

# The case of "The Phantom Racist"

by Angela Bryant  
News Editor

*Editor's Note: The following is a synopsis of an article, "The Phantom Racist", by Rita James Simon and James W. Carey. The article appears in Racial Conflict by Gary T. Marx.*

In 1963, at the University of Illinois in Urbana, three Black athletes complained about racial discrimination towards them to a Black graduate student. They had been urged to stop dating or being seen with white girls. The graduate students arranged for the athletes to sign affidavits charging the Athletic Association with discrimination. "This was the precipitating incident in the search for what we call the 'phantom racist'. He is a phantom because the specific charges of discrimination were never proven, but neither were the issues he raised ever resolved. They underscore the continuing problems of Negro students at the white universities."

Members of the campus chapter of NAACP other Blacks and graduate students formed an ad hoc committee and brought the grievances to the university administration. After an

investigation, the administration did not confirm the charges, but issued a directive to the staff warning against discrimination practices and interference into social life of Black students.

At the end of the football season, the ad hoc committee received evidence that the directives had been ignored - an athlete had been warned against interracial dating and his choice of courses was interfered with. At this time, the NAACP took the conflict to the public.

Three days later, a statement, claiming to represent the sentiments of all Negro athletes on campus, was released to the news media. It denounced the NAACP and defended the coaches and Athletic Association. When the NAACP took the issue to the media, the case became part of the great public drama of Civil Rights. After charge and counter-charge of fraud, unauthorized and distrust, and without a formal charge ever being made, without identification of either the racists or the athletes, without resolution of the issues, without adjudication of the charges, the case dropped from public view.

In analyzing the situation, one question comes to the

forefront. Was the NAACP authorized to speak for the athletes?

The NAACP did not feel they needed endorsement: when discrimination clearly violates rules and official policy, one case is sufficient cause for complaint. They had listened to athletes complain and believed that they had the implicit support of the Black athletes.

The athletes when questioned about the situation stated that the NAACP should have talked to them before releasing the story. "Everyone should have a chance to voice his own opinion"; "Athletes, Negro or white aren't dumb. We can speak for ourselves".

"A strong majority of the Negro athletes organized and led by one of their colleagues, resented the NAACP's intrusion into their affairs, particularly without consultation, advice, or consent....

To take the case to the public without securing the support of the athletes was politically foolish - in Lenin's terms, it was "political adventurism" - leading a revolution with no following. But this action did not cause the rupture between the NAACP and the athletes -

rather it was a manifestation of other disorders, and a symptom of the social distance that separates Negroes from their leadership...

But in spite of the fact that Black athletes admitted to discrimination from coaches and students, if they had not been organized, they would have stayed out of the conflict. Why?...

We think that the most reasonable explanation lies in the image that the athletes have of themselves, and in their goals...

Success in athletics depends on individual achievement and recognition by the coaches and managers of the sport. The crucial figures in the lives of the athletes are the coaches and trainers who work with them. If they are to permanently escape from their backgrounds, they must have support. The NAACP and other organizations cannot write their ticket for social and financial success...

Finally, the alleged discrimination within the Athletic Association was an issue seized upon to express symbolically an ineffable and inchoate feeling of mistreatment. There was much

more than a case of discrimination at issue here. The attack on the Athletic Association expressed a real grievance, albeit not the grievance specifically charged. The Athletic Association served as a symbol which coalesced and expressed the Negroes' general alienation from, and unhappiness with the university. The NAACP was not out in this case to save the athletes from themselves or the Athletic Association, but to galvanize public sentiment behind the general plight of the Negro at the University of Illinois and not the specific plight of an athlete warned about dating white girls.

The move backfired. First, because the Negro athletes did not share the same sense of alienation - they were better integrated into the structure of the university because of their involvement in athletics, and especially because they knew that success in sports, and not other Negroes, would determine their futures. Second, because the administration was too near-sighted to be able to distinguish between a demand for sympathy and understanding for the Negro student, with a demand for the resolution of a particular case."

## "Gentleman's agreement" broken

by Pamela Williamson  
Staff Writer

As a consequence of the Civil War, in 1867, America had 4.5 million new citizens - all Black. In this same year, there were over one hundred baseball clubs in the North, and the nine-year old National Association of Base Ball Players was the game's first league. This organization was formed primarily to make rules for member clubs. At its annual convention in 1867, two-and-a-half years after the Civil War, the NABBP addressed "the Negro question." The answer was to bar Blacks and the clubs they belonged to from membership. The Association's nominating committee unanimously called for the rejection "of any club which may be composed of one or more colored players."

The National Association of Professional Base Ball Players, the NABBP's successor, had no code against Black players. Its "gentleman's agreement" excluding Blacks sufficed, and passed on its discrimination to the National League. As a result, Blacks formed their own clubs.

In 1945, the color line in professional baseball succumbed to the planned strategy and efforts of two men. Jack Roosevelt Robinson was then shortstop for the Kansas City Monarchs, a Black baseball team. Wesley Branch Rickey was a 62 year-old white man, then

The Black Ink staff, which formerly shared an office in the Student Union with Carolina Talent Search, has acquired its own office. The new office is in Y-Building, Room 202. Office hours still remain 1-3 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

president and general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Rickey began looking for fresh talent in 1942 after the second place finish of the Dodgers in the National League. It was time to fulfill a vow he made forty years ago as baseball coach at Ohio Wesleyan University. His Negro catcher, Charles Thomas, was denied entrance to a hotel in South Bend, Indiana. Looking at his Black hands, Thomas cried, "Black skin! Oh, if only I could make them white!" Rickey promised, at the first opportunity to do what was necessary to see that a Black player need never again deny his race and culture because of prejudice.

Backed by the Dodgers' owners, Rickey searched for the right Black player to be the test case. The man had to be talented, of course. But equally important, was the requirement of a strong will to stand the ridicule and resist the temptation to retaliate. Camouflaging his efforts to scout Negroes, Rickey announced intentions to start a Negro team, the Brooklyn Brown Dodgers. After the Brown Dodgers were sufficiently organized, Rickey released his best scouts, ostensibly to recruit players for the club.

The name, Jackie Robinson, of the Kansas City Monarchs, was the most frequently and favorably mentioned. To make sure Robinson was a man able to stand the inevitable abuse, Rickey personally went to Jackie's hometown in California to check his reputation. The only "blemish" in Robinson's character was his non-hesitation to stand up for his rights on or off the field. Rickey approved,

for his pioneer had to have courage.

In late August, when the Monarchs were playing in Chicago, Robinson was approached by Dodger scout, Clyde Sukeforth. He wanted Jackie to meet Branch Rickey in Brooklyn. On August 28, 1945, the young player arrived in Brooklyn with Sukeforth. For three hours, Rickey graphically outlined the abuse and insults Robinson would face, from Negro-hating players, umpires, and even hotel clerks and restaurant managers.

Robinson said, "Mr. Rickey, do you want a ballplayer who's afraid to fight back?"

"I want a ballplayer with guts enough not to fight back," Rickey thundered. "You've got to do this job with base hits and stolen bases and fielding ground balls, Jackie. *Nothing else.*"

On October 23, 1945, Jackie Robinson signed a contract to play the 1946 season with the Montreal Royals, Brooklyn's top farm team in the International League. Later, Rickey began to initiate Robinson's transition to the major leagues. He met with leaders of Brooklyn's Negro community. He told them that there must be no gloating by Negroes when Robinson was brought up from the Dodgers, no "Jackie Robinson Days." Rickey also had to deal with a possible mutiny among the Southerners on the Dodgers team. They were trying to get "a general handshake agreement" among the Dodgers to refuse to play with a Negro.

Robinson's debut with the Dodgers in Brooklyn on August 15, 1947 was not earthshaking. He got no hits, but the Dodgers won, 5-3, with Robinson scoring the fifth run for Brooklyn.

However, 1947 turned out a good year for Robinson, the player. He batted .297, led the Dodgers in stolen bases with 29 and in runs scored with 125, and was tied for the club home-run leadership at 12 with Pee Wee Reese. The Dodgers won the National League Pennant for the first time since 1941.

Nevertheless, for Jackie Robinson, the man, 1947 was very trying. In addition to the usual pressures of a rookie trying to prove himself, Robinson endured indignant white teammates, debasement from players on other clubs and threats on his life and family.

Tuesday, October 25, 1972, Jackie Robinson died from a heart attack at the age of 53. Born January 31, 1919, the youngest of five children, he overcame the desertion of his father at the age of six months and the poverty of his family, living on welfare checks and his mother's salary as a domestic. In high school, Pasadena Junior College, and UCLA, he acquired fame in football, basketball, and track. By his senior year in 1941, he was an All-American runner, he set a Pacific Coast Conference broad jump record, and led the league in basketball scoring.

In professional baseball, Robinson was the National League Rookie of the Year in 1947, the most valuable player in 1949, and five times selected an all-star infielder. The ultimate of his accomplishments opened one more frontier. He became the first Black enshrined in baseball's Hall of Fame at Cooperstown, New York.

In 1967, the *Saturday Review* called Jackie Robinson's breakthrough into the major

leagues "one of the most dramatic and fruitful steps the American Negro had taken since the Civil War toward social integration." He did not just blunder into the formerly all-white sport. His acceptance was the result of a systematic, step-by-step plan, similar to the NAACP test case strategy in outlawing school segregation in 1954. Both actions forced the surrender of another American institution to Black participation. Yet one important difference exists between them in the manner of surrender. Jackie Robinson won acceptance for himself and every Black baseball player since 1947. And he did it without Supreme Court decisions or Congressional mandates.

*Black Ink* is the official newspaper of the Black Student Movement -- we too strive, ideally, to reach every Black student on campus. Naturally, where there is an organization, there are various opinions. *Black Ink* strives to serve as a voice of Black students opinion.

We want to help each student as he or she searches for personal and group ideology; we want to keep each student aware of some of the many things going on around us on campus, in the community, and in the world, which affect Black lives.

The *Black Ink* staff would like to solicit and encourage responses from our readers. "LETTERS TO THE EDITOR" of any nature will give us feedback on how we are meeting, or failing to meet, the needs of the readers. Please express desire for withholding publication of any letters or comments.

The Editor