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OPINION

Reclaiming baseball's emancipator

Curt Flood led the way for free agency at personal risk

Growing up in New York in the 1960s meant sports, and sports in the spring, summer and fall, meant baseball if you had a field to play in, or stickball if you did not. There was no other way. It meant baseball cards, and as an African-American, it meant intense pride in the accomplishments of African-American baseball players.

As the 1960s turned into the 1970s, and as the 1970s turned into the 1980s, not only in New York, but around the country, there developed something of a disconnect between African-Americans and baseball. An increasing number of Afro-Latino ballplayers came to the U.S.A., bringing an enthusiasm and dynamism that strengthened the sport, while at the same time, the African-American baseball player and fan seemed to be slowly stepping back into the recesses.

There are many ironies in the evolution of baseball and Black America. While Jackie Robinson broke the color line in the Major Leagues in 1947, another African-American, just as great but not as well remembered — Curt Flood — was instrumental in the transformation of Major League Baseball and the 'liberation' of the players. Before Curt Flood's famous challenge in the early 1970s, baseball players, irrespective of color, were bound to their teams like indentured servants by something called the "reserve clause." Flood, recognizing the fundamental injustice of this shackle, took this on in a lawsuit that came to be known as Flood v. Kuhn. While Curt Flood lost these suits, it ultimately set the stage for the elimination of the reserve clause and the advent of "free agency," the system that we have come to know.

Despite the righteousness of his cause, and despite his death in 1997, Curt Flood has never been forgiven by the titans of the baseball industry. His audacity has kept Flood, an outstanding ballplayer by everyone's judgment, out of the Baseball Hall of Fame. Repeated appeals to the Hall of Fame for Flood's inclusion have gone nowhere and have been treated to both silence and contempt.

Flood's challenge to Major League Baseball was both an act of outstanding courage as well as a thrust coming from black America's love affair with the sport of baseball. Baseball had been an important, if not critical, component of African-American culture since the beginnings of baseball itself. After having been excluded from what came to be known as Major League Baseball during the racial cleansing of the sport in the late 19th century, African-Americans went on to establish the legendary "Negro Leagues," the producer of some of the most dazzling players the sport has ever seen (people such as Josh Gibson, Satchel Paige, Cool Papa Bell). Black America took great pride in the Negro Leagues while at the same time waging a relentless struggle against the white supremacist restrictions of Major League Baseball that kept black ballplayers outside the so-called mainstream.

Black America began to lose its affection for baseball sometime in the 1970s. There were probably several contributing factors. As the cities began to witness so-called revitalization, land became a premium. It does not take much land to have a basketball court, but it does to have a baseball field. Thus, the land was sacrificed in the name of real estate development and it became more and more difficult to introduce a new generation to the sport since there was nowhere to play. Second, as right-wing tax cuts strangled the public sector, schools had to make very difficult choices as to what sports, if any, to keep. So, baseball was being eliminated as a precursor to the elimination of most sports. Third, the price of tickets to Major League games skyrocketed. Once upon a time, baseball was a working-class sport. Over time, the price of tickets rose significantly with the owners placing more of a priority on skyboxes and new, expensive stadiums than on the accessibility of baseball to its working-class constituents.

A final possible factor is pure, gut speculation that I derive from my parents' attitude toward the Dodgers. My parents will never be able to root for the "Los Angeles" Dodgers, nor will they ever permit me or my sister (or our children) to, even if we should move to California and live at Normandy and Wilshire in LA. The feelings that many people of my parents' generation (particularly from New York) hold concerning the betrayal represented by the disgraceful desertion of New York by the formerly Brooklyn Dodgers probably sowed the seeds of a disconnect that has never been repaired. The move by the Dodgers and Giants reminded all fans that the baseball owners had no loyalty to the communities that supported them; only loyalty to the almighty dollar.

Yet, this is a sport that was more central to black America than any other, a true team sport with players like Robinson and Flood, as well as countless others we shall never remember.

Reclaiming baseball is not only about encouraging our children to play in and follow the sport, but to reclaim the heritage of the courageous players like Curt Flood. Flood put the demand for dignity and justice in front of his career, and paid a stiff price. In reclaiming baseball, and reclaiming figures like Curt Flood, we are in essence saying, "...brother, we could not have done it without you, you were the right person at the right moment..."

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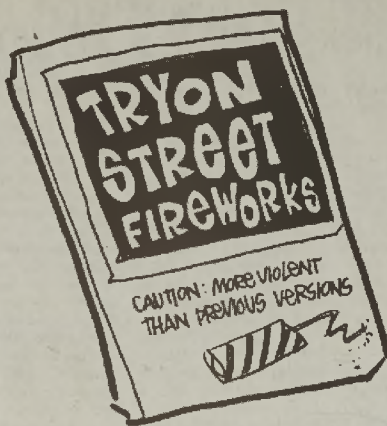


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Flood

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Bullying the U.S. news media

When the New York Times disclosed a secret Bush administration program that monitored global money transfers by a banking consortium in Brussels, President Bush, leading Republicans in Congress and the Right-wing talk shows



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unleashed a flurry of venom. Bush said: "If you want to figure out what the terrorists are doing, you try to follow their money. And that's exactly what we're doing. And the fact that a newspaper disclosed it makes it harder to win this war on terror."

Rep. Peter King (R-NY), chair of the House Homeland Security Committee, told Chris Wallace on Fox network news: "...The New York Times is putting its own arrogant elitist left wing agenda before the interests of the American people, and I'm calling on the Attorney General to begin a criminal investigation and prosecution of the New York Times — its reporters, the editors who worked on this and the publisher. We're in a time of war, Chris, and what they've done has violated the Espionage Act."

Conservative talk show host Melanie Morgan, referring to New York Times executive editor Bill Keller, said she "would have no problem with him being sent to the gas chamber."

There is a major problem

with this professed rage, indignation and bile directed at the New York Times — the Bush administration has repeatedly and publicly boasted about its efforts to track the finances of terrorists. And now it wants to punish the media for printing information that was already in the public domain.

Media Matters, a watchdog group that is generally critical of the press in an effort to make it better, recounts the administration's disclosures on its site, mediamatters.org.

• In a September 24, 2001, speech, Bush announced the establishment of a "foreign terrorist asset tracking center" at the Department of the Treasury to identify and investigate the financial infrastructure of the international terrorist networks." He added, "It will bring together representatives of the intelligence, law enforcement, and financial regulatory agencies to accomplish two goals: to follow the money as a trail to the terrorists, to follow their money so we can find out where they are, and to freeze the money to disrupt their actions."

• In a September 24, 2001, letter to Congress, Bush noted, "Terrorists and terrorist networks operate across international borders and derive their financing from sources in many nations. Often, terrorist property and financial assets lie outside the jurisdiction of the United States." He affirmed his commitment to working with international agencies such as the Financial Action Task

Force "to build momentum and practical cooperation in the fight to stop the flow of resources to support terrorism."

• A White House fact sheet published on September 24, 2001, noted the launch of the Treasury Department's Foreign Terrorist Asset Tracking Center: "The FTAT is a multi-agency task force that will identify the network of terrorist funding and freeze assets before new acts of terrorism take place."

• In a September 26, 2001, statement, Bush said, "We're fighting them on a financial front. We're choking off their money. We're seizing their assets. We will be relentless as we pursue their sources of financing. And I want to thank the Secretary of Treasury for leading that effort."

• On October 1, 2001, Bush told FEMA employees, "As you may remember, I made it clear that part of winning the war against terror would be to cut off these evil people's money; it would be to trace their assets and freeze them, cut off their cash flows, hold people accountable who fund them, who allow the funds to go through their institutions; and not only do that at home, but to convince others around the world to join us in doing so."

• On October 10, 2001, Bush stated that the "nations of NATO are sharing intelligence, coordinating law enforcement and cracking down on the financing of terrorist organizations."

• During remarks at FTAT,

then-Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill said, "[W]e have begun to act — to block assets, to seize books, records and evidence, and to follow audit trails to track terrorist cells poised to do violence to our common interests." O'Neill added, "We have built an international coalition to deny terrorists access to the world financial system."

• A December 2001 report on the steps the administration had taken to combat terrorism noted that the FATF — a 29-nation group promoting policies to combat money laundering — adopted strict new standards to deny terrorist access to the world financial system."

• A September 10, 2004, Treasury Department statement read: "The targeting of terrorist financing continues to play an important role in the war on terror. Freezing assets, terminating cash flows, and following money trails to previously unknown terrorist cells are some of the many weapons used against terrorist networks."

This is not about the New York Times. It's another naked effort to squash dissent and intimidate the media. Having already placed the media on the defensive by claiming it has a "liberal bias," conservatives are now trying to lay the groundwork for weakening the First Amendment's protection of a free press.

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Spellman grads make the mainstream

As an African American child growing up in the 1940s and '50s in the midst of America's segregation epoch, it was understood that you had to be twice as good as a



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white person to be considered equal in the economic mainstream. The pursuit of excellence was a black American expectation. However, an unintended consequence of the civil rights epoch is somehow mediocrity has displaced black American yesterday's excellence zeal, thereby offering credence to some closet white racist teachers to find little value in educating black children in today's desegregated public schools.

In an article, "How White Teachers Perceive the Problem of Racism in Their Schools: A Case Study in 'Liberal,' Lakeview," Julie Kailin shares the white teachers' perception of black children when considering issues of racism. "Research findings indicate that most white teachers operated from an impaired consciousness about racism; that a majority 'blamed the victim,' assigning causality for racism to blacks.

Findings further indicate that of those who witnessed racist behavior by their white colleagues, the majority remained silent and did not challenge such behavior. Because teachers play a pivotal role in the sum total of race relations in education, it is critical to consider how they perceive the problem of racism in their schools. Their perceptions may influence decisions about how to interpret and respond to racial inequality."

Kailin offers a strong case for the need of today's Historically Black Colleges and Universities because racial desegregation has meant a hostile attitude in some white teachers' minds against African American children or tacit approval of racism of other white teachers by remaining silent when witnessing racist actions perpetrated against black children.

We hear a great deal of discussion about the poor performance of minority students in the public schools but we do not hear enough on the economic impact of white teacher racism on the upward mobility of Black America. Today, the bachelor level degree from an accredited college is a key requirement for full participation in

the economic mainstream. Its financial value is estimated at roughly two million dollars over a lifetime of earnings. Thus, today's poor black academic performance under the tutelage of white racist teachers may be helping to close college doors to black America.

In reading the history on some HBCUs, you may find that their creation was to offer access to higher education, especially since it had been against the law during slavery to educate blacks and white America was not ready to embrace any hint of racially integrated schools in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, fallout of the civil rights movement is that today's black colleges must now compete against traditionally white colleges for black students.

In "A Call for Articles-Educational Foundations, Special Issue on Historically Black Colleges and Universities" in the TCRRecord, we get a feel for the HBCUs loss of control of today's black college students.

"Currently 300,000 students attend the nation's 105 historically Black colleges (40 public four year, 11 public two-year, 49 private four year, and 5 private 2 year).

This amounts to 24 percent of all African American college students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004)." This statement suggests that 76 percent of African American college students are now going to traditionally white colleges. There was an additional statement to the above comment that calls attention to the need of black colleges today: "...However, at a time when black access to historically white institutions is once again in decline, we need additional research to treat more comprehensively the basic assumptions and questions behind the African American institutions that might fill the gap."

In this competitive environment, HBCU Spelman College shows that it is normal to be a first rate HBCU with a 100 percent black student body and be number one of all colleges in graduating its students. Spelman's four-year graduation rate is approximately 24 percentage points higher than the University of Georgia. On the other hand, HBCU Delaware State University's four-year graduation rate is 38 percentage points below the University of Delaware.

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