4-10-2015

Stealing Home: Jackie Robinson, the Pittsburgh Courier, and Integration through Baseball

Miriam Roth

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/curcp_14

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/curcp_14/26

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Celebration for Undergraduate Research and Creative Performance at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in 14th Annual Celebration for Undergraduate Research and Creative Performance (2015) by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.
Stefani's High Standards Meant the Man Who Would Break the Color Barrier Would Need to Be Genuinely Capable of Playing in the Majors. The Pittsburgh Courier, led by sports editor Wendell Smith, echoed this position when it arranged tryouts for various players, including Jackie Robinson. Later, Smith pressured Rickey behind the scenes to sign Robinson, who though inconsistent was a dynamic player. When Rickey did sign Robinson to a minor league contract in 1945, his interviews with the Courier insisted that it was Robinson's gameplay, not his race, that mattered. According to Rickey, Robinson would "go as far as he [was] capable of going." The Courier and other papers spoke of Robinson's need to "make good" on the promise of integration by playing his way into the majors. Once he did reach the majors, the Capability Criterion dictated that Robinson prove, through his success on the field, that his signing to the Dodgers had not been a fluke.

Sensationalism v. Normalization

As Jackie Robinson rose from the minors to the majors, the Courier aimed to boost public view of his success on the field by reporting sensationally on his gameplay. The paper reported even the smallest of on-field contributions with vibrant language and weighed Robinson's success over the overall success of his team. Once Robinson reached the majors, however, the Courier also tried to normalize his presence there. Efforts at normalization included statements that Robinson was “just another baseball player performing his duties,” and appeals to African American spectators to conduct themselves reasonably and treat Robinson like any other player. Meanwhile, the Courier challenged its own claims of the star player's normalcy by continuing to feature him more than any other player.

Civil Rights Rhetoric

Although the Courier largely avoided outright discussion of the implications of Robinson's success on the Civil Rights Movement, it nevertheless made it clear that its discussion of Robinson's success of the field had everything to do with the greater movement for integration. Sometimes the Courier wove subtle references to the greater mission directly into its descriptions of Robinson's gameplay. Other times, it tagged the mantra “End Jim Crow in Washington” onto the end of articles which otherwise discussed purely baseball. Additionally, because the Courier was a well-known activist paper, articles on Robinson did not need to mention civil rights explicitly in order to remind its readers of the broader implications of the infielder's gameplay. Due to all these factors combined, positive reports on Jackie Robinson's gameplay meant positive reports on the progress of integration.