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Book Review: Baseball's Great Experiment, Jackie Robinson and His Legacy

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BASEBALL'S GREAT EXPERIMENT, JACKIE ROBINSON AND HIS LEGACY

Jules Tygiel

[New York: Oxford University Press 1997]

xii / 355 pages

ISBN: 0-19-510620-2: \$ 14.95

The year 1997 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Jackie Robinson's legendary entry into professional baseball. Numerous authors have written about this event, but perhaps none have written as thoroughly, historically, or honestly as Jules Tygiel. In honor of this anniversary, Professor Tygiel has re-released this book, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, with a revised foreword to commemorate this momentous occasion.

Professor Tygiel's book began by accident when he found a 1947 *Time* magazine cover while studying for his doctoral examinations at the University of California, Los Angeles. Intrigued by thoughts of Jackie Robinson, Professor Tygiel researched baseball's desegregation.

The book opens with Robinson's background and leads into his first meeting with Branch Rickey of the New York Dodgers. While giving a detailed description leading to Robinson's signing, Professor Tygiel includes an interesting synopsis of professional baseball's attitude and customs at that time. The reader is reminded of the country's political climate as well. This blend of baseball and politics allows the reader to grasp more fully the impact of Rickey and Robinson's actions.

In addition, Professor Tygiel reminds the reader of the other Negro league players and their plight. For example, Roy Campanella, Josh Gibson and Willie Mays figure prominently in Professor Tygiel's account of baseball's desegregation. professor Tygiel's research results in a striking account of Campanella's struggle as he watched Robinson play in the league in which Campanella himself desired to play. The reader gains an appreciation for Jackie Robinson, who supported the great weight of being the first player to break the color barrier in baseball, and for his peers who waited patiently for their own opportunity.

This book takes the reader into Robinson's personal life, allowing the reader to better understand Robinson's struggles and triumphs, and it does so with honesty. It also provides the reader with an honest account of other players' experiences resulting in a diversity of stories told and reactions felt. For instance, Professor Tygiel includes stories of verbal abuse from other baseball players, as well as the struggle of dealing with Jim Crow laws which did not allow blacks and whites to stay in the same hotels or eat at the same restaurants.

Professor Tygiel's portrayal of Jackie Robinson is truthful as it includes a variety of occurrences and opinions. He tells of Robinson's immeasurable patience as he faced racism at training camps in the South and from other players. However, Professor Tygiel also retells stories of Jackie's outspokenness, which often lead others to think harshly of Robinson.

Baseball's Great Experiment retells a favorite story among sports enthusiasts with a new twist. By including the political climate of the time and using history to fill in the story, Jules Tygiel has created an exciting recantation of Jackie Robinson's breaking of the race barrier in professional baseball.

AMY E. WORDEN