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A COLOR LINE IN BASEBALL.

THE ST. LOUIS BROWNS REFUSE TO PLAY WITH THE CUBAN GIANTS.

PHILADELPHIA, Sept. 11.—The Philadelphia Times will say to-morrow that for the first time in the history of baseball the color line has been drawn, and that the "world's champions," the St. Louis Browns, are the men who have established the precedent that white players must not play with colored men. There have been little dissensions before, but only about a player here and there. The Browns were in open revolt last night. Some time ago President

This image depicts an article from the New York Times, c. 1887, indicating that the St. Louis team - then called the "Browns" - refused to play against a team with "colored men." Image online, courtesy STL Cardinal website.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, African-Americans were forced to play segregated baseball. Sol White (an infielder/outfielder on various teams) documented some of those years (from 1887 through 1903) with his History of Colored Base Ball.

In the book's current edition, the late historian Jerry Malloy included documents like this April 11, 1891 article from *Sporting Life* magazine:

Probably in no other business in America is the color line so finely drawn as in base ball. An African who attempts to put on a uniform and go in among a lot of white players is taking his life in his hands.

Were black and white players also treated differently by business establishments as they traveled to various towns? From firsthand experience, Sol (a 2006 Hall-of-Fame inductee) tells us that it was even difficult for him, and others similarly situated, to find a place to sleep:

The colored player suffers a great inconvenience at times while traveling. All the hotels are generally filled from the cellar to the garret when they strike a town. It's a common occurrence for them to arrive in a city late at night and walk around for several hours before getting a place to lodge. (Sol White's History of Colored Base Ball, page 77.)

It was not always thus. White describes a significant change:

The situation is far different to-day in this respect than it was years ago. At one time the colored teams were accommodated in some of the best hotels in the country ... The cause of this change is no doubt due to the condition of things from a racial standpoint. With the color question uppermost in the minds of the people at the present time, such proceedings on the part of hotel-keepers may be expected and will be difficult to remedy. (Sol White, page 78.)

Sol White traced the attitude change to Cap Anson. He could not understand why Cap was so opposed to African-American players, but that issue - according to White - caused an unwritten "color line" to evolve:

Just why Adrian C. Anson, manager and captain of the Chicago National League Club, was so strongly opposed to colored players on white teams cannot be explained. His repugnant feeling, shown at every opportunity, toward colored ball players, was a source of comment through every league in the country, and his opposition, with his great popularity and power in base ball circles, hastened the exclusion to the black man from the white leagues. (Sol White, pages 76-77.)

The "color line" impacted Jackie Robinson. Whether he was good-enough to play Major League Baseball was not the issue. It wasn't even a question which applied to him. To play baseball at all, he had no choice but to be employed by a Negro-League team.

For one year - in 1946 - Robinson played with the Kansas City Monarchs. Traveling from town to town, facing the same kind of discrimination which Sol White describes, Jackie played really well.

Meanwhile ... someone who could make a difference for Jackie Robinson's future was watching all of these goings-on. Someone who wanted to make a difference for Major-League Baseball had an idea which would profoundly change both the sport and the spectators.

That someone was Branch Rickey.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/BASEBALL-S-COLOR-LINE-42-Jackie-Robinson>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/BASEBALL-S-COLOR-LINE-42-Jackie-Robinson>

Questions 2 Ponder

Why Was Discrimination in Major-League Baseball Called the “Color Line?”

In his book describing 19th-century baseball, Sol White tells us that "at one time the colored teams were accommodated in some of the best hotels in the country..." Then things changed, before the end of the 19th century. What could have caused this change?

Why do you suppose the changed situation, for African-American baseball players, was called "The Color Line?"

Media Stream



Sol White

Image online, courtesy the Major League Baseball website.

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Jackie Robinson as a Kansas City Monarch

Photo of Jackie Robinson, c. 1945, wearing a Kansas City uniform. Online, courtesy Library of Congress, which provides additional information regarding the picture:

Photograph from The Call (Kansas City), 1945. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. Reproduced with permission from The Call.

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BASEBALL'S COLOR LINE

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