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The Greening of Branch Rickey - Part

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Lead: In the fall of 1945 Branch Wesley Rickey stunned the sports world. He hired a black man to play major league baseball.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In no American institution were color lines more rigidly enforced than in major league baseball during the first half of the twentieth century. Since 1884 when the brothers Welday and Moses Walker played for Toledo, blacks had been excluded from major

league play. Reflecting the society in which they competed the teams excluded African Americans from participation even though to do so robbed them of a rich pool of athletic talent.

Branch Rickey began his career while still a student at Ohio Wesleyan University playing two seasons for the American League. After Law school he served as field manager for the St. Louis Browns and then had a long association with the St. Louis Cardinals. He was tight-fisted club manager but had a streak of innovation. In 1919 he devised the farm system of training baseball players. A major league club would establish or buy stock in minor league

teams to have first choice of their hot new players or train and season newcomers. While at St. Louis he signed players that led the Cardinals to nine National League pennants. In 1943 he became president and general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Within six years he had won a World Series and had changed the face of American professional sports.

Branch Rickey was an unlikely candidate to hammer down long-established social barriers. A conservative, Republican, mid-western Methodist, his views on race were fairly typical of most white Americans at the time. While harboring no animosity toward blacks neither was he particularly concerned for their

advancement, but he was very concerned about winning baseball games. It did take much to recognize that there was a gold mine of baseball talent waiting just beyond the horizon of prejudice. Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, Bill Yancey and others had been playing brilliantly in various Negro leagues since the 1920s. To mine all those riches required a man of vision and courage who was hungry to win. Next time: The Greening of Branch Rickey.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Fox, Stephen. "The Education of Branch Rickey,"
Civilization 2 (5, September - October, 1995): 52-57.

Robinson, Jack Roosevelt. *I Never Had it Made* (1972).

Tygiel, Jules. *Baseball's Great Experiment* (1983).