marcantonio, a member of the radical American Labor Party, introduced a resolution to investigate racial prejudice in baseball. In addition to Tygiel's book, for sources on the progressive movement's efforts to integrate major league positions, see Tom Gallagher, "Lester Rodney, the *Daily Worker*, and the Integration of Baseball," *The National Pastime: A Review of Baseball History* 19 (1999): 58-64; Chris Lamb and Glen Bleske, "Democracy on the Field: The Black Press Takes on White Baseball," *Journalism History* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 27-35; Bill Weaver, "The Black Press and the Assault on Professional Baseball's Color Line, October 1945-April 1947," *Phylon* 5 (Winter 1979): 17-22.

13. The play was originally staged at the Old Globe Theater in San Diego in 1992. In another attempt to repair the city's relationship with Robinson, the Pasadena Playhouse staged *Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting* in early 1997.

14. Ethnicity and ethnic identity have played an important role throughout the history of American baseball. Prior to Robinson's arrival, for example, a few teams hired Jewish ballplayers to attract Jewish fans. A decade before Robinson reached the majors, Hank Greenberg, the Detroit Tigers slugger, faced persistent anti-Semitism from opposing players and others. Greenberg was, not coincidentally, one of the major league players most sympathetic to and supportive of Robinson. Joe DiMaggio played a similar symbolic role among Italian Americans and also had to deal with negative stereotypes about his ethnic group. See Peter Levine, *Ellis Island to Ebbets Field: Sport and the American Jewish Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and G. Edward White, *Creating the National Pastime: Baseball Transforms Itself, 1903-1953* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

15. In contrast, blacks comprise only 5 percent of fans attending major league games.

16. Aaron Rosenblatt, "Negroes in Baseball: The Failure of Success," *Transaction* 3 (September 1967): 58-62. Another study found persistent though declining discrimination against black players from the 1950s through the mid-1980s. See Andrew Hanssen, "The Cost of Discrimination: A Study of Major League Baseball," *Southern Economic Journal* 64, no. 3 (1998): 603-627.

17. Richard Lapchick with David Stuckey, "Professional Sports: The Racial Report Card," in *Sport in Contemporary Society: An Anthology*, 4th ed., ed. Stanley Eitzen, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993). Also see Lawrence Kahn, "Discrimination in Professional Sports: A Survey of the Literature," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 44, no. 3 (April 1991): 28-36.

18. Dusty Baker of the San Francisco Giants, Don Baylor of the Colorado Rockies, Cito Gaston of the Toronto Blue Jays, and Felipe Alou of the Montreal Expos.

19. Another black, Leonard Coleman, served as National League President, a position he inherited from another black, former big leaguer Bill White.

20. William Dawson of Chicago and Adam Clayton Powell of New York City.

21. See John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality: 1954-1992*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993); Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975); Gunnar Myrdal, Richard Sterner, and Arnold Rose, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944).

22. Unionized whites and blacks not only earn roughly the same wages, they both earn more than workers without union representation do. According to the Economic Policy Institute, unionized black males earn 15.1 percent more than black people in comparable nonunion jobs; for whites, the union "wage premium" is 14.9 percent more; 18.7 percent more for Latinos. See Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and John Schmitt, *The State of Working America 1998-1999* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

23. Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997); Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992); and Orlando Patterson, *The Ordeal of Integration* (Washington, DC: Civitas/Counterpoint, 1997).

24. G. William Domhoff and Richard Zweigenhaft, *Diversity in the Power Elite: Have Women and Minorities Reached the Top?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

25. Dan Gillmor and Stephen Doig, "Segregation Forever?" *American Demographics* 35 (January 1992): 35-41; Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*; Paul Jargowsky, *Poverty and Place: Ghettos, Barrios, and the American City* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997).

26. A U.S. Census Bureau study using 1990 data found that 60 percent of black residents of metropolitan areas—compared with 26 percent of whites—lived in poverty neighborhoods (those with at least 20 percent living below the poverty line). Most poor whites live in working class or middle class neighborhoods and areas removed from the large concentrations of poor people in central cities. See "Poverty in the United States: 1990," *Current Population Reports, Population Characteristics*, Series p-20, No. 450 (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, 1991).

27. Jackie Robinson, *I Never Had It Made* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1972).

28. On the business side of baseball, see John Helyar, *Lords of the Realm* (New York: Villard, 1994); and Andrew Zimbalist, *Baseball and Billions* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). Good one-volume histories of American baseball include: White, *Creating the National Pastime*; Charles Alexander, *Our Game: An American Baseball History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1991); and Benjamin G. Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

29. This was true of Robinson and many of his teammates.

30. Peter O'Malley is the son of Walter O'Malley, the team owner who moved the Dodgers from Brooklyn to the West Coast.

31. In the past, team owners often named baseball parks after themselves, such as Comiskey Park in Chicago, Briggs Field in Detroit, and Busch Stadium in St. Louis. There are still some recent examples of this phenomenon, such as Turner Field in Atlanta and Jacobs Field in Cleveland.

32. The first major strike occurred in 1972, lasting for 86 games.

33. Flood wrote a letter to Commissioner Bowie Kuhn that said, in part: "After twelve years in the major leagues, I do not feel that I am a piece of property to be bought and sold irrespective of my wishes." Flood filed a \$1.4 million suit against Kuhn, the league presidents, and the twenty-four team owners. He was attacked in the press as being ungrateful for the fame and money baseball had brought him. Flood's challenge to baseball's establishment destroyed his career and his financial situation. The case dragged on for three years before reaching the U.S. Supreme Court. Close to bankruptcy, Flood signed a contract with the Washington Senators, but played only thirteen games, during which he received several death threats, and then quit. Flood later said: "I am pleased that God made my skin black, but I wish He had made it thicker." The discussion of Flood and the reserve clause draws on Moffi and Kronstadt, *Crossing the Line: White, Creating the National Pastime*; Alexander, *Our Game*; and Zimbalist, *Baseball and Billions*.

34. Some observers attribute the ballplayers' rising pay scale to supply-and-demand economics. In this view, the nation's 760 major leaguers are highly skilled, almost irreplaceable athletes, which gives them enormous leverage at contract time. This "labor shortage" theory may apply to the few dozen superstars and the next hundred top players—those with high name recognition, a big following of fans, and a consistent track record of high-quality performance. Even so, the majority of major leaguers are journeyman ballplayers who last less than five years in the majors. Despite their high yearly salaries, they have little long-term job security. Unless they have a college education and another occupation to fall back on, their economic future is not as secure as the glamour of their baseball careers.

35. Robert Frank and Philip Cook, *The Winner Take All Society: Why the Few at the Top Get So Much More Than Rest of Us* (New York: Penguin USA, 1996).

36. This doesn't mean that if more American workers were unionized, their pay scales would be even close to those of major league players. It does mean, however, that their pay and benefits would increase, as the figures on the union "wage premium" indicate.

37. Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

38. Economic trends are drawn from the following: Edward N. Wolff, *Top Heavy: A Study of the Increasing Inequality of Wealth in America* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1995); John E. Schwarz, *Illusions of Opportunity: The American Dream in Question* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997); Frank Levy, *The New Dollars and Dreams: American Incomes and Economic Change* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998); Mishal, Bernstein, and Schmitt, *The State of Working America*; and Reporters of the *New York Times*, *The Downsizing of America* (New York: Times Books, 1996).

39. Baseball owners play a similar game of playing cities and states against each other to get the best deal to construct new ballparks. And like the flight of business from central cities, a number of major league ballparks have been built in the suburbs. See Mark S. Rosentraub, *Major League Losers: The Real Cost of Sports and Who's Paying for It* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

40. The U.S. government promoted this flight with national tax policies that encouraged businesses to relocate to new sites (rather than modernizing and expanding their plants and equipment in cities) and with foreign policies that propped up Third World governments that suppress dissent.

41. Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970). The revival of scholarship about the Negro Leagues began with Donn Rogosin, *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues* (New York: Atheneum, 1983). Subsequently, there have been many biographies and autobiographies of Negro League players, histories of Negro League teams and their owners, and analyses of other aspects of the Negro Leagues. The most comprehensive source on the Negro Leagues is Dick Clark and Larry Lester, eds., *The Negro Leagues Book* (Cleveland: The Society of American Baseball Research, 1994).

42. See Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 320ff.

43. This information was gathered for several articles about the players' union, including Peter Dreier and Kelly Candaele, "Pitchers and Pickets: Baseball's Labor Day Lessons," *Boston Sunday Globe* (September 4, 1994); and Kelly Candaele and Peter Dreier, "Baseball Players Must Act Like a Labor Union," *Los Angeles Times*, Opinion section (May 19, 1996).

44. In fact, surveys show that a majority of American employees want union representation. But they won't vote for a union if they feel their jobs are at stake. Any employer with a clever labor attorney can stall union elections, giving the boss enough time to scare the living daylights out of potential recruits. And according to one study, one in ten workers involved in an organizing drive is fired. The lucky ones get back pay and reinstatement five years after the fact. American employers can require workers to attend meetings on work time where company managers and consultants give antiunion speeches, show antiunion films, and distribute anti-union literature. By contrast, unions have no equivalent rights of access to employees. To reach them, union organizers frequently must visit their homes or hold secret meetings. The rules are stacked against workers, making it extremely difficult for even the most committed and talented organizers and workers to win union elections. Our nation's cumbersome labor laws deprive workers of elementary rights of free speech and assembly in an atmosphere free of intimidation. Fixing these crusty laws is key to providing American workers a democratic voice in the workplace. Reforming the nation's outdated labor laws should also be a key part of the progressive agenda for racial progress.

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42. See Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 320ff.

43. This information was gathered for several articles about the players' union, including Peter Dreier and Kelly Candaele, "Pitchers and Pickers: Baseball's Labor Day Lessons," *Boston Sunday Globe* (September 4, 1994); and Kelly Candaele and Peter Dreier, "Baseball Players Must Act Like a Labor Union," *Los Angeles Times*, Opinion section (May 19, 1996).

44. In fact, surveys show that a majority of American employees want union representation. But they won't vote for a union if they feel their jobs are at stake. Any employer with a clever labor attorney can stall union elections, giving the boss enough time to scare the living daylights out of potential recruits. And according to one study, one in ten workers involved in an organizing drive is fired. The lucky ones get back pay and reinstatement five years after the fact. American employers can require workers to attend meetings on work time where company managers and consultants give antiunion speeches, show antiunion films, and distribute anti-union literature. By contrast, unions have no equivalent rights of access to employees. To reach them, union organizers frequently must visit their homes or hold secret meetings. The rules are stacked against workers, making it extremely difficult for even the most committed and talented organizers and workers to win union elections. Our nation's cumbersome labor laws deprive workers of elementary rights of free speech and assembly in an atmosphere free of intimidation. Fixing these crusty laws is key to providing American workers a democratic voice in the workplace. Reforming the nation's outdated labor laws should also be a key part of the progressive agenda for racial progress.