Jackie Robinson: Initial Responses to His Signing Through Newspaper Outlets

Baseball has always been one of America’s greatest pastimes and is something that will always be held close to many hearts. One important aspect of baseball is the social impact of it; it brings people together where otherwise they would not have much in common. Whether it is a fan or player people gather, root, cheer, and most importantly hate against. As an avid sports fan, there is nothing more about sports that brings people together than through hatred towards a great. However, this aspect if done in the wrong way can be absolutely unacceptable. This research paper will answer the question, how newspapers and society immediately reacted to the signing of Jackie Robinson following his signing with the Brooklyn Dodgers. I hypothesize that through the study of major newspaper outlets there will be an overbearing use of derogatory language and negative racial slurs throughout the immediate period following Jackie Robinson's debut in the MLB.

As sources for this research paper the primary sources used will be different newspaper articles, digital collections, and personal transcripts. As for secondary sources the use of books, scholarly articles on the subject, and journals will allow for adequate information. Different newspaper articles convey two different storylines about Robinson, one positive and one unacceptably negative. The context in which Robinson was written about is why this idea is important, his legacy lives on but how was it covered and talked about at the time being. One newspaper article that represents this idea is from the Chicago Daily Tribune. “Admitting that

---

racial equality in all sports must be an eventual fact, is this the right time to proclaim it in baseball? Is it too soon?” ² This is from a newspaper article released immediately following Robinsons signing with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1945. Released on the same day as the previous article but from the New York Times “Robinson was signed on his merits as a shortstop after he had been scouted for a long time.”³ This reveals that Robinson being signed was covered in two different ways by these mainstream newspaper sources. However these examples are for the most positive, a negative view was widely put into the headlines of other newspapers. The example of coverage from two different newspapers gives just a small example of the inconsistencies throughout the coverage of Robinson. This perspective is only half the story of how Robinson was perceived through newspaper outlets.

In the Library of Congress collection By Popular Demand: Jackie Robinson and Other Baseball Highlights, 1860s-1960s there are letters written from Robinson to other important people in his life. These letters can be used to place in perspective the different newspaper articles that will be used and their relevance. One source is a transcription of a letter from Jackie Robinson to Branch Rickey. ⁴ This is a letter containing information that pertains to Robinson


and his signing with the Brooklyn Dodgers. This source provides perspective into how Jackie Robinson was not the normal baseball prospect and race had a lot to do with that.

The next news source that is an example of which will be used is from the New York Times, interesting enough it is from the day that Robinson had his debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers. The language used in this to describe Robinson were positive words except for the one time use of the word “negro”.

As for secondary sources that will be useful in for this research the first is What's Wrong with Baseball: The Pittsburgh Courier and the Beginning of Its Campaign to Integrate the National Pastime written by Chris Lamb. This analyses just how the Pittsburgh Courier began to write about African Americans in baseball. This specifically covers the lead up to the eventual signing of Jackie Robinson and will be an extremely useful source for this proposal because it relates directly to the proposed question.

Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy written by Jules Tygiel. This secondary source gives a description of Robinson not only socially but historically which will give insight into Jackie Robinson as a whole to be able to have the proper perspective of this iconic player. The book also has a section on Robinson's legacy following his impact on baseball

---


6 Chris Lamb. "What's Wrong with Baseball": The Pittsburgh Courier and the Beginning of Its Campaign to Integrate the National Pastime." (Western Journal of Black Studies 26, no. 4, 2002).

and society. This will be useful in being able to basically just gather a basic understanding of Robinson and why his role in the MLB was so important.

Another key secondary source that will be helpful in tracking newspaper coverage is from Pat Washburn in 1980, which is *New York Newspaper Coverage of Jackie Robinson in His First Major League Season.* This will provide multiple primary sources that will be helpful in getting a specific understanding of how exactly newspapers were covering Robinson. This source covers three different New York newspaper outlets which were popular at the time. This talks about the different language used which will be really useful regarding this controversial topic.

Historians have covered ideas relating to the coverage of Robinson’s impact through media coverage. However there can be a new light shed on this topic if the focus is only on the initial reactions in the weeks to months following his signing and debut. The different sources in this proposal show only some of the diverse reactions of Robison in his debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers. The newspaper articles allow for insight into the public's perspective of Robinson and overall consensus. Robinson was a very impactful person in the civil rights movement and there are a lot of sources that are available that describe his life and his impacts. Whether they are primarily talking about when he is being signed or they are books on him and his legacy.

In conclusion this research paper will be analysing the reactions of different newspaper outlets following Robinsons signing and debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers. Ultimately leaning towards an underlying question of how was it really for Robinson at the time. Looking back the coverage and discussion of Robinson is hindered towards a positive light when the words and

---

8 Pat Washburn, *"New York Newspaper Coverage of Jackie Robinson in His First Major League Season."
1980.
descriptions of Robinson from the actual time say otherwise. Was American society really this fast to drop their ideas of discrimination if an African American athlete on their favorite team brought more wins to their hometown? This research paper will be analysing Robinson trying to break the color barrier and how different newspapers covered it. This paper will bring to light the coverage of the debut of Jackie Robinson and the negativity shown through news sources about it. Jackie Robinson was a baseball player and barrier breaker on and off the field and the Newspaper coverage openly voices that aspect both positively and negatively.
Bibliography

Primary Sources-


The Chicago Daily Tribune

The Pittsburgh Courier

The New York Times

Ebony Magazine


Secondary Sources -


Grella, George. "Baseball and the American Dream." The Massachusetts Review 16, no. 3


Riess, Steven A. "Professional Baseball and Social Mobility." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary


Baseball at the movies. By George Grella. Edited by Leonard Cassuto, Fordham University, New York, Stephen Partridge, University of British Columbia, Vancouver. Book: The Cambridge Companion to Baseball. Its special place in the history and culture of the country, its appeal as the national pastime, and its practice as an everyday American activity certainly account for its innumerable incidental appearances in hundreds of non-baseball motion pictures, as a characterizing touch, a thematic statement, even a kind of cinematic wallpaper. In addition, despite its spotty history, the baseball movie itself boasts its own traditions, some peculiar to its particular temporal context. Recommend this.