1998

Race and Baseball in North Dakota in the 1930's

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RACE AND BASEBALL IN NORTH DAKOTA IN THE 1930s

A THESIS

The Honors Program
College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Distinction "All College Honors"
and the Degree Bachelor of Arts
In the Department of Political Science

by

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May, 1998
Abstract

In the 1930s in North Dakota, town teams employed black players from the Negro Leagues. In the communities of Bismarck and Jamestown, North Dakota, players were denied membership while performing a socially important function—playing baseball. Because of their race, they were ineligible for membership.
Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the help of Scott Johnson, my advisor, Rodney Cunningham and James Murphy, readers, and the following people who contributed in so many ways: Kyle McNary, Tony Carlasco, Jack Brown, Mary Young, Bruce Berg and Agnes Fredicks.
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INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the difficult 1930s, many Americans relied on an important diversion—baseball. They watched as Major League Baseball held its first all-star game in 1933 at Comisky Park in Chicago. While the baseball fan of today may cherish this historic event, many may not know what happened at Comisky Park that same summer. Another all-star game was played. The East-West Game featured the best players from the Negro League. Formed in the 1920s, the Negro League was comprised of many players who were talented enough to play Major League baseball but were barred from doing so because of their race.

Possibly the most fascinating aspect of the first East-West Game is that Negro baseball’s star player was absent. LeRoy “Satchel” Paige was a 6’3” pitcher that may have been the best pitcher in all of baseball that year. He passed up that historical game for another surprising opportunity. Where was Satchel Paige? He was in Bismarck, North Dakota. Paige had left the Pittsburgh Crawfords, a premier Negro League team at a time when the Negro League was in its glory, to play for the Bismarck Capital Nine. They were a semi-professional team with a few talented players, but no other standout features.

Paige was one of several black players who were lured by large salaries to play for local teams in the Midwest. In the early 1930s, baseball teams in North Dakota, particularly in the cities of Jamestown and Bismarck, fielded a significant number of black players. This paper will focus on the way North Dakota’s citizens treated the
players when they came to play in the state. Despite being respected as baseball players, they were denied a central aspect of citizenship that they deserved—membership.

Specifically, this paper will focus on the special significance of the situation of black “guest” baseball players. While revered for their baseball talent, they were still denied acceptance, and subsequent membership in the communities in which they lived. Despite that their stay may only have been for a few months at a time—the duration of a baseball season—and that the treatment they received in North Dakota was better than in most other places, these players were denied just treatment. They were not simple laborers; they were some of the best baseball players of their time and thousands of fans came to watch them.

The migration of Paige and many other black players produced viable political questions that are still of importance today. Dahl (1) helps us understand why we might even bother to extract political elements by the migration of a few baseball players to a rural state over 60 years ago:

Political analysis helps one understand the world he lives in, to make more intelligent choices among the alternatives he faces, and to influence the changes, great and small, that are an inherent aspect of all political systems.

The subject of racial equality (or its absence) is still an intensely political subject. It addresses questions of power, justice and equality. These forces were certainly at work in the lives of the migratory players of North Dakota in the early 1930s. I will analyze the results of this experiment by extracting the political elements of equality and membership. I will show the intertwining of race and membership. Of particular interest are the writings of Michael Walzer, who discusses what he calls membership. He looks at the political process of a group determining its membership. We can apply this
process to the reception of a group of black baseball players coming to play in North Dakota.

Most importantly, the story of 1930s North Dakota baseball seems to have implications that reach beyond a few small-town baseball diamonds. In assessing the treatment and justice that these players encountered, we can extract lessons about community membership, citizenship and equality that can be applied to any group or association.
Chapter 1—Walzer’s Membership and North Dakota Baseball

The noteworthy occurrence of black players coming from other states to play in North Dakota is not simply a story about baseball. It addresses central aspects of human community, of justice and of race. This paper will extract from the migration of talented black baseball players key issues of the entrance and acceptance of new members to a community.

With support from the historical section of this paper, I will apply Michael Walzer’s theory of membership in a community. In brief, Walzer’s makes the distinction between a community’s members and its strangers. Members are accepted as part of community and strangers are not. I will examine the distinction between members and strangers as it applies to the denial of membership to the black baseball players that came to play in North Dakota. In the communities they joined, these players were often considered strangers and were denied membership.

The primary reason for the denial of membership was the race of the players. They wanted the privileges membership can bring, but were denied them as a result of racial discrimination. Although the racial climate in North Dakota was by far not the worst in the nation, black players were the targets of several forms of racial discrimination. They were denied housing, services and were subjected to discriminatory portrayals in local newspapers. The players did not want to live in boxcars and low class hotels, but because of their race, they were not given a choice.

In this chapter, I will examine how membership applies to the black baseball players of North Dakota. I will discuss how baseball in North Dakota in the 1930s aligns with Walzer’s theory of membership distribution and its dependence on the relationship
between the member and the stranger. I will show how Walzer’s analogies—the neighborhood and the club—apply to the black baseball players of the 1930s. Finally, I will examine the injustice in denying membership to these players.

**Distribution of Membership**

I will use Walzer’s writings to show that the experience of these guest players can be looked at in terms of membership. Walzer’s theory of membership is tied closely to the conception of distributive justice which he discusses in *Spheres of Justice*. He begins with a “bounded world where distributions take place” (Walzer, 31). Inside a community’s boundaries lay a finite set of resources Walzer calls “social goods,” one of them being membership, that are distributed amongst its members. Like any limited resource, the privilege of being a member of a bounded community cannot extend to everyone: “…so long as members and strangers are, as they are at present, two distinct groups, admissions decisions have to be made, men and women taken in or refused” (34). Because there exists a limited supply of social goods, the number of recipients must be limited. Individuals who are already members of a community must decide to whom they will extend the privilege of membership.

Distribution of membership is “a matter of political decision” (40). According to Walzer, citizens determine what kind of communities they want to create and with which men and women they want to share and exchange social goods. Members must make choices about the composition of their community. In choosing who will share in the distribution of social goods, members hold the power to decide what the future of their community will be like. In having the capacity to pick its future members, current
members possess the authority to make the political decisions for the community in which they live.

**Relationships and Distribution**

The process of selecting new members requires some sort of interaction between members and strangers. Members give membership to strangers and "the choice is...governed by our relationship with strangers (32)." The nature of the relationship between members and strangers can affect the admissions choices that a community makes.

Characteristics of the relationship between members and strangers often affect the admission process. For example, colleges and universities often give admission preference to a prospective college student if she is related to an alumna. There is a characteristic of the relationship—a familial connection to another member—that increases her chance of gaining admission. On the other hand, a country club might refuse membership to a black golfer simply because of her race. The admission committee discriminates between blacks and whites and, in choosing only the latter, prohibits admission for the golfer.

There are two important characteristics of the relationship between black guest players and the members of the communities to which they came to play. First, the black baseball players came to North Dakota to perform a clearly valuable social function—playing baseball. Baseball was the most important sport of the time and watching it was a popular entertainment activity (Newgard, 234). As I will show, baseball in the 1930s in North Dakota was an important community activity that served to support both a community's pride and enhance its identity. I will also present evidence that shows that
through playing baseball, the black players thoroughly fulfilled these functions. It is clear from local newspaper accounts that the black players that came to North Dakota were participating in an activity of significance to the communities in which they played. Fans supported players for their baseball skill, but as I will show, this treatment did not extend to players once they left the baseball diamond.

Second, the little contact that members of these communities had with blacks prior to the arrival of the black guest players helped to inappropriately reinforce a perception that all blacks were strangers. Newgard, Sherman and Guerrero’s *African Americans in North Dakota: Sources and Assessments* describes several developmental factors that may have helped establish this perception. Not surprisingly, an initial contributing factor to the image of blacks as strangers was that in the early twentieth century (as well as today), the state did not have many black residents.\(^1\) In fact, the jobs taken by many blacks were temporary, if not transient in nature; many were steamboat workers, ranch hands, farm laborers, railroad workers and sports figures. Much of this work was seasonal in nature and required only temporary help. Considering the positions that blacks filled, it is easy to understand how citizens of North Dakota could have viewed blacks as strangers.

Walzer uses a historical example of the member-stranger relationship that has striking similarities to the experience of black baseball players in North Dakota. Over two thousand years ago (Walzer, 53), Pericles opened the Greek city-state of Athens to workers from the outside: “We throw open our city to the world.” Thus began the influx of metics into Athens. But in gaining economic opportunity, metics gave up certain

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\(^1\) An interesting if not humorous point is that an appendix to Newgard’s book lists every single African-American that lived in North Dakota (according to census documents) from 1880 to 1920.
rights. Metics occupied labor-intensive jobs and rarely rose above the lower classes of Athenian society. They were saddled with the obligations of citizenship, like joining in the defense of the city, but had no political or welfare rights.

In the 1930s, it seems that Neil Churchill, owner of Bismarck’s baseball team, assumed the role of Pericles, as he threw open the gates to Roosevelt Davis and then Satchel Paige. As word spread of the opportunities available for baseball players in the North, large salaries lured several of them to play in a place where they would be denied membership in the community. This is not to say that the treatment they received in North Dakota was any worse than in other parts of the country, but it is obvious that they were not given social status commensurate with their social value, namely membership.

**Analogies**

Two of the analogies that Walzer uses to point out how membership manifests itself within human associations are particularly applicable here—the club and the neighborhood. Indeed these players played for clubs and lived in neighborhoods. But more importantly, that the players were excluded from neighborhoods and clubs is further proof that the race of the players relegated them to being strangers.

A neighborhood (Walzer, 36-7) is an association that has the special characteristic of indifference. A neighborhood should be open to whoever wants to live in it. It functions as a random association where strangers are either welcomed or not (as opposed to being either admitted or excluded). The market, as Walzer says, determines who will live in a neighborhood and who will not. “Ideally, market works independently of the existing composition of the neighborhood.” The current members of the
neighborhood should not be able to prevent anyone wanting to live in a neighborhood from doing so.

It seems, however, that exclusion from neighborhoods was exactly what happened to many of the black players who tried to find a place to live in the cities where they played. Satchel Paige told of his difficulty in finding a place to live once he moved to Bismarck:

Most of the folks there were pretty nice, but there were some of those other kind, like you run into everywhere. Those mean folks didn't want any colored people around. They didn't want us living by them(88).

Paige, one of the greatest players to ever play in the state, was forced to live in a railroad boxcar (Roper, Another, 83). His reference to meeting people “like you run into everywhere” indicates that Paige was familiar with differential treatment because he was black. Likewise, most players in Jamestown were forced to live in the one hotel in town that would accept black tenants (Fredricks). That players like Paige expressed disappointment over not being able to find a place to live shows that they wanted the privileges that membership in neighborhoods could provide, but were not given that opportunity.

Walzer uses another analogy that is particularly applicable to our subject—the club. Walzer explains that in a club, current members must choose new members. Clubs have admissions committees that evaluate potential members and decide who they will accept. Current members decide on their present and future populations and in doing so distribute membership (Walzer, 31). “The members decide freely on their future associates, and the decisions they make are authoritative and final” (41). The analogy of
the club is important because the black players that played in North Dakota were granted
(and were sometimes denied) membership in baseball clubs.

The baseball clubs for which the black players played were similar to Walzer’s
conception of the club. Current members had the authority to determine who its new
members would be and who could not be a member. A March 9, 1931 article in the
Jamestown Sun illustrated the way that the Jamestown club exercised its authority to
eliminate members it did not want. It decided to field an “all white team” because it had
received many “requests from fans.” It is obvious that the club no longer wanted black
players on its team. “Requests” were a polite way to discriminate racially. Roper
verifies that in 1934, due to “some racially-motivated” problems, the clubs in Jamestown
and Devils Lake, North Dakota, released their black players. Furthermore, the move of
Art Hancock, a player on the 1934 Jamestown team, to nearby Valley City is evidence
that he wanted membership in a baseball club (Jamestown Sun; Roper, Another, 83).
After being released by Jamestown, it seems he found the nearest club to join so that he
could continue gaining the benefits of membership—playing baseball. The Jamestown
club did not give him the choice of having membership.

Injustice: Lack of Choice

The crucial aspect of Walzer’s theory on membership involves the denial of
membership. Walzer believes that the governing of guest workers who are not granted
membership is “the exercise of power outside its sphere, over men and women who
resemble citizens in every respect that counts in the host country, but are nevertheless
barred from citizenship (Walzer, 59).” Likewise, North Dakota’s black baseball players
were subject to a power relationship operating outside its sphere. Walzer explains on a theoretical level what was denied:

Participants in economy and law, they ought to be able to regard themselves as potential or future participants in politics as well. And they must be possessed of those basic civil liberties whose exercise is so much preparation for voting and office holding. They must be on the road to citizenship. They may choose not to become citizens...But unless they have that choice, their other choices cannot be taken as so many signs of their acquiescence to the economy and law of the countries where they work (60).

It is here that I come to a central issue of my study: choice. It is true that not all black baseball players who lived in a community for only three or four months may have wanted to become full members of a community, but the very nature of a relationship that denies them that choice is problematic. As the racial discrimination directed toward them demonstrates, they were not given the choice because they were often considered to be strangers. The stereotypes and subordination applied to blacks in North Dakota and even to these valuable players shows that many blacks were seen as strangers and not worthy of membership.

Returning to Walzer's comments on metics, we can examine a crucial opinion put forth by Aristotle. Non-citizens, according to Aristotle, live in the realm of necessity and citizens live in the realm of choice. Possibly the most obvious result of choice is of self-determination. Citizens have some measure of control over their future and destiny. Non-citizens do not have a choice among political alternatives and they can neither participate in political activity nor possess political rights. Both metics and black players in North Dakota were denied the choice to become a member because they were relegated to stranger status.
Walzer's theory on membership differentiates between members and strangers.

The black players of North Dakota, despite being highly respected for their baseball talent, were often considered strangers unworthy of the chance to obtain membership. The account of racial discrimination that follows shows that black baseball players, like the metics long ago, could not rid themselves of the stranger status that kept them from gaining membership. Again we encounter the commodity central to my argument: choice. In this paper, I do not argue that North Dakota's black guest players should have become members or should have wanted to become members. I argue that they did not have the choice.

Walzer says of communities that hire workers from outside their communities:

...if they want to bring in new workers, they must be prepared to enlarge their own membership; if they are unwilling to accept new members, they must find ways...to get socially necessary work done (61)."

The communities that hired black players to play for their baseball teams should have been willing to let the players have the benefits of membership. They performed socially necessary and socially important work and deserved the choice of whether or not to be members.

The historical account in chapter 2 reinforces and builds on the theoretical framework in two ways. First, it gives a more detailed account of the discrimination that the black players in North Dakota faced. This information strengthens the connection between the players and their "stranger" status and also better defines the relationship between the members of the communities and the players. Second, the historical account shows the injustice to which the players were subjected. They were treated as strangers while doing not just socially necessary work, but work that was central to the
communities' sense of identity and pride.
CHAPTER 2—Historical Analysis

In supporting the theoretical framework offered in Chapter 1, the account of the black baseball players that came to North Dakota serves two important functions. First, it examines the discrimination that black players faced in North Dakota. Such prejudice is evidence that they were considered strangers because of their race. Second, it shows what a socially significant function the players were fulfilling by improving the baseball teams of Jamestown and Bismarck. In fulfilling these two functions, the historical account exposes the injustice to which the players were subjected. Even after fulfilling such an important social function, they were denied membership and its privileges.

In this historical account, I will expose the injustice North Dakota’s black guest players faced by establishing the social value of their participation in baseball and then by examining the discrimination the players faced in the communities in which they played. I will establish the importance of baseball in the North Dakota communities that employed black players in the 1930s and I will discuss the role of rivalry between communities. I will then show the importance of black players to the communities in which they played by looking at public reaction to the arrival of several black players. Their importance will also be shown by the national prominence achieved by the teams for which they played. Finally, by assessing the discrimination the players faced, I will show how black players were treated unjustly for being denied the membership they deserved and wanted in spite of the socially important work they provided.

The historical account shows that the players, despite the services they provided for the cities in which they played, were denied central aspects of membership by being subjected to discrimination. Poor living conditions, prevalent stereotypes reinforced by
newspapers and a second class status are a few examples of the differential treatment they received.

Before I continue with the historical account, it is important to acknowledge that relative to other places in the United States, particularly in the South, North Dakota on the whole had a decent record for the treatment of black people (Newgard, Sherman and Guerrero, 331). Many people in North Dakota, including Bismarck team owner Neil Churchill, treated the players relatively well. That they were playing on an integrated team in the 1930s—something unheard of in most other states at the time—shows that the racial climate was certainly not the worst it could have been. North Dakota was likely one of the more hospitable places for a black player in the 1930s, but that fact does not discount that they were not granted the justice and equality they deserved as human beings, regardless of skin color.

The North Dakota baseball experience as it relates to race is not an isolated incident without implications for the other aspects of baseball and for other human relationships. If anything, baseball provides an important way for us to distill social science issues into terms that are easier to comprehend and absorb. Unfortunately, illusions exist that we must eradicate before we can get to the heart of the issues.

Historian John Thorn describes the apparent microcosmic function that baseball serves for a larger world:

The lie of baseball is that it is a level playing field, that there’s equality; that all the inequalities in American life check their hat at the door and don’t go into the stadium; that there’s a sort of bleacher democracy, that the banker can sit in the bleachers and converse with the working man next to him. This is a falsehood. You have class and race issues that mirror the struggle of American life that play themselves out on the ballfields (Burns).
Baseball’s Beginnings

When Satchel Paige arrived in North Dakota, baseball had become a very important community activity. Newgard Sherman and Guerrero claim it was the “big” sport in both small and large towns in the state (234). Many North Dakota towns found baseball to be important enough to become the “major community activity” (Jansson, 2). We can trace its path to importance from its beginnings on the prairie.

Baseball’s beginnings on the prairie may have foreshadowed its future. The 1860s and 1870s brought military outposts and soldiers to what is now North Dakota. With baseball as their game of choice, soldiers played to pass the time and to encourage unit cohesion (Jansson, 28). The military created these camps in part to protect railroad workers from the perceived threat of Native Americans already living on the land called Dakota Territory (Roper, Geographic 17-18).

It seems North Dakota has a history of intertwining ball games and diverse ethnicity. On the early plains, Native Americans had their own ball game, called racket, which used a ball and netted racket (Jansson 30). The popularity of the game declined when Native Americans in federal boarding schools were pushed to play baseball as a way of urging their assimilation into American life (Roper, Geographic 77). The Northern plains fostered ethnically and racially integrated baseball before most of the rest of the country. After 1890, blacks became prominent players in the region (75).

In other parts of the country, blacks had been excluded from playing professional baseball by an association of professional teams. In 1867 the National Association of Base Ball Players held its annual convention in Philadelphia. In the midst of a war-scarred nation, the NABBP, claiming that it was trying to avoid subjects of political
content, barred any team that had one or more non-white players. Robert Peterson, author of *Only the Ball Was White* better characterizes the true nature of the political climate of the time and affirms that the NABBP’s explanation was all too complex:

The Negro was a political subject in 1867, but politics was a secondary consideration for the NABBP. Simple prejudice brought baseball’s first color line. The members of the Association were all Northerners, but most shared with Southerners the belief that the Negro was inferior and not fit company for white gentlemen (Peterson, 17).

The exclusion of blacks in Major League baseball lasted until 1947, when Jackie Robinson was allowed to play with the Brooklyn Dodgers. If not for such a color line, players like Satchel Paige may never have played in North Dakota. These players represented a pool of talent that was barred from playing with other players of their caliber.

**Town Rivalry**

The rivalry between Bismarck and Jamestown, North Dakota acts as a catalyst in this story of equality and justice. Baseball was viable way for towns to compete against one another for power. The railroad built an inherent sense of equity into its posts as it expanded Westward. A quick glance at a North Dakota map reveals a grid of towns with distances of one hundred miles between them. With Bismarck and Jamestown being one hundred miles from one another, there seemed no better way to demonstrate one team’s dominance over another than to play baseball.

An important actor in what would become a great rivalry in small town sport was the owner of Bismarck’s Capital Nine baseball team, Neil Churchill. A prominent citizen, accomplished businessman and future mayor of Bismarck, Neil Churchill’s entrepreneurial spirit brought legends like Satchel Paige, Ted Radcliffe and Chet Brewer
to North Dakota. His attempt to improve his team also led to the rivalry and competition that would sprinkle the rest of the baseball teams in North Dakota with players from the other states.

The *Bismarck Tribune* reveals that from the beginning of the 1933 season, (Churchill’s first year as owner of the Capital Nine), Churchill was looking to improve his team with players from outside of North Dakota (McNary 79). As was often the case, town teams looked elsewhere for talent to augment the skills of the local players. The search for “ringers” would lead to something not unlike an arms race for small-town baseball. At first, towns employed players from other semi-professional leagues and professional retirees. Soon Churchill and many other owners in Minnesota and North Dakota realized where the most talented players were—in the Negro Leagues (McNary, 78). The Negro Leagues, formed in the 1920s, fielded black players that could have been competitive (if not worthy of stardom) in Major League Baseball.

The Jamestown baseball team was the first to employ a Negro League player and thus started the race for black talent. Barney Brown was a left-handed pitcher who became Satchel Paige’s rival during immensely popular games between Bismarck and Jamestown (McNary, 79). At one point in 1933, according to the *Bismarck Tribune*, the Northern Pacific railroad accommodated for rivalry between Bismarck and Jamestown by chartering a special train to transport over 700 fans to the game. A total of 4,000 fans were in attendance and fans were forced stand on the outer edges of the field.

The intense rise in popularity of baseball can only be attributed to the arrival of black players brought to make each team better than the other. The rivalry also points to the important social function that the black players fulfilled by playing baseball in North
Dakota. Their talent was a valuable commodity and although they were paid for playing, I will show that they were denied the membership they deserved for performing such important work. A major barrier between the players and community membership was the racial climate present when they came to North Dakota and the relationship it fostered between whites and blacks in the 1930s.

Racial Climate

Understanding the racial climate of North Dakota is central to understanding the relationship between whites who already lived in the state and the black players who came to play there. The climate and relationships were established by interaction between whites and blacks that had already been living in North Dakota.

Newgard, Sherman and Guerrero provide us with a quality assessment of the lives of blacks in North Dakota before 1930. A brief overview of the book shows that for the most part, blacks came to the state to fill labor positions for the railroad, on steamboats and on ranches and farms. Newgard, Sherman and Guerrero explain that several North Dakota towns had separate neighborhoods for blacks. Fargo had its “colored section,” Bismarck had a part of town considered “under the hill” and Jamestown had its West End, where most blacks lived. Sometimes it was a block or just a row of low-rent houses, but North Dakota towns certainly had neighborhoods that separated blacks from whites (253).

The climate in North Dakota was not only prone to racial inequalities. Aggie Fredricksm, a longtime resident of Jamestown, tells of an intrinsic stratification that existed in the town. “There was a feeling in town that the West End was not the place to be. It was all railroad people. In the Northeast [section of town], they dressed
differently. They spoke differently.” Dahl affirms Aggie’s words in discussing the nature of agriculturally based communities like Jamestown:

Agricultural societies are particularly prone to cumulative inequalities, for the value of the land a man owns not only determines his total wealth and income, but pretty much fixes his social status, educational opportunities, and his political, administrative, and military skills (Dahl, 70).

Aggie Fredricks reveals something about the general climate of prejudice that extended far beyond discrimination resulting from racial prejudice. “The community was not just anti-color. They were anti-whatever didn’t fit their perspective.” Other ethnic and religious groups were treated poorly, according to Fredricks. She tells of Germans who were discriminated against during World War I and of Jehovah’s Witnesses who were put in jail and beaten by policemen.

The social climate present in North Dakota when black players arrived was one that was prone to discrimination on the basis of skin color. As I will show, it fostered discrimination that was directed at the black players who came to play in North Dakota. Discrimination only on the basis of skin color is unquestionably unjust. But in light of the socially important function that they were performing, this racial discrimination against black baseball players was especially unjust.

**Social Importance of Black Baseball Players**

The historical account shows that blacks baseball players were of significant social importance in North Dakota. From their foundations to their national prominence, black players were often associated with high-caliber baseball, which added to their image of value in performing a socially important function.
Foundations

The climate in North Dakota in the late 1920s indicates that people were accepting of racial difference in the world of baseball. The late 1920s appear to have been a formative time where black and Hispanic players were assumed to be of a higher caliber than whites in terms of baseball skill. The June 30, 1927 issue of the Bismarck Tribune tells of an incarcerated Native American named Bear who had been “showing up well in practice” and was expected to play for the state penitentiary’s Prison All-Star team.

Before the first blacks came to play for Bismarck’s team in the 1930s, the region was exposed to players of color who were members of barnstorming teams that traveled the country playing local teams. The social climate was not only ready for integrated play, but there was stardom available for black players. One such team was the Union Giant Nine started by a man named Bob Gilkerson, which had several black and Hispanic players.

There is substantial evidence to show that players of color were glamorized. A headline in the July 9, 1928 Tribune referred to the traveling “Cuban” team as the “Classy Union Giant Nine.” The Bismarck Tribune raved of infielders Pelayo Chacon and Regolio Crispo who were both batting over .350 each after more than 100 games. It seems that the race of its players was the team’s drawing card. Later they were called the “best team that has played in Bismarck this season.”

Racial identity seems to have been an indicator of baseball talent in North Dakota. A 1930 issue of the Bismarck Tribune features a photograph and an accompanying caption about two players from the Union Giants. Photographs in general, but
particularly local sports stars, were not common in the 1930s. I question why it would be important to publish such a photo, particularly without an accompanying story. Was it to emphasize that they were black? The two players, named Crespo and Turanta appear standing next to one another. Regardless of the motivating factor for the photo, the words that accompany it indicate that there was a level of respect present for these players that may have been associated with the exotic image of the team. The article refers to Turanta as “classy”.

There is further support to show that North Dakota’s black players had become a commodity. During the end-of-the-season tournaments, teams would temporarily hire players from teams that did not make it to the tournament. A black player named Vivens, a pitcher from Rutland, North Dakota, was employed by the Jamestown Northern Pacific team before a tournament. On the baseball field, there was an already present feeling of respect toward non-white players.

The historical accounts lay the groundwork for the early 1930s, where players of color were sought after for their baseball abilities. Communities began to associate black players with high quality baseball. This observation is important to consider along with the treatment the players received when they were not playing baseball. While they were welcomed as baseball players, they were seen in many other ways as strangers and denied membership within their community.

1933 Season

The 1933 season is important because it exemplifies how important black players were, particularly in Bismarck. Neil Churchill recruited several very good Negro Leaguers to play for his team as a result of the rivalry between Bismarck and Jamestown.
By looking at local newspaper accounts, it is apparent that these players were highly valued for their baseball talent. The 1933 season establishes the value of these players and emphasizes both their social importance and the unjust treatment they received.

The chronology of the 1933 season is important because it lays out the process by which Neil Churchill infused his team and his community with a set of new players that improved his team greatly. But he also (probably unknowingly) set a stage where both the team and the community valued a group of people that would otherwise not have been valued. The appearance of black players in Bismarck seems to coincide with the sudden rise of importance that baseball experienced in Bismarck. If not as individuals, as a group and if not deliberately, peripherally, the presence of black players in North Dakota seems to have infused communities with a strong sense of pride for their baseball teams.

In 1933, Bismarck baseball went from being occasionally mentioned in a corner of the sports page to front-page news. The Capital Nine’s owner, Neil Churchill, began looking for the best talent he could find after his team was beaten by Jamestown’s ace pitcher, a black man named Barney Brown. Knowing Churchill, if he could have pulled Babe Ruth away from the Yankees, he would have. But the best help that existed in 1932 was obviously off-limits to Churchill. They were all in the Major Leagues. But excluded from this game were players that had talent enough to be playing alongside Ruth.

The Negro Leagues had produced some of the most talented players of the time, and Neil Churchill must have known that they were within his grasp. During the Great Depression, the right amount of money could move anyone to do just about anything. At
the peak of his career, Satchel Paige’s salary was $1000 a month, a sum that must have been significant during the Great Depression.

Newspaper coverage of baseball in Bismarck was sparse at best before the 1933 season. If games were being played, they were not often being covered. Every few weeks there would be mention of a game played or a game planned, but baseball had plenty of room to grow in popularity. One of the first seeds that grew into a flourishing racially integrated team was a pitcher named Roosevelt Davis. It appears that the community and Churchill were very excited at the prospect of having a quality pitcher. “[Davis] is supposed to be one of the leading colored pitchers in baseball and made a fine record last season in the colored league in Columbus,” Churchill told the Tribune. “If he makes good he will have a home and a job here for the rest of the summer.”

On June 26, the day Davis pitched his first game, baseball received the most media attention it had in a long time. With Davis pitching, Bismarck scored 16 runs and allowed none. Davis’ accomplishments for the day were spelled out in bold type and Churchill said “Davis will remain with the Bismarck team through the remainder of the season.” It appears Davis was then able to connect Churchill with a broader talent pool of Negro League players that were prospects for the Capital Nine. Prospects became players during the summer of 1933, and Churchill brought many.

The “Babe Ruth of colored baseball,” as the Tribune called him, was next to join the team. Quincy Troupe arrived in Bismarck from Chicago on July 27, 1933. After receiving a free flight from Northwest Airways (the company’s contribution to the local team), Troupe was welcomed as a “catcher, a pitcher and a utility man.”
Satchel Paige was next to arrive. On August 13, his debut against Barney Brown, another Negro League pitcher playing for Jamestown produced a win for Bismarck, 18 strikeouts for Paige and the ticket revenue of 2,200 fans for Churchill. The Tribune called it the “largest [baseball] crowd ever assembled in North Dakota. According to McNary, “North Dakota baseball had officially “arrived””(82). The rivalry between towns was brewing; fans were showing up at the ballpark in record numbers. Such interest can only be attributed to the arrival of talented Negro Leaguers.

The rematch game played in Jamestown a few days later could possibly have been the most exciting played in North Dakota history. Once again a Bismarck versus Jamestown game pitted Paige against Barney Brown. The Northern Pacific railroad chartered a train expressly for this game to transport over 700 fans from Bismarck. Another 400 or 500 fans drove in cars to the game to bring the estimated total to 4,000 in attendance. The Bismarck Tribune noted:

The crowd stood around the field six or seven deep after the bleachers and grand stand were filled, necessitating ground rules for center field as well as left and right.

The game ended in a 12-inning 1-1 tie with Paige striking out nineteen batters and Brown eleven. Baseball was flourishing and the “ringers” from the Negro Leagues were the primary reason. The attendance of 4000 fans in a town with less than 20,000 people speaks highly of the importance of these players. Negro Leaguers like Satchel Paige, Quincy Troupe and Barney Brown were performing a socially important function that the citizens of these communities valued.
National Prominence

Gaining national prominence by both beating a major league all-star team and by winning a national semi-professional tournament showed what the black players were capable of and what continuing value they were to the communities in which they played. They were beating talented teams and gaining national prominence.

In 1934, a team of American League all-stars made a swing through the Midwest on a hunting trip. The team, managed by Earle Mack, (baseball legend Connie’s son), featured stars like Jimmy Foxx (McNary, 94). Amazingly, they were beaten twice by a North Dakota all-star team, comprised mostly of black players. Phil Dixon and Patrick Hannigan, authors of The Negro Baseball Leagues: A Photographic History, 1867-1955, in discussing the talents of Chet Brewer, the North Dakota team’s pitcher, explain how beating them was no easy feat:

...Brewer defeated Earl Mack’s All-Stars in Jamestown, North Dakota, striking out Heinie Manush of the Washington Senators three times. That was no small achievement, considering Manush had struck out only twenty-three times while batting .349 in 556 at-bats during the regular season (218).

The final scores were 6-5 and 11-3. A major leaguer reportedly reacted to the losses by saying, “I knew there were a lot of good colored players. I just didn’t know they were all in Bismarck” (McNary, 95).

The most tangible and quantifiable evidence that the black players who came to North Dakota had an impact on baseball and on community life was Bismarck’s winning of the national semi-professional championship in 1935. Baseball became front-page news as Satchel Paige led one of the only mixed teams in the tournament to victory.
Unable to secure Satchel’s services for the 1934 season due to contract complications, Churchill set his sights on the 1935 season. With a record of 100-22, the team was a congregation of some of the best black talent outside of the Negro Leagues.² Later in his career, Paige said that the team was, according to the Bismarck Capital “the best team I ever saw, the best players I ever played with.” In taking home the championship in the national semi-professional tournament in Wichita, Kansas, the team won every game it played and was front-page news back in Bismarck. Paige was named Most Valuable Player of the tournament and was given the “Outstanding Pitcher” award. He had a recorded 60 strikeouts throughout the tournament, which was still a record when McNary’s book was completed in 1994 (121).

The flourishing of baseball in Bismarck and Jamestown in the early 1930s illustrates the impact that these players had not only on North Dakota baseball, but also on the lives of thousands of people who watched the games. One would expect that gratitude for such a feat would lead to membership for the players who did so much for their teams and for baseball. As we shall see, however, that was not the case. The record of racial discrimination that follows is evidence that the black players in North Dakota were made to feel like strangers and appeared unworthy of membership in these communities.

**Discrimination and Denial of Membership**

As a way of illustrating the denial of membership and its privileges, I will show that the black players of North Dakota were subjected to three basic types of discrimination. First, black players were often denied housing or forced to live in the

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² This statistic the source of controversy. Paige in several sources, including the Bismarck Capital claims that Bismarck lost only one game that summer and that it was to Jamestown.
only places that would allow blacks to rent. Second, newspapers promulgated discriminatory stereotypes by calling attention to the race of the black baseball players in derogatory ways. Third, some players were subjected to outright exclusion. They were excluded from their teams and looked upon unfavorably by service providers and the general public because they were black.

To paint a portrait of what life was like for the players, we must rely mostly on historical sources to determine the general situation for the players. In particular, we will look at newspaper accounts and testimonials concerning the kind of treatment the players received. As we shall see, we can most certainly discern that the discrimination they faced showed that black players were considered anything but members.

**Housing**

Off of the field, treatment of black players was different. Life was difficult for many of them because they were the targets of discrimination. Agnes “Aggie” Fredricks, a Jamestown resident who remembers the early 1930s, sheds light on the experience of black players who came to play in Jamestown. Formerly a Catholic nun, Aggie’s father owned the Central Hotel, the only place where non-whites could stay on an extended basis. Near the railroad tracks on the edge of the lower class “West End” of town, the Central Hotel often catered to the transient population that traveled on the trains. “They were good people, but they had a hard time,” said Fredricks of the black players from both the local team and other teams playing in town who could not stay anywhere else.

Despite being possibly the best pitcher to ever play in North Dakota, Satchel Paige was subjected to some of the worst discrimination in terms of housing. When he first came to North Dakota, despite the efforts of a powerful Neil Churchill, Paige and his
wife were forced to live in a railroad boxcar (Roper, 84).

Mrs. Fredricks’s comments are challenged somewhat by Tony Carlascio, a second generation Italian who grew up in the West End of Jamestown and served as batboy for the Jamestown teams of the 1930s. “They thought the people of Jamestown were very nice to them…very kind to them.” The view from deep in the West End, however, may have been different than what Fredricks saw closer to the boundary of the West End. She lived closer to the border of what she called “haves” and “have-nots.”

It is important to address the apparent tension between the view represented by Fredricks and that of Carlascio. Even the casual reader would be inclined to question whether or not the players themselves felt they were denied membership. There is a fair amount of evidence indicating that black players in Jamestown did not feel they were treated unjustly. The defense we have to offer is that the degree of inequality these players experienced in other places may have made North Dakota comparatively pleasant. Considering the circumstances, many thought they were treated well. Ted “Double Duty” Radcliffe once said: “Playing with Jamestown was nice (McNary 93).”

Radcliffe obviously believed that he received above-standard treatment from the people of Jamestown. But it also becomes apparent that Radcliffe believed that differential treatment was not something that could be changed and that to expect differently was futile. Radcliffe’s content over the treatment he received was heavily influenced by his vision of the climate of race relations at the time (Wickham, Whiteside 119-20):

People ask us all the time if we are bitter. I tell them we didn’t think about it, really, until fifties when Martin Luther King, Jr. started the fight for integration. Before, it didn’t do no good. It didn’t get you anywhere.
Black players like Double Duty Radcliffe were tolerant of the differential treatment they received because they felt there was no other choice. They were discriminated against and felt they had to live with it.

Carlasco’s West End neighbor in the late twenties was Martin Ross, one of five blacks living in the city, according to census records (Guerrero, appendix). Serving as the foreman of the Northern Pacific railroad’s power plant, Ross had a job with a fair amount of responsibility, particularly as a black man (Young). He recalls Ross housing Satchel Paige and other black players from opposing teams. Carlasco remembers that the players would talk to Martin about major league baseball and the desire to play in the big leagues.

He also remembers watching as Ross was refused service in a local restaurant. After asking for a sandwich, he was asked to leave. When Carlasco offered to buy the sandwich and bring it to Ross, Martin simply said “Let it go Tony, just let it go.” His response seems indicate that he understood exactly what Aggie Fredricks observed about the presence of this particular black family in the town: “The Rosses were ‘tolerated’ but not accepted.”

Martin Ross is an important actor in the tracing Jamestown’s prejudice. Having lived in Jamestown for several years with his family and a respectable job, it appears that he was never truly accepted as a member of the community. Being refused service in a restaurant shows that at least some of the community’s members wanted to keep Ross a stranger. This provides evidence of what some of the underlying sentiment must have been like for black baseball players who came to play in Jamestown.
**Newspapers**

Newspapers of the 1930s were an important indicator of discriminatory treatment. They often drew attention to a player’s race for no justified reason. Journalists often portrayed blacks using derogatory language and imagery. Attempts to characterize blacks as incapable of functioning as normal citizens often made them appear less than human. Newspaper coverage is further evidence that blacks were perceived as unworthy of membership.

The early 1900s saw abominable discrimination directed at blacks playing baseball in North Dakota. The newspapers of the state, particularly the *Fargo Forum* and the *Jamestown Sun*, were overtly racist in their coverage of local games. A 1912 account of a traveling team called the Tennessee Rats playing in Moorhead, Minnesota, mocked the players solely on the basis of their race:

> As coaches no race has anything on the coon race for making fun and as base runners they are funny as a bunch of monkeys and can sprint some (Roper, 81).

Another story explained that to the home team, “all coons looked alike.” For these two comments, not much interpretation is necessary. They have nothing to do with the players’ ability to play baseball, which should have been the intention of the story. Making the black players out to be subhuman is the only way one can interpret the reference to the players as “a bunch of monkeys.” In fairness, not all newspapers at the time provided the same slurring coverage, but portrayals like this laid the groundwork for future newspaper coverage and the attitudes with which future black players would be viewed. Even in the early 1900s, players were being viewed as strangers.
Newspapers in North Dakota can be held at least partially responsible for the way the players and other blacks in the state were viewed. Newgard, Sherman and Guerrero:

Aside from the matter of motivations, the very frequency of the "funny black situation" stories, in itself, is an indictment of the early Dakota newspaper establishment. The owners and writers, wittingly or not, were guilty of perpetuating stereotypes which described blacks in unfortunate terms: happy-go-lucky, ignorant, superstitious, small-minded, irresponsible. (The newspapers were, perhaps, not just perpetuating the stereotypes, but were introducing those misconceptions to successive waves of immigrants as they formed their initial concepts of the social fabric of their new homeland) (309).

"'They don't get no mo' runs,' Paige confided as he left the dugout to hurl the ninth inning, reported the Tribune, calling attention to Paige's accent. Never before had a player's comments about a game been included in a story, much less those said on the field. It is important to ask why the difference was accentuated, why Paige was portrayed as different. Perhaps it embellished the story by detailing Satchel's determination to finish the game. Perhaps the intent was to honor him for following through. Inadvertent or not, however, the characterization detailed a shallow unit of difference that emphasized an inequity off the field. It seems to say Satchel can pitch wonderfully, but he is not capable of proper speech. The article seems to emphasize that talent on the baseball field did not necessarily become respect or equality off of the field. This example may be only one sentence in one story on one page of a newspaper, but as we shall see, it seems to be consistent with the rest of the treatment and media attention these non-white players received in North Dakota.

Our analysis is further augmented by the work of Scott Roper in his article "Another Chink in Jim Crow? Race and Baseball on the Northern Plains, 1900-1935.

Roper details the discrimination faced specifically by black players who played in the
North. He gives many examples of how newspaper writers would often call unwarranted attention to the race of players if they were black, often in criticism.

Even after the Capital Nine won the National Semi-pro tournament, the Bismarck Tribune reprinted a racist and derogatory cartoon that appeared in the Wichita Beacon. The cartoon compares Satchel Paige’s pitching delivery to an Ethiopian war dance. Calling an black person an Ethiopian was a derogatory term of the time. The representation of Paige has no actual likeness to him. He has enlarged lips and other stereotypical facial characteristics for blacks. The portrayal compares him with several athletes, all of them black, which suggests that Paige should not be equated with whites. In the drawings representing the other athletes, Jesse Owens and Joe Louis among them, their bodies and faces resemble those of monkeys.

**Exclusion**

Sometimes discrimination was not as subtle as refused service or derogatory newspaper portrayals. Black players in North Dakota were also subjected to blatant exclusion from the clubs with whom they played. Due to apparent public pressure, clubs decided that they no longer wanted to employ black players. We can find no other reason than their skin color to account for the loss of membership.

There is convincing evidence that citizens of Jamestown made a concerted effort to prevent black players from being a part of the team. A 1931 article in the Jamestown Sun discussed the season to come by stating that “because of the many requests from the fans Jamestown will have an all-white team this year…”

Ironically, the article goes on to say that “Every man with playing ability should get out for practice when it starts…All will be given a fair trial chance. No one will be
favored. Ability to make the position will be the only gauge, it is pointed out.” One wonders whether this “thumbing the nose” action was intentional or a proliferation of ignorance.

McNary wonders whether a similar incident may have resulted in the 1935 Jamestown team being once again all white. There seems to be no record of this happening, but because newspaper accounts show that the non-white players simply moved to other nearby teams (as opposed to leaving the region) it is easy to speculate about their forced exit. Roper verifies McNary’s suspicions by saying that the Jamestown team chose to have all white teams after the 1934 season (Another 83). A fight even broke out the next season after a player from the all-white Jamestown team used racial slur to describe neighboring Valley City’s catcher, Charlie Hancock, who was a former Jamestown player. The police were required to break up the argument.

Aggie Fredricks reveals that regardless of their talent on the baseball diamond, black baseball players were treated poorly by some and certainly never accepted by the community as a whole. “They were called niggers and other unsavory names. Some of my friends were warned not to go near them... They were taunted if they went uptown... They were not accepted (Fredricks).”

This historical analysis supports the previous chapter on issues of the split between members and strangers in baseball in North Dakota in the 1930s. With twenty-twenty hindsight, we see that these players were not treated as equals and were certainly not treated as if they deserved membership in the communities they served. The players themselves may have thought that a good salary and better treatment than they received in the South was pleasant. These perceptions, however, are not antidotes to the injustice
to which these players were subjected. They were denied the choice of whether or not they wanted to become members of these communities and were usually treated as strangers. They were denied the membership they deserved.
Chapter 3—Findings and Conclusion

Perhaps the most important reason to study the lives of the black players who came over 60 years ago to play in North Dakota is that their story has value for the world of today. The end of the 1935 season did not devalue the lessons of this experience. The story of these players continues today, both in the world of baseball and beyond.

What we have found in our study of black players in North Dakota is the element of injustice. As Walzer tells us, they were in a position to be offered membership, but were denied it because of the color of their skin. They were denied the choice to become members. This installed a permanent boundary between member and stranger, whom Walzer explains, is unacceptable:

No democratic state can tolerate the establishment of a fixed status between citizen and foreigner...Democratic citizens, then, have a choice: if they want to bring in new workers, they must be prepared to enlarge their own membership...(61)

Japanese Baseball

A similar situation in Japan over the past few decades saw Americans, brought overseas for their baseball talent, shunned because of their outsider status. For decades, Japanese professional teams have hired American baseball players for their power-hitting ability. Japanese fans, however, have been known to exclude foreign players, which they call gaijin. Even the Japanese home run record holder, Sadaharu Oh, who hit more homeruns than both Babe Ruth and Hank Aaron, never gained the popularity of other Japanese-born players because he was born in Taiwan (Thorn, 268). Unwilling to enlarge their membership, the Japanese baseball establishment ensured that Americans would remain strangers.
Today we must ask a most important question: If baseball players in North Dakota, worthy of stardom, were treated this way, how would someone with less apparent social value, like an agricultural migrant worker, be treated?

**Migrant Workers**

The problem is still apparent in communities where seasonal agricultural migrant workers live for a few months out of the year, lured by economic advantages. Every summer, families, many of them of Hispanic decent from the southern United States, travel north to work for farmers growing summer crops. Such migrant workers inhabit the same stomping grounds in North Dakota as did the black players of the 1930s. Economic opportunity drew them to the area. As a group, migrant workers are seen as second class citizens and are subject to discrimination. They are viewed as strangers and the relationship between migrant workers and members of the community makes their acceptance problematic.

Part of this relationship is furthered by media portrayals of Hispanic stereotypes. The very same *Fargo Forum* known for its racist attitudes in the early 1900s recently ran a controversial story on a Hispanic family. Alvaro Garza, Jr. made headlines as a 10-year-old when he was rescued after falling into the icy Red River. Spending over 30 minutes without air in near freezing water, Garza was revived. A trust fund fed by public donations was set up for Garza and his younger brother. After recuperating, the local news media followed Garza and his family as their lives took a turn for the worse. Garza’s father was in the headlines after being arrested for drug possession and then for committing suicide.
Recently Alvaro was featured at the top of the front page in a “ten years later” story. The Forum’s story featured a timeline detailing the family’s moves between Texas and North Dakota and their criminal activity. It called attention to their status as migrant workers when much of it was not newsworthy. Discrimination of this type is less blatant, but possibly more powerful.

Why would a story about a boy who fell through the ice ten years ago be worthy of a front-page story today? Why would a newspaper spend such much time and energy reporting on someone who is neither a prominent figure in the community nor has the potential to affect the lives of the citizens of Fargo? Why would a newspaper go to the trouble of such in-depth research on a topic of such little public value if it was not intending to construct an negative image of this family? The portrayal is not in the language, but in the selection and placement of the news story. Alvaro Garza, Jr. is not a public figure, but possibly representative of a group of people who are consistently discriminated against.

The Forum could be credited with an investigative search to discover where the money donated to the Garza trust has gone—it is possible the newspaper believes it has a responsibility to report that information. But as a front and center news story, I wonder whether it serves more as a constant reminder of the belief that migrant workers are responsible for so many evils. Discrimination against migrant workers in Fargo and many other Midwestern rural areas has been a problem. By accentuating the perceived stranger role that migrant workers continue to play in our society, the Forum has reinforced that it is acceptable to further this image.
As Walzer tells us, if we as democratic citizens want to bring in new workers to get “socially necessary work” done, we “must be prepared to enlarge our membership (61).” We must have a place for foreign baseball players, migrant workers, and anyone else who through their obligations deserves citizenship.

**Possibilities for Membership**

If membership were available to distribute, what would it look like? To give us an idea, I can offer one more historical example. One of the first players to ever play for teams in the North was Chet Brewer, a Negro Leaguer who was recruited by Crookston, Minnesota. Most accounts indicate that he was treated well there. One might even say he was granted membership. McNary (78) even says that Brewer was given a key to the city after pitching a no-hitter. No symbol could better illustrate the granting of membership, but it is also apparent that Brewer’s acceptance was more than ceremonial. Brewer’s own testimony indicates that he felt he was treated in a manner commensurate with his value to the city, not as a second class citizen:

The first Sunday I was up there in Crookston, I said, “I’m going to church...I’ going to see what these people are going to do.” I walked in, dressed nice, walked right down the middle, looked at the minister, sat there. When the minister finished the sermon, he almost ran to the door to get there ahead o me, shook my hand, told me how happy he was that I came to his service, invited me to Bible class. I was just like one of the citizens.

This is the sort of world blacks who came to play in North Dakota should have found. They deserved to have the choice to be members and to be welcomed as something other than a stranger.

Saul Davis, a black player who once played for a team in Minot, North Dakota is another example of a possibility for membership, but certainly seems to be an exception
to the rule. After his playing days were finished, Davis stayed in Minot and became a successful businessman and was given the city's outstanding citizen award in the 1970s (Jansson 46). A stranger like Davis was allowed to choose membership.

**Conclusion**

The experience of black baseball players migrating to play in North Dakota reveals much about the nature of membership. The communities of North Dakota, particularly Bismarck and Jamestown, valued immensely the efforts of these players and the boost that they gave to baseball and to the reputation of the state. Multitudes of fans watching players like Satchel Paige beat a Major League all-star team and win a national championship is proof that the presence of black players was extremely important to North Dakota baseball.

Many players, however, were subject to various forms of racial discrimination. Poor living conditions and inaccurate media portrayals were just a few ways that players were barred from membership in their communities. The discrimination they faced was evidence that many members in these communities wanted the black baseball players to maintain their status as strangers in an attempt to prohibit them from becoming members.

Although the players may not have wanted membership, the ability to choose is a primary obligation that should be owed to anyone providing socially necessary and important work. One need not be a star baseball player to be entitled to the choice to be a member of a community. Providing a socially necessary or socially important work should be enough. Anybody providing such work, whether it is as a famous baseball player or a beet harvester, should have the choice of becoming a member.
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