Baseball in the Black Public Sphere: Curt Flood and the Disappearance of Race

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For My Mom and Dad

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Chapter 1

The Demise of the Activist Athlete

In 1990, the race for the US Senate in North Carolina featured contrasting images of the United State's troubled racial past. The Republican candidate was incumbent Jesse Helms, whose anti-intellectualism and racist platform had kept him in office since 1972. His chief opponent was Democrat Harvey Gantt, the first African American admitted to Clemson University and former mayor of Charlotte. In a close contest characterized by the symbolic echoes of segregation's ugliest manifestations, some of Gantt's closest associates appealed to University of North Carolina alum Michael Jordan, then arguably the most famous person in the world, to offer at least some small measure of support. A television commercial would not be necessary, they assured him, nor an oration; instead, just a photo-op would do, or, a brief, passing token of affinity. Jordan's now-infamous response?: "Republicans buy sneakers, too."[1] Whether discouraged by a greedy conscience or dissuaded by Nike, whose sneakers he sold, Air Jordan stayed out of politics. Jesse Helms was re-elected, and Michael Jordan became a transnational commercial brand.[2]

In November 2002, a *New York Times* editorial implored defending champion Tiger Woods to boycott the Masters golf tournament, held each April at Augusta National Golf Club, a cloister of the power-elite that refuses to admit women as members.[3] Five years earlier, Woods' professional career was inaugurated by a Nike commercial that declared, "There are still golf courses in the United States that I cannot play because of the color of my skin. I'm told that I'm not ready for you. Are you ready

for me? Hello world!"[4] In response to the *New York Times*' appeal to that once-promising gesture, Tiger said, "It would be nice to see everyone have an equal chance to participate, but there is nothing you can do about it."[5] That year, Tiger finished nine strokes off the lead. Augusta National has still not added a woman to its membership, and Tiger Woods was recently declared the world's first billion-dollar athlete.[6] Hello world, indeed.

On the strength of examples such as these, reports of the "demise of the activist-athlete" abound. Depending on who is asked, the rise of the "activist-athlete" can be traced to 1936, when Jesse Owens repudiated white eugenic fantasies right before Hitler's eyes; or 1947, when Jackie Robinson endured a summer of racist insults in Major League ballparks; or 1967, when Muhammad Ali refused to go to Vietnam. Regardless of where this origin is imagined, the activist-athlete is embodied in John Carlos and Tommie Smith, who raised their black-gloved fists in Mexico City in iconic unity in 1968. Figuratively speaking, Smith and Carlos were escorted to the podium by Harry Edwards, a Cornell-educated sociologist from California who had attempted to lead an international boycott of the Olympics by black athletes. Known as the Olympic Project for Human Rights, Edwards' project failed to created the absence it desired, but the tenor of its rhetoric produced the circumstances in which one of the most recognizable photographs in the history of sport was taken. Believing that the Olympic moment has set something powerful in motion, Edwards wrote in 1969 that "the black athlete has left the facade of locker room equality and justice to take his long vacant place as a primary participant in the black revolution."[7]

To be sure, Edwards makes explicit what these examples of the "activist-athlete" suggest to the imagination. The demise of the activist-athlete is a story about the changing relationship between black sports participation and black political participation. Over thirty years later, Edwards offered an account of the vivid contrast that so clearly distinguishes Jordan and Woods from Carlos and Smith: "[B]lack athletes have become sufficiently integrated into the sports system. They have a stake in all of the business dimensions of that system, [...] the business matrix of sports. Thirty years ago that was not the case. We are talking about different times."[8] But this account of the changing times is not an account for how and why the times have changed. Certainly, Edwards' observation induces nostalgia's warm comforts. But in using that familiar trope of civil rights discourse to explain the shift - black athletes have become sufficiently *integrated* - Edwards extends an alluring invitation to view these developments with a rooting interest. After all, this is how sport's progress narrative is told; from Jesse to Jackie to Ali to Jordan, things are only getting better. However, Edwards adds explanation to his description, and his memory is expressed in sickness for the home that was built in 1968:

> [T]he outcome of the actions of Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith, John Carlos, Jim Brown, Curt Flood, Bill Russell, Spencer Haywood and others who paved the way is Dennis Rodman, Deion Sanders, and so forth. There are a whole bunch of athletes whose focus is on ME, and I am so militantly about me, that there are no rules I need to recognize. Whatever serves to promote me is legitimate. So you have guys who are not demonstrating and raising a fist at a podium in deference to a greater cause, but doing anything to draw attention to themselves as individuals.[9]

In the end, Edwards' memory of the activist-athlete is defined by a sense of loss. As an historical narrative, it is compelling in its tragic simplicity; once integrated into the business matrix, black athletes lost their incentive to oppose structures of inequality. But,

problematizing the commodification of sport through lost consciousness obscures the differences articulated by each figure in the golden lineage of activist luminaries. To be fair, something in this obscurity may be instructive.

Houston Baker suggests that "Black modernity in the United States [...] is articulated through the twin rhetorics of *nostalgia* and *critical memory*. [...] Nostalgia is a purposive construction of a past filled with golden virtues, golden men and sterling events. Nostalgia plays itself out in two acts. First, it writes the revolution as a well-passed aberration. Second, it actively substitutes allegory for history."[10] In contrast, says Baker, "critical memory judges severely, censures righteously, renders hard ethical evaluations of the past that it never defines as well-passed. The essence of critical memory's work is the cumulative, collective maintenance of a record that draws into relationship significant instants of time past and the always uprooted homelessness of now."[11] Read against this conception of black modernity, Edwards' critique reveals that nostalgia and critical memory are not necessarily at odds, but instead have figured cooperatively, for better or for worse, into the fabrication of a black political imaginary. The demise of the activist-athlete is not precisely an expression of grief over the historically specific objectives of Carlos and Smith, Ali and Jim Brown. Instead, Edwards narrates the loss of a black civic ethos, a mode of political activity made possible and rendered visible by the public rhetorical performances of black athletes. He imagines an agency — a *potential* energy — incrementally eclipsed every time a black athlete deposited a paycheck. Instead of effacing blackness to sell sneakers, like Michael Jordan, or inventing categories of racial otherness into which a collective political will could not possibly fit, like Tiger Woods (who once called himself a "cablinasian" on the

Oprah Winfrey Show), for John Carlos and Tommie Smith, blackness *mattered* — they asserted their racial identities unapologetically as the crucial signature of political engagement. All at once, Edwards delivers a righteous censure of the contemporary black athlete and constructs an ideal past that crystallized all too briefly on the gold medal podium in Mexico City in 1968. Between then and now, the social influence of the black athlete was sold to Nike, this story seems to go, and the activist-athlete is now simply a figure frozen and flattened in a famous photograph. T-shirts are available on eBay.[12]

From this perspective, the differences and contradictions among those individuals who populate Edwards' golden lineage are neither here nor there. Instead, the black civic ethos embodied in their nostalgic image operates in the service of a critical memory to the extent that it functions as an antidote to dangerous and regressive forms of sporting amnesia. Of course, the amnesiac culprits are contemporary black athletes who, according to Edwards, "don't care about whose shoulders they stand on. They have no idea about who set the table at which they are feasting. And the worse part about it is not that they are ignorant of this history, but that they are militantly ignorant."[13] Edwards is certainly not alone in his lamentation. In 2006, *New York Times* sports columnist William Rhoden published a social history titled *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete* that critiqued not just the corporate sensibilities of Jordan and Woods, but also the damaging images permitted by figures such as Mike Tyson. In 2007, ESPN sportswriter Cal Fussman collected a series of oral histories from various 20th century athletes. Titled *After Jackie*, with a foreword by Hank Aaron, Fussman hoped to recover what he called "baseball's forgotten heroes."[14]

And, late last year, *Newsday* columnist Shaun Powell published a series of essays thematically bound by the selfish forgetfulness of contemporary black athletes. The image on the cover of Powell's *Souled Out?* puts the today's black athlete at odds with history. Instead of two black fists raised in iconic unity, the fists on Powell's book are at cross purposes, headed in opposite directions, one gloved in black, the other bejeweled and clutching a wad of cash.[15]

Perhaps the most impassioned admonition to appear recently, though, comes from filmmaker Spike Lee, who in 2005 wrote the introduction to a reprint of of Jackie Robinson's 1964 integrationist treatise, *Baseball Has Done It*. Organized into three major sections titled, "Past," "Present," and "Future," Robinson's text is itself an exercise in the attempt to shape the memory of his achievements. Capturing the spirit of its theme, and deriving a lesson from its ostensible failure, Spike Lee traces over the familiar golden lineage of black athletes from whom the current ones ought to take their cue:

> Today's African-American athletes owe everything to Jackie Robinson, and to others like him, such as Jesse Owens, such as Joe Louis, such as Curt Flood, who sacrificed his career, sacrificed his life, in challenging the reserve clause in baseball. If it weren't for people like Curt Flood, and Jackie, and Jesse, and Joe, the athletes of today wouldn't be making the kind of money they're making. Unfortunately, the only thing that matters to today's players is getting paid. They're not educated about the past, so their level of consciousness is not high. They know nothing of the many African-American athletes who put their careers on the line to fight for future generations, men like John Carlos, Tommie Smith, Mohammed Ali, Jackie, Jim Brown, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Bill Russell. We can't forget these people, can't forget their stories—they are great American stories.[16]

Those who watched professional basketball in the early nineties may detect an uneasy irony in Spike's commentary. His alter-ego, Mars Blackmon, appeared in a popular

series of Nike commercials with Michael Jordan, selling sneakers. Mars obviously "got paid."

Be that as it may, Spike Lee speaks from a position that claims access to an instructive past. Like Harry Edwards, he puts contemporary black athletes on the shoulders of giants — and Dodgers, and Cardinals. The chafing noise sounded by Spike's final point of emphasis, however, reveals the limits of his nostalgic allegory. From one angle, his assertion that the stories of these heroes are great "American stories" enacts a rhetoric of recognition that claims representational space for the black athletes who took risks and made sacrifices in order to widen the repertoire of identities included in the national image. From another angle, however, Lee's injunction to remember simultaneously records a narrative of national identity in which the civic ethos of these black champions has been consumed by the progress entailed in their sacrifices. The difference, and the tension, turns on the question of the "we" who must not forget. On the one hand, read as a didactic history aimed at the black athletes of today, Lee's observation is an exhortation to reacquire lost consciousness and engage civic life with a courage of conviction borne from black experience. On this view, the problem of amnesia is a function of them having become apolitical — the essential error of the sell-out. On the other hand, if Lee's "we" is all of us, a plural collective romanticized longingly in the "American story," then the problem of amnesia is widespread, not confined to the lost consciousness of a forgotten few, but structured into a sputtering national narrative that continues to hide its racialized exclusions. If the social significance of sport is its ability to measure progress in a microcosm, then Spike Lee's allegory of the black athlete attempts to have things both ways. Trying to tell the

"American story" through the consciousness of the black athlete proves to be treacherous work—it seems that they inaugurated an era of social progress that we are supposed to measure as no progress at all. Thus, the limit of nostalgia is this: the long-lost revolutionary subject is both the victim and agent of a faulty national character.

This dilemma urges critical reflection on the historical nature of the black athlete as a revolutionary subject — one wonders if the golden lineage wasn't corrupted from within. In 1969, Harry Edwards had declared that the revolt of the black athlete was the "newest phase of the black liberation movement in America."[17] Make no mistake, Edwards put black athletes at the center of American history, insisting then that "America's response to what the black athlete is saying and doing will undoubtedly not only determine the future course and direction of American athletics, but also will affect all social relations between blacks and whites in this country." In the context of his current disappointment, it is possible to read Edwards' strident prediction as an ephemeral rallying cry that vaporized once its utility in a unifying rhetoric lost traction. In other words, it is possible to say simply that Harry Edwards was wrong — the revolution never materialized. But set against Spike Lee's invocation of these great American stories, it is important to emphasize that Edwards' vision in 1969 saw history in terms of a dialectical motion; America's *response* to the black athlete was what would count. Edwards imagined black athletes to be a collective voice of opposition angling in from the margin, "speaking out not only on their own behalf, but on behalf of their downtrodden race."[18] This is where the revolutionary subject demands closer inspection. As an ethos of political participation, a model of civic activity, it is easy, and perhaps even worthwhile, to idealize Jackie Robinson and Muhammad Ali and John Carlos and

Tommie Smith and cobble them together into a long-lost heroic figure. As individuals engaged in concrete, historically specific negotiations over the meaning of national identity, however, this tightly wound memory begins to unravel. The dialectic motion of the black athletic call and the American response produced fissures sealed by compromise, illuminated omissions redressed by inclusions, and mounted challenges managed by accommodations. So, the story I am telling comes down to this: The revolution *did* materialize, but not according to a spirit of permanent protest. Instead, it materialized as liberalism.

In an analysis of black political culture in the 1990s, Manning Marable defines "liberal integrationism" as "a strategy of political action that calls for the deconstruction of institutional racism through liberal reforms within the government and the assimilation of blacks as individuals within all levels of the labor force, culture, and society."[19] Though Marable concedes that the motivational "thesis" of liberal integrationism was "largely true during the era of Jim Crow segregation,"[20] he argues that this political strategy has produced a dilemma for formulations of black identity in the post-civil rights era. Personified most vividly by Clarence Thomas, the dilemma involves a disjunction between Thomas' "reactionary ideology" on the one hand and the promise of his "symbolic representation" on the other. According to Marable, the shifting social conditions of middle class black leadership has arrested the development of a political imagination that might find its way out of this crisis. He worries, "A new type of African-American leadership emerged inside the public and private sectors; this leadership lives outside the black community and has little personal contact with other African Americans. Symbolic representation no longer works with bureaucrats and

politicians who, like Clarence Thomas, feel no sense of allegiance to the Black freedom struggle."[21] If the story of the activist-athlete's demise is understood in this context, the train of thought offered by *today's* Harry Edwards leads to a significant historical insight. Edwards says, "Today's black athlete is very different. Their identity is different—they live in a rich, largely white world, a world where black individuality is tolerated so long as it is without reference to the black community. If you asked them about the history of the black athlete, many couldn't tell you much."[22] By locating the loss of the activist-athlete within the shifting sociology of black participation in public life, Edwards gestures toward, but does not fully elucidate, the broader historical narrative into which the demise fits. I would argue that the inert political identity assumed by the contemporary black athlete is a consequence of the way in which middle-class black leadership ushered the activists to a representational stage. The political dynamic that Harry Edwards hoped would emerge in the dialectic between the "revolt of the black athlete" and the American response was mediated by the civic imaginary of liberal integrationism.

Admittedly, this is a grand summary, uncomplicated by the problems of fact and detail. To fill it in it is fruitful to take one last look at the golden lineage of black athletes. Two years ago, FOXSports.com columnist Dayn Perry evaluated the status of the activist athlete in surprisingly animated terms: "It's a belated blessing that the strains of racism in our society have been reduced, but it's lamentable that professional athletes have been co-opted by the inwardly rotten corporatists in the enduring American class struggle. That's why we miss Curt Flood, Tommie Smith, John Carlos, Muhammad Ali, Jim Brown, Bill Lee, Dick Allen and those like them more than we probably realize."[23]

Certainly, the language of "co-option" is provocative — it directs our attention to a cunning antagonist whose pockets have been lined through the duping of our heroes. And though it is fair to say that, in this instance, capital is once again winning, Perry's critique is also a grand summary, uncomplicated by the problems of historical detail. But, unlike Harry Edwards and Spike Lee, Perry's genealogy contains a crucial nuance, and this is where a little known baseball player named Curt Flood operates as much more than just another link in a chained memory of righteous protest. Perry dwells on Flood to say, "In an odd way, Flood's cause bears some of the blame. That's because his challenge to baseball's economic structure laid the groundwork for the lushly moneyed professional athletes we have in our midst today. Flood, in being such a prominent and vital activist athlete, actually heralded the sad death of the activist-athlete."[24] Though I disagree with Perry that the increasing wealth of black athletes provides a sufficient account of their "co-option," he points to an idea necessary to any critical memory of the activist-athlete. To paraphrase Stuart Hall, the representational space occupied by our golden lineage is not ideologically innocent.

Against the backdrop of a dominant contemporary cultural narrative with profound symbolic investments in idyllic memories of black activist-athletes, this dissertation conducts an historical investigation of the public rhetoric surrounding Curt Flood, a black professional baseball player for the St. Louis Cardinals throughout the sixties. In 1969, after having played for ten years in one city, Flood was "traded" from St. Louis to Philadelphia. Refusing his assignment as a matter of self-professed principle, Flood filed suit in federal court arguing that baseball had violated both US anti-trust laws and the 13th Amendment's prohibition of involuntary servitude. Until 1975, Major

League Baseball players were subject to the "reserve system," which was comprised of a standard contract clause that prohibited each player in the league from entering into salary negotiations with a team other than the one with whom the player originally signed. These days, baseball players enjoy the benefit of what has come to be called "free agency," but in 1969, the effect of the reserve clause was to bind a Major League Baseball player to one team in perpetuity, unless he happened to be "traded" elsewhere. Being traded elsewhere, though, entailed one of two options: play under the same reserve conditions for the new team, or retire. With the support of the Players Association, MLB's inexperienced labor organization, Curt Flood opposed both of these options in federal court.

Most significantly, however, Flood appeared on national television with the notorious Howard Cosell and described himself as a "well-paid slave," an explosive accusation thrust into public circulation under vexing rhetorical conditions for talking about race in the United States. Flood's characterization of baseball in terms that referenced the nation's foundational moral error violated the social agreement that had provided baseball with its public significance since at least 1947. Sometimes called a "microcosm," other times called a "crucible," baseball's status as an index of racial progress rested on its ability to publicly announce the accumulating liberalization of its hiring practices. And Curt Flood said that baseball was *slavery*.

From the broadest perspective, I make the case the in pages which follow that Flood found himself positioned fatally at the fault-line between liberal and radical modes of black public address. In the former, black newspapers labored to deny the importance of Flood's racial identity in advocating careful labor reforms in pro baseball. For

reporters and opinion columnists in papers such as the Chicago *Defender*, the Pittsburgh *Courier*, and Baltimore *Afro-American*, Jackie Robinson had been a habituating force for circulating the truths of integration and in securing sport as an agency of social justice. In this mode of address, reference to Flood's blackness worked gratuitously, as something that was there but always said to be beside the point. In the latter mode, however, Flood's case was advocated by speakers narrating the emergence of the "revolt of the black athlete," a radicalized persona whose concrete experiences in sport's integrated spaces — on campuses and in pro clubhouses — were characterized, in the words of Harry Edwards, by "the real world of degradation, humiliation, and horror that confronts the overwhelming majority of Afro-Americans." In contrast to the black press, Edwards had crafted a black political rhetoric that depended fundamentally on the strident, calculated assertion of racial identity for its persuasive force. The problem here, of course, is that Harry Edwards stood much farther from meaningful political action than he would have liked. The rhetorical predicates of symbolic representation generate insuperable complications for strategies of public argument that assert principled, embodied, and affective claims regarding racial injustice. Curt Flood would get himself nowhere in suing Major League Baseball by aligning himself with black radicals. So, his dilemma was one that seems to be a chronic condition: the race-effacing move was the smarter move, the realistic move, the one with the better odds. But, it wasn't the truth as Flood had claimed to experience it. The US Supreme Court ruled against Flood in a 1972 decision that, on the view of the most charitable legal experts, made a mockery of American jurisprudence. Curt Flood never played baseball again.

Notes

[1] David Halberstam, *Playing for Keeps: Michael Jordan and the World He Made* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000), 359.

[2] Walter LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999). LaFeber presents a useful (but admittedly aging) account of Michael Jordan's risk-averse corporate brand identity and attendant globalization script.

[3] "America's All-Male Golfing Society," *New York Times*, editorial, November 18, 2002.

[4] Dave Dorr, "Tiger Woods Inspires a Generation of Minority Golfers," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 6, 1997, *Everyday* magazine section. The *Post-Dispatch* article that appeared in 1997 was only one of many of its kind.

[5] Jere Longman and Clifton Brown, "Debate on Women at Augusta Catches Woods Off Balance," *New York Times*, October 20, 2002.

[6] Kurt Badenhausen, "Sport's First Billion-Dollar Man," *Forbes*, September 29, 2009, http://www.forbes.com/2009/09/29/tiger-woods-billion-business-sports-tiger.html.

[7] Harry Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), xvi.

[8] Harry Edwards, "The Decline of the Black Athlete: An Online Exclusive: Extended Interview with Harry Edwards," interview with David Leonard, *ColorLines*, Spring 2000, http://www.colorlines.com/article.php?ID=340.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Baker, "Critical Memory," 5.

[11] Ibid.

[12] This is very true. A look on ebay.com on October 1, 2009 listed Carlos and Smith t-shirts available for about $14.99.

[13] Edwards, "The Decline of the Black Athlete."

[14] The subtitle of Fussman's book is "Pride, Prejudice, and Baseball's Forgotten Heroes."

[15] Shaun Powell, *Souled Out?: How Blacks are Winning and Losing in Sports* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2008).

[16] Spike Lee, introduction to *Baseball Has Done It*, by Jackie Robinson (Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2005; 1964), 10-11.

[17] Edwards, *Revolt*, xvi.

[18] Ibid., xvii.

[19] Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, 55.

[20] Ibid., 56.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Edwards, "The Decline of the Black Athlete."

[23] Dayn Perry, "The Demise of the Activist Athlete," on AlexBelth.com (2006), http://www.alexbelth.com/article_perry.php.

[24] Ibid.

Chapter 2

Curt Flood, Race, and Public Memory

One of the sincere joys of being a sports fan is engaging in idle arguments with other sports fans over just about anything. In my experience, this began probably around the age of ten, when I became aware not just of sport and its excitement, but of its conversational significance to everyday life. In the summer of 1984, the Chicago Cubs were on their way to their first postseason appearance in thirty-nine years. As a quick-witted, but undoubtedly irritating youngster, amused by the fog of Cubs hysteria that hung thickly in the halls of my elementary school, I watched the sports pages of the *Chicago Tribune* every day just to identify and embrace their likeliest rival in the Fall. I had not yet discovered that the sworn enemy of Chicago Cubs fans was the St. Louis Cardinals, so by early September I had picked the New York Mets. The Mets did not make the playoffs that year — the Cubs did, but my relationship with the Mets (which is still surprisingly strong) was never really grounded on anything more than my desire to be contrarian, to argue that the Mets' Dwight Gooden was a better pitcher than the Cubs' Rick Sutcliffe. I wished to tell Cubs fans that their darlings were cursed, and to gloat over those rare days when the Mets won and the Cubs lost and the standings were altered incrementally in my favor. Two years later, my gloating had surely become insufferable when the Mets won the World Series and my seventh grade class was left with no other rejoinder than to point out that I had never even *been* to New York. I hardly cared. What I wanted was to argue. I was after the kind of playful but charged dialogue that works as a means to camaraderie even as it enacts rhetorical competition. As a ten-year-old, sports

were fun to talk about, especially when the talk was about who would win, who would lose, and who was better than whom.

Of course, the media institutions that give sport its contemporary presence in US culture are fully aware of the relationship between argumentative discourse about sport and sports' very appeal. Talk about sport is just as important, if not more important economically, than the games themselves. Today, virtually every major network that broadcasts sports in the United States produces a show like ESPN's *Pardon the Interruption*, in which two Washington sports journalists debate a list of topics enumerated graphically on the right side of the television screen. Pre-game and post-game shows for all sports — even golf — have proliferated, and predictions and dissections from analysts and commentators (with their attendant arguments) anchor such programs. Aside from this kind of daily debate, with its narrow focus and dependence on ephemeral news cycles, sport also generates ritualized forms of discourse that appear and reappear as media personalities and fans debate the proper recipient of a league MVP, or the "rookie of the year" award. They debate stolen victories and unjust losses. They quibble over the composition of various lists: all-pro teams, college football rankings, or the "best shooters" in basketball. And, every so often, the discourses of sport find their way into rarefied rhetorical space, such as in 1999 when EPSN broadcast a year-long series of documentaries that counted down, week-by-week, the "greatest athletes of the 20th century." With the turn to the millennium at hand, the culture industries cashed in on manufacturing a global obsession with canonization: films of the century, musicians of the millennium, the most influential historical figures of the past thousand years, and so on. These lists, strident in their pronouncements and memorializing in their aims, tend

to reveal more about the list-makers than they do about the categories they inscribe. But, nobody accepts them at face-value. To attend to the list is to invest in it, and that fact alone solicits disagreement. To attend to the list is to be enjoined to argue with others.

With apologies to film buffs, music fans, and historians, who have no doubt staked their own claims of allegiance and hierarchy, this impulse to disagreement and debate is perhaps nowhere more pronounced than in conversation about sport. Unless one counts the scorekeeping of the commercial economy, films and rock stars are not in competition with one another; sports, on the other hand, is fundamentally predicated on competition. If it doesn't matter who wins and loses, as the saying goes, then why play the game? In both personal and public discourse, athletes, teams, and notions of fair play serve as prosthetic communicative personae as sports fans engage each other in ways that Clifford Geertz once called "deep play."[1] Geertz was talking about the rituals of the Balinese cockfight, but the thrust of his observation obtains: conversation about sport often times is itself a sport; when talking about sport, it is okay to argue simply to win. A final resolution will never be found to the disputes about the greatest football team in NFL history, but I will argue on behalf of the 1985 Chicago Bears every time, not because I know it to be true, but because I want it to be true and I want others to believe it. If they believe, the Bears have led me to victory.

So, in the autumn of 1999, with ESPN's list of the greatest athletes of the 20th century dramatically revealed one section at a time, I argued with friends and colleagues over its order, its faulty inclusions, and its unfair exclusions. By December of 1999, the only question remaining for the countdown was the order of its final three, likely to be Babe Ruth, Muhammad Ali, and Michael Jordan. Each figure offered ESPN a

compelling narrative through which it could thematize the "Sport Century." Babe Ruth may be responsible, more than any one individual, for the place of baseball as the "national pastime." He was arguably sport's first hero, the prototype for the cult of sporting personality in the United States. Muhammad Ali, as a black fighter who refused to fight in Vietnam, personally embodied the collective traumas of the 1960s and at one time was the most recognizable human being in the world. Michael Jordan offered ESPN the timeliness of his achievements and his status as a champion, in addition to his epitomization of sport's maturity in the scripts of global capitalism — Jordan was (and still is) a multinational corporate marketing demigod. As a Chicago native (and despite my disavowal of the Cubs), I rooted for Jordan with the zeal of a patriot. I made the argument from commercialism, I cited the six NBA titles, the scoring records, his revolutionary effect on the game, and I asked doubters if they had actually *seen* the dunk from the free-throw line or the sixty-three point game against the Celtics in '86. To my relief (and my surprise), Jordan topped ESPN's list when the final two (Ruth was second) were revealed on a Christmas Day telecast in 1999. This neither lined my pockets nor delivered me a trophy, but I felt like I had won. In the middle of my victory gloat, a colleague in the hallway of my university called the whole list a fraud.[2] The most important athlete of the 20th century, he said, didn't even make the list. He had in mind a name that I had never heard, a baseball player from the 1960s: Curt Flood.

Impossible, I replied. Who ever heard of Curt Flood? Curt Flood "changed sports forever" by "pioneering" free agency in baseball, my colleague replied insistently, as if to disqualify me from those in the know. In fact, Curt Flood *sued* baseball for the right to become a free agent, and took the owners all the way to the Supreme Court. In

any case, Flood never cracked EPSN's list (though they did devote a biographical episode to him in 2003), but my curiosity was piqued. I am no novice when it comes to talking about sports. I do not observe casually. I am a *serious* fan who invests in sport with enthusiastic emotion and intellect, sometimes with volatile results on both fronts. I watch games with the eyes of an expert and, above all, I know my sports history. So, how could it be that I had failed to even hear of the individual who another fan could credibly argue was the most significant athlete of the 20th century? After all, I was no longer a ten-year-old contrarian; I was an adult contrarian who made it his business to know of anyone with such vociferously purported importance.

Section A — The Topic

Part of the problem was that Curt Flood's story, for a long time, was a kind of open secret, something that many knew but did not discuss when baseball's dominant displays of nationality and progress were on the line. He was a notable ballplayer in his era; in 1968 *Sports Illustrated* had even labelled him the "best center fielder in baseball."[3] Flood started in center field for the Cardinals for almost a decade, including the World Series winning teams of 1964 and 1967. His career batting average was .293 (respectable, but not remarkable), and he never hit many home runs or stole many bases. If Flood's baseball achievements stand out for any reason, it is that he was a superior defensive player with great speed, talents that helped to forge a 223 game errorless streak—impressive at any position, but a staggering feat for a center fielder.[4] From a "sabermetric"[5] perspective, Flood enters very few conversations about baseball's all-time greats. Baseball's dramatic sports narratives are told through figures to whom impressive figures are attached, and its progress narratives are reserved for the likes of Jackie

Robinson, who often works to condense and symbolize the kind of social progress that baseball claims to refract. Nineteen-sixty-eight notwithstanding, Curt Flood's statistics rarely qualify him for inclusion into those quotidian debates about the best center fielders ever. And, for better or for worse, the kind of social change to which Flood can lay claim does not seem to be the kind that baseball's narrators are eager to promote. Flood does not refract well, so to speak. Until very recently.

Hall of Fame Debates and the Problem of Jackie Robinson

Of all the ritualized baseball arguments that fans take seriously, perhaps the richest for understanding what is at stake in these conversations are the athletes in the Hall of Fame. In all sports, but maybe most influentially in baseball, the memorializing function of the Hall of Fame renders its composition a locus of discursive contestation. It is an institution that confers legitimacy upon greatness, authorizes the categorical parameters of player significance, and guarantees an athlete's parcel in the landscape of public memory. But, the inverse of this is just as important. As a symbolic site of official memory, the Hall of Fame produces discursive opposition that takes shape every time the case is made that someone has been unjustly left out. Baseball will never forget Pete Rose, for example, even though Pete Rose may never gain "official" entry into the Hall of Fame — someone will always be there to argue his case for entry. In this sense, the Hall of Fame is a contentious rhetorical zone that continually re-transcribes the memories of even some it happens to exclude in perpetuity. Put differently, a baseball player's endurance in the public imagination often depends on his appearance on the Hall of Fame's conversational agenda, whether on television, in newspapers, in street corner

bars, or at family dinner tables. The Hall of Fame, after all, is really just another thing over which fans will argue.

It was with great interest, then, that I read an opinion in the *New York Times* by William C. Rhoden in April 2008 triggered, of course, by the ritualized question of the Hall of Fame. "One of the vexing questions of the new baseball season," Rhoden wondered, "is why Curt Flood isn't in the Hall of Fame. Is it simply ignorance of history by the voters? Or does contempt have no statute of limitations?" Though "ignorance" speaks for itself, Rhoden's use of the term "contempt" suggests a malicious amnesia, a deliberate forgetting of an individual who threatened, or continues to threaten, the prevailing mythology of baseball's Hall of Fame. Along these lines, says, Rhoden, "The omission of Curt Flood is [an] embarrassment." Embarrassment to whom, one wonders? He says, "Some omissions are an embarrassment for the sport and for those who are considered its caretakers." So, baseball should be embarrassed, as should those who claim to tend to the game under the auspices of the Hall of Fame. Rhoden's main concern: "Thirty years ago, Flood was a casualty of a conservative sports media that often sided, or at least identified, with management. Today? Ignorance or contempt?"[6] Election to the baseball Hall of Fame is earned according to the vote of the Baseball Writers Association of America.[7] Rhoden's admonition, then, applies to his colleagues, those stewards of baseball's public significance that animate the game in print culture. For Rhoden, by either ignorance or avarice, baseball writers were on the wrong side then and many of them shill for the wrong side still.

Rhoden's column is not the first of its kind either in its passing rehearsal of Flood's story or in its rhetorical recitation of the Hall of Fame "omission" genre. But, it

is notable for offering itself as a solution to the kind of baseball amnesia cast into stasis by the very field of public discourse of which Rhoden is a part. He is, after all, a baseball writer. By putting Flood's candidacy on the Hall of Fame agenda, Rhoden both helps Flood endure and indicts the "news media's" persistent conservatism. At the conclusion of his exhortation, Rhoden's attempt to revise public memory occurs through an allusion made possible by baseball's most familiar progress trope:

> Earlier this week the Mets unveiled the Jackie Robinson Rotunda at Citi Field [New York's newest ballpark]. A continuing act of respect by the Mets and of M.L.B. to pay homage and repay a debt that can never truly be paid.
>
> Now baseball needs to make peace with Curt Flood.
>
> In his book, "Like It Is,"[8] Flood described a scene from his court hearing against baseball when Jackie Robinson, his body ravaged by diabetes, eyesight failing, entered the courtroom. Flood leaned back to thank him, to which Robinson replied, "I couldn't leave you out there by yourself."
>
> Jackie Robinson embraced Flood.
>
> When will Hall of Fame voters?[9]

Rhoden's reference to Jackie Robinson attempts to hold baseball to account for its purported self-image through a revealing contrast. Robinson's position in public memory is secure, and according to Rhoden, is rightfully made more secure through unceasing institutional memorialization.

Jackie Robinson is not just remembered by baseball; Jackie Robinson *mediates* baseball, filters its meaning, provides it with significance, and shapes its definition as a crucible of social progress. In the Burkean sense, Jackie Robinson is a "god-term" in discourse about baseball, or a "terministic screen"[10] whose invocation encrypts references made in his name with the authorizing code of baseball's most deeply held sense of itself. Jackie Robinson, in other words, is sacred, and by forgetting Curt Flood,

Rhoden catechizes, the Hall of Fame refuses the righteous his worthy sacrament and cultivates unwitting apostasy throughout the church of baseball.[11]

In the simplest of terms, Jackie Robinson is the main character in baseball's progress narrative, literally the star of baseball's show of social importance. On April 15, 1997, exactly fifty years after he played his first game for the Brooklyn Dodgers, Major League Baseball announced that Robinson's jersey number would be retired by each of its thirty franchises. Individual clubs had retired numbers before, but the communal shelving of number 42 placed Robinson on the highest tier of baseball's menagerie. And though his career statistics certainly qualify him for the Hall of Fame, baseball's symbolic genuflection had little to do with batting averages and home runs; it was an exercise in the construction of national memory. On the day of the memorial ceremony in New York (during a Mets-Dodgers game), baseball commissioner Bud Selig explained the League's rationale: "Baseball's most powerful moment in its really terrific history was Jackie Robinson's coming into baseball. It's an incredible moment, not just for baseball, but for society."[12] As Jules Tygiel points out in his seminal history of baseball's racial integration, the profound depth of MLB's symbolic investment in Jackie Robinson in 1997 "primarily represented a partnership between the commissioner and Rachel Robinson [Jackie's widow] to secure Robinson's memory and employ it as an educational tool."[13] On the approved record, the memory of Jackie Robinson gives baseball its civic importance and operates as moral pedagogy. Thus, in addition to the collective jersey retirement, April 1997 produced opulent (and sometimes uncomfortably obsequious) spectacles of Robinson honorifics in ballparks, on television, in schools, and in government.

In the middle of the fifth inning of the Robinson-dedicated Mets-Dodgers game, President Bill Clinton spoke. By lending the powerful rhetorical symbol of the presidency to the moment, Clinton concretized Selig's claim about the importance of Jackie Robinson to the collective national imagination. The meaning of that moment was articulated clearly when he said, "I think every American should say a special word of thanks to Jackie Robinson and to Branch Rickey and to members of the Dodger team who made him one of their own and proved that America is a bigger, stronger, richer country when we all work together and give everybody a chance."[14] Clinton's mention of Branch Rickey is a recurrent feature of Robinson memorialization because it registers the interracial amity and collaboration that prevents the Robinson story from collapsing under the weight of his blackness. The Jackie Robinson moment, if it is to occupy the wide space carved for it by such hegemonic enunciations, cannot dwell on the errors of racism. It must instead model the civic transcendence of racial difference. Jackie Robinson thus stands for progress since progress assumes the risks of individual recognition and social acceptance taken willingly by both the black baseball player and the enlightened white bureaucrat.

Consequently, the Jackie Robinson narrative, as a rhetorical resource summoned in the articulation of national progress, imposes limits as well. To the extent that his story makes America "bigger, stronger, and richer," the ideals of integration and racial transcendence come to stand in for the imaginary *telos* of national progress. In his Jackie Robinson speech, Bill Clinton observed, "It is hard to believe that fifty years ago at Ebbets Field a twenty-eight year old rookie changed the face of baseball and the face of America forever. Jackie Robinson scored the go-ahead run that day, and we've all been

trying to catch up ever since."[15] Clinton positioned the nation in pursuit of a perpetually elusive goal achieved only in Jackie Robinson's unlikely civic perfection. In the context of this kind of collective submission, there is hardly room for other faces on baseball's Mount Rushmore of social influence. Babe Ruth and Willie Mays may have been loved by millions, but they do not make America better; their stories do not fit into lesson plans of national moral correction. Underscoring the constitutive monotheism that the reverence for Robinson instills, Bud Selig framed the communal retiring of Robinson's jersey number categorical terms: "No single person is bigger than the game of baseball. No one except Jackie Robinson. He remains bigger than the game."[16] For all of his contribution, all of his sacrifice, all of his courage, Jackie Robinson is ironically left all alone; he is a category of one.

As a saint, Jackie Robinson imposes a burden on those who have canonized him, which was, of course, Bill Clinton's point — we have yet to enact all of Jackie's moral lessons. But, this also creates a burden for others when Robinson's name is invoked. Like a flame that consumes all the progressivist rhetorical fuel of baseball's institutional existence in public life, Robinson both sets a high threshold for the social significance of a would be Hall of Famer (since "nobody has *meant more*") and controls the political imagination that underwrites baseball's symbolic existence as an institution of social value. The problem for Curt Flood, along these lines, is two-fold. First, relative to baseball's fixed categories of achievement, such as the statistical standards for Hall of Fame induction, social significance is really all Flood has. Second, the social meaning that Flood can claim and that his public advocates may narrate is not quite the same as Jackie Robinson's. In fact, it is significantly different. As Rhoden wrote in the *Times*,

"Over time the feats that Flood accomplished on the field — Gold Gloves, stolen bases, great plays in center fields — were dwarfed by his decision to *take on* Major League Baseball."[17] Jackie Robinson "took on" baseball in only the broadest sense. The dominant Robinson story holds that he courageously sublimated his response to racist players and fans for the purpose of enacting a cooperative spirit that came to alter the attitudes and lives of individuals throughout the country. Flood's story is one of unrequited resentment, of a presumably race-neutral fight in a time when all was race, and of personal recklessness.[18] Jackie Robinson teaches the moral lesson of mutual accommodation; Curt Flood sued baseball for being un-American. Jackie Robinson is proof of how racial transcendence works; Curt Flood called himself a slave. Jackie Robinson saved a rocking boat; Curt Flood threatened to capsize it. So, perhaps in the same way that noting Jesus would help the poor does not actually get the poor any help, Rhoden's observation that Jackie Robinson embraced Curt Flood does not actually mean that Flood will ever be embraced. Curt Flood, in essence, was no Jackie Robinson.

A Flood of Racial Memories

Despite all that, or maybe because of it, Curt Flood has become popular recently. Besides Rhoden's plea for Hall of Fame consideration, and his devotion of Flood to a chapter in his recent book,[19] four full book-length treatments of Flood's story have been published in the last two years. Arising with apparent spontaneity, these books vary in their approach. The most detailed and insightful of the four, Brad Snyder's *A Well Paid-Slave*, is part biography and part court history. With the careful skill of a legal scholar, Snyder explicates the rationale of the judicial system that ended Flood's career without proper vindication. Snyder's book is copiously and intricately researched, especially

with respect to its portrayal of Flood's personal life and its understanding of the workings of the federal court system. The closing words of *A Well-Paid Slave* lend significance to Snyder's subject with a thought-provoking comparison:

> [Jackie] Robinson and Flood took professional athletes on an incredible journey — from racial desegregation to well-paid slavery to being free and extremely well paid. Robinson started the revolution by putting on a uniform. Flood finished it by taking his uniform off. Robinson fought for racial justice. Flood fought the less-sympathetic fight for economic justice. They never stopped fighting for freedom. The struggle took years off their lives. Neither man lived into his 60s. Curt Flood dedicated his life to making Jackie Robinson proud.[20]

Like Bill Rhoden, Snyder puts Flood in relation to Robinson for the purpose of erecting a parallel totem of social significance. Perhaps it is simply because Robinson's name is persuasive gold. Robinson, after all, confers status by mere association. In any case, Snyder's rhetorical choices are provocative: Flood and Robinson bookended a "revolution" that began with desegregation and ended with riches; they may have fought discrete battles, but both were in the name of "freedom"; Curt Flood's life was a testimonial to the symbol of Robinson. Snyder assigns the fight for racial justice to Robinson, and gives Flood the "less-sympathetic" fight for economic justice. Putting aside this problematic disarticulation, the contrast helps Snyder explain why Flood is not remembered as Robinson's peer. But, to the extent that Snyder urges a memory of Flood that co-nominates them for significance under the sign of Jackie's pride, his conclusion is pregnant with an unmistakable symbolic possibility. Both Jackie Robinson and Curt Flood were black men.

This fact, perhaps more than any other, best accounts for the surprisingly sustained resurgence of interest in Curt Flood. It should be noted that Flood did not win his fight for free agency. The Supreme Court ruled against him in a 5-3 decision in 1972. The first free agents in professional baseball were Andy Messersmith and Dave McNally, two white players who played baseball for a year without a contract and were awarded the right to negotiate with any team they desired by an independent labor arbitrator in 1975. By then, Flood had been out of baseball for five years with no hope of return. From a strictly homologous angle, Messersmith and McNally were free agency's Jackie Robinson, but nobody has written such laudatory tomes about them. No, just as was claimed by my colleague in 1999 in our "Sports Century" debate, and just as is claimed by Snyder, Curt Flood is the revolutionary, or the "pioneer" — that other term that renders the Robinson comparison so easily uttered and the vocabulary of racial justice so rhetorically fitting. Nearly always implied, but almost never directly observed, and sometimes observed so that it can be rejected overtly, Curt Flood's story finds its way into public discourse through his blackness. I do not mean to commit the counterfactual error of saying that Flood would have been summarily lost to history were he not black, but I do mean to argue that the impulse, characteristic of both Rhoden and Snyder from different directions, to insinuate Flood into history through Jackie Robinson is a distinctly racialized rhetorical path into public memory.

Before further exploring some of the suggestive links that Curt Flood organizes between baseball's narrative of social progress, the politics of racial identity, and the formation of public memory, I offer one more observational thread from Bill Rhoden, this time from his recent history of blacks in sports, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*. The

book takes its title from an episode in which a white spectator heckled the New York Knicks' Larry Johnson during an NBA game in Los Angeles. Shouted the "fan," "Johnson, you're nothing but a $40 million slave." Rhoden's text is centered on a concern regarding the collective memory of black athletes, who "have little or no sense of what came before, there is no sense of mission, no sense of the athlete as part of a larger community, a foot soldier in a larger struggle."[21] Using slavery as a controlling trope for describing the racial inequities that endure in sports, Rhoden accuses contemporary black athletes of living in comfortable ignorance on sport's "plantation." As a corrective, Rhoden looks back in attempt to recover the history of black athletes in order to resolve "the loss of mission, a mission informed by a sense of connection to the larger African American community and a sense of responsibility to the legacy of struggle that made possible this generation's phenomenal material success."[22]

In the course of his project, Rhoden pauses on Curt Flood, about whom he offers this:

> What made Flood's fight resonate is that at one level his battle went beyond race. Flood said that he was filing this suit against a "situation" that was "improper" for all ballplayers. Many white players never thought of themselves as being on a plantation or as being only so much chattel. But the legacy of black people in sports had sensitized Flood; that history had tuned him into a different frequency than white players had access to. He used the insight born of that legacy to help all players, black and white, fight a corrupt system.[23]

This account of Flood is prescriptive in two senses of collective memory, one nested within the other. First, by telling Flood's story, Rhoden inserts Flood into the "legacy of struggle" that motivates his project from the start — by remembering Flood we are urged to remember the "mission" of black athlete "foot soldiers." In this first sense, Rhoden's

telling of history is a prescriptive act of remembrance. Second, Rhoden appeals to the importance of collective memory itself. The generalized "plantation" of professional sport was not occupied solely by blacks, Rhoden reminds us, and thus Flood did much more than represent other black athletes — Flood's fight went *beyond* race. And, here is Rhoden's most interesting rhetorical move: Curt Flood's cause was not intrinsically racial, but racialized memories provided him with the resources to discover the necessity of struggle and communicate its meaning to the white players on baseball's plantation. In this second sense, it is not just Flood that Rhoden urges us to remember, but Flood's own memories and the uses to which he put them. Embedded within Rhoden's act of remembrance, then, is Flood's memory of black sports participation, better than our own and loyal to a more effective past. Through race past race, Flood's cultural memory was attuned to the hidden dangers of sport's progress narrative, implies Rhoden, because Flood knew of events that the story of progress still works to occlude.

From the broadest perspective, this dissertation project is centered on an investigation of the ambivalent role that Curt Flood's blackness plays in his appearance[24] in the public memory of sport and the narratives of social progress that situate and make use of sport's public memory. Snyder and Rhoden, in their differing appropriations of Jackie Robinson, provide an anecdotal contrast that momentarily illuminates the opaquely racialized rhetorical terrain that this project occupies. According to the common assumption that Flood's blackness underwrites his significance, Snyder and Rhoden comment on sport's dominant progress narrative in both overlapping and competing ways. On the one hand, each invokes Jackie Robinson as a way of demonstrating Flood's importance in history. Robinson, of course, elevates sport in

general to a level of great social and political consequence. By way of association, memories of Flood are thrown dramatically into view alongside the memories of Robinson that have enduring (even if shifting) presence. On the other hand, Snyder asserts baseball's progress narrative, and Rhoden casts it into doubt. Whereas Snyder compares Flood to Robinson for showing how they engaged in parallel struggles for freedom, Rhoden offers the same comparison to intervene critically in the political imaginary produced by stories of black sports participation. Simply put, both call attention to the principled stand of a black athlete; but Snyder writes Flood into baseball's progress narrative, and Rhoden writes Flood into an apocryphal image of progress beset by disappointment and amnesia. As Rhoden puts it, "Ignorance of the past makes it difficult for black athletes today to unite and confront the issues of the present. [...] African American athletes, blinded by a lack of history of what preceded them, have played a major role in helping maintain an unfair, corrupt, destructive system."[25] Thus, he concludes, "The quest today is to remember."[26] Between remembrance and amnesia lie the abstruse politics of racial identity, the contradictory history of the black athlete, and the dilemma of Curt Flood, a black man who, according to this history, set his white colleagues free.

I do not mean to suggest that Snyder is wrong and that Rhoden is right, or that both are wrong in their comparisons between Flood and Robinson. Instead, a primary research question that drives the analysis which follows revolves around the historical narratives into which Curt Flood has been inserted — of which the accounts of Snyder and Rhoden are merely two. But, Flood's story is compelling for a variety of reasons. By all accounts, he was an interesting and complex individual, a sophisticated critic of

the social and political moment he occupied. Moreover, as Flood well knew, he fought a battle that was rigged from the outset in full public view. On this point, Rhoden is no doubt correct. Curt Flood said things about Major League Baseball that most people in the United States did not want to hear. Though many agreed with him, most notably writers in black newspapers, Flood called baseball — *the national pastime!* — a slaveholding institution on national television. He called himself a slave, took the owners to court, and wrote a book about it. The national press, for better or for worse, worried in dystopian terms about the potential consequences of his legal action. Moreover, despite his series of public embarrassments, he never expressed regret. In the theater of public life, Flood was a fascinating character. Whether viewed as a protagonist or antagonist, his persona achieved a gripping, if fleeting, stage presence. People paid attention to Curt Flood. He was captivating news. This, of course, made for good stories, and it still does, even if they presently lack the dramatic realities of Flood's life and baseball career. And above all, Flood's blackness helps to tell these stories, which is why the persistent parallels to Jackie Robinson are so striking. Recognize that Robinson and Flood did vastly different things and became part of the public record in vastly different times (Robinson in the late 1940s and Flood in the early 1970s, with what we now call the "civil rights movement" in between). The broad research question to which I earlier alluded, then, is this: In what ways did Flood's blackness matter?

In Rhoden's narrative, Flood's blackness matters because he fits into a "legacy" of black athletes who "have symbolically carried the weight of a race's eternal burden of proof."[27] On this view, Flood's blackness operates as a demonstration of a lost civic consciousness, an enactment of a political ethos that contemporary black athletes are too

comfortable to enact themselves. Black athletes, according to Rhoden, have historically been at the forefront the attempt to show that "blacks, as a community, were good enough, smart enough, strong enough, brave enough — indeed, *human* enough — to share in the fruits of the nation with full citizenship and humanity."[28] Flood mattered, then, because he carried the burden of symbolic representation voluntarily and at great peril. Today's athletes, says Rhoden, "have dropped the thread that joins them to that struggle."[29] Rhoden's point is well taken, and it may be that contemporary black athletes are to blame for promoting a sport system that is exploitive and damaging. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that contemporary athletes have merely forgotten their predecessors in an instantaneous stroke of selfish depoliticization. Just like Curt Flood did, contemporary black athletes position themselves relative to prevailing cultural, social, and political orders. And just as the legacy of the black athlete has a rich history, the amnesia that worries Rhoden is a consequence of historical developments in the discourses of racial politics. It is, in other words, an error to lay complete blame on contemporary black athletes. Rhoden's text, of course, attempts to improve their memories, but as a nostalgic exercise, Rhoden ignores the ways in which the black athletes he reveres were mediated by the political culture of their times in ways that give rise to current anxieties. Curt Flood is no exception. His fight may have gone "beyond" race, but Flood's racial particularity mattered in public discourse. With that in mind, this dissertation project can be construed as an investigation into the race politics of the early 1970s that both influenced Flood's public address and filtered the manner of Flood's influence on public life.

Section B —- Race, Culture, and Public Address

Until now, I have been using the terms "race" and "racialized" unproblematically for the purpose of highlighting the topical space of this project. As should be well-known, however, those terms are hardly transparent — they never speak for themselves. Furthermore, I have made reference to racial categories, such as "black," "blackness," and "white" without difficulty according to the expectation that their meanings can be determined according to the contexts in which I use them. Thus far, that may be the case. But, since this dissertation is in many ways an inquiry into the rhetorical work that race does, I should not relegate its meaning to reader inference. Similarly, given my use of these terms thus far, there is a danger in reducing my claims about race to a discussion of black identity, as if that is all race "really is." In part to clarify these issues, and in part to outline the theoretical and methodological assumptions on which this project rests, this section details some of the crucial relationships between the study of race, the analysis of culture, and the criticism of public address that inform this dissertation generally. I move through the following three steps in order to situate this project with respect to theory and method: (1) Understanding race as a social construction invites a recognition of the liberalist tension between universal and particular identities, (2) despite its disciplinary status as a social construction, race has political and cultural consequences that manifest in public life, (3) the study and criticism of public address can trace the movement and consequences of race through cultural space.

Race as a Social Construction: Problems and Categories

To begin with, this dissertation project is aligned with trends in various (inter-)disciplines that view race as a social construction. Throughout critical humanist and

social scientific fields, the idea that race is biologically "real" has been displaced by some version or another of the analytical premise that race is a human invention designed to suit specifiable purposes in social and public life. Whether this idea is taken to be psychological, cultural, ideological, or rhetorical, the thread that joins these conceptions is the proposition that racial categories have emerged historically in order to describe social subjects and explain social phenomena.

The primary motivation for identifying race as a social construction is perhaps the impulse to formulate an anti-racist praxis. Since Ashley Montagu famously transcribed the collective views of the world's most prominent social scientists in the UNESCO "Statement on Race" nearly sixty years ago, the notion of "race" as a human invention has become critical orthodoxy.[30] The UNESCO statement had as its goal the dismantling of racism through the dismantling of the the scientific discourses that had historically authorized racist social thought and public policy (the "biological" justifications for slavery and segregation, for example). Those critical of the human sciences, along similar lines, have attempted to replace "race" with categories that recognize the socially constructed character of descriptions of human groupings. Michael Omi and Howard Winant have argued that contemporary racial theory has tended to focus on three "paradigmatic approaches to race and race relations—approaches based on the categories of ethnicity, class, and the nation."[31] As an example of these kinds of efforts, Leonard Lieberman and Larry Reynolds engage in what they call a "deconstruction" of racialized science that replaces "race" with "ethnicity," a construct which they admit contains its own errors, but which avoids the damning power of biological authority. Such an alternative to "race" is preferable, they say, because it is "nonetheless necessary to use

some kind of cultural designation for human populations rather than a biological concept such as race with its prodigious baggage of misconceptions and heritage of horror."[32]

Although race-theorizing from this angle is interesting and potentially useful[33] for the ways in which it attempts to substitute the notion of race with less worrisome categories, as a project in rhetorical criticism (or perhaps rhetorical history), this project is not interested in the formulation of recuperated identity categories. The notion of race, as both a concept and sign, for better or for worse, exists in social and public arenas that simultaneously stage and determine relations of power between individuals and groups. Merely dispensing with the scientific investment in race does not eradicate race from sociality, but it does make possible, or legitimate, a litany of critical enterprises that seek to understand, disclose, and interrogate the power relations predicated on racial categories. Located mainly within the disciplinary loci of the humanities, these projects go by various labels and fit within various epistemological traditions. Critical Race Theory (CRT), for example, emerged out of critical legal scholarship as a means of critiquing the brand of liberalism that seemed to be abetting the retrenchment of gains achieved during the civil rights movement. In their introduction to a canonical anthology of CRT, Delgado and Stefancic say, "Our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct it with words, stories, and silence."[34] This statement gestures towards an important feature of contemporary ways of apprehending the idea of race, namely that race is a feature of society's linguistic repertoire — that the social construction of race is a *discursive* construction. Along these lines, "race" has been called an "empty signifier," a "floating signifier,"[35] a "metalanguage,"[36] and other terms which focus on its constitution in

language and other symbol systems. Furthermore, this reading of race encourages a rigorous anti-essentialism that resists ascribing human thought, emotion, behavior or group formation to the "natural" characteristics of racial identity.

Recognizing that race is socially, linguistically, or rhetorically constructed is significant in that it has the effect of race's "unmaking"; asserting the constructed nature of race reveals its contingency and urges racialized thinking to confront race's fictive character. Ending there, however, produces a profound danger: the seductive platitudes offered by the myth of racelessness. In many ways, this is what CRT was designed to combat — the regressive appropriation of race's undoing that articulates a crypto-racist colorblindness, as evidenced in the fight against "reverse discrimination," the dismantling of affirmative action policies, and the hegemonic rhetoric of neo-liberal individualism. (This brings to mind the satirical insight of Stephen Colbert, who insists that he does not "see race": "People tell me I'm white, and I believe them.") On a post-structural view of race, there is no ontological necessity to any sign, and race, being a highly contested sign, can contain no essence. It follows, then, that post-structuralism, though it accounts for race's status as a mark of difference, also disrupts the stability of identity claims in the realm of the "real." This non-essentialist view of race, in other words, tends to flatten the uneven terrain of identity politics, which in turn accelerates the pace of the regressive colorblindness that traverses that terrain.

The basic task, then, is to conceive of race in a way that both recognizes its constructed-ness and at the same time enables practical criticism. In other words, the challenge is to critique race as a social construction without freezing social relations through conceptual and analytical paralysis. From my point of view, and from the

perspective adopted in this dissertation project, practical criticism of race holds two ideas closely. First, race has a discursive life and history that can be apprehended through historical interpretation. As Kirt Wilson suggests, recognizing that race is a social construct renders the effort to give it transhistorical meaning difficult, since from the beginning of racial theorizing, "a single material definition of race was impossible, because race cannot be defined empirically."[37] What is possible, however, is a plotting of race that tracks its temporally local, historically specific shifts, manifestations, and uses in an empirical fashion. Analytically speaking, it is possible to discover the cultural and social "career" of race.[38] With that in mind, this dissertation project is concerned with the workings of a specific racial category, blackness, as it appears within the discourses of sport in the early 1970s, within the moment inhabited by Curt Flood.

Second, race is a symbolic locus of political struggle. As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham points out, "we must recognize race as providing sites of dialogic exchange and contestation, since race has constituted a discursive tool for both oppression and liberation."[39] This idea rebuts the regression into racelessness that might come about as a consequence of viewing race as a social construction because it signals that racial categories are often used to organize politically effective coalitions. In fact, it is precisely its ability to marginalize that provides race with a measure of political effectivity. Put differently, groups that have been marginalized on the basis of race have often found it useful to organize political activities around the racial categories deployed in oppressive projects by revaluing and asserting the meaning of racial identity. Relative to black identity (if these distinctions work for now) this can be seen in the political domain (from the NAACP to "black power"), the economic domain (such as "black

capitalism"), and educational and scholarly domains (such as in "Afrocentrism"). The basic idea, which Higginbotham calls "race as a double-voiced discourse," is that racial identity figures into progressive models of inclusion and in many instances provides marginalized groups with the resources necessary to enact collective interests.

With respect to this second point, however, those progressive models are predicated on a specifiable political imaginary: liberalism, described by David Theo Goldberg as "modernity's definitive doctrine of self and society, of morality and politics."[40] According to Goldberg, "the spirit of modernity is to be found most centrally in its commitment to continuous progress."[41] The political impulse that underwrites this spirit is liberalism, since "liberalism presupposes that all social arrangements may be ameliorated my rational *reform*. Moral, political, and economic, and cultural *progress* is to be brought about by and reflected in carefully planned institutional improvement."[42] As baseball's deep investment in the Jackie Robinson story demonstrates, liberalism weaves the problematic aspects of racial identity into narratives that affirm the progressive character of its various institutions. Conceived through sport, the "color-line," famously predicted by W.E.B. Du Bois to be the "problem of the twentieth century,"[43] is becoming narrower and narrower, we are told, because of individuals like Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey, black and white respectively, courageous and pioneering combined. This seems to be the case regardless of the metaphors that vivify the liberal imaginary: the doors are opening, the arc is widening, the quilt continues to add panels, because sport has rehabilitated the nation through blackness. Prejudice has been conquered and reason has won. Or, so the story goes.

Liberalism so conceived, however, elicits a quandary. Progress rendered through race presumes that race is, as Du Bois implied in 1903, a problem. In front of a black audience in Detroit in 1963, Malcolm X worded racial matters bluntly: "America's problem is us. We're her problem. The only reason she has a problem is she doesn't want us here. And every time you look at yourself, be you black, brown, red, or yellow — a so-called Negro — you represent a person who poses such a serious problem for America because you're not wanted."[44] Tellingly, Malcolm X spent half of a lifetime challenging "liberals" such as Martin Luther King, Jr. And perhaps even more tellingly, it is King who is commemorated in a national holiday, and it is King whose imagery pervades public memory of the civil rights era, not Malcolm X. Progress made, problem solved. The quandary here is that liberalism must manufacture and marginalize racial identities in order to warrant its operational telos. The progress narrative depends, paradoxically, on categories of identity that function to exclude — liberalism *needs* race to sell itself. Accordingly, argues Goldberg, racism is not an aberration, nor is it an accident that science or reason can correct; it is a constituent feature of modernity authorized and sustained by liberal rationality. As he puts it:

> So the irony of modernity, the liberal paradox comes down to this: As modernity commits itself progressively to idealized principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, as it increasingly insists upon the moral irrelevance of race, there is a multiplication of racial identities and the sets of exclusions they prompt and rationalize, enable and sustain. Race is irrelevant, but all is race. The more abstract modernity's universal identity, the more it has to be insisted upon, the more it needs to be *imposed*. The more ideologically hegemonic liberal values seem and the more open to difference liberal modernity declares itself, the more dismissive of difference it becomes and the more closed it seeks to make the circle of acceptability.[45]

Race's "double voice", then, is only possible because of modernist liberalism's intrinsic commitment to the production of racial identities and racialized exclusions.

What Goldberg hints at here is a terminology for locating race in discourse as a site of political struggle. His critique is predicated fundamentally on the idea that western modernity, in universalizing its values as rationality uncorrupted, views essential human subjectivity as "Reason." Since the justification for condemning racism lies ostensibly in racism's irrationality (in a prejudice that resembles superstition), "Reason, precisely because of its purported impartiality, is supposed to mediate the differences and tensions between particular social subjects in the domains of market and morality, polity and legality."[46] Along these lines, humanity possesses an abstract universal identity to which all subjects may claim access, but through which all subjects as individuals must endure the vicissitudes of racial particularity, a process that in Goldberg's view produces uneven and exclusionary results. In sum, Goldberg gestures toward a critical vocabulary that seeks to track racialized discourse — the "work" that race performs — through the ongoing, multifaceted tension between the universal and the particular. Stated simply, race functions as a locus of political struggle by setting the terms according to which some identities, and not others, may occupy modernity's foundational abstraction. Liberalism, as the discursive ground of this struggle, pretends to deliver the moral goods, but in actual practice ensures the proliferation and exclusion of racialized particulars in order to insist on its own expansive universalism.[47] As will be evident throughout this project, the liberal antagonism between universal and particular identities provides my

historical observations with analytical categories for making claims regarding race's social existence.

Race, Culture, and the Public Sphere

Although liberalism, as Goldberg imagines it, emerges from enlightenment rationality, as the *sine qua non* of modernity, liberalism does not assert itself spontaneously; rather, it must be expressed discursively. To account for the field in which liberalism is able to condition social subjectivity, Goldberg turns to what he calls an "underlying culture," a *racist culture*. It is at this point that a noticeable friction begins to take shape in his thesis, one that I address after hearing from Goldberg on precisely what "racist culture" includes:

> Included in racist culture, as in culture generally, are ideas, attitudes, and dispositions, norms and rules, linguistic, literary, and artistic expressions, architectural forms and media representations, practices and institutions. These cultural expressions and objects embed meanings and values that frame articulations, understandings, and projects, that constitute a way of life. In this sense, a culture is both, an interrelatedly, a signifying system and a system of material production. In commanding the culture, social subjects are uniquely situated to assert power. Where the cultural invention is given over to cultivating order, to rendering the strange familiar so as to control it, and to defining inclusion and exclusion, the violence of power and the power of violence will be central to it. Culture in the sense intended here consists in knowing and doing.[48]

From this comprehensive view of culture, Goldberg, in echoing Raymond Williams, arms himself with the conceptual resources necessary to implicate a "whole way of life" in the production of racism. It is hardly surprising, then, that his critique operates in the grandiose milieu of modernity; he intends to deconstruct everything in his path. "Racist culture" allows Goldberg to account for the transmission of racism through liberalism at

a sequence of turning points linked by a functionally undifferentiated register. In that sense, the friction that emerges is between the type of cultural foundationalism that creeps toward the trans-historical and the analytical injunction to view race as socially constructed. I do not mean to rescue the critical utility of culture from Goldberg's totalizing grip, but I would suggest that when it comes to accounting for the transmission — or *communication* — of racial discourse, a greater degree of conceptual composure is in order.

Liberalism certainly does not manifest out of thin air, but Goldberg's thesis is thin with respect to its understanding of the specific horizons that provide culture with discursive effectivity. His argument finds a more parsimonious resonance with what John Sloop calls the "materiality of culture." Borrowing from the cultural studies tradition exemplified by Paul Willis, Sloop suggests that though culture "is positive in the sense that life cannot be experienced without the bricks and mortar that give it shape and substance, it is also negative, or constraining, in that bricks and mortar have a discursive materiality that privileges existing discourses, existing ideology."[49] Like Goldberg, Sloop presents culture as a material constraint on knowing and doing, but places it in relation to a specifiable analytical register: rhetoric. Sloop says, "If culture is the bricks and mortar of everyday understandings, rhetoric is the 'energy' of culture. That is, just as energy in the material world represents the 'work' of material objects, rhetoric is that which is the energy of the symbolic of cultural world."[50] Though Sloop is not concerned centrally with race, his observations occur in the context of a cultural rhetorical analysis of media representations of the boxer Mike Tyson in which "race, gender, and so forth"[51] play a prominent part. Both Goldberg and Sloop take cues from Foucault's notion of

discursive formations, in which subjectivity, and thus racial identity, can be articulated only within the limits imposed by a culture's historically given rules. To read those rules, and to understand how racial subjects may be formed at any given cultural moment, Sloop turns to rhetoric which, in a sense, makes culture go.

Before I elaborate on where to find rhetoric, it is important to be more specific about where sport fits in culture, especially in relation to racial identity and the progress narrative of liberalism. Sloop cites Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* to make the case for discursive formations, and here I shift that Foucauldian glance slightly. Sport is responsible for an "incitement to discourse" about race: "an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail."[52] Foucault's observation, offered in the context of 18th century sexuality, points to the way in which such discourse permitted "a policing of sex: that is, not the rigor of a taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses."[53] If this frame is extended toward race, it becomes clear that sport provides liberalism the opportunity to deny the significance of race through the very same discursive field that makes race materially significant. As the continual reinscriptions of Jackie Robinson in public memory frequently illustrate, sport offers up endlessly accumulated detail about racialized experiences in order to prove that sport is moving us past the problem of race. Race in sport is a kind of *idee fixe*, a political obsession that lends the progress narrative a material presence, which perhaps explains why Curt Flood is so urgently fit within race's rhetorical frame.

Sport has long been a cultural location that has incited discourse of another kind, one easily identifiable within the type of discursive formation, the "racist culture," described by Goldberg. For example, in the US in 1936, international politics had affected domestic cultural life in a way that permitted Jesse Owens to be seen as a national hero. By winning four track and field gold medals in Berlin right before Hitler's eyes, Owens ostensibly repudiated white eugenic fantasies. Of course, Owens' demonstrated rejection of white athletic superiority would not initiate a racially progressive social policy back in the United States easily or immediately. Nevertheless, suggest some, a slow process had begun whereby black entry into and subsequent widespread success in a variety of sports inverted the dominant racial script into a story of "natural" black athletic dominance. As Patrick Miller observes:

> When African Americans began to register an increasing number of victories on the playing fields during the first decades of the twentieth century, mainstream commentators abandoned the athletic creed that linked physical prowess, manly character, and the best features of American civilization. Although many African Americans had subscribed to the ideal that achievement in sport constituted a proof of equality, a mechanism of assimilation, and a platform for social mobility, the recognition successful black athletes actually received from many educators and journalists explained away their prowess by stressing black anatomical and physiological advantages or legacies from a primitive African past.[54]

Miller's essay assiduously catalogs the history of racial science wrought in response to black athletic achievement. Furthermore, Miller provides a narrative that anchors historical moments in sport occurring both before 1936 and well after. A number of scholars have detailed the efforts of biologists and anthropologists working in the late

19th and early 20th centuries to provide a scientific explanation for white superiority.[55] This tradition, incidentally, is what the UNESCO statement on race had been designed to entomb. Despite that, and despite the turn to the social construction of race that UNESCO inspired, sport continues to lay the discursive "bricks and mortar" of racial science and produce the rhetorical energy that put sport into cultural motion.

Consider recent works such as Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve*[56], and Dinesh D'Souza's *The End of Racism*[57], which tend to resurrect race as a "natural" category. Putting aside their problematic arguments, inquiry into the reason these debates exist would recognize their simultaneous appearance with renewed debate in sport over the significance of racial difference. It is certainly no coincidence that these works show up in historical conjunction with a debate framed by John Hoberman and Jon Entine over the explanation and meaning of the success of black athletes. Hoberman, in *Darwin's Athletes*, argues that sport contributes to a "racial folklore" that perpetuates a colonialist mindset and offers false dreams to sports-addled black youth.[58] Entine, in *Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why We're Afraid to Talk About It*, offers anecdotal evidence from the fields of genetics and evolutionary biology to account for the success of East African distance runners and other racialized athletes.[59] I mention these debates in order to stress that even beyond the Jackie Robinson story, which tells us that things are improving every day, sport incites racial discourse on epistemological ground that both reinforces deeply held assumptions about racial difference and imposes rigid limits on racial subjects. Most notably, it seems that after passing through sport's progress narrative, "blacks are good at sports," and "white men can't jump" — although as Entine makes clear, Norwegians *are* gifted weight-lifters.

In this vein, it is important to keep in mind that race's discursive movement into a cultural idiom subsumes even the effort to re-inscribe racial difference in biological immutability. Entine's book, for example, is prefaced by a discussion that contextualizes the reception of his argument relative to his alleged attempt to "subvert science to politics."[60] I have no interest in engaging this debate, but it is striking to read Entine's rejoinder to his assertion of "the facts" of genetic racial difference, which elicited disdain and vitriol from critics like Kenneth Shropshire, who asks, "Why care? Why care if there are some minor anatomical or genetic differences between blacks and whites?"[61] What we hear from Entine is a rehearsal of liberalism, this time in an iteration that has passed from racist biology through the cleansing mechanisms of racial culturalism and finally back to a refreshed geneticism, recuperated now by the barreling engine of scientific rationality, itself keeping pace with the progress narrative's locomotive march through history:

> Demonizing genetics in the name of social justice is a dangerous (and ultimately futile) gambit. Today, no credible scientist disputes that evolution has helped shape Kenyan distance runners, white weight lifters with enormous upper body strength, and the explosive runners and jumpers of West African ancestry. [...] Respecting human differences enhances the possibility that we can constructively, but critically, confront the breathtaking changes that genetic research is spurring. [...] That is the guiding spirit of *Taboo*.[62]

Entine's error is not in making his case; he is not the first and certainly will not be the last to wonder why Kenyans and Ethiopians keep winning the Boston Marathon. His error is in assuming that his argument stands apart from cultural discourse and corrects it from above with the force of purer reason. Instead, Entine's *Taboo* is implicated within

sport's incitement to discourse about race that fuels liberal progressivism; it is of a piece now with the liberal imperative to become "respectful" of racial difference, which, of course, means that racial identities must be multiplied, classified, and endlessly understood. A more accurate answer to Shropshire's exasperated question — one that informs and in many ways motivates this dissertation project — would be that sport *makes culture care* about racial difference.[63] The "nature/nurture" debate in which Entine finds himself, in other words, is simply neither here nor there.

Another way of saying all this is to say that sport occupies a significant portion of public space; what Hoberman, Entine, Shropshire, and even Bill Rhoden have in common is a public voice, the access to speak culture (make it "go") through the forums and arenas that make up public life. In the sense of the term that I use here, they are rhetors. In his analysis of Mike Tyson, Sloop provides an analog for this argument through the term "boxer," which might be applied easily to the analysis of racial identity I pursue in this dissertation: "[W]e must know how the term is enacted, embodied, and given meaning within public discursive boundaries. We cannot understand the enacted meaning of the term by looking only at what a sociologist of sport means when she or he utilizes it unless or until s/he has taken her or his discourse into the public forum, staking a claim in the ideological struggle over meanings."[64] The hypothetical sociologist to whom Sloop refers is one who participates in public life, throws herself or himself into culture by supplying its discourse with rhetorical "energy." Moreover, as Anthony Appiah reminds us, "If there is a liberal form of life, it was always characterized not only by institutions but also by a rhetoric, a body of ideas and arguments."[65] On this account, sport is an institution through which the liberal form of life finds rhetorical expression in

ideas and arguments in the public sphere. Scholars such as Shropshire, Todd Boyd, David Andrews, and others have detailed the various ways in which basketball, particularly in the Reagan-Bush era, has produced and transformed black cultural identity and thus come to influence the political questions that operate on racial logics.[66] But, in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the US, baseball still held a hegemonic position relative to other sports, especially if one considers Jackie Robinson's mediating influence on the civil rights movement, and further still if one considers baseball's unique historical connection, right along with apple pie, to the performance of national identity. Recognizing that sport catapults race into culture, even if it is not alone in doing so, this dissertation is concerned at its conceptual core with the politics of public life that baseball expresses rhetorically through race.

One more point about Goldberg. He conducts his analysis of "racist culture" with obsessive detail and erudition, and thus dwells comfortably within the disciplinary confines of modern and post-modern Western philosophy. He moves easily between Kant, Locke, Nozick and Rawls in order to build his case for the place of "Reason" in the liberal imaginary. On these points, I take him at his word. Having said that, I want to suggest that Goldberg's radical intellectualism can be enriched by careful historical analyses of the public sphere, at least in accounting for the history of liberalism in the US. This project, in part, attempts to fulfill that goal. Earlier I asserted that Goldberg's argument lacked stable and specifiable horizons for elucidating culture's discursive effectivity, and I also promised to explain where I believe culture can be found. Relative to both of these issues, I want to suggest that the public sphere both makes culture work

and provides rhetoric with its discursive setting. Once discourse becomes public, race, liberalism, and baseball begin to matter a great deal.

Publicity and Rhetoric

As I introduced Curt Flood as the subject of this project, I did so through the idea of public memory. In the way I use the term, public memory refers broadly to the version(s) of historical events given in public discourse. This usage implies a distinction between "history" and "memory" intended to highlight what Kendall Phillips says are "multiple, diverse, mutable, and competing accounts of past events."[67] Philips argues convincingly that studies in public memory emerged coterminously with post-structuralist and multicultural critiques of "official History." The problem with History, so capitalized in order to signify its putative objectivity, is that simply put, no single account of past events is agreeable to everyone in a pluralistic society — a problem complicated by calcified inequities along the lines of class, gender, and race. What exist in the public imagination, then, are memories of past events put to use for the purpose of rendering historical narratives that fit pragmatically within the politics of the present. As the difference between Snyder and Rhoden demonstrates, their accounts of Curt Flood seek to constitute the present in ways that overlap and compete simultaneously. Each compares Flood to Jackie Robinson in order to establish Flood as *worthy* of remembrance, but the *nature* of that remembrance accomplishes different tasks; Snyder connects his history of Flood to baseball's orthodox narrative of racial progress, and Rhoden urges a more critical interpretation of the same. Snyder says Flood ought to be remembered in order to affirm the progress revealed in the present, and Rhoden says that Flood ought to be remembered because the present is not as progressive as it is often said

to be. In observing Rhoden's more critical view, I do not mean to offer his account as a preferable one; I only mean to illustrate through sport the idea that public memory is a contested rhetorical zone. Using the term "collective memory," Barbie Zelizer puts matters this way: "the same memory can act as a particular representation of the past for certain groups while taking on a universal significance for others."[68] Different individuals (and social groups), in other words, can make use of the same memory in different ways.

Zelizer's assertion evokes my reading of Goldberg in describing the tension between the universal and the particular in collective memory. Of course, as Goldberg says of liberalism, public memory contains a political logic. Though she again uses the term "collective" memory to make her point, the crucial assumption on which her argument about the universal and particular rests perhaps evinces the reasons to consider the implications of the term "public" on the meaning of that category. She says, "This [memory's simultaneous universality and particularity] follows from the rather basic fact that everyone participates in the production of memory, though not equally." She means this as a qualitative difference, in the sense that sometimes memories are deliberately, or in her terms, "actively," constructed and that sometimes individuals "perform activities that are crucial to their transmission, retention, or contestation."[69] The inequality to which she refers is not quite the same as those that confound liberal politics, which tend to center on the question of access to public life. Instead, Zelizer seems to draw a distinction between intentional collective memory and unintentional collective memory, as in the difference between those who produce (and finance) the creation of a war memorial (or, the "Jackie Robinson Rotunda at Citi Field") and those who utter the

presumably orthodox ideas the memorial is supposed to represent. Those who repeat the ideas coded by memory into the meaning of the monument (say, relative to the "nation") do memory's work accidentally or unwittingly, while those who erect the monument personally do so intentionally. In this sense, she says that collective memory is both universal and particular since on the one hand, some use an event to define the past in universal terms, and on the other hand, some recognize the same event as a referent to a mere part(icular) of the past.

This framing of collective memory seems to put an old debate on the agenda and miss the critical potential of thinking about Goldberg's categories. Differentiating between those who make memory actively and those who do so passively invites attention to the conflict between agency and structure; i.e. some construct memories while others merely pass them along. Those who make memories are said to have agency, and those who pass it along are said to be conditioned by structure. But, attention to the relationship between the universal and the particular forces two different issues into view. First, the passive/active distinction is too sharp. To speak of "contestation" in public memory is to recognize that some groups, who may merely "transmit" memory, are privileged with more public space, and that other groups, who may "contest" memory, become marginalized. Consider by way of anecdote the dominant memories of the civil rights movement. The individual who symbolizes the events of the 1960s, with regard to race, is King. King is then inserted into stories that make selective use of him, such as when a "conservative" commentator attacks an affirmative action policy on cable news because she or he "judges people by the content of their character and not the color of their skin."[70] In contrast, an individual who asserts

Malcolm X as the principled embodiment of the events of the 1960s, or who cites King in order to emphasize the need for a solution to poverty, is likely to be marginalized, moved to the "fringe," and possibly even excluded from public discussion altogether. Be that as it may, marginalized groups still manage to generate strategies of resistance, and at the same time seek to gain inclusion into public discussion.

Second, once contestation becomes crucial to theorizing memory, we arrive at the problem of the public sphere. If a conflict is occurring, then it must be occurring *somewhere*. Distinguishing public memory from "collective memory," Edward Casey conceptualizes the former as a kind of mutable rhetorical resource:

> [Public memory] is there as a basso profundo in the chorus of the body politic, its medley of voices. It is there, however, not just as presupposed but as an active resource on which current discussion and action draw: members of the public count on this historical *Hintergrund*, they speak in terms of it, and they take off from it. Indeed, they can revise it on the spot, but then they are revising *it*. The "it" is a continuant that serves to stabilize any given direction of public events.[71]

This formulation takes memory out of the past, puts it into circulation for editing and revision, and thematizes the setting in which such action occurs. Public memory, in brief, is a form of rhetoric, along with others, that exists in a specific location: the public sphere. It follows that one way to lend sport social significance and proclaim it as a reflection of progress made is to remember Jackie Robinson publicly. But, one is advised to remember him the right way, which brings me to the next crucial point.

It is important to remember here that liberalism, as the driving discursive force of modernity, does not manifest by divine intervention (though some have claimed that it

does). Liberalism must find a way to speak; it must find its way into the public sphere. Goldberg comes back, then, this time through Michael Warner, who offers a critique of what he calls the "bourgeois public sphere":

> The rhetorical strategy of personal abstraction is both the utopian moment of the public sphere and a major source of domination, for the ability to abstract oneself in public discussion has always been an unequally available resource. Individuals have to have specific rhetorics of disincorporation; they are not simply rendered bodiless by exercising reason. And it is only possible to operate a discourse based on the claim to self-abstracting disinterestedness in a culture where such unmarked self-abstraction is a differential resource. The subject who could master this rhetoric in the bourgeois public sphere was implicitly, even explicitly, white, male, literate, and propertied. These traits could go unmarked, while other features of bodies could only be acknowledged in discourse as the humiliating positivity of the particular.[72]

Warner later continues:

> The bourgeois public sphere is a frame of reference in which it is supposed that all particularities have the same status as mere particularity. But the ability to establish that frame of reference is a feature of some particularities. Neither in gender nor in race nor in class nor in sexualities is it possible to treat different particulars as having merely paratactic, or serial, difference. Differences in such realms come coded as the difference between the marked and the unmarked, the universalizable and the particular. Their internal logic is such that the two sides of any of these differences cannot be treated as symmetrical — as they are, for example, in the rhetoric of liberal toleration or "debate" — without simply resecuring an asymmetrical privilege. The bourgeois public sphere has been structured from the outset by a logic of abstraction that provides a privilege for unmarked identities: the male, the white, the middle class, the normal.[73]

I quote Warner at length because his criticism of the "bourgeois public sphere" assembles in concise form a series of assumptions that guide this dissertation project, particularly in the ways in which his critique of the public sphere finds consonance with Goldberg.

First, Warner thickens Goldberg's plot by providing a specifiable field of discursive activity in which the conflict between the universal and particular occurs. In this sense, it is the bourgeois public sphere that mediates the liberal tension between the universal and the particular, which itself filters the meaning, significance, and function of racial difference. The racialized paradox that Goldberg takes to be a fundamental installation of modernity, on this view, operates on the rhetorical horizon of publicity. Second, Warner productively complicates Goldberg's understanding of culture. Goldberg sees culture — racist culture — as the discursive plane that both supports and facilitates liberalism's internal contradictions. Warner sees culture as a space of material circulation (such as "print culture") that entails certain modes of public address (such as "disincorporation"). Taken together, ideas and arguments alone do not constitute (in Appiah's terms) liberalism's rhetoric. Instead, liberalism's rhetoric also includes the modes of speaking, as rendered through style, topoi, genres, vocabularies, and the like, that characterize the public sphere as a scene of discursive action. Far from simply generalizing culture as a kind of underlying undifferentiated forcefield, Warner shows how "Reason" comes to be embodied as universal in the public sphere. Thus, racialized exclusions are not only rational, but they exist as a function of the public speech protocols that enact, through the performance of an unmarked identity, the rhetoric of universalism.

Finally, the observation that universality requires a rhetoric of disincorporation is crucial for making sense of liberalism's fundamental political dynamic: the struggle for inclusion. Keeping in mind that the public sphere is characterized by contestation, Warner's critique points to the idea that particular racial subjects, in order to participate in public life, must cope with the imperative to disincorporate. In other words, racialized identities must invent and utilize rhetorical strategies that will allow them to manage the problem that their particularity presents. These strategies might be thought of as strategies of "resistance," but not necessarily. A range of rhetorical options is available to public subjects marked by racial particularity, but the struggle for political inclusion is characterized by the paradoxical attempt to occupy a universal subject position while simultaneously asserting one's self-interest. This tension, which echoes what Goldberg calls the "liberal paradox," both makes identity politics dangerous and provides the progress narrative with rhetorical energy. On the one hand, asserting one's particular racial identity often means sacrificing one's claim to "impartiality," "objectivity," or "neutrality," each notions that animate the liberal imaginary through both explicit political discourse and implicit modes of address. On the other hand, if one is willing to submit to compromise, assimilation, or the indignities of "tolerance," inclusion becomes possible, even *desirable* to liberal institutions eager to represent themselves as reformed. (Once again, progress made, problem solved.) Either strategy is damning, it seems; the former abets mechanisms of exclusion, and the latter makes inclusion seem hardly worth it. Hence, Warner suggests, the public sphere imposes an asymmetrical system of rhetorical privilege.

I began this section by outlining some important points about public memory because, theoretically speaking, this dissertation project exists in the interstices between public memory and the broader problematic of the public sphere. Public memory, or the version of events given in public discourse and made available to rhetors in public life, is in one sense the object of my critique and in another sense the encompassing scenery of a critical intervention. Although the central focus of this project is not Curt Flood's present — or perhaps stated more accurately, present memories of him — as my references to Rhoden and Snyder demonstrate, public memory of Curt Flood serves as a frequent point of departure for my analysis of Flood's initial moment in public life. In some cases I find that the memories of Flood can be traced to the public discourse of the 1970s, but in other cases, the memory of Flood has been put to completely different purposes and fits into completely different public problems. But, my central focus is trained on the first three years of the 1970s, in which Curt Flood found his life, his career, his wealth, and in many ways, his sense of himself, at risk in the complex dynamics of public life. Flood's unusual circumstances make for an interesting case study of the political relationships between racial identity, liberalism, and rhetoric. Thus, this dissertation project pursues that case study by going in search of Curt Flood's blackness in the public sphere.

Notes

[1] Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 412-453.

[2] This conversation actually happened and is vivid in my mind. I cannot remember the exact date, but I credit James Brey for unknowingly prompting this dissertation project approximately eight years before I began writing it.

[3] William Leggett, "Not Just a Flood, But A Deluge," *Sports Illustrated*, August 19, 1968, 18-21. The label "Best Center Fielder in Baseball," appeared on the cover of the issue.

[4] Flood's career statistics can be found on the following page of the useful on-line resource Baseball-Reference.com at: http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/f/floodcu01.shtml.

[5] This term was coined by baseball statistician Bill James, whose statistical understanding has influenced both baseball management decisions and the fan experience. For an account of James' influence, see Alan Schwartz and Peter Gammons, *The Numbers Game: Baseball's Lifelong Fascination with Statistics* (New York: St. Martins, 2004).

[6] William C. Rhoden, "Flood Lost the Battle but Won the Free-Agent War," *New York Times*, April 18, 2008.

[7] The rules governing Hall of Fame election procedures can be found on the website of the National Baseball Hall of Fame: http://web.baseballhalloffame.org/hofers/bbwaa.jsp.

[8] Rhoden mistakes the title of Flood's book. It is *The Way It Is*.

[9] Rhoden, "Flood Lost the Battle."

[10] Kenneth Burke, "Terministic Screens," in *Language as Symbolic Action* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966), 44-62.

[11] I take some liberties here with my religious metaphors, but for an excellent discussion of the idea of the "church of baseball," specifically in relation to the building of national identity, see Michael Butterworth, "Ritual in the 'Church of Baseball': Suppressing the Discourse of Democracy After 9/11," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 2 (June 2005): 107-129.

[12] Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 346.

[13] Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 346.

[14] Bill Clinton, "Jackie Robinson Speech By President Bill Clinton," http://www.baseball-almanac.com/players/p_robij4.shtml.

[15] Bill Clinton, "Jackie Robinson Speech By President Bill Clinton."

[16] Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 345.

[17] Rhoden, "Flood Lost the Battle." Emphasis added.

[18] Among the texts that constitute Curt Flood as a contested historical subject, the one that develops these themes most fully is Stuart Weiss, *The Curt Flood Story: The Man Behind the Myth* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007).

[19] William C. Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete* (New York: Crown, 2006).

[20] Brad Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave: Curt Flood's Fight for Free-Agency in Professional Sports* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 352.

[21] Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, 3.

[22] Ibid., 2-3.

[23] Ibid., 233.

[24] Charles Scott, "The Appearance of Public Memory," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall Phillips (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 147-156. Scott pays special attention to the notion of "appearance" in theorizing public memory.

[25] Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, 7.

[26] Ibid., 6.

[27] Ibid., 3.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ashley Montagu, "The UNESCO Statement by Experts on Race Problems," in *Statement on Race: An Extended Discussion in Plain Language of the UNESCO Statement by Experts on Race Problems* (New York: Schuman, 1951), 11-20. See also, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 10. In their history of race, Omi and Winant suggest that this tradition extends as far back as the 1920s with sociologist Robert Park's "assimilation cycle." For an insightful critique of Park, especially as it pertains to the relevance of the body in structuring social epistemologies, see Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[31] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 11.

[32] Leonard Lieberman and Larry Reynolds, "Race: The Deconstruction of a Scientific Concept," in *Race and Other Misadventures*, ed. Larry Reynolds and Larry Lieberman (New York: General Hall, 1996), 154.

[33] I say "potentially," because in order for such attempts to effectuate the type of social change they are after, they cannot just replace one problematic construct with another, they must instead attempt to imagine categories that disrupt racialized epistemologies.

[34] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, "Introduction" to *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 2nd Edition (Philadelphia,:Temple University Press, 2000), xvii.

[35] Stuart Hall, *Race the Floating Signifier*, VHS (New York: Media Education Foundation, 1996).

[36] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17 (Winter 1992), 251-274.

[37] Kirt Wilson, *The Reconstruction Desegregation Debate: The Politics of Equality and the Rhetoric of Place* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2002), xvi.

[38] I borrow this term from C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002; New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

[39] Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History," 252.

[40] David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 1.

[41] Ibid., 4.

[42] Ibid., 5. Emphases in original.

[43] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003; first published 1903), 3.

[44] Malcolm X, "Message to the Grass Roots," in *Malcolm X Speaks*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990; New York; Grove Press, 1966), 4.

[45] Goldberg, *Racist Culture,* 6. Emphasis in original.

[46] Ibid., 4. "Reason" is capitalized in Goldberg's text as a way of distinguishing it as a putative absolute, like "Truth with a capital T."

[47] Admittedly, this critique of modern liberalism is totalizing and somewhat self-sealing. I would argue that Goldberg's critique of modernity is thoroughly modern because it neither offers a future without modernism's flaws nor fetishizes difference as a matter of political necessity. To be sure, the paradox he identifies precludes his alignment with post-modern sensibilities that rely on the politics of difference. And though he manages to make our familiarity with modernity appear strange—perhaps through a post-structuralist ontology—he makes no provision for its escape. I do not mean to defend Goldberg's thesis whole-cloth, but to offer it as a critical idiom whose cash value lies in the vocabulary of the universal and particular for understanding "race" and struggles for racial justice.

[48] Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 8.

[49] John M. Sloop, "MikeTyson and the Perils of Discursive Constraints: Boxing, Race, and the Assumption of Guilt," in *Out of Bounds: Sports, Media, and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Aaron Baker and Todd Boyd (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 104.

[50] Sloop, "Mike Tyson," 105.

[51] Ibid., 107.

[52] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 18.

[53] Ibid., 25.

[54] Patrick B. Miller, "The Anatomy of Scientific Racism: Racialist Responses to Black Athletic Achievement," in *Sport and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth Century America*, ed. Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins (New York: Routledge, 2004), 330.

[55] See, for example, Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1996; New York: Norton, 1981).

[56] Richard Herrnstein and Charles A. Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

[57] Dinesh D'Souza, *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

[58] John Hoberman, *Darwin's Athletes: How Sport Has Damaged Black American and Preserved the Myth of Race* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

[59] John Entine, *Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why We're Afraid to Talk About It* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000).

[60] Entine, *Taboo*, xiii.

[61] Shropshire is quoted in Entine, *Taboo*, vii.

[62] Entine, *Taboo*, xiv.

[63] This assertion finds agreement with Rey Chow, who, in citing Etienne Balibar, notes that "'Biological or genetic naturalism is not the only means of naturalizing human behavior and social affinities.... *Culture can also function like a nature*, and it can in particular function asa a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin.' [...] The discourses of tolerance, acceptance, and understanding that are crucial to anthropological culturalism are, in this light, part and parcel of the multiplication and democratization of networks having to do with classified lifeworlds, populations, demographic movements, ethnic differences, dispositions of particular social groups, and so on in late capitalist society., in which racial or racialized discourse is not necessarily 'opposed to emancipatory claims; on the contrary, it effectively appropriates them.'" Chow takes her last quote from Ann Laura Stoler. From the perspective of Foucauldian biopower, Chow shows essentially that the liberalist telos of progress is bound up with the multiplication and domestication of racial identities, even when those identities are couched in the anthropological vocabulary of "ethnicity." Moreover, for my purposes, Chow shows that science is not distinct from culture; they are not in tension. Instead, they work together to produce the discourse on which the liberal imagination is premised. See Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 13-14.

[64] Sloop, "Mike Tyson," 106.

[65] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), x-xi.

[66] Todd Boyd and Kenneth Shropshire, eds., *Basketball Jones: America Above the Rim* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); David Andrews, "Excavating Michael Jordan's Blackness," in *Reading Sport: Critical Essays in Power and Representation*, eds. Susan Birrell and Mary G. McDonnell (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 166-205.

[67] Kendall Phillips, "Introduction," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall Phillips (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 2.

[68] Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (June 1995), 230.

[69] Zelizer, "Reading the Past," 230.

[70] I think here of Sean Hannity, who seems to appropriate this line in any circumstance that forces him to account for race in addressing a political question.

[71] Edward Casey, "Public Memory in Place and Time," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall Phillips (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 25.

[72] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 165-166.

[73] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 166-167.

Chapter 3

The Way It Is: **Curt Flood's Public Case**

Several baseball historians point to one moment in Flood's pursuit of free agency as the most important of his risky adventure. On December 13, 1969 in Puerto Rico, Flood met with twenty-five player representatives, and with Marvin Miller asked for the financial support of the Player's Association. This meeting afforded Flood the opportunity to explain his motives to the players clearly and, hopefully, to persuade them to pay his legal expenses. It also gave the players the opportunity to understand Flood's argument fully and to ask important questions regarding their role in the legal action. After Miller spoke in support of having a voice in Flood's legal strategy, Flood spoke to the players for twenty minutes.[1] Immediately afterward, Los Angeles Dodgers team representative Tom Haller asked a question that brought the facts of Flood's racial identity to the center of the conversation. He asked, "with today's social situation, is being black a motivation?"[2]

Approximately a year later, Flood interpreted the question this way, "This is a period of black militance. Do you feel that you're doing this as part of that movement? Because you're black?"[3] Flood recounts his response to Haller's query: "I told the meeting that organized baseball's policies and practices affected all players equally and that my color was therefore beside the point. It occurred to me later that the answer, while valid, had by no means exhausted the subject."[4] Measured against Flood's immediate opportunity to earn the financial and symbolic support of the Players

Association, his failure to "exhaust the point," no doubt, was wise strategy. Tom Haller remarked later, "I didn't want it to be just a black thing…I wanted it to be a baseball thing."[5] The vote to support Flood, by both paying his legal bills and helping to choose his representation in court, was unanimous in favor, thus securing what Flood hoped would be crucial symbolic (and monetary) capital.

Flood's speech to the players in December 1969 explicitly dismissed the significance of race and instead emphasized their shared interests. Such a position might suggest that Flood perceived a need to move rhetorically away from race politics if he was to succeed in suing baseball for his free agency. Gerald Early places Flood's struggle into the context of a "white backlash" against further civil rights reform in the late 1960s. "There was," according to Early, "nostalgia among many for the old days when blacks knew their place."[6] Perhaps Flood's recognition of this political culture explains his dismissal of race in his meeting with the players. But, on national television, only days after the players meeting, Flood released a powerful form of racialized imagery into public circulation. On January 3, 1970, Howard Cosell interviewed Flood and player representative Marvin Miller on ABC's Wide World of Sports. Presented as an opportunity to make his case directly to a national audience, Flood's television appearance generated this exchange:

> Cosell: It's been written, Curt, that you're a man who makes $90,000 a year, which isn't exactly slave wages. What's your retort to that?
>
> Flood: A well-paid slave is nonetheless a slave.[7]

Flood's reliance on the slave metaphor as a controlling figure in his narrative took deep root in the public discourse surrounding his case over the next few years. It was used both as an expression of baseball's injustices and as a straw argument by critics who would lampoon him as being histrionic. In any case, and whether intentional or not, the introduction of the figure of the slave urged a consideration of the racial politics of his claim. I am not suggesting that Flood's mere mention of slavery constituted a racialized perspective (though one could argue that it did).[8] Rather, his promise to say more about his "being black" evinced a consciousness of race that would ambiguously permeate his public position. Moreover, by summer 1971, the figure of the slave had come to determine the central symbol of Flood's self-characterization. After presenting a life history nuanced by detailed memories of racial experiences, Flood offered a telling capstone to his book, *The Way It Is*:

> Frederick Douglass was a Maryland slave who taught himself to read. "If there is no struggle," he once said, "there is no progress." Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing the ground.... Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." To see the Curt Flood case in that light is to see its entire meaning.[9]

For Flood, Frederick Douglass delivered more than an inspirational axiom. Uttered in strident and dramatic tones, Douglass helped Flood condense a series of implied meanings which, without explicit elaboration, constituted his case's "entire meaning." What, then, did Flood's case mean?

At first glance, the allusion to Frederick Douglass seems to have invited race into Flood's field of vision. Douglass, after all, was not simply an agitator — he was a black

slave turned free abolitionist, presumably the identity Flood attempted to assume. Moreover, Douglass spoke on behalf of a constituency whose enslavement was enabled by the social and political meanings assigned to their blackness. Be that as it may, Flood's chosen quotation centered not on the matter of Douglass' racial identity, nor on the way that the history of racial injustice may have motivated him, but instead on the problem of freedom rendered in the abstract. In the same vacillating manner that that he put race "beside the point" when asked if he was a "black militant," Flood stood vaguely between a racialized allusion and a universal expression, between an opaque invocation of race and its deferring gesture toward universal principles.

This chapter takes up Flood's recommendation that the "entire meaning" of his case be understood through his allusion to Frederick Douglass, a reference that vacillates on importance of Flood's racial identity. As this chapter attempts to show, *The Way It Is*, which stands as Flood's only complete self-authored account of his free-agency challenge, relies for its rhetorical force on the strategic ambiguity regarding race found within the carefully selected quotation from Frederick Douglass. Flood's story is both about the concrete meaning of blackness and about the abstract meaning of freedom. On the one hand, these themes work symbiotically as Flood attempts to give formal expression to the conditions of his bondage. On the other hand, these themes' simultaneous appearance work parasitically as Flood struggles to effectuate a suitable political rhetoric. His meeting with the players and the highlighted question from Tom Haller illustrated the type of risk inherent in reducing his claim to the logic of racial binaries. Unlike "the Maryland slave who taught himself how to read," Flood's constituency — the fellow slaves he claimed to *represent* — was not constituted in its

racial identity; instead Flood, if speaking for anyone, was speaking for a constituency bound by its identity as baseball players. If situated explicitly within a black political idiom, Flood's rhetoric risked alienating white players who might benefit from his lawsuit and whose support was a necessary condition of the case's immediate success. On the other had, if situated outside of a racial idiom entirely (or if the significance of race was denied too insistently), Flood's rhetoric risked sacrificing the powerful discursive forms that characterized the identity politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Race could help him, but he would need to manage its influence carefully.

Section A — Sarcasm and Poesis in Curt Flood's Public Sphere

Stuart Weiss' biography of Curt Flood contains a tension in its understanding of Flood's most developed public argument, the 1970 book, *The Way It Is*. Weiss struggles to generically categorize Flood's text, alternatively labeling it a "memoir," and an "apologia." Finding a category against whose implied standards this text might be measured is an admittedly difficult task; Flood blends stories of his childhood with political observations grounded in social history, and he attacks baseball's power structure through both dialectical arguments and figurative allegories. Struggling to discover Flood's genuine purpose in *The Way It Is*, Weiss explains his predicament:

> At last, then, Carter and Flood's book is an apologia, Flood's justification of his battle. Equally, *The Way It Is* is the story of Flood's life as he was about to turn thirty-two, but especially the story of his baseball career and temperament as it set the stage for his reasoning or lack thereof in challenging the reserve system. Despite the fact that the book is something other than it claims to be, and that it was written when it Flood was still relatively young, the reader will find it referred to in these pages as a memoir.[10]

The frustration Weiss expresses is not exactly between the generic characteristics of an apologia and those of a memoir (which might be expected to work together productively), but instead in the way that these genres lead Weiss to a problematic critical judgment of *The Way It Is*. Categorizing it as a "memoir" allows Weiss to measure Flood's recollections against a documentary standard of empirical truth. At the same time, categorizing it as an "apologia" urges Weiss to recognize Flood's strategic objectives. Taken together, these tasks prove damning for Curt Flood.

Weiss fits *The Way It Is* into a larger biographical narrative that portrays Flood as brooding, narcissistic, and prone to dissembling his self-pity with disingenuous pronouncements about "the way it is." Thus, he concludes his assessment of Flood's book with a promise that implicitly urges further reflection on Weiss' judgment: "[I]t is hoped that what follows is a more detached, more objective, and therefore more realistic portrait of Flood's life, and especially of his lawsuit, than is presently available. It may not be the final word, but it attempts to separate myth from reality in his life[.]"[11] Admittedly, Weiss defines the term "apologia" loosely, so the problem is not necessarily that Flood exceeds its generic boundaries. Instead, he uses apologia's strategic predicate as the ground from which to expose Flood's distortions. For Weiss, *The Way It Is* "is about Flood as a victim,"[12] meaning that a reading which appreciates its strategic function renders the act of biography complicit in cultivating a misleading image of Flood and his battle. Hence, Weiss operates from an ostensibly safe distance, testing Flood's the truth of Flood's text as if it is "propositionally summarizable."[13]

I mention Weiss' assessment of *The Way It Is* because, despite its limitations, Weiss points toward two dimensions of the text that help to situate my discussion of its

importance. First, there is no question that *The Way It Is* is apologia, at least in part. Rich disciplinary debate regarding apologia's precise characteristics notwithstanding, the text is justifying and strategic. In some places, Flood was deliberative and dialectical, making his case for reserve clause abolition by directly engaging the baseball owners' (and other critics') argumentative terrain. In other places, Flood spoke in allegories that worked to animate and dramatize the justness of his fight. Regardless of whether these allegories recorded actual events, they executed his argumentative strategy in narrative form. Second, if *The Way It Is* is understood as apologia, then it then it becomes critically necessary to view it as an instance of public address. Flood's case is certainly made *to someone* — it presumes an invested and attendant audience. Apologia, at the very least, entails unique attention to the object of address, or specifiable hearer(s) to whom the discourse is meant to appeal. If apologia arises only in the context of the need to justify one's actions, then its addressee is assumed to be in a position, above all, to pronounce judgment.

Having It Out In Public

Who was Curt Flood's addressee? The answer, in both a narrow historical sense, and in a broad analytical sense, was the public. Flood avoids any use of collective pronouns, so it is nearly impossible to safely make inferences about his intended readers by examining the subject position constituted in or through "we." Instead, Flood speaks directly to his audience only once, as "the reader," in the opening pages of *The Way It Is*:

> As the reader may already know, the story itself is about a career in professional baseball. Customary though it may be to write about that institutionalized pastime as though it existed apart from the general

> environment, my story does not lend itself to such treatment. In fact, without attention to its social setting, my story would be incomprehensible, and so would I. This is not said apologetically. The facts are that nobody who plays professional baseball or owns its teams or reports its goings-on to the public is exempt from what takes place beyond the stadium walls. Some of the players hope that they are and most of the sedentary members of the cast pretend that they are, but you will get no such mythology here.[14]

Flood's assumption that "the reader" might be expecting a story about baseball positions his addressee vaguely. From one perspective, Flood can be read as addressing the "reading public," the baseball public, and the fans; or, a public that exists empirically prior to his discourse. From a broader view, however, Flood's assertion of social context as the condition of understanding his story and identity aims to constitute a novel public space that that exists at a critical distance from the "mythology" circulating in public discourse. As Michael Warner suggests, "all discourse or performance addressed to a public must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate and it must attempt to realize that world through address."[15] On this account, Flood's book can be read productively as an attempt to rehabilitate the public imagination in order to address readers armed with the ability to view mythology as such. It is, in other words, a intervention that positions Flood as the mediating figure in his audience's transformation.

Much of Flood's anxiety over his public image centered on the sports press, the writers and columnists who provided (and continue to provided) baseball with its cultural narratives. He says:

> To challenge the sanctity of organized baseball was to question one of the primary myths of American culture. To persist in the heresy required profound conviction, with endurance to match. I knew in advance that

> litigation might take years. I had become thirty-two in January 1970, and could not expect my athletic skills to survive prolonged disuse. The proprietors and publicists of baseball could be depended on to remind me of this at every turn, meanwhile reviling me in print as a destroyer, an ingrate, a fanatic, a dupe.[16]

This assertion bespoke the perception that his discourse faced formidable constraints. Baseball journalists, acting as agents of the owners, would, Flood feared, damage his cause by manipulating his public image. It is certainly a cynical prediction of how his lawsuit would be framed, but implicit in the prediction is the displacement of one circulatory space with another. Throughout *The Way It Is*, Curt Flood attempted to indict the mediated landscape through which his public image was maliciously manicured by the sports press and supplant that landscape with a world of his own making.

In 1969, his last season playing baseball for the St. Louis Cardinals, Flood had earned a salary of $90,000. After being traded to the Philadelphia Phillies, their general manager, John Quinn, in an effort to lure an obviously displeased Flood to Philadelphia, made him a contract offer of $100,000 for the 1970 season. The amount would have placed Flood within the top tier of Major League Baseball's wage-earners. In 1968, *Sports Illustrated* placed a riveting action shot of Flood making a leaping catch in front of the ivy-covered wall of Chicago's centerfield on the magazine's cover with the headline, "Curt Flood: Baseball's Best Centerfielder."[17] This compliment was slightly backhanded; some observers saw it as a thinly-veiled swipe at Willie Mays, arguably the best player of his generation, but whose physical skills were obviously diminishing by the late 1960s. Nevertheless, the Phillies' contract offer was commensurate with Flood's professional stature, and the specific amount of $100,000 was meant to place him into a

symbolic category of elite ballplayers. Flood listened politely to John Quinn, but rejected their proposal in favor of pursuing his lawsuit. In *The Way It Is*, Flood commented indignantly about the manner in which his rejection of the Philadelphia offer was covered in the press:

> Comparatively few newspaper, radio, and television journalists seemed able to understand what I was doing. That a ball player would pass up a $100,000 year was unthinkable. The player's contention that he was trying to serve a human cause was somehow unbelievable. Who had ever heard of anyone giving up $100,000 for a principle? For them, the only plausible explanation was derangement. Or perhaps I was a dupe of Marvin Miller. And, in any case, I would surely show up in time for spring training. I wasn't that crazy. As a matter of fact, more than one newsman nudged my ribs with his elbow and winked conspiratorially about the money he thought I might blackmail from the Phillies with this suit. I began to wonder if the whole goddamned country wasn't infected with moral corruption. Some of the same people who criticized me for threatening the Good of the Game made it clear that they would respect my acumen if I abandoned the Player's Association, disavowed honor and signed for a higher salary than the Phillies had previously offered.[18]

Flood presented a stark contrast in values between his service to a "human cause," and the avaricious motivations that the mass media ascribed to him. For Flood, the tendency to mischaracterize him was not even necessarily a malign impulse, but instead an unfortunate function of their assumptive logic. The central contrast was between the discursive world in which his public identity was situated and the one he attempted to project. Flood implied that the press' preoccupation with the size of his salary was not simply indicative of a failure to understand his motivations properly, but that a larger, foundational moral failure rendered his genuine motivations *incoherent* relative to the prevailing conditions of sport's publicity. Under these conditions, "humanity,"

"principle," and "honor" were thought to always be a ruse — they merely helped to line one's pockets. Alternatively, they were, for Flood, terms that helped characterize the world in which he hoped his public rhetoric could be taken seriously, on its own terms, and at face value. Thus, Flood's commentary on the press was more than an expression of simple moral disdain; it was more importantly an attempt to reorder the space in which discourse about him would circulate.

This effort illustrates what Warner calls "the poetic function of public discourse."[19] Concerned with exposing the "language ideology" that takes the public to be a space of rational-critical dialog, Warner emphasizes the dynamic interdependence between stylized rhetorical forms and public address's reception contexts. He says, "There is no speech or performance addressed to a public that does not try to specify in advance, in highly condensed ways, the lifeworld of its circulation: not just through its discursive claims — of the kind that can be said to be oriented toward understanding — but through the pragmatics of speech genres, idioms, stylistic markers, address, temporality, mise-en-scene, citational field, interlocutory protocols, lexicon, and so on. Its circulatory fate is the realization of that world."[20] This conception of public address entails a notion of publicity characterized by both an ideational element and a poetic-expressive element. In other words, the arguments contained in public speech cohere only within the figural world implied and imagined in its moment of address. From this perspective, all public discourse aims at constituting its reception context; addressees are not simply disinterested adjudicators of public argument who acquire their critical skills elsewhere, but instead are the recipients of an invitation to occupy the world created by the speaking performance itself. Considered according to this model of public address,

Flood's argument for reserve clause abolition in *The Way It Is* cannot be separated from his figurative gestures. Moreover, Warner's insertion of public address into a world-making project focuses critical attention on Flood's anxieties regarding the "decision to have it out *in public* with the owners of organized baseball."[21]

"The Show"

Throughout *The Way It Is*, Flood exercises a tendency to revise common knowledge regarding his lawsuit specifically by revising the public understanding of baseball more broadly. Generally speaking, this attempt entailed establishing Flood's perspective as a baseball insider and then presenting insights about baseball's "ideology" that were possible only from the insider's point of view. Stated differently, in *The Way It Is*, Flood assumed the role of an informant, a kind of whistle-blower, whose case was made according to a sequence of revelations. He enacted this position by repeatedly characterizing baseball as inauthentic, as "show business." For example, after detailing "the mythology in which [the owners of major-league baseball] swaddle the minds of their customers and employees," Flood said:

> After decades of such bullshit, the loyal fan knows exactly as much and no more about the inner workings of baseball as the industry deems advisable. Which is not very much and often is besides the point. To understand baseball at all, and make reasonable demands of it, the fan must bear in mind that baseball is show business. Their protestations notwithstanding, the owners measure the Good of the Game in terms of the profits that remain after expenses are subtracted from receipts. Everything else is subordinated, including the quality of what takes place on the playing field.[22]

This assertion proves two points, each of which are supported by Warner's conception of public address. First, although Flood explicitly recognized that his readers might be expecting a book about baseball, he addressed them not as fans, but as members of a public bound by a putatively refreshed understanding of what being a fan entailed. "The loyal fan" was a victim of illusion, and once addressed by Flood, one was either a loyal baseball fan no longer, or one was claiming possession of Flood's knowledge from the start. Second, he undermined the image of baseball by adding new context to the "Good of the Game." Flood's capitalization of that phrase bespoke its significance sarcastically, urging his addressees to apprehend it as the rhetorical sign of a public lie.

John Haiman uses the stage metaphor to explain the function of sarcasm, a rhetorical trope that bears close relation to irony: "The sarcast perceives only two versions of reality: that which obtains on the stage among the characters where he or she pretends to be and that which obtains for the playwright in real life, where the sarcast really stands. The sarcast's perspective is that of the know-it-all wiseguy, who rolls his eyes while he mouths the lines of his 'role,' demonstrating that he appreciates their absurdity."[23] It was Flood's position as a baseball insider, as a disgruntled purveyor of baseball's mythology, that cast him rhetorically into the role of Haiman's sarcast. Flood admits, "Like other showfolk, the the player usually understands the commercial necessity of kidding the public. He is willing enough to cooperate in that regard if only to be in on the joke. What burns him is the awareness that certain of his contributions to the fables of baseball strengthen the employer's position and weaken his own."[24] So weakened by the capriciousness of baseball owners and the hegemony of their public rhetoric, Flood turned to sarcasm as a means of illuminating disingenuous discourses of

oppression. Flood was the playwright who mouthed the absurd lines of the baseball player, thus directing his addressees to measure the difference between baseball's stage (its "show" quality) and its abject realities.

Flood's reliance on sarcasm as a tropological force in *The Way It Is* cannot be underestimated, especially in assessing its poetic-expressive quality. Consider his lengthy and acerbic description of baseball owners and the relationship they were said to cultivate with players:

> These dedicated men are custodians of a great tradition, the slightest neglect of which would plunge the entire United States into degradation.
>
> Their gravest concern is the Good of the Game. With this in mind, they maintain constant vigil over the integrity of the game—its competitive honesty and fairness. And the cultivate the Image of the Game, having realized long ago that what the public perceives, or thinks it perceives, need not always correspond to reality. If reality becomes an inconvenience, it can be camouflaged.
>
> Everyone in baseball plays a structured role in the promotional rites that emphasize the integrity, enhance the Image and consolidate the Good of the Game. On camera or within earshot of working reporters, the behaved player is an actor who projects blissful contentment, inexhaustible optimism and abiding attitude.
>
> "I'll sweep out the clubhouse to stay here," he says. "I love the game. I owe everything to baseball. I am thankful to this grand organization for giving me my big chance. I'm in love with this town and its wonderful fans. Even though I had kind of a slow start, I think I'm getting it all together now. I expect to have a big year."[25]

If irony inheres in the contradiction between what is said and what is meant, then this passage took eloquent advantage of its corrosive qualities in order to execute its critique. Interestingly, Flood spoke in two sarcastic voices: first, in the voice of the owners who pompously asserted their their paternalist responsibilities, and second, in the voice of a player whose public persona depended on a cliched discourse of gratitude. Moreover,

Flood's mention of the press ("on camera or within earshot of working reporters") operated as the setting in which this inauthentic exchange was said to occur. Imagined as a promotional conspiracy designed to shape public perception of baseball, Flood's identification of this dynamic was more than a cynical comment on the sociology of sports journalism; it was also an exhaustive indictment of baseball's mode of circulating discourse. Flood makes no attempt to argue *with* baseball. He certainly refuted the owners' arguments, and he may have regarded ownership and the press as a complex of interlocutors, but he took their intransigence for granted in making his case. It was the observers of this debate that stood as his audience, a choice which entailed a dismantling of baseball's discursive "lifeworld." Flood delivered a public warning by sarcastically lending voice to the dialogue that bore the mark of oppressive circumstances.

The question of Flood's "audience," crucial to understanding *The Way It Is* as possessing a rhetorical strategy, becomes clearer once baseball obtains its inauthenticity. Though he failed to address baseball's owners in the second person, he surely expected that they and their agents would be readers. His rhetorical choices demonstrated, however, that he did not expect them to give up their side of the fight in a bout of instantaneous edification. Weiss' adoption of the term "apologia" is useful, then, at least to the extent that it identifies *The Way It Is* as a public warrant for action. Flood understood that baseball owners used a paternalistic rhetoric in order to manage their public image, thus securing an economic advantage. By offering themselves as guardians of the public trust, they invested it with social and cultural significance and thereby ensured a considerable stream of television and ticket revenue. From this perspective, Flood understood that moving "public opinion" would be crucial factors in producing a

positive outcome through his lawsuit. After all, if genuine pressure could be brought to bear on the owners to loosen the reserve clause, the owners' would take that as a financial motivation to do so. Flood believed also that baseball broadcasters influenced player salaries. Speaking of Harry Caray, the radio broadcaster for the sixties Cardinals, Flood said his "judgments were influential, both immediately and cumulatively. By affecting public opinion, he affected our livelihood. So we kept tabs on his broadcasts. If our stock was going down, we needed to know it."[26] Together, these assertions attributed a type of agency to public opinion grounded in its ability to render judgment with material force; Flood imagined public opinion as holding a causal relationship to the quality of his baseball employment and the quantity of his salary. Understood as apologia, *The Way It Is* has the public as its audience by virtue of the influential judgment it is capable of pronouncing.

Flood's self-comparison to Frederick Douglass permits a useful sight-line for understanding his use of sarcastic irony. In an essay that examines the ironic rhetorical dimensions of Douglass' famous oration, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July," Robert Terrill worries about irony's political potential, recognizing that it can have an arresting effect on audiences who are asked only to seek distance, but never asked explicitly to pass judgment. This concern, argues Terrill, is grounded "a disconnection between [irony's] figural and attitudinal manifestations."[27] In other words, as a figure, irony provides distance and insight, but as an attitude, irony cannot perform the deliberative or persuasive work necessary to urge action. As an element of political strategy, this observation reveals a paradox in Flood's frequent use of irony. On the one hand, Flood used sarcasm to reveal that owners and the press, as the architects of baseball

publicity, together constructed an inauthentic world replete with hidden dangers, thus making the public the object of his critique. On the other hand, Flood needed the public to pronounce judgment on his case, move opinion, and win his case, thus making the public simultaneously the audience of his critique. The paradoxical circumstance is this: If his audience exists in a hall of mirrors, it would seem to lack a model of political action. Curt Flood, after all, told the public to never trust what it sees (or hears) in public.

With respect to Frederick Douglass, Terrill resolves this kind of tension by suggesting that Frederick Douglass' "rhetorical practice is intended to produce, in his audience, an ironic political attitude, at least temporarily, and thus draws figure and attitude into a dynamic relationship."[28] Terrill argues that Douglass' ironic inversion of typical American platitudes aimed at effectuating a transformation among white audiences: "Irony turned toward political ends, then, is sacrificial, calling for its own termination. Douglass [...] offers his (white) audiences both narcotic and goad, bidding them to observe passively their own inconsistencies and then actively to redress them."[29] Similarly, Flood's use of sarcasm avoids irony's paralysis by revealing the public's falsely constructed character to the public itself. His sarcasm was central to a poetic project in which the public could obtain "a withdrawal and detachment that is preliminary to judgment. One must exit the fray in order to see the available means within it."[30] In Flood's case, and from his point of view, the agency of public opinion consisted not in its ability to abolish baseball's reserve clause — only the owners can do that — but instead in its ability to bring hidden discourses into view and thereby influence the owners and legal system. Thus, when Flood gave voice to the inauthentic

exchange between the owner, protecting the "Good of the Game," and the player, who is "thankful to this grand organization for giving me my big chance," *The Way It Is* "specifies the lifeworld of its circulation"[31] by projecting a public capable of viewing its own distorted image.

Racism and Cynicism

The St. Louis Cardinals lost the 1968 World Series in seven games to the Detroit Tigers. In the top of the seventh inning in the seventh game, with the score tied at zero, Curt Flood committed a fielding error that many baseball historians and fans have argued was decisive in the Cardinals' loss. Misjudging a line-drive that went over his head in centerfield, Flood allowed a base clearing triple, producing three runs in a game whose final score was 4-1. Stuart Weiss views Flood's personal reaction to this moment as evidence of a psychological depression into which Flood would spiral by March 1969, when Cardinals team owner August A. Busch delivered a speech to an immediate audience composed of both the team's players and the press. Busch accused the players for having fostered a disconnection with fans by demanding salary increases and pension improvements in the winter prior to spring training. He told the players, "Your representatives threw down all kinds of challenges, threats and ultimatums." Busch's tantrum continued, "many fans are saying our players are getting fat...that they now only think of money...and less of the game itself. And it's the game they love and have enjoyed and paid for all these years."[32] Weiss suggests that Flood took this speech personally, not just as one member of the Cardinals among many similar others, but as the World Series goat who petulantly asked for a salary increase. The speech in its entirety appears as an appendix in *The Way It Is*, and for Flood, Busch's diatribe served

to illustrate that the notion of the "Good of the Game" was not something he invented as a straw argument. It was, instead, the rhetorical centerpiece of the owners' effort to position the players and fans as antagonists and the owners as victimized bystanders.

Suggesting that "Mr. Busch staged a happening," Flood described his visceral response:

> Picture the situation. If those remarks had been made by a stranger in a bar, any of the Cardinals would have felt free to reply and would have had no trouble exposing the mean reasoning for what it was. But the remarks were not delivered by a stranger in a bar. The orator was the boss himself. His chief lieutenants were at his side. Reporters were covering the event. In no other industry of the Western world could an employer publicly belittle his professional staff without risking mass resignations. Knowing that we would not resign (because baseball law does not permit us to seek another employer), Busch was using the occasion not only to revile us, but to reassert the uniquely feudal privileges vested in him and other club owners by baseball's reserve system.[33]

Aside from the patronizing substance of Busch's speech, Flood was obviously enraged by the public nature of the castigation. The presence of reporters guaranteed that the players could not respond, at least not in a way that would not ultimately prove the "Boss's" point. Busch attacked the Cardinal players at length for harboring financial motivations at odds with the interests of "the fans," but in Flood's view, "the fans" merely stood in for the interests of the owners. In essence, Flood revealed the logic according to which baseball's public sphere operated. The "good of the game," "the fans," and even "the kids," worked as disguised expressions of the owners' smug greed. The job of the press was to constitute a discursive space in which this idiom could be safely transmitted and through which the owners could project a kind of public that takes

the sanctity of baseball for granted. In theory, Busch's accusations might have been directed at the press — they, after all, were responsible for reporting the player discontent that Busch found so threatening to institutionalized baseball. As Flood says, "If baseball's customers are unhappy about the increasing salaries of players, it is because the baseball industry has promoted that particular frame of mind through the press."[34] Instead, Busch used baseball's public image to his advantage. Inviting the press to hear his comments transformed the harangue into an admonishment that both set the terms for understanding what was happening between baseball and its labor and officially communicated the power relation between owners and players. As Flood pointed out, Busch used the conditions of publicity to assert the owners' "feudal" privilege; he was sanctimonious precisely because he knew the baseball press would put his sanctimony into play.

Viewed against this background, Flood's sarcasm in *The Way It Is* reached past indecorousness toward an incisive critique of the baseball "laws" that found protection in the relationship between ownership and those that generate baseball's presence in the public imagination. For Flood, this relationship was the stuff of which baseball's "show," "mythology," or "stage," was made. He distilled this perception into the following observation, designed to define the context of his public address: "According to one doctrine of the young, I was already too old to be trusted. I disagreed. It seemed to me that I saw the world with young eyes. I was offended by the disparity between American reality and American pretension. I wanted reality upgraded, pretension abolished."[35] Whether in an effort to abolish pretension, or to reveal the staged illusion, or to mock the show, *The Way It Is* strategically put irreverence into circulation. For

Flood, baseball's existence in publicity depended on the poisonous relationship that produced baseball's romantic genres and thereby consigned players to abject subordination. Sarcasm provided his audience with a discursive tool with which they might recognize the image as a scam; a sarcastic mode of address might inject the public sphere with the antidote for the diseases of mass delusion.

At the risk of belaboring the metaphor, it is worthwhile to consider the question of the patient a little further. *The Way It Is* operated strategically as a warrant for action hoping to publicly legitimate his offense to the national pastime. But, Flood's anxiety about the public nature of his struggle evinces only an oblique connection to his audience. He addressed the public but critiqued the conditions of baseball's publicity. The question that persists, then, is instrumental: Who did Flood aim to convince? As apologia, *The Way It Is* is an argumentative endeavor. And though Warner unmasks the "language ideology" that equates public address with rational-critical debate, as an *argument*, *The Way It Is* exercised the public sphere's deliberative imperatives. But Flood's rhetorical constraints included the "speech genres, idioms, stylistic markers," etc., constitutive of baseball's public existence. In response to this dissonance, Flood turned to sarcasm, poetically assembling the reception context of his argument by leading the public toward self-doubt. Robert Terrill asserts that "[i]rony is inactive, mute, and self-indulgent, but it also is expansive and multivisual."[36] Flood's sarcasm speaks to baseball's public, but invites that public to view itself as inauthentic, as the mark in a long discursive con, and thereby adopt the "intellectual attitude"[37] necessary to re-imagine baseball as a social institution. But since sarcasm's ironic effect "does not generate the kinetic energy required to wield that edge as a political strategy," it does not

constitute judgment. Instead, sarcasm entails a litany of potential judgments. As the fabric woven into an innovative rhetorical project, *The Way It Is* demands that it be circulated in a public sphere characterized by a logic of false impressions. In this sense, Flood aims to convince anyone willing to understand *The Way It Is* according to the ironic distance it promotes.

The extent of Flood's sarcasm cannot be overstated, both in terms of its frequency and its vituperative quality. For example, the introductory chapter of *The Way It Is* closes with Flood anxious at home in March 1970, frustrated by a craving for baseball. Seeking catharsis, and moving restlessly though his apartment, he settles on reading his mail, an experience he shares graphically:

> Three letters for me. A child begging for an autographed picture. An old ballplayer wishing me luck. And the third, on lined paper torn from a notebook, began with "Dear Nigger."
>
> The animal informed me that if it were not for the great game of baseball I would be chopping cotton or pushing a broom. And that I was a discredit to my race. By definition, any black hurts his people if he is other than abjectly, supinely, hand-lickingly grateful for having been allowed to earn a decent living.
>
> I assembled a martini, very dry. I probably had spoiled the animal's breakfast. I might even have ruined his day. No doubt it had started splendidly, with a front page full of grand news about undesirable elements being bombed, shot, incinerated, beaten, arrested, suspended, expelled, drafted, and otherwise coped with here and abroad. Then he must have turned to the sporting page, where horror confronted him. Curt Flood had sued baseball on constitutional grounds. If the newspaper was typical, it lied that a victory for Flood would mean the collapse of our national pastime. God profaned! Flag desecrated! Motherhood defiled! Apple pie blasphemed! The animal was furious. Them niggers is never satisfied.[38]

Whether or not the precise details of this story are historically accurate, Flood created a character, "the animal," to personify everything he was up against. This synecdochic figure had no specific identity apart from its expression of racist entitlement and its uncritical devotion to baseball's nationalist image. "The animal's" racism and nationalism were coincident with a limited sense of racial accommodation that approves nothing but the same grateful reply demanded by Gussie Busch. In enacting a truth-telling persona through a sarcastic rendering of the voice of the oppressor, Flood invited his audience to view his antagonists at work, offering the "animal's" own words in place of his own so that such discourse could reveal its repugnant motives. If there was any question that Flood understood his constraints as containing a racist dimension, Flood answered clearly by concluding the allegory with this observation: "I am pleased that God made my skin black, but I wish he had made it thicker."[39]

Flood's insertion of racialized discourse into his sarcastic mode of address indicates that the system of oppression he imagined was not merely a consequence of a beguiling romantic image, but instead was sustained by a thematic articulation to the racist discourses of the late sixties and early seventies. He says, "The hypocrisies of the baseball industry could not possibly have been sustained unless they were symptoms of a wider affliction. Wherever I turned, I found fresh evidence that this was so. Baseball was socially relevant, and so was my rebellion against it."[40] This assertion of social context, that baseball's situation was symptomatic of larger issues, helped Flood turn his sarcastic gaze outward — away from self-indulgence — toward critical genres predisposed to sympathy with his cause. Contrasting sarcasm with unintentional forms of irony, Haiman says, "the playwright sees both the message and the metamessage; so

do the elect among the audience; the characters in the play itself, however, do not." Personifying "the animal," Flood was not addressing baseball owners, their sympathizers, nor even racists. "The animal" was a character that delivered a "metamessage" which, combined with ambiguous gestures toward a "wider affliction," elected an audience with a critical view. Put differently, *The Way It Is* behaved like a discursive party crasher, addressing an audience that can identify with his "rebellion" because it has a similarly styled critical acumen in place. The cynic who knew how to roll her eyes in disgust at the hypocrisies of "God and country" might be the same cynic who would roll her eyes at the "Good of the Game." In sum, various forms of opposition working against injustice in 1970 could be summoned to his cause if his idiomatic cynicism could find quarter in their discourses.

***

Two additional points from Warner's conception of public address help to summarize this analysis of sarcasm in Flood's rhetoric. First, public addressees are real individuals, "people who do not commonly recognize themselves as virtual projections."[41] This important but easily misplaced point brings Flood's particular circumstances into relief. Flood could project his reflexive, ironically self-aware public *ad infinitum* in *The Way It Is*, but that didn't mean he was really going to bring it about. Speaking at all, as he says, "without interruption or modification by anyone," meant risking further alienation. The publication of the book, as opposed to a series of television appearances or interviews in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* may have sought a path to the public around the press, but Flood had to know that the book would be quoted either to his detriment or in his defense. And even if he were not quoted, *The Way It Is*

would operate for the press, at the very least, as a means of gauging his persona.[42] Anything he said could be used against him, so to speak. The owners and press were, for Flood, a cohort of discourse engineers quite capable of absorbing his blow. Perhaps ironic reversals were his *only* chance to destabilize matters, but that does not mean that they necessarily *stood* a chance.

Second, the circulation of public address is not a purely theoretical phenomenon; to work it must literally find itself in new locations. Warner's elaboration of this idea is rich with useful metaphors: "Public discourse says not only 'Let a public exist,' but 'Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way.' It then goes in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success - success being further attempts to cite, circulate, and realize the world understanding it articulates. Run it up a flagpole and see who salutes. Put on a show and see who shows up."[43] In order to work as a strategic document — in order to actually manage public opinion in a way favorable to Flood's cause — *The Way It Is* would have to audition for circulation through the places that mattered. Sarcasm was certainly part of this audition, since it constituted the primary way in which Flood saw the world. *The Way It Is* could confirm the existence of such a public only to the extent that it found its way into spaces of public discourse that saw the world in the same way: shaded by irony, dissimulation, and pretense. When Flood's blackness became part of his show, when the flag being run up the pole included black as a primary color, *The Way It Is* attempted to find a unique and hopeful circulatory lifeworld. Perhaps black addressees would know something about the rhetoric of false promises.

Section B — Discovering Dehumanization: Curt Flood's Double-Consciousness

Flood's 1969 meeting with the player representatives in Puerto Rico is worth recalling because it illuminates a problematic tension in his rhetorical situation. Tom Haller's question, "are you suing baseball because you're black?," forced Flood to resolve the dissonance between what he claimed as personal conviction and the practical realities of any public rationale. Exactly what motivated Flood was for the next two years was subject to open debate, meaning that its expression turned on his ability to manage the meaning and influence — the politics — of his racial identity. On the one hand, in *The Way It Is*, Flood's blackness was in full view animating his life history. Among "three factors that emerged to influence Flood's decision," Michael Lomax argues in reading Flood's motives off the "autobiography," that "the first was black rage."[44] Lomax locates Flood's challenge within the context of "Black Power." Though he recognizes that "the slogan's meaning was contingent upon who defined it," Lomax puts Flood in relation to widespread "disillusionment" among professional black athletes regarding "racism and structural inequality" in sport, asserting that "the same angry mood permeated Curt Flood's autobiography."[45] Brad Snyder makes a similar case about Flood's motivations, but on the other hand suggests that Flood's end of the Puerto Rico conversation was simply disingenuous. Snyder says, "Flood knew that his answer may have satisfied his fellow players, but it again raised the question about his true motivations. [...] Flood did not tell any of the players about the racism that he had experienced in and out of baseball or his passion for the civil rights movement. His answer to Haller's question was technically correct - the reserve clause did affect players of all races - but the answer avoided the lifetime of motivations behind his lawsuit."[46]

So, on the other hand, his meeting with the players may have meant to relegated race to the background. As a kind of rhetorical Hamlet on the matter of race, Flood attempted to elide its dilemmas — did it matter, or didn't it? — through a sophisticated sense of humanism predicated on racialized double-consciousness.

According to Marvin Miller, the Players Association representative, this is precisely how Flood responded to Tom Haller's question:

> I'd be lying if I told you that as a black man I hadn't gone through worse than my white teammates. I'll also say that, yes, I think the change in black consciousness in recent years has made me more sensitive to injustice in every area of my life. But I want you to know that what I'm doing here I'm doing as a ballplayer, a major league ballplayer, and I think it's absolutely terrible that we have stood by and watched this situation go on for so many years and never pulled together to do anything about it. It's improper, it shouldn't be allowed to go any further, and the circumstances are such that, well, I guess this is the time to do something about it.[47]

Blackness, Sensitivity, and Consciousness

Most contemporary observers focus on the notions of "sensitivity," and "black consciousness" to help resolve Flood's apparent dissonance and render his motivations narrowly in terms of baseball. Alex Belth's 2006 biography situates the Haller exchange in such a way: "Flood acknowledged that being black made him especially sensitive to the inequalities of the current system. He admitted that he had become increasingly aware of this during the past several years as black consciousness influenced African Americans around the country. But he made it clear that his action was not motivated by race. He was acting as a ballplayer for the benefit of other players, for whom he was prepared to risk his career."[48] Snyder suggests the same: "Flood explained that as a black

man he had experienced many hardships in baseball, hardships that made him more sensitive to injustice than the average white player. Yet, he was not suing baseball as a black man; he was suing as a major league ballplayer."[49] Though loyal to the letter of Flood's comments, these observations foreground Flood's baseball identity in order to quarantine his black identity. To be sure, Flood spoke in that meeting from two positions — as both a black man and a baseball player. Be that as it may, Belth and Snyder propose a disjunction in Flood's subjectivity in order to resolve two problems, each of which emerge from Flood's response to Tom Haller.

First, proposing a neat division between Flood's black identity and baseball identity helps to answer the question of his "true" motivations. From this perspective, Haller's question is a historiographic prompt that urges Flood's biographers to discover if he was, in fact, suing because he was black. Belth, Snyder, and even Stuart Weiss are careful to contextualize Flood's case in the the late sixties and early seventies when the civil rights movement underwent turbulent change. But the conflicts and shifts of "black consciousness" central to such change are not the objects of their investigations. As such, Belth and Snyder connect Flood to an ambiguous sense of the "spirit of the sixties" in order to ground their claims to his historical significance, but then dismiss Flood's assertion of black consciousness in order to establish the meaning of Flood's lawsuit relative to baseball. On this score, "sensitivity" becomes the key term in Flood's explanation, positioning Flood's blackness as the means through which he acquired an enlightened affective faculty. In other words, the division in Flood's identity renders his blackness parallel to his cause, not constitutive of it — Flood's blackness allows him to *feel* oppression when others might not. Consequently, Flood's "black consciousness" is a

private state of affairs, unrelated to the issues he and the Players Association would have to face together. His "true" motivations, then, are aligned ostensibly with the players' interests.

Second, Flood's divided identity helps to build a case for his instrumental reasoning. On this account, his "true" motivations are beside the point. Flood, as Snyder insinuates, may actually have sued baseball because he was black, but to admit that point would be to poison his relationship with the players. To assert his black identity explicitly as central to his cause would be to invite the "white backlash" the players expressly feared in attending to Haller's question. Connecting Flood once again to the "spirit of the sixties," Stuart Weiss writes,

> The late sixties was an extremely volatile period, the era not only of the war in Vietnam and its protest movements, but also of the radical demands and methods of the Black Panthers in Flood's hometown. Conversely, this was also a period marked by a backlash among whites who feared the ends and means of this radicalism. Apparently, Haller wanted to know if Flood's desire to sue was linked in any way to this new black militancy, and if he would try to use his and their lawsuit, with its attendant publicity, to promote a militancy that would invite a backlash against the Players Association.[50]

In highlighting the "demands and methods" of black radicalism, Weiss rings a note of disdain for Flood's gesture toward race, especially if one considers that Flood had no known connection to the "Black Panthers in Flood's hometown," an allusion that seems gratuitous. Flood was born in Oakland, and learned to play baseball in its parks, but his racialized experiences would be felt most acutely in the Deep South, in places like High Point, North Carolina, where Flood played minor league baseball for the Cincinnati Reds

organization. In any case, Weiss implies that Haller and the other players were worried that Flood would use "their" lawsuit as a cause celebre on behalf of a radical black agenda. Whether or not this was the essence of their concern, Weiss argues that Flood needed to distance himself publicly from racialized expressions in order to establish a coalition with the Players Association. Consequently, Flood's "black consciousness" would require suppression if he planned to create an effective political strategy.

Disjoining Flood's black identity from his ballplayer identity assists Flood's biographers in erasing the symbolic complications entailed his assertion of "black consciousness." To the extent that Flood can be understood as *either* black *or* as a baseball player, a case can be made that he buried his blackness in pursuit of his cause. Out of his explanation to Tom Haller, Flood emerges as either an individual with an amplified sensitivity toward unrelated, albeit analogous, instances of injustice, or as a wisely strategic political actor who understood what he needed to say in order to get what he wanted. Precisely what Flood meant by "black consciousness" is left largely unexplored as his biographers are content to draw murky connections to phrases like "black power," "the civil rights movement," "radicalism," or "militancy." Relative to this posture, two points remain unsettled. First, *The Way It Is*, published about a year after Flood's meeting with Haller and the others, highlights, very vividly, a narrative grounded in his experiences as a black man. Given real worry about a white backlash, combined with the bare political necessity of forging an alliance with white teammates, Flood's elaboration of a racialized story seems almost foolhardy. Second, if the "change in black consciousness" made Flood "more sensitive" to injustice, then certainly Flood's race politics cannot be sentimentalized into the amorphous vapor of "extremely volatile"

sixties radicalism. The problem with equating Flood's racialized story to the affective state of sensitivity is that the complexity of "consciousness" is obscured in the service of unfounded historical inferences. Flood's blackness cannot be divorced from his identity by historical fiat; he was a black baseball player whose comprehensive view of the world, baseball included, was influenced by a racialized epistemology. Flood not only *felt* injustice, but his blackness taught him to *know* injustice when he saw it. Or, perhaps more to the point, Flood knew the discourses of injustice when he heard them.

Instead of stressing the notion of sensitivity in Flood's response to Tom Haller, I contend that if emphasis is placed on "black consciousness," *The Way It Is* becomes fully intelligible as a strategic rhetorical document. There is no question that a direct announcement of a racial motivation would have been polarizing and therefore damaging to Flood's cause. As principled as he might have been, Flood was seeking a tangible outcome: he wanted to either remain in St. Louis or be given the opportunity to negotiate a contract with another baseball team. Realizing that objective depended on the support of the Players Association, an organization with increasing leverage (even if it was merely symbolic) and the ability to pay his legal bills. From Flood's perspective, the problem with the Players Association was its entrenched willingness to assume a subservient position relative to the owners. Speaking of a labor dispute in 1961, Flood recalls, "In those days, the Association's primary problem was ignorance of the broad principles that govern fairness in employer-employee relationships. Whatever we had, we owed to the employer with abject gratitude. Whatever else we might get could be obtained only through his paternal kindness. He was a feudal lord and we were his humble petitioners."[51] Securing their support would require a deft touch; even if they

agreed with him in principle, the Players Association was in its infancy and its organizational structure was delicate. Flood would need to simultaneously awaken them and reassure them, so telling Tom Haller and the others that he was suing baseball "because he was black" would have doomed his chances for their support. As Gerald Early suggests, "as some whites saw it [...] blacks were moving from being a stigmatized caste to becoming a specially privileged caste."[52] *The Way It Is*, then, was an opportunity to both perform black consciousness that was deeply and genuinely felt and at the same time navigate baseball's slippery racial terrain. In this sense, the truth of Flood's motivations are neither here nor there. The important point is that "black consciousness" offered Flood the resources to execute a maneuver that perforated his blackness from the case. With race linked but detachable, Flood was able to use the consciousness borne of black experience as a foil for constructing a pedagogy of oppressive discursive practices.[53]

Of the Coming of Curt

Given Flood's tendency to compare himself to iconic figures in the history of black American experience — Dred Scott, Frederick Douglass, Robert Brown Elliott — perhaps we could add to Flood's allusive list of luminaries with one he missed, but should not have: W. E. B. Du Bois. Calling *The Souls of Black Folk* an "incipient theoretical position about the nature of race and its pervasive role in society,"[54] Kirt Wilson argues that Du Bois "demonstrates the power of one individual who embraced the veil and double-consciousness and used them for critical production."[55] Wilson's analysis of *Souls* highlights the critical potential of these two concepts. In the opening pages of *Souls*, Du Bois writes:

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[56]

Du Bois' veil can be read as a metaphor for the material and social divisions between blacks and whites in America. Translucently partitioning a common American space, the veil operates as a boundary that marks the social limits of black identity. In this sense, the veil is the very structure of racism. By linking the veil to consciousness, Du Bois shows that the veil of race is manufactured to ensure that "the Negro" will come to acquire a self-image aligned with racism's routine operation. Interestingly, Du Bois allows a momentary glimmer of promise in this otherwise damning description. Although the veil describes the psychic condition of ostracism, "the Negro" is "gifted with second-sight in this American world." Seeing oneself through the veil provides one with the ability to see the stuff of which the veil is made. Seeing oneself through the eyes of the other permits one to see what the other sees; such is the gift of double-consciousness. By locating this condition within consciousness, Du Bois establishes an array of critical possibilities that rely on ways of seeing, ways of listening, ways of speaking, and ways of knowing. This "peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness"

sees racist circumstances, hears racist discourse, is capable of uttering it, and therefore knows, through its inescapable intimacy with the other, precisely what racism is.

The irony of double-consciousness, or what gives the veil its double-valence, is that the "gift" comes at a high price. Delivered by an oppressive agent, such "second sight" manifests only as a consequence of experience with soul-crushing racism. Du Bois provides a fictional case study of double-consciousness in "Of the Coming of John." In this poetic allegory, John leaves the boyhood innocence of his rural southern home of Altahama, Georgia to acquire an education. He works against a lifetime of disadvantage to succeed in prep school and then college, leaving Altahama behind physically and psychically. In New York, John finds himself ejected from a theater by his boyhood friend, the "white John." This experience punctuated a series of many that alerted John to the existence of the veil. In a moment of climactic indignation, John is unable to withstand his mounting recognition of racism and resolves to return to Altahama to educate and enlighten his family and friends. In Altahama, they had long spoken wistfully "of the coming of John," but his arrival, greeted with great anticipation, suddenly turns sour as John no longer exhibits his characteristically bright spirit. Hardened by his acquired knowledge of racism in the North, John had discovered the veil and had come to exhibit the bitterness and cynicism of double-consciousness. Returning to his home, John's attempt to reveal the veil is met with scorn by a black community loathe to exchange the comforts of religious tradition for the discontent of social awakening.

Wilson's account of "Of the Coming of John" focuses in on this conversation between John and his sister Jennie after his return to Altahama:

> Long they stood together, peering over the gray unresting water.
> "John," she said, "does it make every one—unhappy whey they study and learn lots of things?"
> He paused and smiled, "I'm afraid it does," he said.
> "And, John, are you glad you studied?"
> "Yes," came the answer, slowly but positively.
> She watched the flickering lights upon the sea, and said thoughtfully, "I wish I was unhappy,—and—and," putting both arms about his neck, "I think I am, a little, John."[57]

Out of this passage, Wilson draws two inferences. First, "Any set of experiences that contrasts one's personal potential to society's racist oppression can highlight the veil's presence."[58] Although John's awakening occurred primarily as a consequence of his education in the North, his experiences help to mediate Jennie's transition to double-consciousness. "Second," says Wilson, "it is not easy to understand the discourse that categorizes you as different and labels you as a problem, but unhappiness is preferable to ignorance. If a person does not see herself through the eyes of the oppressor then she will be trapped without the knowledge of that imprisonment. If she does not see the veil and embrace double-consciousness, then she misses an opportunity to resist the social forces that shape her subjectivity."[59] When one recognizes racist discourse for what it is, it is both the outcome of a difficult process and a source of pain. Moreover, seeing oneself through the eyes of the oppressor entails a self-understanding defined by one's imprisonment. Once this self-understanding is achieved, innocence is replaced with enlightened incredulity, and happiness is replaced with angry motivation to resist.

In *The Way It Is*, Flood offers a narrative of racial experience similar to DuBois' John. Like John, Flood's story begins in a small naive world, travels to discover racism, exhibits fantasies of return, and adopts a double consciousness expressed as reflective

cynicism. Like John, Flood demonstrates his double consciousness by identifying the discourses that mark oppressive circumstances. And though the moral of John's story centers on his frustration in imparting double-consciousness to the black residents of Altahama, the moral of Flood's story centers on his attempt to bear witness to universal oppression through the veil of race. At the conclusion of DuBois' allegory, John desires to return to the North. At the conclusion of *The Way It Is*, Flood desires a return to baseball.

The opening chapter of *The Way It Is*, titled "The Butterflies of March," describes the dissonance produced by the longing to once again find residence in baseball, even with its oppressive circumstances. The central theme of Flood's self-introduction is the anguish that manifests as a result of a bind: He needs to play baseball to settle his mental state, but his unsettled mental state is a consequence of his vocation's intrinsic indignities. In early March, around the beginning of baseball's spring training, Flood's mind races disquietly, and he admits to self destructive behavior: "I withdrew to a couch and consulted the beer. My body protested. It was not programmed for a morning beer in a St. Louis apartment on a sunny March 2. Years of habit had established a seasonal craving for other pursuits and a different setting."[60] He looks out his window and shares his nineteenth-floor view. After a reverent visual description of the famous Gateway Arch, erected by "leading citizens of St. Louis," Flood's prose becomes acidic:

> The wicket celebrates the city's geographic and historic good fortune as a gateway to the West. It stands also as an emblem of local and national priorities. A scant few blocks away are some of the most horrible slums in the United States. And barely yards from the arch is the old courthouse in which Dred Scott sued for his freedom. From the shattered windows of

> the worst of the slums—the government sponsored ghetto called Pruitt-Igoe—10,000 inheritors of old Dred's disappointment are free to enjoy superb views of the arch and to draw what conclusions they will. Their proximity to the city's glinting symbol of unconcern was especially educational during the merciless winter of 1969-70, when Pruitt-Igoe heating pipes burst, ice mantled the floors and subzero temperatures punished the residents for their helplessness.[61]

This passage allows Flood to begin his story at its end and push his narrative backward through the orientation it provides. It operates to condition a point of view that will take shape as the double-consciousness of his black identity. First, By juxtaposing the majesty of the arch to the slums below, he gestures toward the malicious hypocrisy inherent in venerated national imagery. Flood presents this contradiction by speaking in platitudes and then illustrating their emptiness with bitter sarcasm; certainly, Flood thinks that the slum-dwellers' views are anything but superb. Second, Flood contrasts the arch's putative symbolic meaning with an admixture of competing symbols. The "inheritors of old Dred's disappointment" are those presently burdened by his loss; in other words, the slum-dwellers are black. Thus, the injustice that Flood highlights is racialized and possesses intransigent history. Finally, Flood's invocation of Dred Scott is doubly significant. Like the fate of "old Dred," Flood sees himself as tragic hero in the fight against slavery, righteous in the struggle and destined to failure in the Supreme Court. As Dred Scott works as an appalling symbol of slavery's racial oppression, Flood writes the damning national history of racism, and the irony of its discourses, into his own particular abolitionist case. What emerges from this passage is Flood's expression of poetic sadness, made possible by a combination of sarcastic insight and racialized second-sight.

Flood initiates the discussion of his personal history - the "memoir" dimension of *The Way It Is* - in the second chapter, titled, "Your Grandfather and I." These recollections give voice to his childhood and offer an interpretation of black history in the US through a series of parables. He begins with a description of his home by comparing his socioeconomic circumstances to others in his community: "In the conventionally squalid West Oakland [California] ghetto where I grew up, most other households seemed worse off. To achieve these triumphs of stability, my parents held not fewer than four underpaid jobs at a time."[62] Flood expresses genuine appreciation for his parents' sacrifice, but comments incisively on their modest expectations for his future: "By white standards, this was a loser's outlook. By larger standards, it attested to the durability of the human spirit. I am proud of it."[63] Flood's reflective view of his childhood thus recognizes a distinction between a "white outlook" and an approach to life characteristic of the Oakland ghetto in which he was raised. As Flood looks back through the veil of race, he notices that his environment was devoid of any racialized consciousness. Trying to remember his reaction to *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, he says, "By then I was sixteen. I think that I would have been aware of local reaction, had there been much. Just as the ghetto warps its victims, it also insulates and lulls them."[64] Ultimately, as Flood looks back, he sees the ghetto not as a place of angry resistance, nor even as a source of the rebellious spirit he would enact in 1971. Instead, the West Oakland ghetto was a place of misrecognized innocence in which the veil of race was hidden from view.

This sense of isolation extends to the notion of the "American Dream," as Flood reflexively indicts the discourses of national identity. He recalls,

> Every child in the grammar and junior high schools was black. In the national tradition, the curriculum spared us the truth about our heritage. We had once been slaves, the teachers reminded, but now we were free. If anything went wrong, we had only ourselves to blame. Everybody rise and sing *Oh Beautiful for Spacious Skies*.[65]

Flood's sarcastic incantation of this patriotic hymn works to demonstrate how the veil of race is constructed cunningly to obfuscate its own existence. The "truth" of black heritage, Flood presumably knows now, is that race operates to confer authority. He continues,

> We saw few whites. None was a bearer of joy. The landlord, storekeeper, cop, teacher, meter reader and the various bill collectors were all enforcers. We accepted their presence, much as a Seminole accepts alligators. They were hazards too familiar for urgent comment. We were so accustomed to things as they were that we seldom speculated about how things ought to have been. When a teacher announced from her remote eminence that the United States was the champion of liberty and the benefactor of world mankind, we scarcely reacted.[66]

As Flood's directs his sarcasm toward his teachers' enunciation of dominant nationalist rhetoric, he remembers neither sadness nor disillusionment, but instead unmitigated disconnection. His hindsight indicates that he did not hear racism in that discourse then, but that he is able to hear it now, and it is coincident with the voice of authority.

Concretely describing his current outlook on the social relations between blacks and whites in the US, Flood inverts another familiar trope of national identity: "To be sure, black experience teaches that the American white is guilty until he proves himself innocent. No present reason exists to modify this axiom. Our country's prospects might improve if the guilty were less abundant."[67] This gesture toward experience is pivotal to

Flood's logic in *The Way It Is*. Though uttered in passing, it clarifies Flood's sense of perspective. The essential point is that he is remembering his own past, and that his reflections are noteworthy for measuring the difference between how he imagined the ghetto before and how he understands his experiences now. Even when he finds the baseball field and his talents on it, Flood refuses to call it a sanctuary from racist violence; baseball was, instead, the highlight of an unmediated existence: "I was headed for the crushing defeat that, in ghetto experience, awaited all strivers, all blacks who tried to better themselves. I did not think of it that way at all. I was not striving. I was just doing what I liked."[68] Experience, then, would teach him a lesson that could never be known inside the ghetto itself. Looking back through the veil of race, he knows it now.

The Cool Cat

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, Curt Flood was very cool; at least, that is how Flood saw himself. One of Flood's primary objects of reflection is the development of his own personality. Though the narrative of his early life concentrates on his transformation, Flood asserts a particular persona that anchors his identity throughout *The Way It Is*: "the cool cat." Describing the stage of childhood in which he found himself in modest trouble (and before he would find baseball), Flood observes, "The phase passed, because it was at odds with reality. But it lasted long enough for me to become a sufficiently cool cat. I am a young thirty-two, but I was an old, old eight."[69] The eight year-old cool cat works as a prefiguration of the persona that Flood would assert and enact twenty-four years later in *The Way It Is*. Looking backward, Flood identifies his youthful self as constituted by the attitudinal resources predictive of his

current point of view. As a way of approaching life, experience would cultivate his "coolness."

For example, once he finds baseball, and discovers that he excels at it, Flood recognizes his coolness as having an instrumental utility:

> Professional scouts began coming around to chat. None seemed overwhelmed by my prospects, but all were interested enough to inspect me at close range and appraise my personality. I have been told that I was in those days a fetching mix of cool confidence and adolescent eagerness. Seems plausible. I recall having felt that way most of the time, and I am sure that I was artful enough to project the best possible vibrations to those sharp-eyed white men with influence back East.[70]

In the kind of reversal that only double-consciousness permits, Flood sees those white men as the unwitting receivers of his roguish charm. They are the target audience of *his* inauthentic stage play, and the "cool cat" is the star of the routine. "Coolness" allows Flood to observe the performative dimension of his identity and thereby postulate a view of the white other from behind the veil of race. As an acquired faculty and discursive resource, Flood's "cool confidence" provided him with the ability to perform his black identity in a way accommodating to white observers of his behavior. In this sense, the "cool cat" was a proactive persona, and Flood's agency resided in his coolness. And though Flood racializes this persona by putting it in relation to "those sharp-eyed white men," it would not yet figure into his constitutive sense of blackness.

Soon after Flood signed his first professional baseball contract with the Cincinnati Reds, he was sent to Tampa, Florida to participate in spring training. On the way there, he fantasized about the the amenities at the Floridian Hotel, where the Reds' team

brochure indicated the team would be staying prior to the start of the 1956 season. Upon arrival at the airport, Flood witnessed and experienced Jim Crow for the first time, and "the truth struck, like a door slammed in my face."[71] When he arrived at the hotel, he was ushered by a porter to "Ma Felder's," a boardinghouse five miles from the Floridian occupied by the Reds' black players. For Flood, this experience was formative, leading` him to social insight: "I was a good athlete and might have an opportunity to show it, but this incidental skill did not redeem me socially. Officially and for the duration, I was a nigger."[72]

Flood's experience with segregation in Florida in 1956 alerted him to forms of racism he did not experience in Oakland. After training with the Reds, his contract was assigned to their minor league team in High Point-Thomasville, North Carolina. In *The Way It Is*, Flood recalls feeling hopeful about what the departure from Florida would mean: "It would be good in North Carolina. I would find myself a nice apartment. I would establish myself in the community. I would proceed to the fame and riches that awaited me."[73] This optimism would evaporate quickly, however, as Flood found himself in Jim Crow baseball parks: "One of my first and most enduring memories is of a large, loud cracker who installed himself and his four little boys in a front-row box and started yelling 'black bastard' at me. I noticed that he eyed the boys narrowly, as if to make sure that they were learning the correct intonation."[74] Flood's attention to the interaction between the racist heckler and his children is significant because it blends Flood's awareness of racist discourse with an insight into discourse's social effects. That is not to say that Flood thought the central front on the fight against racism was between parents and their children in the bleachers, it indicates Flood's growing recognition that

racism consisted in the basic social circumstances that the transmittal of racist discourse could instantiate.

In Flood's rich history of his minor league experience in the South, one parable stands out as a crystallized expression of his racial learning process. He explains in detail the category of experiences that most acutely characterized his time in North Carolina in 1956:

> Toward midseason, when I had established myself as a star, I attended to another matter of importance. During the pregame practice one evening, a little black kid jumped onto the field, grabbed a loose ball, and climbed back into the stands. One of our lint-head pitchers screamed, "Hey you black nigger, come back with that ball!" Then he jumped into the stands, took the ball from the child and returned to the field, flushed with triumph. I was waiting for him.
>
> "Don't use that word around me," I said. "You owe me more respect than that. White kids steal baseballs all the time without interference, you wool-hat son-of-a-bitch. If you ever come near me again you'll be sorry."
>
> I would have killed him without regret. I was hoping that he would swing at me, but he skulked off and gave me a wide berth for the rest of the season. His peers became more civil now that they sensed my rage. By the end of the year I had even begin to adjust to the abuse from the stands. I had developed explanations for the behavior of the fans. They were little men. The opportunity to insult a baseball player made them grow a few inches. They were not worth my contempt. Who cared about them? An so forth. None of these rationalizations could have stood close scrutiny, but they worked. I became cooler and cooler. When you have answered insult and rejection with a .340 batting average, you have done something more than philosophical. Especially when you are sure that your achievements have emancipated you from North Carolina for keeps. I believe that I would have quit baseball rather than return there.[75]

With this passage, Flood executes the transformation of his "cool cat" persona and provides a clue to the direction of his critique of baseball in later pages of *The Way It Is*. By announcing his willingness to kill his racist teammate, he dramatizes his sense of

increasing alienation and detachment. The coolness he found in himself at the age of eight, which first served him by perfecting his performance for white scouts, became in North Carolina the emotional and cognitive resource with which to compartmentalize his rage and practice his resistance pragmatically.[76] Despite his physical proximity to his teammates, Flood explains that he was able to achieve a conscious distance from them by producing rationalizations that sustained his self-image. According to the terms of Flood's social awakening in North Carolina, "coolness" became the attribute necessary to emancipate himself through his achievements in baseball. Finally, Flood offers an embryonic homology between the kind of racism that made him cool and the character of the oppression he's fighting in baseball's reserve clause by implicitly identifying each as that which would force him from baseball.

After traveling through the South playing baseball with racist teammates and in front of racist fans, Flood gained an awareness of the veil of race. In *The Way It Is*, Flood provides an account of how he arrived at double consciousness through the change in the "cool cat." As the centerpiece in the transformation of his identity and the object of his personal memory, this persona helps Flood enact his recognition of the veil's presence. Like Du Bois' John, Flood was unaware of the racism of home. "Lulled and insulated" by the Oakland ghetto, he would have to experience the limits of his blackness in a world predisposed against his achievement. Operating psychologically under the assumption that his baseball skills would assure his professional and social prominence, the racism of Florida and North Carolina - from the color line of their accommodations to the venomous fans and prejudiced baseball players - threw him into shock. The coolness which was once used to project a divided sense of self to the "white men back east"

became the locus of a fracture. Always a performance, Flood's "cool cat" transformed from an inert instrument into form of subjectivity designed to mediate others' perception of him. In short, Flood demonstrates his double consciousness through his memory of the cool cat: once he was just a kid playing baseball, but after experiencing blackness and observing the veil of race in the South, the cool cat now has second-sight. Flood sees himself in his fantasies of return, in which he "would have lunch with the mayor, dedicate the new library, [and] endow an animal hospital,"[77] and he simultaneously sees his own image from the opposite side of the veil of race: "My [minor league] teammates despised and rejected me as subhuman. I gladly would have sent them all to hell."[78]

Flood's narrative explicitly asserts his movement from innocence to enlightenment in a way similar to Du Bois' parable of John. Flood says:

> I had spent my boyhood in the shelter of the ghetto and in the isolation of the baseball park. I truly did not know, I did not know in my bones that I had been discriminated against from birth. Fully to *know* and feel the penalties of blackness, I would have to experience something new, the onslaught of the outside world. But I did not even know that.[79]

Thus, Flood came to know the meaning of his blackness through the type of knowledge that only experience with blackness in the South could provide. Furthermore, Flood used experiential knowledge to build a sense of blackness in response to the production of his racialized otherness. Speaking of the Carolina League's racism, Flood says:

> If I did not sabotage the team (and I never did), it was only because I had been playing baseball too long and too well to discredit myself. And I was too black. Pride was my resource. I solved my problem by playing my guts out. I ran myself down to less than 135 pounds in the blistering

> heat. I completely wiped out that peckerwood league. I led it in everything but home runs—although I hit 29. I played in all 154 games. I batted .340, driving in 128 runs with 190 hits. The better I did, the tougher I got. I no longer wept in my room.[80]

As coolness begat toughness, Flood's reflexive response turned blackness into a shelter for his identity. Refusing the dehumanization into which baseball's racism had invited him, Flood detached himself from his social circumstances and strived to achieve in spite of them.

Du Bois narrates John's experience with the veil of race in terms that foreground his entry into a racist society and that turn on the attitudinal shift entailed by the self-understanding racism produces. Du Bois says of John:

> He had left his queer thought-world and come back to a world of motion and of men. He looked now for the first time sharply about him, and wondered he had seen so little before. He grew slowly to feel almost for the first time the Veil that lay between him and the white world; he first noticed now the oppression that had not seemed oppression before, differences that erstwhile seemed natural, restraints and slights that in his boyhood days had gone unnoticed or been greeted with a laugh. He felt angry now when men did not call him "Mister," he clenched his hands at the "Jim Crow" cars, and chafed at the color-line that hemmed in him and his. A tinge of sarcasm crept into his speech, and a vague bitterness into his life; and he sat long hours wondering and planning a way around these crooked things.[81]

John notices oppression and feels the veil once leaving home and entering the world. Like Flood, sarcasm became a discursive response to his recognition of the veil. And, like John, Flood plotted a way around crooked things. As experience with race induced the quickening of double consciousness, each became individuals with an expertise in social critique.

For Curt Flood, the essence of racism was dehumanization and the violation of individual dignity. As an acquired faculty, double consciousness structured a way of knowing through which he came to understand his intrinsic self-worth. Flood was therefore capable, through his second-sight, of seeing dehumanization. Along these lines, Flood postulated a sense of freedom that sought an escape route from dehumanizing conditions. Speaking again of the Carolina League, Flood says, "What had started as a chance to test my baseball ability in a professional setting had become an obligation to measure myself as a man. As such, it was a matter of life and death. [...] I wanted to be free of these animals whose fifty-cent bleacher ticket was a license to curse my color and deny my humanity. I wanted to be free of the imbeciles on the ball team."[82] Similarly, Flood saw the racially segregated conditions of the South as further evidence of racism's dehumanizing effects. Recalling having to take meals on the team bus after a game, instead of dining at a restaurant with white teammates, Flood says, "Of the many indignities to which I was subject, few angered me more than that routine in the bus. After playing a double-header in some piney woods clearing, it was absolutely maddening to sit all sweaty and sticky and funky in that rotten bus instead of walking like a human being into a restaurant."[83]

Flood's Humanism

Individual human dignity and respect for the intrinsic worth of others became, on this view, Flood's model for living above the veil of race. His double consciousness bore witness to dehumanization, so Flood assembled a sense of humanism, or "the human spirit," with which to present his idealized view of social life. Just as Flood came to know the penalties of blackness through his social experiences in the South, he lived

above the veil in relationships with individuals he characterized as humanists. He formed a lasting friendship with his junior high school art teacher, Jim Chambers, described by Flood as "a fervently unorthodox young man, appalled by pomposity, inhumanity, and pretension." Chambers "taught me art not as technique alone but as one of the great resources of the human spirit."[84] Early in Flood's career with the Cardinals, Chambers introduced him to Johnny and Marian Jorgensen, with whom he also became close friends. Admiring their marriage, Flood says, "It was a marriage of total congeniality, enriched by a deeply held philosophy of life. They were humanists. They believed in the worth and perfectibility of man. And in the obligations of man. And in the powers of love and honor."[85] The Jorgensens' example allowed Flood to glimpse life above the veil and thereby repair the fracture in his identity entailed by his double-consciousness: "They had become part of my identity, and I of theirs. [...] I could feel myself growing and changing. Johnny and Marian's daily example taught me to place a higher value on life than I had in the past. Cherishing life as they did, they refused to degrade it in others or suppress it in themselves."[86] In sum, Flood's social experiences with Chambers and the Jorgensens inverted the effect of his experiences with racism. Jim Crow showed him the veil of race and produced a double consciousness on alert for dehumanizing circumstances; Chambers and the Jorgensens showed him life above the veil and thereby came to embody an idealized form of humanism.

Flood's humanism should not be confused with a bland sense of colorblind equality, an orthodox narrative of American social progress, nor a romanticized memory of black power. Instead, Flood's humanism demanded the depth of human interaction necessary to both live above the veil of race and understand and accept the facts of racial

difference. On this point, Flood's race politics become difficult to unpack. Although historians like Early and Lomax glide inferentially from Flood's attention to and regard for his blackness to descriptors like "black power" and "black rage," Flood explicitly distances himself from from predetermined political labels. After returning from a Nation of Islam meeting to which he and Cardinal pitcher Bob Gibson were invited by Muhammad Ali, Flood remarked, "The speeches—or sermons—were rampantly, savagely racist. The only discernible program seemed to be destruction of the hated White Devil and substitution of black rule. After Bullet Bob and I got home, he summed it up: 'Sounds as if black power would be white power backwards. That wouldn't be much improvement.'"[87] Instead of offering his social observations from the opposite side of the veil of race, Flood's articulates his race politics from above it by rejecting its binary logic and attending to broader structures of domination:

> I know now, and have known for years, that the American black's main problem is not the white as such. And that the main problem of the brainwashed animal who calls me "Dear Nigger" is not the black as such. The problem for us all is the organization of human society. The Man would be no bargain if he were black and the ground rules were otherwise unchanged. Can society get no further than one man's foot on another man's neck? On what basis can we assume that peace and justice would be achieved by substituting the foot of another color? Does the ghetto slum become a more suitable habitation after it falls into the hands of a black landlord? Would war be better if the Secretary of Defense were black?[88]

Flood's rhetorical questions point toward an understanding of racial identity as an element of hierarchical social arrangements. Those arrangements then function as the

target of his critique. His humanism thus emerges as an opposition to the "ground rules" imposed by "The Man," whomever he may be.

On the other hand, however, Flood is also repelled by bromide aphorisms about colorblindness. Regarding the "genuine" team spirit possessed by the 1960s Cardinals teams, Flood observes, "it was baseball at a new level. Nobody on that team had occasion to utter the petty platitude, 'I don't care if he's white, black, purple, or green, just so he does his job on the field.' On that team we cared about each other and inspired each other. As friends we had become solicitous of each other's ailments and eccentricities, proud of each other's strengths."[89] Indeed, Flood assigns meaning to his blackness and expects others to recognize his black identity. Chambers and the Jorgensens allow Flood to express the utopian potential contained in his complicated sense of humanism. Chambers' strength was that, "he accepted my blackness without fuss. More precisely, he accepted blackness as my central attribute."[90] The Jorgensens showed him life above the veil by accepting his individuality without insult to his blackness. With an insight that focuses on their influence on his awakening, Flood says, "How could these dear, generous people stand my prattle? I knew how! They liked me, without caring a damn whether I played center field or pushed a broom. They did not pretend that I was white. They did not pretend that they were black. They were not at all uptight. I felt as if I had been transported to the twenty-first century."[91] Although Flood seems to have overestimated the twenty-first century's possibilities, he locates the fundamentals of humanism in the performance of discursive practices characteristic of life above the veil of race. Flood refused to deny his blackness, and saw its denial as degrading, so the key to humanism was imagined to involve a recognition of the veil and

the simultaneous rejection of its oppressive effects. For Flood, there is no question that race was meaningful, but it certainly need not mean what racism entailed.

***

In *The Way It Is*, Flood offered social insights according to a view of things provided by racialized double-consciousness. Blackness figured prominently into the economy of his rhetorical performance, but not as the locus of a bond to an explicit social movement or given norm of political practice. Instead, it was the sign of individual identity that emerged from his transition to double-consciousness. Flood's black identity endured a series of experiences with the veil of race in the South that conditioned his social knowledge of dehumanization. The "cool cat," which originated as an inert racial performance to white scouts in Oakland, became in Florida and North Carolina a dynamic figure capable of critique. Seeing that blackness was a primary means according to which an oppressive social hierarchy was structured, Flood refused its denial in order to center his sense of humanism. The problem of racism, in other words, was not the existence of race as such, nor was it the attention that others simply paid to blackness. To the contrary, Flood expected others to attend to his race actively in social interactions; blackness was, after all, an indelible fact of his lived experience and the source of his social knowledge. Racism's damage, for Flood, consisted in its dehumanizing consequences. As an individual who "embraced the veil of race and double-consciousness and used them for critical production," Curt Flood enacted his critical aptitude though his memories of racism's destructive effects on the human spirit. From Du Bois' allegory of John, Wilson infers that, "Neither biology nor racism's hegemony can determine a person's soul if that person understands and engages the

surrounding discourse."[92] In sum, Flood's intimate knowledge of racism entailed an intimate knowledge of the discourses that sustained dehumanizing social relations. Such discourses might have been overtly racist or housed in a rhetoric of colorblind tolerance. In any case, as a cool cat, Flood could now identify these discourses when he heard them.

Section C — Curt Flood's Slave Narrative

In 2007, Cal Fussman, a sportswriter for *ESPN The Magazine*, collected and published hundreds of observations about the relationship between sport and race from athletes, former athletes, various popular figures, and individuals close to the people best known for advancing baseball's racial history. The volume, *After Jackie: Pride, Prejudice, and Baseball's Forgotten Heroes, An Oral History*, focuses on Curt Flood in one illuminating chapter. Titled "Flood of Money," Fussman's editorial observations are brief, but concentrate on Flood's loneliness in his fight to sue baseball. Noting that none of Flood's baseball contemporaries would testify on his behalf in federal court, Fussman says that Flood "was as alone and naked as he had been in that minor league clubhouse in 1957,"[93] in High Point, North Carolina. Specifically, Fussman refers to an incident in which Flood had to wait naked in the clubhouse before a game while his uniform was delivered from a cleaner "on the black side of town"; the clubhouse manager had refused to wash Flood's uniform in the same machine as the white players's. Unlike Stuart Weiss, who takes Flood's minor league experiences as evidence of an irrational antipathy toward baseball, Fussman asserts that they were defining moments in Flood's changing consciousness: "One thing is certain: His thoughts were unlike those of any other ballplayers in the clubhouse that day."[94]

Among the observations about Flood that Fussman collects for his oral history, two stand out as revealing indicators of the way in which Flood's racialized consciousness may have influenced his fight against the reserve clause. The first, from former Pittsburgh Pirate pitcher Bob Veale, is pithy in its insight: "Nobody with white skin was going to challenge the reserve clause."[95] Although Veale does not elaborate, his assertion suggests that Flood's blackness, however meaningful, positioned him uniquely as a qualified challenger. The second observation, from Judy Pace, the black Hollywood icon who was Flood's second wife, speaks directly to the question of Flood's consciousness:

> When you think about it, it's not surprising that a black man did this. A white man was not going to have that consciousness. A white man was not walking around thinking, My rights are always being penalized.
>
> That's what Curt called it - the penalty of being black. There were always penalties for being black. If you never had that inflicted on you, then you might think everything was okay.
>
> If you were a white baseball player, you might think, I'm doing something that some people would give their second child for - a chance to play major league baseball. Why stir things up?[96]

Though it is impossible to know if Judy Pace's characterization of Flood is a faithful understanding of his rationale, her anecdote animates his struggle in a way consistent with Flood's narration of his transition to double consciousness. Moreover, Judy Pace presents an important distinction between Flood and white players that both highlights the epistemic advantages of Flood's blackness and illustrates the difficulties that his public argument faced. The penalties of blackness, Flood seemed to indicate in *The Way It Is*, ushered a means of knowing unjust circumstances. On this account, white players

lacked this perspective and consequently were unable to see injustice; they would, in fact, be prone precisely to the fanciful and romantic discourses that secured baseball's exploitive hierarchy. Flood would be fighting formidable obstacles in justifying the way he stirred things up, particularly once he described himself as a well-paid slave; white players (and, thereby Flood) could benefit from double consciousness, but they would not come to acquire it easily.

Blackness and Second-Sight

Recalling the days after Flood's lawsuit was disclosed to the public, Snyder says that "Flood went on national television and attacked the reserve clause in the starkest moral terms. He shocked and offended the American people during an interview with the man people loved to imitate but claimed to hate, Howard Cosell."[97] The instrument of such shock and offense was, of course, the statement about being a $90,000 slave. Putting aside the problem that Snyder's claim exercises a latent prejudice by inscribing "the American people," whoever they were, with reactionary whiteness, his point, if taken charitably, is that the slave narrative was a confrontational rhetorical option. But, by lending it public expression, Flood executed a flexible rhetorical maneuver. On the one hand, the slave narrative was a symbolic accusation that implicated his white colleagues in the reserve clause's original sin - slavery's rhetorical iconography brought racial politics to the forefront of his claim and abetted the anxieties of those articulating the white backlash's story. On the other hand, the slave narrative was a symbolic invitation to his white colleagues to occupy the conscious space from which racialized second-sight obtains its view. In essence, its dramatic potential offered a powerful discursive resource to criticisms derived from an insider's view of dehumanizing

conditions. Asking white players to see themselves as slaves was analogous to asking them to see themselves as black, at least to the extent that it enjoined them to be on the alert for the signs of oppression that only a black person in America could see.

For Flood, the figure of the slave helped to clarify the meaning of blackness relative to his American experiences. One of the reasons that blackness provided an exceptional form of social insight, according to *The Way It Is*, was that the dehumanization of black individuals occurred as a consequence of the history of American slavery. In other words, Flood offers his point of view as uniquely adept at locating oppression by way of a discursively controlling history. In a passage that explains the chapter title, "Your Grandfather and I," Flood elaborates:

> I probably cannot influence those whites who complain that they are tired of feeling guilty about what their grandfathers did to my grandfathers, but I can at least suggest that they stop making idiotic comparisons between my people and European immigrants. I think it wholesome to bear in mind that American statute and unlegislated custom not only enslaved my people but outlawed their languages, their religions and their expressions of group and individual dignity. Including their desire to form abiding family relationships. They were bred like cattle. It is inspiring that so many survived with their finer feelings in tact, after a century of emancipation in which color has been the badge of ineligibility. To hell with your grandfather, baby. Just get out of the way.[98]

The distinction between Flood's "people" and European immigrants works to both rebut the argument that American blacks inhabit a land of equal opportunity and to provide a historically grounded home for the exceptionalism of black consciousness. Additionally, Flood focuses not just on the sheer fact of slavery, but on its effect on human dignity even after a hundred years of emancipation; there is no question that slavery was unjust,

but the abolition of slavery does not trump or erase the dehumanizing social circumstances produced in slavery's historical context. Finally, Flood provides a view of slavery's damage through a trope that vividly illustrates the meaning of slavery to the oppressed: "They were bred like cattle." Black slaves were, in short, not just forced to work but, more importantly, treated as less than human, and as long as blackness continues to stand for ineligibility, so goes inhumane treatment. As Snyder says of Flood in reference to the $90 million slave, "He wanted to feel like a person and not an object. As a black man, he expressed those feelings in terms of slavery."[99]

Snyder's interpretation of Curt Flood's feelings is well-meaning and probably correct. Flood clearly singles out black experience as unique in its relationship to dehumanization. But, Snyder's observation reads as an apology for Flood's introduction of blackness to an argument about humanity that might well have been proven through a different, more universal, and self-evident logic. Moreover, as Snyder admits, "Flood's 'well-paid slave' remark turned America against him. The media seized on it. The public vilified him for it."[100] By Snyder's reasoning, Flood's blackness could not help but result in his vilification because his racial identity was responsible for feelings expressed necessarily as insult, thus leading to a tragic outcome that may have been averted had the public come to know the truth without the story of the slave. I do not mean to assert that Snyder is in error either in the accuracy of his inferences regarding Flood's feelings, or in his reading of the historical effects of Flood's allusion. However, Snyder easily separates blackness from the truth of Flood's argument, when it seems clear that blackness was, for Flood, the central means by which he came to know his oppression from the start. Flood's rhetorical performance centers on the figure of the

slave because the slave has double-consciousness. Blackness, for Flood, is neither ancillary nor regrettable; it defines what he means by humanity and it is the engine of his understanding.

Furthermore, Flood cannot be counted among those who valorize baseball as a mirror of racial progress or as a presumed beacon of social advancement. Flood's experiences in the South with vituperative and overt racism had disappeared in the social context of the Cardinals, a team, according to Flood, composed of "Latins, blacks, liberal whites and redeemed peckerwoods, the best team in the game and the most exultant. Victorious on the field and victorious off it, by God."[101] Indeed, the Cardinals operate as Flood's utopian image: "A beautiful little foretaste of what life will be like when Americans finally unshackle themselves."[102] But, Flood's utopia is not located on the field as such, nor is it located in the transforming minds of individuals witnessing the unexpected athletic achievements of a black man. Instead, Flood's romantic allegory of racial harmony is located in the social relationships the Cardinal players were able to form among themselves. Bonded my mutual appreciation for each others' fundamentally human qualities, the Cardinals were able to achieve what Flood calls, "true team spirit." Once baseball is turned into a showcase for the phenomenon, and its potential is compromised by its insertion into the shallow politics of racial progress, baseball's benefits begin to backfire. Flood explains:

> Having demonstrated our ability to help win ball games, and having disproved the theory that our complexions would repel white trade, we blacks seemed to have reached our zenith. We were being allowed to play major-league baseball! We were being allowed to "prove" that any black kid could get ahead in this enlightened society if he would only try! What

> more could we possibly wish? Or, as cranky whites asked when things began to heat up in the United States during the sixties, "What do you people want?"
>
> For openers, Colonel, how about eliminating skin color as a factor when you appraise another human being's worth?[103]

Abhorring the stage, Flood refused the political symbolism of his blackness because baseball's racial integration did not eliminate racist dehumanization from its social composition. Instead, baseball exploited blackness when integration transformed its discourse into an empty spectacle of progressive promises. Flood's sarcastic rendering of the dialogue produced by baseball's racial show discursively performed the relationship of subordination and domination experienced between the black baseball player and the "cranky white." Flood issues an alert: *if you hear this, you are hearing the voice of the oppressor*. To the extent that blackness is an implicit penalty, an unlucky impediment to be overcome meritoriously, dehumanization is still at the bottom of things.

Consider similarly Flood's account of the way in which he saw racial politics shifting in his socialite circles in 1970:

> In the last couple of years, of course, institutionalized prejudice has diminished slightly. Black faces now appear in television commercials. As any frequenter of urban cocktail parties can testify, black celebrities are granted certain social indulgences.
>
> Although genuine friendships have been established, much of this new warmth is superficial and offends us. We do not appreciate being treated as interesting exceptions by people who would never be caught under the same roof with less prominent but equally worthy blacks. This is no compliment to us as individuals. On the contrary, it supposes that we hope that our brief fame will somehow whiten us permanently. It solicits our endorsement of the false belief that (a) any worthy black can make the grade and (b) whoever is still in the ghetto deserves to be.[104]

Tokenism was paternalism, and baseball's story of liberal progress was an instrument of the veil of race, a difference maker, and a producer of false warmth more damaging than acid-bathed racism. For Flood, the spectacle of social tokenism imposed a discourse of patronizing dehumanization by quietly negating, rhetorically and ideologically, the blackness it pretended to admire. With no desire to be whitened, Flood skillfully decodes the implicit meaning of "social indulgence" and the repulsive logic of the urban cocktail party.

Flood the Critic, Flood the Connoisseur

Once Flood identified oppression as being exercised through paternalistic discourse, his desire to "abolish pretension" acquired critical traction. Assuming a didactic tone, Flood inscribed the epistemic privileges afforded by his double consciousness explicitly and asserted his credentials to organize a pedagogy of discursive oppression: "I was an expert in baseball's spurious paternalism. I was a connoisseur of its grossness."[105] Armed with intellectually effective cynicism, Flood recalls his interpretation of August Busch's response to baseball's labor disputes in the winter of 1969:

> He had a fit. Profanity rattled the windows and turned the air blue (it is possible to be baronial and earthy at the same time). Labor annoyances were not what he had envisioned when he took up baseball. They could not be classified as wholesome sport. They were no fun at all. They boded ill for the future of the game. What would become of the fans? The fans! Mr. Busch decided to attack us in behalf of the fans.[106]

This characterization of Busch, which sarcastically utters the empty appeal to the "good of the game," rhetorically epitomizes Flood's "cranky white." As a result, Flood is able

to demonstrate the unjust truth behind baseball ownership's most trusted public argument:

> As I interpret baseball's recital of its financial woes, the situation is peachy for the fans and the players, but the owners bear a heavy load. All that stands between the Good of the Game and utter havoc is the arrangement that exempts the owners from the hardships imposed on all other interstate entrepreneurs by the nation's antitrust laws. Should a court order, a Congressional statute or players strike weaken the owners' control of their livestock, the game might perish.
>
> According to this pessimistic theory, if baseball players were as free to shop for employment as actors are, the richest club would hire all the stars, making a shambles of every pennant race. The implication is that some teams are too poor to compete for talent in an open market. The present reserve system protects them from that catastrophe. Reduced to its essentials, the argument suggests that baseball players now subsidize their employers by working at cut rates. And that the courts, Congress and the public should perpetuate this unique state of affairs. For the Good of the Game.[107]

In the end, the "Good of the Game" delivered on the inevitability of Flood's warning that the oppressor will mask exploitation in phony appeals to fairness. Once again saying what *they* would say, Flood reveals that the economic relationship imposed by ownership is a dehumanizing state of affairs. Just like the relationships between the slave and the master, the black baseball player and the racist fan, and the token black at the white cocktail party, the relationship between the player and owner is unfair, dehumanizing, and sustained by hegemonic discourses.

In *The Way It Is*, racialized double-consciousness - and the situations only it may grasp - transforms into connoisseurship of these discourses. Flood's "connoisseur" has a detailed, intimate, and nuanced understanding of paternalism; he recognizes easily when he is the object of condescension. The connoisseur has not only the refined critical

categories in place through which to identify and judge paternalism, but has also the authority to demonstrate the mechanics of its reckoning to others. Flood's notion of connoisseurship is crucial to the logic of *The Way It Is*, because the term implies that Flood is other than an angry rebel, a slogan-toting revolutionary, or a movement devotee. Instead, the "connoisseur" implies the persona of the philosopher-critic, the refined distaste of the aficionado, and the idiosyncrasies of one who is in the know. It evokes cultivated passion and subtle distinctions, expertise and wit. A connoisseur knows how the artist does the trick. Connoisseurship is simultaneously distant and omniscient, so it is never easily impressed. Connoisseurship is sensuous and penetrating. Connoisseurs, at last, are cool.

Implying the range of critical possibilities available to one with the connoisseur's skill, Flood's view of baseball echoed the empty promise of the brochure for the opulent Floridian hotel in 1957. Social life at "Ma Felder's," Flood implies, provided him with a revealing view of that brochure. By sarcastically uttering the voice of the racist, the snobby liberal, and the baseball owner, Flood posits the homology of their discourses on a horizon of condescension, and assumes the role of baseball's appointed rhetorical critic. Recalling his request to Cincinnati Reds management for a salary raise in 1957, Flood performs the oppressive logic of the conversation:

> I thought the man's heart would break when he replied that a raise was out of the question. He agreed that I had done a pretty fair job, for a beginner. But confidentially, the club's expenses were dangerously out of hand. Son, the Reds were in deep trouble. They simply did not have the money, son. To keep the team alive, we all had to tighten our belts and be patient. At the same time we had to develop ourselves as rapidly as possible, so that we could bring a National League pennant to Cincinnati and make

> money for us all. Those who put their shoulders to the wheel would be rewarded. Son, make no mistake about it. He was confident that he could count on my good sense. He was confident that I would realize that I was not yet ready for the major leagues, and that my most significant contribution to the well-being of the club would come by working hard, seeing the big picture, taking the long view and not becoming impatient. The constructive thing to do was sign a 1957 contract for $4,000, accept promotion to a higher minor league and do my very, very best. I wanted to be well thought of. I agreed.[108]

Flood remembers his response to this reasoning as a form of capitulation to ownership that erroneously inverts the proper response to the cranky white who asks, *what more do blacks want*? The abandonment of his demands sanctioned the rhetoric of gratitude and thus, presumably, constituted his subordination. His sarcastic retelling works as a critical revelation of this relationship. Sarcasm, being a cynic's medium, is how the connoisseur shows that something in this discourse stinks.

Flood offers the assessment of his conversation with management as a model of shared experience with other players. Recalling the range of his reaction when learning that he had been traded to Philadelphia, which according to Flood was "the nation's northernmost southern city,"[109] he expands the scope of his concern: "I was no longer bothered by Philadelphia, as such. I was thinking more clearly. The problem was no particular city but was the reserve clause, which afflicted all players equally no matter where."[110] Besides asserting the universality of the principle for which he would sacrifice his career, Flood inserts "all players," "no matter where," into the position from which the discourse of the oppressor could be identified. Put differently, Flood sutured white baseball players into the critical standpoint entailed by double-consciousness. Every baseball player had engaged in salary negotiations with an employer, and each had

been subject to the indignities intrinsic to their discursive rigging. Although Flood's arrival at double consciousness was racialized and intensely personal, by sarcastically performing management's duplicitous speech, Flood articulates the inchoate connoisseurship of paternalism that "all players equally no matter where" latently possess.

This insight permits two interrelated views of the rhetorical significance of *The Way It Is*. First, viewed as an exhortation to other baseball players (including the increasingly stubborn and relevant Players Association), Flood attempted to cultivate their ability to exercise the double consciousness of the slave. Perhaps due to their whiteness, or perhaps due to their ignorance, Flood needed to instantiate a means of identification with his white colleagues in order to generate the political pressure required to effectuate a material change in baseball's reserve system. Rejecting the politics of "black racism," Flood asks, "Of what possible danger to the existing order are lunatics who scream that 10 percent of the population should overpower the other 90?"[111] Knowing, in other words, that politics are determined through the logic of constituencies, Flood aimed at producing a confederacy of the oppressed out of ballplayers who have heard the owners' lies. On this view, Flood's utterance of paternalist discourse worked as a cue to fellow players to engage their incipient critical faculties; it was an invitation to his way of seeing.

However, it was not at all clear that the players would be brought along so easily. Other players may not have been satisfied with their employment circumstances, but that did not mean that Flood's exhortation would either transform their consciousness or inspire them to action. On a different view then, not in relation to a narrow audience of

white baseball players but, instead, in relation to Flood's articulation of a public argument vis-a-vis the owners, he *asserted* the consciousness of the players. In other words, instead of trying bring white baseball players with him, he rhetorically linked himself to them. In this sense, he told the public what all players knew but were afraid to say. The connoisseurship of paternalism, as a collective way of knowing that bound all baseball players, permitted an argument that positioned Flood as the courageous and self-anointed representative of the oppressed. Instead of urging a constituency into existence, Flood exercised the rhetorical power of a constituency by explaining to the public what most players thought in private.

Using the St. Louis Cardinals of the 1960s (who won two World Series) as a prism for refracting the changes in consciousness that players were capable of achieving, Flood proudly announces that, "The men of that team were as close to being free of racist poison as a diverse group of twentieth-century Americans could possibly be."[112] The Cardinals were not just lucky, however: "Few of them had been that way when they came to the Cardinals. But they changed."[113] In other words, the Cardinals were agents of transforming consciousness. The energy for this process did not emerge spontaneously - it took initiative. Flood is clear assigning credit: "The initiative in building that spirit came from black members of the team. Especially Bob Gibson."[114] Moreover, the means of its achievement were discursive and social: "It began with Gibson and me deliberately kicking over traditional barriers to establish communication with the palefaces."[115] Finally, the Cardinals were a success story in modeling life above the veil of race: "Tim Mc Carver was a rugged white kid from Tennessee and we were black, black cats. The gulf was wide and deep. It did not belong there, yet there it was. We

bridged it. Without imposing blackness on Tim or whiteness on ourselves, we simply insisted on knowing him and being known in return. The strangeness vanished."[116] Within the Cardinals, an idealized crucible of human interaction and social discourse, the veil of race was acknowledged and dismantled, thus transforming the consciousness of everyone in range. Within the Cardinals, blackness operated to erase otherness.

Those Cardinals teams of the early sixties were managed on the field by Solly Hemus. During a game against the Pittsburgh Pirates, "in 1959 or 1960," Hemus, who had been hit at the plate by a black pitcher named Bennie Daniels, shouted invective at Daniels as he trotted to first base that could not be heard clearly by the players in the dugout. The next day, Hemus reported to Cardinals players what he had said: "I called him a black son-of-a-bitch."[117] Flood recalls their collective response to Solly Hemus' insult: "Until then, we had detested Hemus for not using his best lineup. Now we hated him for himself. We became more discerning in our evaluations of baseball's employment policies. We became connoisseurs of the Good of the Game, noting how unconcernedly the owners sabotaged the sport by hiring incompetent or prejudiced or just plain stupid managers."[118] In Flood's crucible, all players bore witness to incompetence, prejudice and stupidity. All of them were connoisseurs. And, all of them knew what the "Good of the Game" really is. Consequently, in *The Way It Is*, Flood enlists them to put their critical faculties to work.

In February 1971, after missing a full year of baseball to his court case, Flood reluctantly agreed to a one year contract for $110,000 to play for the Washington Senators. Because he needed to prove a monetary loss in order to keep his case in federal court, Flood's attorneys and Major League Baseball agreed to stipulate that his playing

for the Senators in 1971 would not be used at trial, and that the loss of the full 1970 season would constitute his claim to damages. Though he would leave the Senators on a late night flight to Spain in mid-April (never to return to baseball), his signing was greeted with curious anticipation by the Washington sports press. Flood had been signed in the winter 1971 along with ex-Detroit pitcher Denny McLain, a former all-star who had been suspended for three months in the 1970 season due to his involvement in gambling. When asked by the press about the Senators' additions of Flood and McLain, Washington owner Bob Short said, "I never would've had any chance at all to get them if they weren't tarnished."[119] Taking rigorous exception to such a description, Flood delivered a line of incisive rhetorical questions to reporter Milton Richman: "They have called Denny McLain and myself 'bad boys' right along. Who determines that? Is it the sportswriters? Is it the commissioner? Is it the American public?"[120] Here, as elsewhere, Flood attends closely to the power of discourse. At center of his interrogation is the way in which ownership imposes uninvited forms of public identity on baseball players. Calling a player "tarnished" implicitly affirms the perceptions required to assure the owners' position of dominance. By asking direct questions regarding their authority to define player subjectivity, Flood enacts his second-sight and critiques the discourse of the oppressor.

In essence, Flood worried that baseball employs a dehumanizing vocabulary, and that by accepting ownership's discourse on its own terms, players participate in their own domination. On this view, the owners perform an ideological discourse that must be unmasked if the players are to recognize what Flood professes to be the dehumanizing reality of their circumstances. For example, owners often expressed worry that reserve

clause abolition would lead to "tampering," a situation in which predatory owners would negotiate contracts with players currently signed to other teams. Putting aside the fact that owners could simply regulate this problem though fair negotiating practices, Flood examines the meaning and effect of "tampering" closely:

> Furthermore, I resent the use of the word tampering. One may attempt to influence the play of a professional athlete, but one does not "tamper" with him. One tampers with figures or a cash register, not with a human being. As usual, baseball's terminology betrays its essential attitudes, which are those of animal husbandry. Baseball regards us as sheep, livestock with which higher forms of life may tamper at will. No wonder we are conditioned to talk the way we do. In the pregame interview and in the postgame wrap-up, and finally in his nightmares, the player dutifully recites, "Baseball has been good to me. I love the game. Baseball has been good to me...."[121]

For Flood, the use of the term "tampering" was a rhetorical index of the way in which players were regarded as commodities, and commodification was constitutive of dehumanization. Furthermore, Flood explains that as baseball players are compelled to fit within the discursive boundaries of owner rhetoric, they come to acquire a consciousness that commits them tragically to a dehumanized fate. As baseball's rhetorical critic, as a connoisseur, and as a purveyor of double consciousness, Flood attempts to reveal the nature of the relationship between player and owner.

"Principle"

Near the end of *The Way It Is*, Flood describes his psychological conditions in the days prior to being informed of his trade to Philadelphia: "If I had taken inventory before the front office called, I would have compiled a formidable list. Expensive athlete. Painter of oil portraits as negotiable as any currency. Student of the human condition. Impervious to shock. Subdivision: black. Belief in the American dream: lapsed."[122]

This reflexive assessment summarizes a narrative that accounts for the evolution of Flood's consciousness. Far from the ghetto in Oakland, he comes to assume an identity composed of elements held together by a productive tension. As a socialite athlete and painter, he expresses his ideal humanism in aesthetic sophistication. As a student of the human condition, his sophistication translates into a cool interpretive aptitude. And, as his black hermeneutic is put into motion, the result is implacable cynicism. From humanist to connoisseur to cynic, Flood assumes the role of one whose dynamism and potential have been imprisoned by a benighted social hierarchy. Though blackness is the boulder in his sisyphean drama, he knows the story well enough to identify the injustices that other imprisoned souls are fated to push up the hill. The struggle between Flood's humanist and cynic results in a consciousness that sentries his social circumstances from further incursions by oppressive agents speaking in gilded tongues.

In this sense, the trade that was to supposed to send Flood to Philadelphia demarcated a line of battle over the imagined essence of his humanity. Although he describes himself as a hardened cynic before learning of his trade, Flood admits to harboring a small bit of undisciplined hope that his baseball career might rise to meet his old, naive aspirations. After being telephoned by Jim Toomey, described by Flood as a "middle-echelon coffee drinker"[123] (he was the Cardinals' general manager's assistant), Flood reveals his shock: "The dream dies hard. It lay deep within me, dormant but not destroyed. Just as stress can arouse a latent virus, one miserable telephone call released the poison of self-pity. The hard-boiled realist who answered the telephone was a weeping child when he set the receiver down. The lightning had struck. The dream lay shattered. It was a bad scene."[124] The phone call from Jim Toomey, then, did more than

announce his trade; it rang the death knell for any remaining motivation to experience the subordination that being a baseball player required. Once the "dream lay shattered," Flood issued an indignant refusal to occupy baseball's dehumanizing prison. Thus, he distinguishes his trade from all of the other baseball trades that had come before it: "Player trades are commonplace. The unusual aspect of this one was that I refused to accept it. It violated the logic and integrity of my existence. I was not a consignment of goods. I was a man, the rightful proprietor of my own person and my own talents."[125] To take ownership of his identity and reclaim his humanity, Flood simply refused the trade. To be an abolitionist of the reserve clause, it seemed, was the only life-affirming posture left.

It is important to bear in mind that just as Flood cannot be counted among those who understand baseball to be an inherently liberating corner of society in which only merit counts, neither can he be counted among those who see sport as intrinsically dehumanizing. Snyder, in his biography, situates Flood's use of the slave narrative relative to contemporaneous users of the analogy in relation to sport. Muhammad Ali once said, "We're just like two slaves in that ring. The masters get two of us big black slaves and let us fight it out while they bet, 'My slave can whup your slave.' That's what I see when I see two black people fighting."[126] Chip Oliver, a former National Football League player said that football "dehumanizes people. They've taken the players and made them into slabs of beef that can charge around and hit each other."[127] But, after having lived within the social utopia of the Cardinal clubhouse, Flood's logic can not be likened to Ali's. Furthermore, since baseball's unmediated form provides him with an outlet to exercise his individual talents, constitute his path to achievement, and center his

desire for wealth and prominence, his logic can neither be likened to Oliver's. Flood found dehumanization in the social structure of baseball's hierarchy and in the restrained status of his employment. It was not baseball as such that degraded, but rather his inability to participate freely in a labor market - to make his baseball achievements a measure of professional growth - that violated human dignity.

Baseball was, for Flood, the preferred means of earning a living. Toward the end of *The Way It Is*, Flood signals a series of retreats from his abolitionist claim. For example, he argues that baseball players, having dedicated their lives and careers, have the game's best interests in mind:

> He has played his heart out. He wants the industry to prosper. He wants to share in that prosperity now, and he probably hopes to make a place for himself in the game later on, being prepared for a life in baseball and little else. Through the Major League Baseball Players Association, he and his professional colleagues (with little dissent), have attempted to negotiate an improvement in the reserve system. Not Abolition. Improvement. [...] At this writing no negotiation of these proposals has been undertaken by the laggards of baseball. The year might as well be 1881, and James Abram Garfield the president of the United States.[128]

Neither seeking the destruction of the game nor expressing gleeful spite in producing "chaos," Flood speaks on behalf of baseball players aiming to acquire a fairer share of its wealth. The problem, he asserts, is the obtuse recalcitrance of greedy owners.

Flood recalls the efforts of the Players Association to alter the terms of baseball's contract system. As the owners issued a string of false promises, the players were betrayed continually, "in 1966 and 1967 and 1968 and 1969." The consequence was that

players were left with no other argumentative terrain besides a call for complete abolition:

> No headway was made into the Association's attempts to negotiate some sense into the so-called reserve clause. In the previous basic agreement, the owners had contracted to join the Association in a study of "possible alternatives to the reserve clause." Not a thing happened. The association had submitted numerous ideas for discussion. Each had been greeted with total silence, save for an occasional flat no. Clearly, the reserve system would remain inviolate, and ball players would remain chattels until somebody did something special.[129]

By characterizing the owners as disingenuous through their persistent deferral on the question of the reserve clause, Flood indicates that drastic action would be required. The reserve clause, which worked as the primary instrument of dehumanization, demanded a martyr. Flood accepted the self-nomination.

In *The Way It Is*, Flood characterizes his trade to Philadelphia as a kind of breaking point, a critical exigence that implored his refusal to allow exploitive and dehumanizing circumstances to continue. If Flood's public address is apprehended within the context of this exigence, *The Way It Is* can be understood as his attempt to exercise discursive command over the nature his resistance. The lawsuit, his failure to report to the Phillies, his refusal to sign a contract in 1970, and even his subsequent flight to Europe were certainly subversive acts relative to baseball's latest, and presumably most egregious, imposition. To the extent that he is the doer of "something special," Flood asserts his qualifications to speak for all baseball players and to act on their behalf. By rhetorically embracing his martyrdom, Flood affirms his view of things from a collective consciousness gifted with second-sight and locates his "specialness" in

possessing the will to sacrifice what other players would not. Put differently, Flood simultaneously expresses an abstract principle and offers himself as an embodiment of principled expression.

Referring again to the Jorgensens, whose "humanism" he admired, he says that their "wide interests aroused an intellectual hunger in me. I rushed to books and gorged myself. I could feel myself growing and changing. Johnny and Marian's daily example taught be to place a higher value on life than I had in the past. [...] I strove to emulate this, wanting now to serve my own principles as best I could, rather than float through the years like a leaf in the wind."[130] And, contrasting his principles to those represented by the press and ownership as a complex of dehumanizing agents, Flood says, "One of the leading wags in the baseball establishment remarked that, unless Curt Flood were another Rembrandt, he'd show up in time to play for the Phillies and collect his pay. Members of that establishment, including its wags, were entirely incapable of understanding that a basic principle of human life was involved. More to the point, they recognized no principle so basic that it could not be nullified by payment of a few extra dollars."[131] Together, these constitute the rhetorical function of Flood's reliance on "principle" as the positive expression of his struggle. In moving from blackness to double-consciousness to life above the veil, Flood comes to occupy a fixed point - a principle of human life. This principle is absolute and universal, and Flood is principled because he is willing to sacrifice on its behalf. Flood's self-nomination to lead player opposition relies on both horns of this proposition. In other words, Flood's "specialness" relies on his self-effacement; he attempts to occupy a position of universal subjectivity by offering the sacrifice of his particularity. Flood is fit to lead the fight because, as he implies, he *is* the

fight. Both committed to principle and animating the principle, Flood enacts the voice of resistance.

Interestingly, Flood's "principle" is never defined axiomatically. Instead, the content of Flood's principle is delegated to the inference of his rhetorical performance. And, though he speaks in strident tones about dignity and humanism, his assurance that baseball's reserve clause negates these sensibilities is unaccompanied by an articulation of precisely what humanism affirms. As Flood describes life above the veil of race, he is confident in his assertion that humanism embrace racial difference as such. But, in living the "principle" that purportedly underwrites the common cause of all baseball players relative to the owners, racial difference is not what seems to matter here. Much in the way that racial difference disappeared in the Cardinal dugout, the significance of racial identity fades from view once Flood's principle assumes center stage. Between Curt Flood, Bob Gibson, Orlando Cepeda and Tim McCarver, appreciation for the human spirit took the form of profoundly authentic social interactions, thus rendering race paradoxically essential and superfluous. The problem with baseball is that its commodification of the player is antecedent to and prohibitive of genuine human interaction.

At the very least, Flood's basic principle of human life contains two constituent elements. First, principle is found in the performance of resistance itself. Just as Johnny Jorgensen exemplifies humanism in relation to race, Flood summons his idealized case in order to illustrate his sense of principle:

> Anybody can spout principles, liberal or otherwise. How many men actually live by principle? Johnny was a true activist who tended his corner of the planet with immaculate honor. Anyone who disapproved of him was welcome to do so. Johnny had his own life to live. It took courage. I gathered that many of the Jorgensens' acquaintances had long since written them off as oddballs or pinks or, by whatever label, disturbers. The era of mindlessness had begun. Patriotism was being mistaken for subservience to authority. Honor was being attended to by pasting emblems on the windows or bumpers of automobiles. Persons of substance were supposed to behave predictably and not voice so many upstream ideas about peace, integration, and the dignity of man.[132]

Johnny Jorgenson, in other words, was principled because he lived courageously in holding to unorthodox views. Moreover, one behaves in a principled manner when the voice of authority is opposed actively and righteously. In the face of disapproval and degradation, principled actors act anyway. On this score, principle consists in one's self-commitment.

Second, principle is, for Flood, found in the assertion of one's humanity, or to use Flood's sexist expression, "manhood." Recalling his final decision to sue the owners, Flood says:

> It had been germinating in me for weeks. Sooner or later, someone would challenge baseball's right to treat human beings like used cars. [...] I telephoned Marvin Miller for an appointment and flew to New York to pick his brains.
>
> "I want to sue baseball on constitutional grounds," I told him. His eyebrows rose. "I want to give the courts a chance to outlaw the reserve system. I want to go out like a man instead of disappearing like a bottle cap."[133]

Used cars and bottle caps are only two arrows in Flood's quiver of dehumanizing tropes. Indeed, his preferred rhetorical approach is to define the principle he defends by asserting

quite clearly what he is not. Offered as variations on an underlying theme, these metaphors describe the way in which he imagines baseball as regarding him. Neither a used car nor a bottle cap, Flood insists that he is a man, thus defining principle as resistance to dehumanization. On this score, principle inheres in the defense of human dignity.

Taken together, principle conceived as a commitment to the self and principle conceived as a commitment to universal humanity work symbiotically to establish Flood as the ideal candidate to lead a righteous fight. Taken separately, this analysis may suggest an inappropriately narrow parsing of Flood's sense of principle. But, each of these senses is essential to Flood's effort to instantiate himself as a symbol of protest. Although he had the support of the Players Association with their unanimous vote to pay his legal expenses, Flood's lawsuit cut against baseball's orthodox, romantic public narrative. Just as his observation that all baseball players were connoisseurs of the "Good of the Game" permits two views of *The Way It Is* - that Flood both attempts to form a constituency and assert its prior existence - these two senses of principle are crucial for similar reasons. On the one hand, describing himself as a "principled" individual willing to live his beliefs through sacrifice allows Flood to demonstrate his agency. On the other hand, describing the "principle" for which he stands as universal human dignity allows Flood to discursively manifest the oppositional agency of all individuals whose dignity has been violated by the reserve clause's dehumanizing effects. In short, this slender equivocation constitutes the center of Flood's political imagination: Flood both is himself and he is all players.

Principled Abolitionism

Returning, then, to the scene in Puerto Rico in December 1969 when he met with player representatives, Flood describes the way he made his case to them in *The Way It Is*:

> I spoke for at least a half an hour. I told the players that I was going to proceed with the suit whether I got Association help or not, but that I needed all the backing I could get. I explained my beliefs about the reserve system and the unreasonable powers it gave to the club owners. I spoke of the affronts to human dignity of a system that indentured one man to another. I pointed out that fair bargaining and real professionalism would remain distant hopes in baseball unless I fought my fight.[134]

Flood's synopsis of the speech (delivered right before Tom Haller would ask the crucial question of his blackness) foregrounds two prominent dimensions of his fight: first, the imbalance of power between owners and players, and second, the idea that the reserve clause violates human dignity. These contentions are circumscribed by his sacrificial willingness to fight on their behalf.

To be sure, Flood makes a case for reserve clause abolition on the basis of the sheer economics of the baseball industry. Dehumanization lies at the center of his claim and his discursive performance, but that does not mean that Flood dismisses the owners' argument that reserve clause abolition would portend financial chaos. Again, Flood is deliberate in expressing his concern for the general viability of baseball as a business. To accuse baseball owners of dehumanizing the players simply by virtue of their position as owners would be to undermine the fundamental moral case for reserve clause abolition. Put differently, if baseball's institutional form is intrinsically dehumanizing, then Flood

would be foolish to seek greater access to its spaces. Hence, he stresses that players want baseball to survive and he idealizes the social interaction of the Cardinal clubhouse. Despite his sarcastic critique of the "Good of the Game," Flood and the other players clearly have an interest in the good of the game.

Fully developed, Flood's argument for reserve clause abolition is a critique of baseball's political economy containing three essential points: first, baseball players earn an unfair share of the wealth created by its commercial success; second, the reserve clause produces a restrictive labor market in which players are denied economic mobility; third, the opportunity costs for a baseball player are high relative to other professions, making the reserve clause uniquely punitive. To prove the first point, Flood asserts that "baseball players' salaries are low, not high. Baseball players' salaries compare unfavorably with those of other athletic performers, like golfers, basketball players and boxers, most of whom are paid far higher percentages of the gross."[135] Whether this observation is accurate or not, Flood's rationale follows a line of reasoning common to organized labor. Flood implies that the players, like perhaps "the workers," are largely responsible for creating baseball's wealth, and as such, they deserve a fairer share. In comparing baseball to other professional sports, Flood measures player salaries against industry standards in a way that illustrates baseball owners' distinctive greed.

In addition to comparing baseball's internal distribution of wealth to other professional sports, Flood advances the second point of his critique by comparing baseball's labor market to those outside of sports. Using a series of labor analogies, Flood finds dehumanization in baseball's conditions:

> A salesman reluctant to transfer from one office to another may choose to seek employment on the sales force of a different firm. A plumber can reject the dictates of his boss without relinquishing his right to plumb elsewhere. At the expiration of one contract, an actor shops among producers for the best arrangement he can find. But the baseball monopoly offers so such options to the athlete. If he elects not to work for the corporation that "owns" his services, baseball forbids him to ply his trade at all. In the hierarchy of living things, he ranks with poultry.[136]

Here, Flood both dramatizes the baseball player's circumstances and presents an obvious alternative to baseball's sacrosanct image. Unlike a salesperson, a plumber, or an actor, the baseball player lacks economic freedom as a consequence of the notion of ownership. Not only does the owner own the team, but the reserve clause transforms players into corporate possessions. Prevented from exercising economic agency in an open labor market, the baseball player is regarded as a commodity to be bought, sold, or traded like poultry - or, like slaves.

Flood offers a final comparison between the economic circumstances of the baseball player and the economic circumstances of the sport reporter. This analogy is particularly insightful since it simultaneously enlarges the scope of Flood's analogical reasoning and indicts the unsympathetic press accounts of his case. Sports reporters were incapable of knowing his indignities because, Flood implies, they always have the option of working for another newspaper. Furthermore, this comparison allows him to advance the third basic point of his critique:

> Under the ideological guidance of baseball's proprietors, an astonishingly high proportion of our sports reporters become incensed when a young man with the career expectancy of five years undermines the Good of the Game by holding out for a $25,000 salary. Admittedly, sports reporters do not usually get $25,000 a year from their own employers and,

> furthermore, are sometimes capable of larger contributions to society than might be expected from a journeyman ball player. If this kind of comparison is on their minds, as it seems to be, I wish they would carry it further.
>
> For example, a young reporter's career expectancy might well be forty years. If he decides to leave newspapering, or is discharged, his education and experience qualify him to enter a related field at no loss of pay. But the ball player who does not want to continue disemboweling himself for $15,000 a year may have very few alternatives. And the washed-up player often confronts a dead end. The last I heard of Sam Jones, an excellent pitcher for twelve years, he was considering a job in the West Virginia coal mines. It was not an executive position.[137]

With rhetorical subtlety, Flood underscores the selflessness of his cause by connecting his struggle not to baseball's stars, who may receive $90,000 salaries such as his, but instead to baseball's young, average, or less talented players. In addition to creating a potential means of identification with the "young man," Flood explains why the absence of labor freedom in baseball acutely disadvantages its employees. With a narrow window in which to exercise their professional trade, baseball players require the greatest degree of negotiating power they can obtain. Their professional circumstances are singularly precarious, and relative to workers in other industries, their opportunities cost make patience and gratitude prohibitively expensive.

The position summarized by this critique serves as an economic and moral rebuttal to what Flood identifies as the owner's central argument in defense of the reserve clause. Far from being a threat to the "Good of the Game," its modification, improvement, or abolition appreciates and invests in the players' contributions and recognizes the players' humanity by allowing them to compete in a fair labor market already predisposed against their short careers. Once baseball players are justly inserted into baseball's corporate structure, the notion of the "Good of the Game" is revealed as

an ideological trick designed to mask the dehumanizing relation on which professional baseball is predicated. In this rhetorical context, to insist that the reserve clause is necessary is to insist that baseball's commercial existence depends on the kind of economic exploitation that requires turning its players into property. Moreover, to say that the players aim to undermine the commercial success of baseball is to misread their position grossly. According to Flood, players need baseball because, unlike sports reporters, baseball is all they can do, and they do not have much time with which to do it.

The Slave Narrative

Flood's claim that baseball's existence depends on dehumanizing labor exploitation leads his argument seamlessly toward his explicit articulation of the slave narrative. In *The Way It Is*, Flood addresses his use of the term "slave" only once, in a passage that begins with his response to the owners' assertion that baseball is in delicate financial circumstances:

> The whole spiel is sheer humbug, of course. No major-league baseball corporation is presently in financial straits. If any were, it seems to me that subsidies should come not from the employees but from the suffering owner's fellow monopolists. Let them pass the hat. Or, if baseball be essential to the national morale, as its proprietors claim, the government itself might support the owners with grants or tax abatements, just as it supports railroads, airlines and oil wells. Unless I misread history, we have passed the stage when indentured servitude was justifiable on grounds that the employer could not afford the cost of normal labor.
>
> Which reminds me that the word *slavery* has arisen in connection to my lawsuit. I have been needled for using the word. Who ever heard of a $90,000-per-year slave? The idea is considered farcical. I concede that the condition of the major-league baseball player is closer to peonage than to slavery. Yet I am content to stand with the sentiments expressed in 1949 by Judge Jerome N. Frank of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in the case of Danny Gardella, a player who had been victimized by the reserve system:

> "If the players be regarded as quasi-peons, it is of no moment that they are well paid. Only the totalitarian minded will believe that high pay excuses virtual slavery."[138]

Flood's analysis evokes the duplicitous and authoritarian logic he exposed in recollecting his contract negotiations with the Cincinnati Reds in 1957. Back then, Flood's desire to be "well thought of" addled his understanding of what actually transpired in his agreement to sign a contract for less than he believed his services were worth to the team. In 1971, Flood has the consciousness to ask how and why it is justifiable for the owners to earn their profits at the expense of the players. Why must the "Good of the Game" depend on *their* sacrifice? The ideal analogy for making sense of an economic situation in which the cost of labor is controlled by similar means is, of course, slavery. In slavery, some people are owned so that other people may profit. Without unfettered access to the labor market, and being bound by a reserve clause that assigns ownership of his services to one employer, Flood identifies himself as a slave.

Flood's use of the slave analogy folds rhetorically into his stand for "a basic principle of human life." It is significant that Flood's only explicit discussion of the term "slavery" in *The Way It Is* occurs in the context of his reply to the notion that he is too well paid to invoke it. By locating the conditions of dehumanization within baseball's basic economic structure, in the relationship entailed by the inexorable reserve clause, which "afflicts all players equally no matter where," Flood stakes claim to an oppressed form of universal subjectivity. In other words, his particular identity as a player is irrelevant - he may be any one of them or he may be all of them. Flood is the universal player fighting for his universal humanity. His $90,000 salary does not speak for players

who earn less money, nor does it trump or excuse the reserve clause's foundational moral error, regardless of its size. Flood's "principle," in short, is the economic freedom of his labor identity, or, free agency.

Despite the fact that it is addressed only once directly in *The Way It Is*, the invocation of slavery is a pivotal feature of Flood's baseball narrative in *The Way It Is*. As an analogy, slavery illustrates the nature of the economic relationship between baseball team owners and baseball players: as masters are to slaves, owners are to players. The condition of bondage is the analogy's inescapable point. As a metaphor, slavery presents a rich rhetorical resource through which the imagery of dehumanization is critically rendered. Whether Flood describes players as "chattel," "poultry," "IBM cards," "used cars," or "bottle caps," the metaphorical advantage of slavery consists in its ability to imagine baseball players as inanimate objects moved capriciously through a economic system designed to promote an oppressor's wealth. Together, the figure of the slave condenses the meaning of the analogy and the images of the metaphor into a critical rhetoric that marks their cruel coincidence. Put differently, bondage and dehumanization as, respectively, the condition and consequence of slavery, similarly characterize the condition and consequence of baseball's reserve clause. Flood's argumentative structure suggests that the condition of bondage is just enough grounds for identifying dehumanization. And, although dehumanization consists in myriad social circumstances, such as in his unwanted trade to Philadelphia, the vested privileges of the owner need not be exercised for the relationship that constitutes dehumanization to exist; bondage may not be necessary to instances of dehumanization but is sufficient to mark their presence.

Fundamentally, for Curt Flood, the slave is the figurative embodiment of this argument. It is the rhetorical centerpiece of his critical description of baseball.

Moreover, as a condensation symbol, the slave is strategically flexible. As the slave illustrates that dehumanization is intrinsic to bondage, Flood enacts a subject position that all players, bound to their teams by the reserve clause - indeed, *afflicted* by the reserve clause - may occupy. Once inserted into the slave's identity, Flood both asserts the collective consciousness of baseball players and enjoins them to activate the critical faculties they possess. By providing baseball players with the slave's subjectivity, Flood invests them with the discursive resources and forms of rhetorical resistance found in the abolitionist. Since the dehumanization of the slave is immanent in the slave's bondage, Flood stretches its meaning beyond his particular circumstances and over anyone who has ever signed a contract in Major League Baseball.

At the same time, the slave narrative implies a symbolic field heavily mined with racial iconography, which suggests a problem with its rhetorical elasticity and simultaneously demonstrates Flood's novel appropriation of it. In this sense, Flood's blackness should not be lost in the shuffle of his movement from racialized double consciousness to the identification of a universal human principle. Here, it is worthwhile to recall Flood's reaction to his experience at the "Black Muslim" meeting with Bob Gibson. Turned off by his discoveries, Flood happened to "doubt that black pride need be accomplished by racism."[139] Be that as it may, the slave narrative held a unique position in Nation of Islam rhetoric, or at least in the oratory of Malcolm X, who often distinguished between the "house negro" and "field negro" in order to give voice to the interests and desires of the black masses he claimed to represent. Relying on the image

of slavery, Malcolm X said that "the house Negroes - they lived in the house with the master, they dressed pretty good, they ate good because they ate his food - what he left. [...] They would give their life to save the master's house - quicker than the master would."[140] In contrast, "The field negro was beaten from morning to night; he lived in a shack, in a hut; he wore old castoff clothes. He hated his master. [...] When the master's house caught on fire he didn't try to put it out; that field negro prayed for a wind, for a breeze."[141] In sum, Malcolm X used this difference to offer a revolutionary subject position to economically disenfranchised black masses through the slave narrative. The house negro symbolized what he understood to be the distorted views of the integrationist civil rights movement, and the field negro symbolized the attitude toward power structures proper to a revolutionary spirit. In his autobiography, Malcolm X illustrates the repugnant dynamic between the house negro and the slave master through a sarcastic utterance of the house negro's fundamental political demand: "Please, lawdy, please, Mr. White Man, boss, would you push me off another crumb down from your table that's sagging with riches...."[142] Turning down crumbs, and refusing the indignity of gratitude, Malcolm X rhetorically fantasized an inferno.

For Flood, the burning of the master's house would have been counterproductive; though he is self-sacrificial and strategically self-effacing, he is not self-immolating. I do not mean to suggest that Curt Flood is *really* a "house negro," nor do I mean to assert that Malcolm X's explication of the slave narrative is in any way more authentic or innately incisive than Flood's. Instead, Malcolm X's allegorical reasoning operates as a useful counterpoint for highlighting both the tension in and ingenuity of Flood's appropriation. First, whereas Malcolm X proposes a division within black identity in order to illuminate

the errors of integrationism, Curt Flood collapses the division between white identity and black identity in order to advance a fundamentally liberal claim through the rhetorical figure of the slave. For Malcolm X, blackness was a unifying feature of social experience whose potential for political mobilization became poisoned through its complicity with white liberalism's progressive imagination. Black identity was a given in Malcolm's slave narrative, but the slave's politics were dependent on the coziness of one's relationship with the master. The slave narrative, on this account, was useful to Malcolm for illustrating the subordinate indignity of the white liberal's reluctant surrender of a few unwanted scraps. Read against this version of the narrative, Flood's invocation seems to be an appeal for more of the boss' crumbs. Flood sought neither the abolition of baseball as such nor a revolution that installed players into the owners' previous position. After the fall of the reserve clause, Flood hoped, owners would still own and players would still play, but the distribution of the game's wealth would more fairly reflect the players' contribution if they were permitted to negotiate contracts freely. Above all, Flood wanted some of the riches, not a reversal of fortune.

Second, Flood's slaves were not all black, but were instead unified precisely by their collective status in what he understood as bondage. To that extent, the racialized imagery offered by the slave narrative, which was central to Malcolm X's purposes, cut against Flood's attempt to construct a political rhetoric suitable for baseball's oppressed. By invoking the slave, Flood may have connected his struggle thematically and emotionally to modes of black protest circulating contemporaneously, but in so doing, Flood laid treacherous rhetorical ground. Evidence of the dangers consisted in Tom Haller's worry that Flood's lawsuit was a "black thing," Gerald Early's placement of

Flood within the context of a "white backlash," and Flood's own persistent ambiguity in asserting the racial politics of his claim. Having said that, the slave analogy helped Flood accomplish rhetorical objectives similar to those of Malcolm X. In sum, Flood's use of the slave dramatized the dehumanizing logic of a grateful response to paternalism, demystified baseball owners' romantic nationalism, and challenged the dominant story of progress told by a mendacious oppressor. Writ large, Malcolm's slave narrative was a didactic attempt to introduce a revolutionary consciousness and reveal the political error of liberalism's naive optimism. By stretching the political symbolism of the slave to include his white colleagues, Flood fashioned their experiences into trope that attempted to reveal the players' collective revolutionary consciousness. As Flood put it, "All but a very few major leaguers share my view of baseball reality."[143]

Notes

[1] Snyder, *A Well Paid Slave*, 76.
[2] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 384 n. 76.
[3] Curt Flood and Richard Carter, *The Way It Is* (New York: Trident, 1970), 17.
[4] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 17.
[5] Mentioned in a personal conversation with Brad Snyder. See Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 76.
[6] Gerald Early, "Curt Flood, Gratitude, and the Image of Baseball," (2006). This essay appears in a series of guest articles for sportswriter Alex Belth, http://www.alexbelth.com/article_early.php. Belth is the author of a Flood biography.
[7] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 103-4.
[8] In a recent essay on Curt Flood, David Leonard makes this argument; see. David J. Leonard, "Curt Flood; 'Death is a Slave's Freedom': His Fight Against Baseball, History, and White Supremacy," in *Reconstructing Fame: Sport, Race, and Evolving Reputations*, ed. David C. Ogden and Joel Nathan Rosen (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 31-47.
[9] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 206.
[10] Weiss, *The Curt Flood Story*, 5.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 115.
[14] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 14.
[15] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 114.
[16] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 16.
[17] Leggett, "Not a Flood," 18-21.
[18] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 197-8.
[19] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 114.
[20] Ibid., 114.
[21] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 120. Emphasis added.
[22] Ibid., 53-4.
[23] John Haiman, *Talk is Cheap: Sarcasm, Alienation, and the Evolution of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20-1.
[24] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 50.
[25] Ibid., 48-49.
[26] Ibid., 93-4.
[27] Robert Terrill, "Irony, Silence, and Time: Frederick Douglass on the Fifth of July," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, (August 2003), 216.
[28] Ibid., 230.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 114.

[32] Flood and Carter, *The Way Is Is*, 229. Busch's speech appears as an Appendix to The Way It Is. "Appendix B," 228-236.

[33] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 174.

[34] Ibid., 173.

[35] Ibid., 16.

[36] Terrill, "Irony, Silence, and Time," 230.

[37] Ibid., 216.

[38] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 18.

[39] Ibid., 18.

[40] Ibid., 16.

[41] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 114.

[42] It was in fact quoted by Bob Broeg in a review, a column I discuss in detail in Chapter 5.

[43] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 114.

[44] Michael Lomax, "Curt Flood Stood Up for Us: The Quest to Break Down Racial Barriers and Structural Inequality in Major League Baseball," *Culture, Sport, and Society* (2004), 61.

[45] Ibid., 63.

[46] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 77.

[47] Marvin Miller, *A Whole Different Ballgame* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 186.

[48] Alex Belth, *Stepping Up: The Story of Curt Flood and His Fight for Baseball Players' Rights* (New York: Persea Books, 2006), 154.

[49] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 76-7.

[50] Weiss, *The Curt Flood Story*, 157.

[51] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 155.

[52] Early, "Curt Flood, Gratitude."

[53] Just as Early is careful to qualify "Black Power" by noting its ability to mean different things to different users of the term, it is important to note that "black consciousness" is a similarly flexible notion. Certainly the consciousness of black individuals is subject to wide degrees of variance. As such, the central task for making sense of Flood's use of the term is not to define black consciousness abstractly and then measure Flood's discourse against a predetermined meaning. Instead, the task is to discern exactly what Flood meant by black consciousness through his rhetorical performance in *The Way It Is*.

[54] Kirt H. Wilson, "Towards a Discursive Theory of Racial Identity: The Souls of Black Folk as a Response to Nineteenth Century Biological Determinism," *Western Journal of Communication* 63 (Spring 1999), 195.

[55] Ibid., 211.

[56] Du Bois, *Souls*, 9.

[57] Ibid., 171.

[58] Wilson, "Towards a Discursive Theory," 208.

[59] Ibid., 208.

[60] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 12.
[61] Ibid., 13-14.
[62] Ibid., 19.
[63] Ibid., 23.
[64] Ibid., 25.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 26.
[68] Ibid., 31.
[69] Ibid., 22.
[70] Ibid., 31.
[71] Ibid., 34
[72] Ibid., 35.
[73] Ibid., 37.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 39-40.
[76] Michael Lomax, who identifies "black rage" as Flood's primary motivation to sue Major League Baseball, perhaps infers his assertion from this passage. But it is important to note that Flood never uses the term "black rage." That is, black rage is not a formalized expression that Flood borrows from a broader political discourse. Instead, Flood's account of his rage emerges from the particularities of his experiences.
[77] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 37
[78] Ibid., 39.
[79] Ibid., 32.
[80] Ibid., 39.
[81] Du Bois, *Souls*, 166.
[82] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 38-9.
[83] Ibid., 26.
[84] Ibid., 27.
[85] Ibid., 115.
[86] Ibid., 120-1.
[87] Ibid., 29.
[88] Ibid., 28.
[89] Ibid., 88.
[90] Ibid., 27.
[91] Ibid., 116.
[9292] Wilson, "Towards A Discursive Theory," 211.
[93] Cal Fussman, *After Jackie: Pride, Prejudice, and Baseball's Forgotten Heroes: An Oral History* (City: Pub, Date), 186.
[94] Fussman, *After Jackie*, 185.
[95] Bob Veale in Fussman, *After Jackie*, 192.
[96] Judy Pace in Fussman, *After Jackie*, 192.
[97] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 103.

[98] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 24.
[99] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 104.
[100] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 105.
[101] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 90.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., 74.
[104] Ibid., 75-6.
[105] Ibid., 188.
[106] Ibid., 172.
[107] Ibid., 138-9.
[108] Ibid., 199-200.
[109] Ibid., 188.
[110] Ibid., 190.
[111] Ibid., 29-30.
[112] Ibid., 86.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., 87.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid., 88-89.
[117] Ibid., *The Way It Is*, 39.
[118] Ibid., 70-1.
[119] *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 20, 1971, 20.*
[120] Ibid.
[121] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 143.
[122] Ibid., 187.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid., 15.
[126] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 104.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 143-4.
[129] Ibid., 169.
[130] Ibid., 120.
[131] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 15. The allusion to Rembrandt was a comment on Flood's supposed ability to paint well enough to earn a living. Its gratuitous insertion by Flood dramatizes the smugness with which the owners leveraged the players against their livelihood.
[132] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 118.
[133] Ibid., 190.
[134] Ibid., 193.
[135] Ibid., 173.
[136] Ibid., 15.
[137] Ibid., 51.

[138] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 139. Emphasis on "slavery" in original.

[139] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 29-30.

[140] Malcolm X, "Message to The Grass Roots," in *Malcolm X Speaks*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1990; New York; Grove Press, 1966), 10.

[141] Ibid., 11.

[142] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New Yorl: Ballantine, 1966), 219.

[143] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 52.

Chapter 4

Curt Flood's Case in the "Fighting Press"

On April 27, 1972, the black newspaper, the *St. Louis Argus*, reported on a meeting held the preceding March between editors and publishers of black newspapers from around the United States to commemorate the 145th anniversary of the founding of *Freedom's Journal*, described by the *Argus* as the "first Negro newspaper." This occasion provided good reasons for the *Argus* to comment on the contemporaneous "role" of the black press in public life. Next to the article appeared a snappy, unattributed poem. Titled, "The Black Newspaper," it read in part:

> It may not look like excellence;
> Its pages sometimes hard to read,
> But there's no question of its role
> Or that it's something Blacks need.
> Its voice may often feeble be
> In sections where the Klan is strong,
> But even when its voice squeaks,
> It squeaks against continued wrong. [...]
> It tries its best to unify
> The Black masses everywhere;
> To rally to the long-oppressed
> And show the world that we care.
> It dares to bait the powerful
> And fights for fuller integration
> When publishers are well, aware
> They plan their own elimination. [...][1]

This delightful poem is interesting for the way in which it reflexively narrates the life of the black press with both a plot and a vexing subplot. The black newspaper is essential,

suggests the poem, to give voice to the fight against racial injustice. The black newspaper is a forum in which unity is expressed and collective black will is decided. The black newspaper, furthermore, works for racial integration, pushes for inclusion; and, this is where the narrative takes a quizzical turn. It does all this while planning its own demise. Paradoxically, its importance is derived from its yearning vision of its own irrelevance. With a self-conscious viability predicated on its own exclusion, this poem projects a hopeful future when the black newspaper might be the archaic site for a superfluous political identity well-sutured into a universal public sphere. I mention this poem because I want to keep the contrary movements of both its plot and subplot in mind as I evaluate the public space in which Curt Flood found himself and was found by others in the early 1970s.

Either because the court system failed to modernize the legal meaning of baseball, or because Flood's contemporary ballplayers refused to defend him publicly, or because Flood was a self-destructive alcoholic, the common story of Flood's personal history as told by his biographers centers on the tragedy of his loss and premature baseball retirement. One persistent theme that underwrites this story is that sportswriters working for major US newspapers in the early seventies pandered to baseball ownership and produced a public image for Flood that at best made him look greedy and at worst made him look ungrateful, a charge which supported the owners' argument that the reserve clause was necessary for the "good of the game." To his credit, Flood anticipated the treatment he would receive by the nation's sportswriters. After sitting out the 1970 season in order to establish for his federal lawsuit that he incurred financial damages from the reserve system, his attorneys and those of the baseball commissioner agreed that

if Flood signed a contract for the 1971 baseball season, that fact would not prejudice his legal standing. The Philadelphia Phillies traded his rights to the Washington Senators, and Flood signed a contract worth $110,000. In *The Way It Is*, after having seen what was written in outlets such as *The Sporting News* and the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, Flood worried about what would happen in public discourse:

> Many fans would surely suppose that I had sold out or, at the very least, had been pressured into abandoning the fight. In 1970 I had called myself a $90,000-a-year slave and now I would be playing quietly for $110,000. This would tend to affirm public belief in the invincible power of the baseball establishment. Worse, it would encourage cynicism about the durability of principles—not only mine but everyone else's. [...] Too bad. Too bad for me. Too bad for those who might misunderstand or misrepresent me.[2]

Indeed, Flood's book is shot-through with this anxiety about the relationship between the sports press, his public image, and his commitment to principle. As Brad Snyder points out, "During the 1960s and early 1970s, members of the press were firmly on the side of management."[3]

Most sportswriters who advocated the owners' cause repeated, in various iterations, the owners' argument that reserve clause abolition would create "chaos," or in any case, bring harm to the "good of the game." But, Bob Broeg, a St. Louis baseball writer whose articles appeared in the *Post-Dispatch* and in the nationally circulating *Sporting News*, was the most vocal of Flood's direct critics. In a January 1970 opinion appearing in both publications, Broeg made the argument that most concerned Flood:

> Now, the maximum pay cut in baseball is 25 percent, reflecting just one of the many financial improvements that have accrued to — careful you don't gag on this one — the poor victims of peonage and servitude. [...]
>
> So it is difficult indeed to be sympathetic to the little man, particularly when it really is not a matter of principle, but of principal.
>
> If principle were really involved in his legal assault on baseball's reserve clause as violating the federal antitrust laws, Flood would have asked for $1 and the right to negotiate for himself.[4]

By the time that Flood wrote his book, he knew well what he was up against.

Section A — Counterpublics and the Dilemmas of Inclusion

Although Flood never recognized it in *The Way It Is*, he did in fact have a source of affirmation while his case was in court and his identity was on public display. Whether or not this source of support understood or represented him in a way that Flood would have approved can never be known, but, says Snyder, "Flood's most consistent supporter was the black press."[5] Gerald Early also notes that the "black press [...] was generally sympathetic and supportive." Early claims further that "the black press generally saw Flood in heroic terms, as a fighter for principle, as someone unafraid to challenge a white-dominated system, as someone who was in the tradition of politically conscious black athletes."[6] And Charles Korr, whose history of baseball's labor relations identifies contemporaneous reaction to Flood as racist and vitriolic, admits, "The black press treated Flood quite differently."[7] In brief, on the historian's balance sheet of Flood's friends and enemies in the public sphere of 1970, the latter category allows standing room only, but the former is generally understood to be a category of one: black newspapers.

This observation invites critical reflection; first, because it is not at all clear that black newspapers were any help to him, and second, because the black press, especially in the late sixties and early seventies, contained its own political logic. As a crucial organ in what Houston Baker calls the "black public sphere,"[8] the black press operated (and continues to operate) as both a controlled space of representation for black cultural identity and as a deliberative forum for issues of concern to (many) black citizens. Noting these first impressions, in this section I dwell on the possibility that the black press constitutes a "counterpublic." In a rare scholarly focus on the history of the black press, Todd Vogel frames a collection of essays by suggesting that "We [...] ask how identity and counterpublics became intertwined in trying to bring change to society. Black newspapers' messages assume their full meaning only as we revise the public sphere and the ways it works with marginalized peoples."[9] Vogel's line of thought can be most charitably understood as an invitation to view the black press against the political possibilities of "counterpublicity," and not as an elaborate empirical argument that the black press are or ever were well-functioning ideals of counterpublic activity, whatever that may be. This chapter takes up his suggestion.

Counterpublicity and The Black Press

The idea of a counterpublic is an attractive notion for the democratic politics of inclusion. By staging an oppositional scene, or by cultivating resistant discourses, counterpublics would seemingly align with political orientations that center on destabilizing dominant, and exclusionary, publics for the purpose of widening the boundaries of democratic participation. According to Fraser's definition, subaltern counterpublics are "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social

groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs."[10] Moreover, Fraser finds promise in their appearance, since "the proliferation of subaltern counterpublics means a widening of discursive contestation, and that is a good thing in stratified societies."[11] Fraser's analysis is guided by a critique of Habermas' ideal bourgeois public sphere. Contrasting the empirical history of civic participation to Habermas' imaginary model, she argues that the impulse to bracket social inequality through rational-critical debate in a liberal democracy — without actually eliminating it — has the effect of advantaging dominant groups. The problem is that the mere bracketing of social inequality removes the *facts* of social inequality from deliberative agendas, thereby strengthening existing hierarchies under the authorizing auspices of an exclusivist discourse on the common good. Generally speaking, exclusivist discourses operate under the rhetorical guise of "rational-critical" debate, the very procedural norm that is, on Habermas' view, supposed to deliver agency to the public in relation to the state. Along these lines, Fraser argues that the Habermasian promise of a single public sphere is not just an illusion, but is predicated politically on processes of exclusion that turn the public sphere into an instrument of social inequality. Recognizing, nevertheless, that marginalized groups (or, subaltern peoples), have historically found discursive spaces in which to enact political identities and define interests collectively, Fraser places democratic faith in a plurality of public spheres that counter this logic of domination by sheltering the formation of oppositional identities, interests, and needs. In this way, the "widening of discursive contestation" is imagined to hold the potential to challenge the lines of social stratification that problematize the public sphere from the start.

At first glance, Fraser's conceptualization of counterpublics provides a useful heuristic for apprehending Curt Flood's appearance in black newspapers in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although it is important to avoid reducing the broader notion of counterpublicity to a singular site,[12] Fraser's idea of a counterpublic provides a theoretical context that renders salient two crucial functions of the black press during this time. First, black newspapers operated as "parallel discursive arenas" in which potentially oppositional interpretations of black identity were cultivated as a means of asserting collective black interest. This, perhaps, provides an explanation for why Flood's only ally seemed to be the black press. Marked by his blackness, and keen to the problem it presented, Flood was destined to find his case and identity represented differently in a public forum similarly marked by blackness than in the "white bourgeois public sphere."[13] Second, black newspapers attempted to project those identities and interests outward toward a dominant public sphere. As Ronald Jacobs argues, "By establishing an independent black press, African-Americans were able to secure a space of self-representation: not only to craft common identities and solidarities, but also to develop arguments which might effectively engage white civil society."[14] Jacobs sounds optimistic about this development, but I am concerned specifically with what "engagement" entails.

According to Fraser, counterpublics obtain their influence through a dialectical movement:

> [I]n stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for

> agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides. This dialectic enables subaltern counterpublics partially to offset, although not wholly to eradicate, the unjust participatory privileges enjoyed by dominant social groups in stratified societies.[15]

Fraser's "dialectic" can be imagined as an oscillating movement, whereby subordinate social groups alternately retreat into counterpublics in order to organize politically effective forms of collective identity and will — a kind of intra-public activity — and pivot to engage "wider" publics (with more or less success) in moments of inter-public interaction. The dual character of subaltern counterpublics puts into conceptual terms what the paradoxical narrative of the *Argus* poem evokes rhetorically. As black newspapers imagined their own life-cycle, they recognized their oscillation between retreat and engagement and hoped that the energy of this movement would erase their necessity. The black newspaper, reminds the poem, tries its best to unify the black masses (in withdrawal and regroupment), and it simultaneously fights for integration (in agitational activities aimed at wider publics).

Fraser's theorization of counterpublics is certainly not the only one, but her account seems to be a useful starting point for a critical view of the public sphere that might explain what occurs when members of subordinate social groups invent and speak within alternate public forums. I do not mean to offer a comprehensive or unifying theory of counterpublicity, and I am not even sure that one is desirable. But, since Fraser's conception seems to be the locus of various disciplinary conversations about counterpublics, I want to suggest that by holding them in synchronous analytical suspense with the black press' self-imagination during Curt Flood's historical moment,

we might come to learn something about what happened to Flood when he appeared on the pages of black newspapers. Nor to I mean to cast this discussion within a binary problematic that attempts to discover whether the black press is or is not a "true" counterpublic. Such a line of inquiry may be useful for the purpose of formulating counterpublicity as a normative construct against an empirical example, but theoretical development is not my task here. Instead, recognizing that the black press, on the face of things, resembles Fraser's initial characterization of a subaltern counterpublic, I hope to use it as a touchstone that presents a line of sight — a critical compass — that permits a thick description of the black press' rhetorical landscape at the inception of the 1970s and comes to grips with the implications of a public sphere structured explicitly by black identity. To accomplish this task, I consider two basic points: the idea that the black press is a "parallel discursive arena," the character of the black newspapers' claim to be oppositional.

The Parallel Discursive Arena

To build the case that the black press appears to possess the characteristics of a subaltern counterpublic, a closer examination of Fraser's "parallel discursive arena" is necessary. Presumably, such an arena can be usefully understood as a space in which members of socially subordinate identity categories, e.g. black citizens in the late 1960s, define their interests and needs without any poisonous interference. Crucial to this formulation is the idea that a common identity binds participants in the counterpublic. That is to say, were it not for the exclusions manifested by a supposedly universal public sphere, counterpublics would be extraneous expressions of particular identities. Examining the normative requirements of participation in "civil society," Jacobs

observes, "In order to protect cultural autonomy, [associations and communities] need to develop smaller, more particularistic spaces of discussion over which they have a lot of control. This suggests that smaller, more 'particularistic' news media, such as the African-American press, have an important role to play in the creation of a more open and inclusive civil society."[16] By describing the black press as "particularistic," Jacobs gestures toward the importance of identity to counterpublic activity: to the extent that blackness is a mark of particularity from the public sphere, the black press becomes a site of discursive exchange in which speakers' interests and needs are expressed through a productive reinterpretation of the excluded particularity that marks their exclusion from the "wider public sphere."

With black identity at the center of their organizing logic, black newspapers understood their own purpose in ways that echo Fraser's description of a subaltern counterpublic. At the 14th annual meeting of the Broadcast Promotion Association[17] in November 1969, John Sengstacke, editor and publisher of the *Chicago Defender*, spoke to the organization about "ways to relate to the black community."[18] His comments were published in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, like the *Defender*, a black newspaper: "From the day of the first Negro newspaper, Negro readers were drawn to it by a common background of disenfranchisement, segregation, and exploitation. The readers have been dependent upon the black press because for over 100 years it has been a champion, friend, advisor, and confessor on a scale matched by no other agency."[19] Sengstacke's observation, delivered in a speech to an organization seeking models with which to engage black television audiences, identifies the black press as a discursive arena, formed according to a subordinate social identity, that circulates alternative interpretations of

blackness. Most notably, this discursive arena is *parallel* to the wider public sphere in that it is oriented along a crucial axis of difference, one precipitated precisely by racial segregation. Sengstacke continued:

> Racial stress and strain have forced the Negro to develop a different line of thought, different emotional reactions to issues and problems that affect his basic interest. They may eat the same food as do other citizens of this nation and may wear the same clothes, but the incidence of segregation has compelled them to be oriented differently, so that different views and messages which appeal to whites may fall on deaf ears so far as black people are concerned.[20]

As a shelter for black identity, black newspapers imagined themselves in terms of their ability to define black interests and black needs. Furthermore, the black press styled itself as an authoritative black public voice by virtue of its unique connection to black readers. The *Argus* claimed that black newspapers "have a believability that other newspapers do not have, for they are the only media that express the black point of view on community affairs which is recognizable and accepted by black readers."[21] And, in August 1972, Charles Rangel, representing Harlem in the U.S. House of Representatives, wrote a laudatory letter to the *Baltimore Afro-American* in celebration of its 80th year of publication reading, "For 80 years, you have provided an invaluable public service to Baltimore's black community. During most of the history of the Baltimore Afro-American, the news of greatest interest to black people was nowhere to be found except on your pages."[22] Seen from Fraser's perspective, Rangel might have said that the *Afro-American* provides an invaluable counterpublic service. Rangel further stated, "Today, the black community turns to you each week for your excellent coverage of the events

and issues which affect their lives."[23] Without black newspapers such as the *Afro-American*, in other words, the events and issues that constitute black public life would be invisible, meaning not public at all.

In this parallel arena, though, the visibility of black citizens and their interests was not enough. Perhaps putting the "counter" in counterpublic, black newspapers self-consciously attempted to challenge the damaging representations of blackness operant in a dominant public sphere. Setting the black press in contrast to "white" newspapers, G. James Fleming explained in the *Afro-American* in 1972 that one crucial function of black newspapers was to undermine the assumption of black criminality and fight on behalf of accused innocents:

> In those days when white newspapers seldom carried any constructive news concerning black, but published much labelled crime news, it was the black press, almost alone, that waged the campaign against such discriminatory handling of news, and that carried non-crime community news. It was black editors and black reporters, also, who exposed the "Negro-did-it" stories which charged blacks with crimes (including sex crimes) which no black person had committed but for which many were arrested and sentenced and imprisoned.[24]

In Fleming, the dual character of Fraser's conception comes into evanescent focus as the appearance of community news in the black press works in tandem with at least one agitational activity: exposing the white press' sordid and malicious lies about black individuals. Whether this type of agitation is "oppositional," or "emancipatory" is still an open question, but it is of interest that as black newspapers examine themselves, they begin to forge the links between racial identity and the politics of public life.

Though less specific about the problem, the article that framed the *Argus* poem in 1972 similarly praised the black press for the positive image of blackness it was uniquely able to promote: "Blacks rely almost completely upon their newspapers for social and religious news, and are the major source of positive news about Blacks' contributions to the American way of life."[25] Obviously, the rhetorical gesture toward the "American way of life" is pregnant with suspicious possibilities, but its connection to the effort to reinterpret black identity registers what Robert Asen calls "collective imagining," which may "function as a background process or [...] be engaged actively."[26] Although Asen frames these two functions as being conceptually distinct, instances of black press reflexivity illustrate what happens when they work together. On the one hand, "as a background process, the collective imagination constitutes a constellation of shared assumptions, values, perceptions and beliefs for matters identified explicitly as topics of discussion."[27] By insinuating positive images of blackness into the general scene of discursive activity, black newspapers filter topics of discussion through "positive" meanings of black identity. On the other hand, "active engagement of the collective imagination occurs in situations where advocates explicitly call upon their audiences to rethink relations to one another."[28] In observations like those appearing in the *Argus* and the *Afro-American*, black newspapers explicitly claim to rethink racial relations in public terms — they reshape black identity by deliberately placing its meaning onto the public agenda. In this sense, Asen's "background process" exists as a function of "active engagement" as black newspapers reflect on their role in producing a black collective imagination through (at least what they take to be) positive images of blackness. Put

differently, positive news is both a topic of discussion and something that all topics "discuss" implicitly.

This combination meant that the black press worked as a site in which to render critiques of damaging representations of blackness circulating elsewhere. For example, in May 1970, the *Pittsburgh Courier* published the highlights of a speech given by a professional publicist named Frederick Weaver to the Georgia Association of Broadcasters. According to the *Courier*, Weaver told the individuals at the meeting that "they should be held responsible for correcting the damage done to black people by programs such as 'The Amos & Andy Show' and 'Beulah.'"[29] Weaver proposed applying the FCC's "fairness doctrine" to "the protracted wrong done to Black people whose ideas, attitudes, and whose very image as people has been grossly and and even traditionally distorted on the air."[30] Furthermore, Weaver argued that the perpetuation of these distortions has "been a great detriment to the progress and general well-being of millions of us who happen to be Black."[31] Perhaps most importantly, Weaver framed his comments to the Georgia Association of Broadcasters as injunctions to resolve a public problem: "It will take innovation from you [...] to provide the initiative and the momentum which I feel you owe the public and which, if recent signs are correctly indicated, the public is beginning to demand."[32] On Weaver's account, the "elsewhere" turns out to be an agglomerated interracial public, of which blacks were assumed to be a part and through which they were beginning to make demands.

As this snapshot of the black press develops into a parallel forum premised on what its participants understand to be a subordinate identity, it develops into an image of counterpublicity. Though the black press explicitly sets itself against "white

newspapers," the formation and advancement of positive identities does not necessarily amount to inclusion, whether hoped for in the "wider public," "civil society," or the "American way of life." Fraser asserts that the identities, interests, and needs generated in counterpublicity are "oppositional." There is no question that the black press staged a conflict, but the next line of questioning is: In what way did black newspapers see themselves as oppositional agencies? What does the counterpublic look like when it pivots outward to engage the wider public? What type of political energy does the oscillation generate?

"The Fighting Press" & "The Cry For Liberation"

Gunnar Myrdal, the Swedish economist whose study of American race relations influenced the thinking of the Supreme Court in the 1954 *Brown* decision, proclaimed in *An American Dilemma* that, "*To get publicity is of the highest strategic importance to the Negro people*," adding that "a great majority of white people in American would be prepared to give the Negro a substantially better deal if they know the facts."[33] Undoubtedly, Myrdal's suggestion was infused with naive optimism — the color-coded, and often violent, social clashes of the 1950s and 1960s attest powerfully to the strength of racist conviction unbent by the self-evident call for justice that the "facts" might have revealed. Nevertheless, Myrdal's faith in the facts worked as a hopeful call to throw two dimensions of the "dilemma" into public view: the sheer rawness of the deal black Americans were handed and the contributions to American democracy that blacks had to offer. In a brief chapter on black newspapers in their recent Pulitzer prize winning book, Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff use Myrdal's characterization of the black press as a "fighting press" as the launch point for a detailed history of how the civil rights

movement came to be covered by white reporters in the late 50s and early 60s.[34] The thesis of their book, though replete with previously unknown details, covers familiar ground: the civil rights movement would not achieve tangible political success until the stories and images that dramatized oppressive circumstances were circulated in the public sphere. This view, shared by many historians, vindicates Myrdal's prediction, but the nature of the black press into the 1970s raises questions about the fight he lauded it for waging.

Myrdal's view of publicity as a crucial factor in racial progress, written in the 1940s, illuminates the significance of the black press as the history of racialized social change moved into the 1950s and 1960s. Noting the importance of the black press to Thurgood Marshall's NAACP, which black newspapers covered extensively, Jacobs (via Nancy Fraser) says that, "this is the normative picture of counter-publics, which are supposed to simultaneously increase the likelihood of inter-public engagement and intra-public autonomy."[35] Jacobs concern is that though a counterpublic is theoretically supposed to facilitate interaction with dominant publics, what occurred in the 1950s casts doubt on what the black press could accomplish in practice. In relation to the NAACP, Jacobs says, "Quite simply, the only publicity African-American leaders could count on was that which came from the African-American press."[36] By the early 1970s, several black newspapers were still imagining their activities in terms that resembled Myrdal's "fighting press." These black papers continued to offer self-descriptions through various idioms of opposition, rhetorically constituting the black press as a field of agitational activity. In a 1972 column that provided an updated rationale for the existence of the

black press eighty years after the founding of the Baltimore paper, the *Afro-American* declared:

> We are still and will continue our major efforts in the aim to upgrade the quality of life for all American people. As a minority member of the press, we know that we are only a small voice in the cry for the liberation of our readers in this complexed democratic society, but we know that the voice provides a viable wedge in the fight for equality and we intend to keep it loud and clear.[37]

Through the language of "liberation" and its self-imposed role as a "wedge" for "equality," the *Afro-American*, despite what may have happened in the fifties and sixties, maintains the spirit of the "fighting press" into the seventies, renewing its vows on its eightieth birthday.

There is another dimension of the *Afro-American*'s self conception, though, that deserves consideration, one that urges renewed attention to the poem in the *Argus* that has black editors and publishers planning "their own elimination." Specifically, the effort to "upgrade the quality of life for all American people" bespeaks a political impulse that cannot be confined to a simple revaluation of blackness. The *Afro-American* notes that American democracy is "complexed," which directs the energy of "liberation" toward a fuller, more complete constitution of national identity. As I suggested earlier, this momentum may exist in tension with an authentically black vision of nationhood (a problem I will discuss later), but it appears that as the black press directs its activities outward toward a "wider public," it aims at inclusion. In this political context, which Manning Marable calls liberal integrationism, the role of the black press is to insert black identity into a mode of representation that enacts the broader meaning of American life.

As such, the fight of the "fighting press" is bound up with its assertion of its own hopeful irrelevance. Ronald Jacobs notes that "around [1970], a number of African-American leaders were beginning to believe that racial integration would remove the need for a separate black newspaper and began arguing that the black press should fight for its own disappearance."[38] One such African-American leader was James D. Williams, who in 1970 directed the office of information and publication for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Williams said that "in a fully integrated society, the black press would shrink and eventually vanish."[39] Recognizing, in any case, that counterpublic activity was still necessary in 1972, the *Argus* asserted the role of the black press in unequivocal terms: "So long as inequities exist *in the framework of American justice*, the black press will remain the most strident voice in the crusade of freedom."[40] Note that this promise does not interrogate the "framework of American justice"; rather, it locates the justification for the black press in the need to identify its manifest inequities.

Along these lines, however, Fraser's notion of counterpublicity begins to assume a peculiar complexion (a white one?). In a direct critique of Fraserian counterpublicity that defends the virtues of "civil society" against the conflictual rhetoric of "discursive contestation," Jeffrey Alexander says:

> This kind of logic takes us back to the strategic logic of conflict theory, the very perspective which civil society theory was designed to overcome. Alternative publics succeed because their intragroup activities have allowed them to learn the art of translating their particular injustices into the more universal language of civil justice. Counterpublic resources give them the power to project these translations into the surrounding civil sphere. In short, excluded groups successfully transform their subordinate position by making more substantial and more deeply institutionalized —

> more real and less utopian — the universalistic solidarity promised by the dominant civil sphere.[41]

Through the language of "civil society," Alexander sees counterpublics interacting with a theoretically denser democratic ideal than Fraser's counterpublics. On his view, an alternative public has the potential to generate not just participatory inclusion by giving voice to previously inaudible "subaltern" arguments, but also mediates a translation from a particularized rhetoric into a universalizable political language. This ideal is theoretically denser because it implies that there is more to political success than asserting one's voice through a recuperated identity and allowing new arguments to poke through the "wider public" from new positions. Alexander instead has a more deterministic notion of civil society that sets the terms for "alternative public" translations. It is tempting to call this relationship a case of identity co-option: Alexander could be saying that the way "alternative publics" succeed is by being more like the public. In the meantime, particularized identities find ways to shed that which marks them as particular — i.e. blackness. Doing away with the complications of "conflict" theory permits Alexander to do away with the problem of being oppositional.

To be fair, he does permit one kind of discursive activity that nevertheless seems "agitational": a counterpublic could destabilize the rigidity of social hierarchies by being *more* universal than the public sphere against which it sets itself. In other words, in its effort to promote inclusion, a counterpublic exists to show how exclusions happen and to deploy such exclusions strategically by offering itself as a "truer" democratic ideal. In this sense, the expressly pyrrhic victory sought by the *Argus* and others makes sense. Though the battlefield may never disappear completely, by orienting the rationale of the

forum as if its participants hope that it will, the black press generates a space from which to critique not the ideal of universal justice itself, but the failure of the "wider public" to protect the promise of social justice universally. Indeed, the mere existence of the black press bespeaks this critique. This seems to be the lesson from, once again, the reflexive rhetoric produced in response to the *Afro-American*'s 80th anniversary, when the newspaper described itself (and similar others) as possessing "firing power": "As a black newspaper, printed primarily for black readers, the AFRO-AMERICAN is proud that it has been on the firing line for 80 years and has never reduced the force of its firing power in the cause of freedom for all, civil rights, and justice. It never intends to lessen its power in this direction."[42] The *Chicago Defender*'s Sengstacke appropriated the notion of the "watchdog" to make a similar point in a published letter to the *Afro-American*:

> It is under this impetus and AFRO's commitment to the democratic process that a high tide of change is rolling through America today. In the scale of human values, there are no decent alternatives to social justice. The persistent struggle to achieve such an end fully sustains the conviction and the rationale that Black America has no greater watchdog than the black press.[43]

All at once, the black press indicts the universality of the public sphere, presents itself as evidence of the hegemony of the putative universal, and claims to more faithfully represent "freedom for all" through the "democratic process."[44]

Despite assurances from the *Afro-American* that it never intends to "lessen its firing power," its status as a "watchdog" for "Black America" squares neatly with a fight that seeks to destroy the scene of the fight. John Belden, President of the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, wrote to the *Afro-American* to compliment their "relentless fight to achieve

for the people of Baltimore equality of opportunity and the full rights of citizenship."[45] Belden's comments universalize the black press' fight, defining the scope of its political activity as working for the benefit of everyone through its advocacy of the disadvantaged:

> For eight decades, with effectiveness, you have fought for the conquest of diseases of the heart and the human spirit of a disadvantaged people throughout America, and the world. I am sure this noble cause for many years has been, and still is, perhaps your greatest challenge. Certainly, you have met this challenge with unparalleled success. Yes, America is richer because the AFRO lives.[46]

Thus, the plot and subplot of the black press, which paradoxically announces its necessity and plans its own demise, achieve coherence in universality - the meaning of its life is articulated in the conditions of its death. America may be richer because the *Afro* lives, but its auspicious mortality signals the "real" (as Alexander might say) value of the riches — universal justice.

This type of dynamic pushes the idea of black press counterpublicity closer to what Asen calls an "emergent collective." Asen's critique of Fraser centers on the reductionist move involved in equating counterpublics with subordinate social groups. "A reductive reading fixed on group identity," says Asen, forecloses "emancipatory possibilities: It reifies an often-imposed group identity and denies diverse coalition building as a source of counterpublic participation."[47] Indeed, Asen worries that most attempts to fix counterpublicity in extra-discursive forms, such as stable identities, pre-given forums, and necessary topics, are poisonously reductive. Preferring a fundamentally discursive account of counterpublics, Asen settles on the idea of

"emergent collectives," which "emerge in the recognition of various exclusions from wider publics of potential participants, discourse topics, and speaking styles and the resolve that builds to overcome these exclusions."[48] Counterpublics, on this account, are ephemeral and intrinsically inert. Since their sole teleological orientation involves overcoming exclusions, they appear in reflexive moments of collective recognition and disappear when their inclusive predicate is either foreclosed summarily by a dominant public or fulfilled by actual participation. Thus, like the black press, the struggle for inclusion — characteristic of counterpublicity — entails an ephemeral scene of discursive activity. On Asen's view, the black press should not be defined as a counterpublic because it contains black voices, exists in black newspapers, or talks about blackness. Instead, it might be called a counterpublic because it is formed out of the recognition of black exclusion from public life and strives to overcome it.[49] Though the 145 year history of black newspapers (by 1972) may seem to rebut this presumption of ephemerality, their self-effacing narrative evinces an aspiring transience that would be satisfied by black inclusion into the commons.

Asen's conception of counterpublics certainly has the advantage of avoiding reductionism and essentialism, but in accepting such a view, the primary appeal of Fraser's notion evaporates. That is to say, whereas Asen's "emergent collectives" are radically non-normative, Fraser's subaltern counterpublics seem to give a democratic politics something to root for. A fair interpretation of Fraser would say that she applauds counterpublics because they protect the interests of those who find themselves without access to public life as a consequence of their subordinate social identities; this makes them "oppositional." Thus, the fight of the black press seems to be a good fight: By

giving public voice to the unfairly excluded, black newspapers disclose new social facts through positive images of black identity and arguments for social justice. Asen, I would argue, would agree that this is a picture of counterpublicity but refuse the further step of assuming that the activity of the black press is thereby "emancipatory." Instead, the descriptive utility of counterpublics lies in their ability convey "the texture, dynamism, and multidirectionality of public discourse in moments of social dialogue, episodes of controversy, debate, and contestation."[50] Neither the outcome of these moments nor the roles of hero and villain can be known in advance.[51] Rather, counterpublics point us to interesting antagonisms. In emptying them of a normative requirement, Asen reveals nothing about a counterpublic's politics. In sum, Asen's idea of "emergent collectives," if it is to be a critical category, urges a question: Is the fight of the black press a good fight? It is a fair question, to be sure, because not everyone thought it was.

Section B — Spiraling Exclusions and the Disincorporation of Curt Flood

This section extends the previous discussion of counterpublicity by viewing the black press through the prism of the black middle-class. Here, I return to problem of the universal and the particular in the public sphere by reintroducing the formula I presented in Chapter 1 that reads Goldberg's critique of liberalism in tandem with Warner's observation that the bourgeois public sphere requires a rhetoric of self-abstraction, or disincorporation. In the previous section, using Nancy Fraser's "subaltern counterpublics" as a starting point, I argued that the black press imagined itself to be a parallel discursive arena and an agency of opposition. As a forum dedicated to protecting the discourses of social justice, the black press mediated a unique vision of politics, one aligned with its hope for future irrelevance. Mirroring the inclusive logic of liberalism,

black newspapers hoped that their efforts in the cry for justice would produce the arguments and representations necessary to reform civic space. The question still open, then, revolves around the consequences of this logic, not just for assessing the politics of the black "counterpublic," but for discovering what happened to Curt Flood once he appeared on the pages of black newspapers. In this section, I move through the following steps: first, I present the critical insights of E. Franklin Frazier, who in 1957 identified a class tension internal to the black press' claim to unity; second, I complicate the picture of counterpublicity I presented in the previous chapter by discussing the problem of counterpublic exclusions and the rhetoric of disincorporation; third, I show how Curt Flood was implicated in the logic of self-abstraction through both a brief return to *The Way It Is* and through an analysis of one dimension of the black press' advocacy of his cause. As a forum modeled on the bourgeois public sphere, black newspapers imposed a collective unity predicated on the liberal political impulses of the black middle-class.

Liberalism and the Black Bourgeoisie

In 1957, Howard University sociologist E. Franklin Frazier published *Black Bourgeoisie*, a controversial and confrontational text that nevertheless established Frazier as "the most capable black sociologist in America."[52] His thesis was that an emergent middle-class of black citizens in the United States faced an identity crisis. Caught between a deliberate, self-loathing rejection of black folk culture and a racist exclusion from white society, the black middle-class, according to Frazier, created a "mythological" world for the purpose of providing a comfortable self-definition. Frazier said, "In escaping from identification with the masses, the black bourgeoisie has attempted to identify with the white propertied classes. Since this has been impossible,

except in their minds, because of the racial barriers those identified with this class have attempted to act out their role in a world of make-believe."[53] *Black Bourgeoisie* is comprehensive in its scope; against a theoretical backdrop informed by marxism and the insights of Thorstein Veblen (specifically with respect to "conspicuous consumption"), Frazier details the various ways in which the "world of make-believe" manifests in social and cultural life. Though not thinking explicitly in terms of the possibility of counterpublicity, his analysis of the black press is replete with critical cues:

> The Negro press is not only one of the most successful business enterprises owned and controlled by Negroes; it is the chief medium of communication which creates and perpetuates the world of make-believe for the black bourgeoisie. Although the Negro press declares itself to be the spokesman for the Negro group as a whole, it represents essentially the interests and outlook of the black bourgeoisie. Its demand for equality for the Negro in American life is concerned primarily with opportunities which will benefit the black bourgeoisie economically and enhance the social status of the Negro. The Negro press reveals the inferiority complex of the black bourgeoisie and provides a documentation of the attempts of this class to seek compensations for its hurt self-esteem and exclusion from American life. Its exaggerations concerning the economic well-being and cultural achievements of Negroes, its emphasis upon Negro "society" all tend to create a world of make-believe into which the black bourgeoisie can escape from its inferiority and inconsequence in American society.[54]

Relative to understanding the type of "fight" waged by the black press, Frazier's criticism urges a rigorous hermeneutic of suspicion thematized according to the identity, interests, and desires of the black middle-class. Frazier invites a reading of the black press that presumes its function as a distorting mirror, a discursive field whose record cannot be taken for granted because its (self-)images are false.[55] All at once, Frazier casts into doubt any claim to authentic and unified black representation, to the meaning of the fight

for equality, to the political efficacy of inclusion, and to the significance of black achievements expressed on the pages of black newspapers.

Put differently, Frazier describes in historically specific sociological terms a situation similar to the one that Asen describes in the theoretical language of counterpublicity. Asen says, "Emergent publics cannot articulate all possible perspectives in public debates without asserting a dubious discursive totality that presumes knowledge of the needs and interests of other prior to discursive engagement. Exclusion thus appears as a recurrent feature of public discourse, in that new formations of publics engender new exclusions."[56] Certainly, Frazier and Asen do not share much ontological ground — Frazier seems to find the "real" very easily whereas Asen presumes the discursive construction of virtually everything. Be that as it may, Frazier's critique of the "Negro press" seems to foreshadow the "dubious discursive totality" that Asen problematizes in terms of recurrent exclusions. Asen, in other words, suggests that new publics entail new exclusions, which may produce new counterpublics, which entail new exclusions, and so on — a kind of spiral of participatory exclusion structured into the very idea of a public. Putting Frazier and Asen together, the black press begins to look like an instrument that builds a liberal political imagination through a rejection of black identity. Moreover, Frazier and Asen direct critical attention to the black press' claim to be the voice of blackness, or the mouthpiece for all possible black perspectives.

For example, as the *Afro-American* celebrated its 80th birthday, it articulated the complementary goals of fighting for social justice and achieving black unity: "[A]s we mark another birthday, we simply pause to let our readers know that we intend to continue to build an effective communication instrument that will create unity in our

fight for full justice and freedom. It will be this unity that will make the difference."[57] The *Argus* asserted the importance of the black press along similar lines in 1972: "The chief aim of the Black press is to maintain a united front to protest and expose every condition inconsistent with democratic concepts we all treasure, and to give coverage to that news of the black population that is ignored and distorted by the white papers."[58] Frazier suggests that such unity is illusory, and Asen suggests that it is dubious. Moreover, both point to the possibility that the political imagination implied in the gestures toward "full justice and freedom" and "the democratic concepts we all treasure" operates in the service of an exclusive assemblage of blackness. Since the black press is the projection of a bourgeois world of make-believe, the unity it asserts becomes a reflection of that projection, rendering the fight of the "fighting press" a narrow and fanciful struggle for black bourgeois identification with the "white propertied class."

These quotations suggest that the notion of black unity operates as a background process that inflects the nature of all black newspaper "agitation." At the same time, however, the black press offered overt arguments for unity in the context of attempting to define clear political strategies. For instance, in August 1970, Whitney Young made the case for black unity as a precondition for negotiation with "white America." At the time, Young was the Executive Director of the National Urban League[59] and a regular columnist in the *Afro* newspaper chain. Young's argument was two-pronged. First, he stressed the need for black unity as a strategic response to a "divide and conquer" strategy of oppression:

> This is no time for blacks to mirror the divisions of white society. It won't be easy to achieve such unity because there are those whose experience has led them to despair of white America ever acting in a decent way. But black leadership and organizations should muster the courage and the strength to make one last effort to stand united. Oppressors have always followed a divide-and-conquer policy. Minorities have only been able to succeed when they stood together and refused to let their differences obscure their basic goal.[60]

If, as Frazier instructs, we look suspiciously on Young's implicit claim to be the spokesperson for "the Negro group as a whole," the notion of the "basic goal" is fraught with difficulty. Additionally, when differences are subsumed for the "basic goal," the consequent political strategy takes on a specific character. Young continues with the second prong of his argument, the *purpose* of unity:

> What's the purpose of a strategy of unity and coalition? Negotiation. The opportunity for a united black community and its allies to negotiate a peace that will settle the issues that have split this country for so long. It is in the self-interest of all concerned to adopt such a strategy for the seventies. And the key to the success of this effort is the achievement of black unity, for we have been the most wronged against and the most self-conscious and organized of America's dispossessed. This could be America's last opportunity to deal with black Americans and to negotiate with leaders responsible to their people before the terrifying prospect of internal strife and armed suppression descend upon us.[61]

Young's alarmist tone evokes the realities involved in the shifting goals and alliances in the early 1970s between civil rights organizations that had been at the front of a broadly visioned social movement until the late 1960s. With the seventies upon him, and the fight becoming more complex, Young can be read as attempting to invigorate the aging momentum of civil rights leadership. The crucial point, however, is that Young, on the pages of the *Afro-American*, illustrates the problem of the "dubious totality." One

wonders, in other words, exactly what negotiation entails when the "self-interest of all" is collapsed into a unified black community within which differences have been successfully eradicated.

Although Whitney Young argued that the purpose of unity was negotiation, the meaning of negotiation as a political strategy was not self-evident. On this point, Frazier's critique of the black press gains traction, and Nancy Fraser reappears. As a medium of communication designed to project the black bourgeoisie's "world of make-believe," Frazier's reading raises concern that "negotiation" might not be a transparent or self-evident synonym for political action, but is instead the public expression of a form of political action designed to solve a dual problem. Frazier says, "As a result of the break with its cultural past, the black bourgeoisie is without cultural roots either in the Negro world with which it refuses to identify, or the white world which refuses to permit the black bourgeoisie to share its life."[62] Floating in isolation between two worlds, one it rejects and one that rejects it, Frazier implies that the black middle-class invents its own world discursively. In this vein, it is worth remembering the dual character of Nancy Fraser's subaltern counterpublics. On the one hand, they serve as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment, and on the other hand, they serve as training grounds for agitational activities aimed at "wider publics." All of this may look "emancipatory" in theory, but only to the extent that this oscillating movement offers participation to those represented in a carefully managed emancipatory ideal. The effort involved in building a parallel discursive arena for the purpose of engaging in discursive contestation seems to burn as much political energy as it generates.

Consider the commemorative article that accompanied the *Argus* poem, which imagined the function of the black press as such: "the black press serves to inspire the race to greater accomplishments by publishing news of outstanding achievements and strives for greater cooperation and unity between white and black newspapers."[63] Publishing news of outstanding black achievements would seem to be a practical elaboration of the activities of a counterpublic in its moments of withdrawal and regroupment, but if the notion of cooperation correlates to the type of inter-public interaction modeled by the outward motion of a counterpublic's oscillation, its forms of representation become "dubious" in their exclusivity. Stated simply, the identities generated by counterpublics must be fit for the pivot. The news of "outstanding achievements" reported by the black press, the representations sheltered and secured, must define achievement in a way amenable to cooperation; the meaning of blackness must make inter-public interaction possible. The worry is that, on this score, the very notion of withdrawal and regroupment is an illusion, because counterpublic engagement with the "wider public" may just be another name for co-option as subalterns come to terms with collective identities qualified for pre-approval. Emancipation usually comes at a prohibitive cost when the captor sets the price. This is the essence of Frazier's argument. The black press "reveals the inferiority complex of the black bourgeoisie" through the way it coordinates its movement; in the early 70s, the black middle-class defined blackness according to the promise of entry into the public sphere. The black bourgeoisie, in other words, thought it could negotiate. Seen this way, the black press does not so much oscillate as spin its wheels while establishing the credentials to be

included in the same white bourgeois public sphere that operates as the target of Fraser's critique.

One of Frazier's most fully developed arguments for the estranged class-consciousness of the black press focused on the "society pages." Frazier insisted that although the basic notion of "'society' was not created by the Negro press, it is the Negro press which feeds and perpetuates the illusion of this element to the black bourgeoisie."[64] Most importantly, said Frazier, "The activities of 'society' serve to differentiate the black bourgeoisie from the masses of poorer Negroes and at the same time compensate for the exclusion of the black bourgeoisie from the larger white community."[65] Magazines such as *Ebony*[66] came under Frazier's most intense scrutiny, preoccupied as it was with reporting on the growing wealth of a few fortunate black citizens, glorifying the incomes of black celebrities, and advertising Cadillacs and "products which will remove or modify Negroid characteristics."[67] As part of this criticism, he noted the "exaggerated" attention given to Jackie Robinson, both in terms of his high baseball salary and as evidence of the press giving "lip service to pride in being a Negro."[68]

In the early 1970s, the gist of Frazier's evaluation was still in evidence, particularly on the sports pages of black newspapers. A one-sided debate raged in both the *Afro-American* and the *Amsterdam News* about the need for a black manager in baseball. In 1970, The Los Angeles *Sentinel*, citing a report from the "Race Relations Information Center" predicted proudly and optimistically that baseball would get its first black manager by 1971.[69] MLB would not hire a black manager until 1975. In 1969, Jackie Robinson had been quoted in *Look* magazine accusing Frank Robinson of egregious neutrality on civil rights questions for the purpose of securing a managerial

job. Whether true or not, whatever Frank Robinson did paid off when he was hired by the Cleveland Indians. Moreover, in the *Defender*, regular columnist Doc Young was highly critical of Jackie Robinson's attention to the ideological qualifications of whomever the first black manager would be:

> Jackie erroneously judges black managerial potential on the basis of militancy. That cannot be the primary role of the first black manager in major league baseball. This man, whoever he is, must be able to manage black and white players alike, all players, regardless of race, creed, or color. Jackie sometimes seems to forget — though he DOESN'T forget — that for and important racial goal, he, himself, made personal feelings secondary.[70]

In the last sentence, Doc Young gestures toward the centerpiece of the Jackie Robinson legend, namely that he sublimated his visceral reaction to racist venom in his first year with the Dodgers. I do not mean to suggest that the need for a black manager in baseball was not pressing or necessary, but this seems to call for a brand of explicit colorblindness that underscores Frazier's criticism — the first black manager in baseball ought to be the "best man for the job."

Perhaps more to the point, however, sport, and baseball in particular, produced a salary spectacle. In the black press in the early 1970s, salary milestones were reported with fanfare and urgency. When Oakland rookie pitching sensation Vida Blue asked owner Charles Finley for a $92,000 contract before the 1972 season, the New York *Amsterdam News* defended Blue strongly, asserting that without him American League attendance figures would drop sharply: "What happens if, perchance, the AL didn't have Vida?"[71] In March 1970,the Pittsburgh *Courier* argued that "the best proof of black

supremacy in the major leagues today resides in the fact that of the 15 historical stars who have signed minimal $100,000 per year contracts, nine of them are black. What is more, of course, centers on the fact that all of the nine blacks are still active, in 1970!"[72] In 1972, Chuck Andrews reported with glee in the *Amsterdam News* that Hank Aaron's $200,000 contract provided him a higher salary than President Richard Nixon.[73] And in April 1970, the Baltimore *Afro-American* produced a magazine insert to their newspaper focused on "Color In Sports," in which the lead article was titled, "Color of Sports: Black blends well with Green." "Since money is the name of any professional game," the *Afro* asked, "what would be wrong with considering first the people who are worth the most in the eyes of the club owners?"[74] The article compiled a formidable list of black names: Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, Frank Robinson, Bob Gibson. When did this all begin, wondered the *Afro*? When "the late Branch Rickey shocked the baseball establishment by signing Jackie Robinson to a contract, and announcing that the modern majors were destined to get their first black player. They did in 1947."[75]

With black unity expressed through a political imperative and through the promotion of sport "society," the consequence was that black newspapers were predisposed to articulate liberal integrationism's civic and social imagination. Manning Marable argues that the politics of integration are premised on "symbolic representation," an idea that urged "select numbers of well-educated, affluent, and/or powerful blacks into positions of authority."[76] Marable's observation, which equates the philosophical ground of liberalism with the strategies of inclusion, is incisive in that it draws three elements of integration together. He says, "The theory is that if blacks are well represented inside government, businesses, and social institutions, then this will go a long way toward

combatting the traditional practices of inequality and patterns of discrimination."[77] Political liberalism, economic liberalism, and social liberalism, on this account, were twisted threads in the black press' attempt to weave the discursive fabric of freedom, democracy, and justice. Therefore, the "oppositional" identities, interests, and needs mediated by black newspapers, who justified their battle by the promise to raze the battlefield, came to be defined by the inclusionist impulse of a black middle-class reluctant to undermine the political, economic, and social structures that gave it public relevance. The fight of the black press was a good fight only for those who stood to benefit from the symbolic representation it provided. In sum, black newspapers in the early years of the 1970s collapsed the problem of internal class difference into a view of blackness determined by middle-class self-understanding.

Disciplining Discourse in the Black Counterpublic

E. Franklin Frazier wrote in *Black Bourgeoisie* that the black middle-class' "feelings of interiority and insecurity are revealed in their pathological struggle for status within the isolated Negro world and craving for recognition in the white world."[78] This assessment is categorically scathing, and it typifies the argumentative tenor that made his text an object of outrage and derision by a number of black readers upon its release in the United States.[79] I do not know if the black middle-class in the 1950s suffered from a pathology, nor do I claim the ability to evaluate the psycho-sociological assertions Frazier offers. Having said that, I want to suggest that his criticism points incisively toward the idea that the black press, far from being a transparent medium of collective black interest, reflected in the early 1970s a very specific field of vision, one constituted by a bourgeois way of seeing. Obviously, with Frazier's book having been released in

1957 and Curt Flood "going public" in 1970, the thirteen years between render my argument prone to the objection that those thirteen years, which might be labelled the apex of black oppositional discourse in the United States, fundamentally recast the terms of the debate Frazier had initiated. In my reading of various black newspapers of the early seventies, including those that operate as the central target of Frazier's critique, not only did these publications seem to evoke his basic concerns, but they seemed to cope with the intervening years in ways that reinforced Frazier's original position. These black newspapers, the only location in which Curt Flood was publicly and vociferously supported, in other words, demonstrated a commitment to disciplining the discourses that ran afoul of their liberal imaginary. The bourgeois way of seeing was, ultimately, a bourgeois way of talking, a frustrated rhetoric of disincorporation.

This assertion brings Warner's critique of the bourgeois public sphere back to the question of the black press' status as a counterpublic. Warner's position is that the public sphere is oriented around the performance of speech protocols that enact the transformation of one's particularity into a universal speaking subject. Rational debate, then, secures an asymmetrical privilege for those whose particularity can be easily shed in public address — white, male, heterosexual, middle-class, etc. If race is a particularizing mark of difference, then racialized subjects must engage rhetorical strategies that establish and project the public sphere's requisite "frame of reference." These critical assumptions help to recast Frazier's psycho-sociological observations about the black middle-class into the vocabulary of the public sphere. The "pathological struggle" and the "craving for recognition in the white world" express, via Warner, the contradictory effort of the black press to both assert black interests and achieve inclusion.

Furthermore, this was an effort that might only be attempted by the black middle-class. The crucial variable that distinguished, at least in the early seventies, the black press in which Flood appeared from the so-called "mainstream press" was the axis of racial difference. As a quite literal "discursive arena parallel" to the "unmarked" press, the principal speakers were men of middle-class means; but they were black. The problem is that blackness could not be shed so easily. As Frazier noted of the black bourgeoisie, using terminology that anticipates Warner, "Despite their attempt to escape real identification with the masses of Negroes, they can not escape the mark of oppression any more than their less favored kinsmen."[80] So marked, a rhetoric of disincorporation was required. What frustrated this rhetoric, however, was precisely the fight for justice the black press claimed to be fighting. Consequently, the nature of the fight came to be determined by that which could articulate the abstraction of blackness into publicity and allow black newspapers to participate in political life.

In the early 1970s, obviously, the civil rights movement was in transformation, the national political landscape was shifting, and those individuals who had long spoken for black Americans as a group were being challenged by a series of new voices. My account of this history is no doubt imprecise, and it probably summarizes developments well at work prior to 1970. In fact, one could argue easily that the polyvocality of black political life in the late sixties and early seventies reflected a pre-existing variety of interests that began to find expression in a variegated, broader "black public sphere." This, in fact, is Houston Baker's argument about Martin Luther King, whom he describes as leading the "leap into black modernity which occurred between 1955 and 1965." Of King, Baker writes:

> A struggle, and indeed a successful one, may well have occurred, but without King, it could never have been as significantly informed or profoundly inscribed as a modern form of black publicity. [...] King felt this this economically impoverished public's history, spirit, local knowledge and leadership like the very beating of his heart. His voice was always tuned by and attuned to its deepest registers. King's goal, therefore, was to transform the invisible deprivations of black day-to-day life into a national *scene*.[81]

Baker rightly warns against the kind of public memory that simplifies the politics of the fifties and sixties by placing King at the center of all things, but at the same time Baker illustrates the unique effect King had. Specifically, King ushered in a period of complex black participation in public life. Along these lines, I do not mean to similarly oversimplify the black public sphere, or even to claim that the black newspapers which serve as the object of my critique were any more authoritative, authentic, or influential than other sectors of the form of publicity Baker describes. Recognizing that there were other things happening in black public life, however, does not mean that those things were happening for Curt Flood. His advocates were in short supply, and his case produced the kind of discourse that enabled the rhetorical discipline of the black press relative to its own self-conception.

It was evident in late 1969 that black newspapers were attuned to (and thus concerned with) the problems of internal black difference. For example, the *Atlanta Daily World* published a story — especially interesting for its apparent lack of a news "hook" — titled "Who Speaks For Blacks? Today's Answer Is, Many Do." The unattributed article (byline New York), deals with how to answer a question the paper perceived to be often posed by whites: "Persons raising the 'who speak' question would

do well, for the sake of clarity, first to answer the question, 'which part of the black community?' for black America is no monolith."[82] Before quoting Kenneth B. Clark, the *Daily World* said, "The obvious answer is that many people speak for the black community, just as many people speak for non-black Americans."[83] The article quoted Clark as saying that "It is no longer realistic — no longer good politics — for top white political officials to depend upon whites as interpreters of the needs and aspirations of the Negro people."[84] The *Daily World*'s article evinces a concern not just for the plurality of voices that speak blackness into publicity, but also for the ways in which the flux of black publicity speaks to politics. The article is both expected and anomalous; expected because, as the paper asserted, it was (and still is) undoubtedly true that "Black America today is a varied conglomeration of many interests, schools of thought, and lifestyles," and it is anomalous because it was a surprising gesture away from the theme of unity, which dominated opinion columns in black newspapers at the beginning of the seventies — specifically according to the theme of trying to define "good politics."

For example, Roy Wilkins, whose leadership of the NAACP earned him the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1967, was a regular columnist in the *Afro* newspaper chain, challenged the "black militants" in a September 1969 article over the question of "strategy": "The truth of the matter is that the black militants have not moved with much strategy except the shock-'em-and-sock-'em kind. Apparently they have never analyzed their position as a minority in America. They have not considered tactics by which they could not only win new ground but build themselves in the eyes of the general public."[85] Wilkins' criticism of the unnamed "militants" links political practice to a preferred speaking style. The the crucial factor for him was to act politically in ways that

conferred public legitimacy, an injunction that bespeaks the rhetorical imperatives of the bourgeois public sphere. Wilkins, in fact, painted the militants in broad strokes, wondering how race-inflected discourse would influence political action:

> [T]here are smarter ways of advertising the just cause than staging shouting matches with public officials, using four letter words, organizing racial clashes in schools and robbing and killing people. [...] Does one use the same slam-bang black racism in a town where black votes total only 10 to 30 percent of the electorate as one does in a town where blacks outnumber whites? Is any racism good politics?[86]

Though grounded on stereotypes and unfair generalizations of the behavior of the "militants," those problems simply underscore the impulse of the black press to discipline political speech in ways that attempted to ensure a colorblind rhetoric proper to electoral politics where, presumably, the important action was. According to Wilkins, political speech had better "adapt itself to the performatives" (in Warner's terms) of good, rational debate in the public sphere.

Similarly, Whitney Young complained in his regular *Amsterdam News* column that though his strategy of negotiation with Nixon represented the interests and views of most blacks, his ideas were often shouted down by an unruly few:

> If black people are to make the changes needed in our society, such divisiveness must and be replaced with the unity and true brotherhood that will allow us to negotiate from strength and from power.
>
> Above all, we must not be diverted from the real struggle by phony issues. In certain quarters, you're considered irrelevant if you don't mouth the current slogans and don't endlessly repeat the same anti-Establishment jargon over and over. For example, after nearly two years of bitter criticism of the [Nixon] Administration's policies, I ventured the

> opinion that it was time to sit down with the powers that be and, from a position of strength, negotiate Black advances.
>
> Most black people agreed with me that restricting ourselves only to endlessly repeated criticisms wouldn't break the deadlock between blacks and the Administration, and that willingness to negotiate doesn't signify approval. But others were satisfied to try to score some cheap verbal points and distorted our position for the sake of grabbing a few headlines.[87]

Whitney Young can certainly be read as an individual attempting to justify his position of leadership; one gathers the impression that he saw himself becoming unfashionable. In any case, Young establishes binaries between the "phony" and the "real," with "slogans" and "jargon" on the one hand, and power and negotiation on the other. These assertions evoke Jeffrey Alexander's distinction between "real" commitments and "utopian" politics in civil society, complete with the assumption that becoming "real" means becoming more universal. From Young's perspective, black particularity, when asserted publicly, was a distraction from the authentic struggle. Thus, he polices the boundaries of political discourse through a careful definition of political activity circumscribed by the call for unity.

The effort to discipline black public discourse extended even beyond direct claims about political ineffectiveness; sometimes the same point could be made indirectly. Once again enunciating the theme of reverse racism, Wilkins extended his argument to the effects that racialized slogans could have on black children. Citing a study by two black psychiatrists covered in *Redbook* magazine, he admitted in his *Afro* column in 1971 that the "pet philosophy of some younger colored people" had its advantages. "The obvious dividend," he said, "has been a restimulation of pride and race and a healthy curiosity about African origin."[88] But, the pet philosophy came with a

worry: "The real danger in a population hungry for recognition and angry at the restraints is that black arrogance may supplant black pride with reverse racism the unhappy result."[89] Quoting the study, Wilkins stated further:

> "However, those who teach by rote the slogans of black dignity — 'I am Afro American,' 'Black is beautiful,' may be too extreme in their approach. It is possible that drilling black pride into a child's head in a stereotyped and isolated manner may actually have a reverse effect." [...]
>
> The two authors declare that some varieties of compensatory actions by black parents may give the child a "false sense of power." Whatever his thoughts, this false sense of power is making it difficult to initiate and enlarge a black-white dialogue.
>
> There is power in the black community which, if used smartly, can help make progress. But some of the braggadocio by colored people is tragic in its patent ineffectiveness, a little like the naked emperor who believed he was clothed.[90]

Wilkins tellingly presents his criticism through the struggle for recognition, warning readers of the dangers of "extremism," and cautioning them about the ineffective uses of false power. The key to black-white dialogue — meaning realistic political discourse — depended for Wilkins on the commitment to progress exemplified in rhetorical moderation.

In January 1970, the *Sentinel* published an opinion by Lin Hilburn, a regular columnist, striking not just for its disciplinary tone, but also for its explicit attack on what Hilburn called "the whole new rhetoric of blackness."[91] The article declared (prematurely) that "The black power pimps, for the most part, are no longer with us. For that, there is thanks."[92] To illustrate the new "rhetoric of blackness," Hilburn targeted "The Black Nationalists," who "are always yelling about their blackness, the 'I am blacker than you' bunch, [...] reflecting, for the most part, a civilization they cannot

identify, let alone identify with."[93] He presents a hypothetical dialogue between himself and a "young black chap, [...] wearing a Buba, necklace of seal tusks, Lucien Picard watch, Aquascutum trench coat and black horned rim glasses."[94] The dialogue parodies the speech patterns of the "chap," who calls Hilburn "Baby" while asking for a job. "Me: 'Alright my man, just what kind of gig did you have in mind?' He: 'something cool.'"[95] Put off by the appearance and speech of the young man, Hilburn offers his reply: "Your bag seems to be one of talk loud and black and then in anger either walk away or try to bring [the Establishment] down. My bag is not to hate or allow my anger to control me, but to stop getting mad and getting even."[96] The difference between their "bags" resides squarely in opposing styles — sartorial style, labor style, political style, and rhetorical style. After responding to the "Black Nationalist's" accusation that Hilburn is "just like all these other Uncle Toms. You have been brainwashed by the Man," he concludes his column with an observation he hopes provides insight into a problematic way of speaking: "And there you have a taste of the rhetoric of the ghetto."[97]

I do not mean to reduce the entirety of the black press to these admittedly fragmentary quotations. Instead, I mean to present by way of representative anecdote the purposive disciplining of particular — and particularized — forms of public address operant in black newspapers in the early seventies. It was not enough to engage in "rational-critical debate," since deliberation alone could not account for the unpredictable consequences of a plurality of black voices speaking in the public sphere. The black middle class had in mind a specific mode of speaking that it hoped would translate into political agency, provided that the distractions, complications, and risks of black identity could be sequestered when engaging white society. Together, this kind of discourse

constituted an appeal on the part of the black bourgeoisie, not just as a set of arguments, but as a promise to represent blackness authentically in a manner that was, above all, *reasonable*. This appeal was fundamentally liberal in its rationale — in search of progress, laboring to avoid offense. Its exhortation to "black nationalists," "militants," and other "young black chaps" to adopt a universal speaking protocol was simultaneously a petition submitted to the white middle class that organized the political logic of the public sphere. It was an entreaty for inclusion, a promise that if the doors of politics were open to blackness, blacks would be willing to play by (at the very least) the discursive rules. Even if E. Franklin Frazier overstated his psychological and sociological reading of the black press as evidence of black self-hatred or as a "world of make believe," his critical observations lend credence to the idea that black newspapers attempted to occupy a middle space, fighting a discursive battle on two fronts, one internal to black speaking styles and the other directed toward the levers of economic, social, and political power that guarded the entry points into public life.

No True Counterpublic?

Moving back to the question of counterpublicity, Nancy Fraser arrives at the notion of "subaltern counterpublics" not just through the recognition that marginalized groups found ways to express themselves publicly, but also through the basic idea that the public sphere is, in actual practice, an internally differentiated system of multiple publics. Some of these may be "counter," and some of them not, but the key point seems to be that, "Virtually from the beginning, counterpublics contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of speech."[98] This, apparently, is what makes counterpublics attractive.

However, she makes an important point about the multiple public sphere that urges a consideration of the difference between a public and a counterpublic:

> Public spheres are not spaces of zero degree culture, equally hospitable to any form of cultural expression. Rather, they consist in culturally specific institutions, including, for example, various journals and various social geographies of urban space. These institutions may be understood as culturally specific rhetorical lenses that filter and alter the utterances they frame; they can accommodate some expressive modes and not others.[99]

Taken together, these observations produce a dilemma for thinking of the black press, at least in the early 1970s, as a counterpublic. If publics exist in culturally specific institutions that operate as rhetorical lenses, and counterpublics contest exclusionary speaking norms, then presumably the black press would frame an inclusive rhetoric. But, what would such a rhetoric look like? The call to unity may look inclusive, but constitutes a strategic exclusivity. As such, Fraser's conception of counterpublicity short-circuits on this tension.

As Asen suggested, the formation of new publics engenders new exclusions, and this seems to be the same perplexing discovery Erik Doxtader finds in his critique of Fraser: "Counterpublics transgress standing codes of public deliberation but depend, to an unspecified degree, on exactly those norms of consensus-building that provoke subaltern discourse in the first place."[100] Put differently, counterpublics form as reactions to exclusion from the public sphere, but to the extent that they rely on the communicative norms, the *rhetorics*, of the public sphere, they entail new exclusions and are no longer dependably democratic. They may fight their way into visibility, but the character of the fight may be as radically undemocratic as the public sphere to which they attempt to gain

entry. This predicament entails one of two exits: Either counterpublicity must be reconfigured conceptually as oriented toward something other than participatory inclusion, or counterpublics must be reconfigured normatively in a way that disjoins them from any essential connection democratic politics. Asen takes the latter view, preferring the construct "emergent publics." That position, however, seems to lose sight of the reason to theorize "counter"publics in the first place — it sacrifices their necessarily oppositional character.

The former view, which requires thinking about counterpublics differently, offers a solution in that it unravels the articulation between liberalism and the political telos publics seem to possess. Up against a public sphere that damns particularity to exclusion, maybe the problem is with the notion of inclusion itself. To arrive at an alternative view of counterpublics, consider Goldberg's critique of liberalism from a slightly shifted angle, inflected by the friction between universals and particulars, and germane to the problem of recurrent exclusions in the public sphere:

> [N]either the formalist universalism of modernist morality, nor the particularism of the postmodernist independently sustain the value and practical commitments necessary to condemn and resist, to restrict or eliminate all racist exclusions and expressions. Universalisms offer the virtues of principles generally acknowledging the injustices of broadly construed racist expressions. However, they hide in the claims to universal values the inherent limitations of their lack of specificity, and they deny the value in culturally construed particularities inconsistent with the putatively universal principle. […] Particularisms, by contrast, recognize the virtues of communities, traditions, and specific cultural values, but they may find themselves incapable of offering any principled restriction of exclusivist expressions mounted in their name.[101]

Goldberg's argument occurs within the context of attempting to fashion an anti-racist praxis. He recognizes that appeals to universal justice provide the resources necessary to challenge racism, but gestures toward the types of exclusions that such appeals tend to mask. One thinks again here of the problems with "colorblindness," which removes the facts of structural inequality from public conversation. By the same token, asserting the value of one's particularity has the effect of justifying new exclusions as the road to inclusion is navigated.

Warner's conception of counterpublicity is predicated on altogether different assumptions. He sees a problem with labeling a public "counter" or "oppositional" on the basis of "its claim to be oppositional," because "there would be no difference of kind, or of formal mediation, or of discourse pragmatics, between publics and any other publics."[102] Referring directly to Fraser's essay, which makes the case for subaltern counterpublics through her reading of the history of feminist discourse, Warner asks, "Is the feminist counterpublic distinguished by anything other than its reform program?"[103] The same question might be asked of the black press. It certainly claimed to be oppositional — through the claim to fight for justice or through the claim to battle for true democratic principles — but in the outlets I examine in the early seventies, it is not just the case that there is no difference in formal mediation or discourse pragmatics between the "counterpublic" and the public sphere, but it is strikingly the case that the black press was centrally concerned, even to the extent of planning its own disappearance, with imposing the discourse pragmatics that would erase its particularized mark of racial identity. Talk the way the public talks, insisted its speakers.

Along these lines, Warner directs his attention to black identity in passing, but with an insightful observation:

> A public of subalterns is only a counterpublic when its participants are addressed in a counterpublic way — as, for example, African Americans willing to speak in what is regarded as a racially marked idiom. The subordinate status of a counterpublic does not simply reflect identities formed elsewhere; participation in such a public is one of the ways by which its members' identities are formed and transformed. A hierarchy or stigma is the assumed background of practice. One enters at one's own risk.[104]

Perfecting rhetorical performances quite the opposite of those described here, black newspapers in the early seventies were preoccupied with enforcing a rhetorical practice that ensured that members spoke to each other in a way that was racially unmarked, disincorporated — public. They disciplined idiomatic expressions inflected with blackness, attempting to form and transform members' identities with the explicit aim of minimizing political risks.

The tentative result of the counterpublic hypothesis, then, is that the black press may have thought of itself as a counterpublic, but its rhetorical orientation was distinctly geared toward participation in the bourgeois public sphere. In fact, it seems that the black press organized its discursive activities in ways that imagined politics according to the Habermasian ideal that Fraser, Asen, Doxtader and Warner each critique from different angles. In a novel configuration of the power relations between dominant publics and counterpublics, Warner asserts: "Dominant publics are by definition those that can take their discourse pragmatics and their lifeworlds for granted, misrecognizing the indefinite scope of their expansive address as universality or normalcy.

Counterpublics are spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely."[105] There's no question that the black press did not take its discourse pragmatics "for granted," nor its lifeworld. Black newspapers could not; it was, after all, the marked particularity of blackness that bound its presumed membership. But, the black press strived to take its address for granted, using those speech protocols as an index of good political discourse and hoping that when this strategy accomplished its goals, the black press would cease to exist. As such, the particularity of black identity was both always present and always under threat. The telos of scene making was an elaborate rhetorical exercise in bourgeois public sphere replication.

The (Self)Abstraction of Curt Flood

Wondering why Curt Flood has not become "a politicized sports hero for a new generation of blacks," Gerald Early explains that "Flood was fighting a particular legal advantage that baseball owners had that was not explicitly racial. In other words, what was done to Flood in trading him against his will, was not done to him because he was black, nor was it something that was only done to black players."[106] Early's point is that there was nothing intrinsic to Flood's cause that lent itself to an argument about racial injustice. Brad Snyder, explaining why organized civil rights groups ignored Flood at the time, supposes that "they lacked sympathy for a small group of athletes perceived to be spoiled and overpaid, rather than subjugated and oppressed. The reserve clause was not strictly a racial issue."[107] Flood may not have echoed throughout history like Jackie Robinson or even Muhammad Ali, but his cause was ideally suited for coverage by the black press in the early seventies. Even down to the salary spectacle of sport in black

bourgeois "society," the fact that Flood's case was not "explicitly racial" resulted in the kind of advocacy that affirmed the liberalism which underpinned black newspapers' own strange dual movement. In other words, Flood did not put his public at risk; his cause — especially as it relied on a solidarity with white players — occupied public space according to the inclusive principles that animated the black press' awkward self-understanding.

Flood's strategic use of double-consciousness and novel appropriation of the slave narrative assisted this manner of uptake. As his response to Tom Haller's question about his case being a "black thing" in the Players Association meeting illustrates, Flood's rhetorical performance in *The Way It Is* was thoroughly accented by the public sphere's requirement that he manage the significance of his racial identity. He had to say, in a sense, "yes, I am black, and yes, my blackness matters to me, but for the problem I'm trying to solve, blackness plays no important part." Like in black newspapers, race was both there and not there, frustrated by the injunction to disincorporate. Earlier in this project I cited Flood's response to Haller. Here, I do so again, but this time with additional context. That meeting was held behind closed doors. Though reporters knew the Player's Association was meeting, and would certainly be interested in their decision to fund the lawsuit against the owners, Flood made the details of the meeting public in *The Way It Is*. Recognizing once again that the book was released after his first loss in federal court, Stuart Weiss' rather damning assessment rings true on at least one note. Though Weiss takes the strategic function of *The Way It Is* as enough evidence of its disingenuousness, the text's strategic logic is what interests me primarily.

The first chapter presents Flood in a philosophical mood as he moves between sarcastic observations about the St. Louis slums, bitter judgments about baseball ownership, and pessimistic predictions about what would happen to him. Near the end of this chapter, Flood reveals Haller's question and explains his response, which I quote at length:

> A fascinating question, well-meant. If I were white, would I be less sensitive to injustice? Was it inevitable that, of all baseball players, a black man would be the first to rebel? Robert Brown Elliot, of South Carolina, was one of twenty blacks elected to the U.S. House of Representatives during the brief period of democracy that followed the Civil War. Arguing in the House for passage of the country's first civil rights law, Elliott said: "I regret, sir, that the dark hue of my skin may lend color to the imputation that I am controlled by motives personal to myself in my advocacy of this great measure of national justice. Sir, the motive that impels me is restricted to no such narrow boundary, but is as broad as your constitution. I advocate it, sir, because it is my right." I told the meeting that organized baseball's policies and practices affected all players equally and that the color of my skin was besides the point. It occurred to me later that the answer, while valid, had by no means exhausted the subject. Neither can it be exhausted in this book or even in our time. As I have already suggested, it heartens me to realize that my dispute with baseball will affect more than baseball. I like to believe that I would feel the same way even if I were white. To diminish the established insanity in one area of life is to undermine it elsewhere as well. In due course, the quality of justice changes. Values alter. Priorities improve. At the very least, the poor get glass for their windows. One need not be black to appreciate that.[108]

At the beginning of this passage, Flood refuses to call the question racist; he claims to understand where Haller was coming from, a fair recognition of the risks that concerned the white players. This, of course, underscores the problem of counterpublicity. As Warner says of counterpublicity, "ordinary people are presumed not to want to be

mistaken for the kind of person would would participate in this kind of scene."[109] Tom Haller did not want to participate in that kind of scene, at least not in public.

Flood's surprising allusion to Robert Brown Elliott is remarkable, not just in the sense that it bespeaks a keen knowledge the history of black oratory, but also because of the use to which he puts the words of another black public speaker. In an analysis of the desegregation debates in the US Congress during reconstruction, Kirt Wilson examines black speakers such James Rapier from Alabama and Robert Brown Elliott of South Carolina, who utilized "enactment" as a rhetorical strategy; that is, they embodied their arguments for African American equality through their eloquent performances. About Elliott's use of metaphor and imagery on the House floor in 1874, Wilson writes, "such language enacted the speaker's equality. Elliott's speech was praised on the floor and in the press. Within the debate his rhetorical performance was used as proof of black equality."[110] According to Suzanne Daughton, enactment most often functions as an announcement of empowerment, it says, "by the very action that I am taking now, I have achieved this power that I sought."[111] But, enactment is, in this instance, also a self-effacing move. In other words, enactment calls attention to the speaker ultimately so that the speaker may fade from view—enactment's power lies in its ability to deliver force to the better argument uttered by an ostensibly universal subject, a move made possible and necessary in a public sphere that requires disincorporation. Enactment, in this situation, functions as what Warner calls a "paratactic," a kind of rhetorical qualifier that means to erase something problematic but which one must admit because it is in full view. Flood knew that his blackness was in full view; Tom Haller had made that much obvious. So, Flood admitted it and attempted to move on. Except that he could not. He says that he

would "like" to think he would have the same opinion were he not black, but that he cannot know, and he is sure there is more to say about race. He assigns himself social influence that reaches beyond baseball, and refuses to close the question of race. There and not there, black but uninfluenced by blackness, sure of his racial identity but unsure of its significance, Flood tiptoes the same frustrated rhetorical lines drawn by the public sphere's requirement that he abstract his identity into a speaking voice that performs the irrelevance of his blackness.

This rhetorical strategy, then, worked symbiotically with (at least) black press coverage of his case. Responding to the transformed labor relationship that a successful conclusion to Flood's lawsuit would initiate between baseball owners and baseball players, Sam Lacy observed:

> Flood sees the need for restraints on the part of employer and employee, but he also sees what football and basketball have done to bring the two sides closer together.... And he and his colleagues in the players association are wondering why they, as baseball players, should be victims of discrimination. Use of the word discrimination, of course, brings in the matter of race, although that is not what this column had in mind at the outset. As a colored athlete, Curt must feel the restraint more than his white counterpart. [...] But, as I have said, this is not to be construed as an A to Z [the title of Lacy's serial] complaining on the basis of Flood's complexion.... It has to do with the reserve clause, its irritation to the stomach of the player and its balm to the mind of the owner.[112]

Here, Lacy makes race present and absent at the same time, invoking the political watchword of racial justice - discrimination - only to stretch its tropological force beyond its typical context and then foreclose the question of race. Baseball's discriminatory practices operate relative to football and basketball, but not on the basis of skin color.

(Of course, Lacy personally had a hand in producing a solution to baseball's "color line.")

Generally, though, such explicit gestures away from the question of race, in terms of either the facts of Flood's identity or the anatomy of these newspapers' public audience, were uncommon. Instead, writers in the black press often asserted the sheer weight of reason as evidence of the justness of Flood's claim. Major League Baseball gained its exemption to federal anti-trust law according to a 1922 Supreme Court ruling which decided that its business operations did not constitute interstate commerce. Moreover, the existence of the reserve clause in the standard player contract depended on this anti-trust exemption; if bound by the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, the reserve system would likely qualify as an unlawful, collusive labor practice. In the *Philadelphia Tribune* in February 1970, civil rights activist Bayard Rustin offered the counter-argument in Flood's defense: "Baseball's income from television now exceeds what is taken in at the local box-office by $10-million. In addition, the traveling and communication that are required to stage a baseball game cost over $1-million a year. Baseball is clearly an interstate enterprise."[113]

Lacy made the same argument, but it came straight from a neutral place of rational critique:

> My knowledge of the law is minimal, but I learned away back in freshman high school that all law is founded on reason.... I find it very difficult, therefore to understand how anything in baseball can be protected because it is said to escape the restrictions of interstate commerce. [...] If 33 workers are flown from Baltimore from Seattle to do a job they are paid to do, before spectators who pay six dollars apiece to sit on wooden benches,

> they are in interstate commerce.... unless, of course, I am all fouled up on my interpretation of what is reason.[114]

Obviously, Lacy is not "all fouled up," and it would be a fair reading to say that his point about "reason" is made with tongue in cheek. Nevertheless, he does not end by saying that his interpretation of baseball's *commercial practices* may be erroneous. Instead, he implies that the error of those who defend baseball resides in their inability to grasp what should be self-evident. In other words, this force of this argument is undeniable, unless one's apprehension of it is influenced by self-interest. Though this rhetorical move may be sarcastic, Lacy's point seems to be that baseball's status as interstate commerce should be plain to anyone who can think. Note that this involves more than assuming the disembodied requirements of public debate; Lacy reflexively observes those requirements in staging his claim.

Moreover, as Lacy observes and performs the rational imperatives of public deliberation in his support of Flood, he inscribes them onto the notion of law itself. Extending his argument about interstate commerce into commentary on the meaning of the legal system, Lacy says:

> [O]ne doesn't need a law degree to assume that somebody is looking the other way when: transcontinental trips are made each year via chartered jetliners; players are transported from one city to another, along with equipment that is essential in pursuit of their work; radio, television and newspaper reporters relay the happenings into the 50 states of the union, and athletes are traded from teams in New York and Boston to teams in Illinois, Minnesota and California at the whim of their employers. If there isn't enough "reason" to make one suspect that the reserve clause vitality has spent itself, the observation made two centuries ago about the main component of "law" appears to be a frivolous one.[115]

Lacy's concluding assertion suggests a homology between the mode of public debate he performs and the procedural rationality of law. Furthermore, this homologous relationship foreshadows a line of critique that operates from a similar distance. Were Flood to lose his case in court, the response demanded by Lacy's appeal to reason would not find expression in embodied self-interest, but rather in the "law's" struggle to disguise its interests. That is to say, Lacy implies that Flood's loss could only be possible if the partisan public discourse governing baseball mythology found its way into a juridical system prone to predatory and improper influence. This is not a rhetorical strategy that claims any self-interest on Flood's behalf, but instead calls attention to the universal interests that the legal system must unavoidably protect if it pursues the inerrant line of reasoning enacted in sincere public deliberation. This presumed background of discursive practice also guides the April 1972 prediction of the *Pittsburgh Courier*'s Jess Peters. In a passage inserted under the heading, "Flood Fighting Slavery," Peters writes, "Curt Flood is fighting that exact battle before the Supreme Court right now. A decision on his test of the reserve clause is due in June. It is inconceivable to this column, that the court will allow the cancerous clause to enjoy the protection of the law."[116] Of course, Flood's loss in the Court was perfectly conceivable; but by stressing its inconceivability, Peters invests forthcoming (and inevitable) criticism of the court with the distancing judgment of universal rationality.

A related rhetorical strategy follows Lacy as he moves his argument from a technical point about interstate commerce to the basic problem of labor freedom. This time in 1972, with the Supreme Court about to hear Flood's case, Lacy says, "As I noted at the outset, I am not a lawyer. But it is a long-held declaration that the law is based

primarily on reason. And, if that is the case, I am convinced that time has outgrown the mood of subserviency, no matter how much money is spent to preserve it."[117] On this point, the sheer weight of reason delivers less argumentative force, but obtains similar rhetorical advantages: it clarifies the self-evidence of baseball's unfairness. Jess Peters takes a similar line in defending Flood against the charge that he is too well-paid to complain about his circumstances: "The fact that major league baseball players are fairly well paid during their big league careers is really irrelevant. Anyone who follows a normal path of logic can't ignore the fact that a man who makes $20,000 a year is entitled to no less Constitutional protection than a man who makes $5000."[118] Here, the universality of the claim and the universality of the speaking subject are meaningfully linked - *anyone* who follows the rules of logic would know that *anyone* deserves the same protection under *everyone's* law.

In sum, the explicit move away from an argument grounded in a raced perspective combines with the rush to rationality to articulate a speaking subject and a subject being spoken of that conforms to the disembodied discursive norms of public debate; the social fact that Curt Flood was a black individual whose cause was being advocated in the black press required a neutralizing rhetoric, a mode of speaking that could find discursive protection in a universal subject unburdened by the risks and complications of racial identity.

Notes

[1] "The Black Newspaper," *St. Louis Argus*, April 27, 1972.

[2] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 214.

[3] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 111.

[4] Bob Broeg, "Just What Prompted Flood's Lawsuit?," *The Sporting News*, January 7, 1970. This article also appeared as a column in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch: Bob Broeg, "Does 'Principal' or 'Principle' Motivate Flood?," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 25, 1970. For fuller discussions of Broeg's relationship to Flood and his general disposition as a sportswriter, see Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 112, and Bob Broeg's book, *Bob Broeg: Memories of a Hall of Fame Sportswriter* (Champaign, IL: Sports Publishing LLC, 1995).

[5] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 113.

[6] Early, "Curt Flood, Gratitude."

[7] Charles Korr, *The End of Baseball As We Knew It* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 97.

[8] Houston Baker, "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," in *The Black Public Sphere*, ed.The Black Public Sphere Collective (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 5-38.

[9] Todd Vogel, *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (Piscatory, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 7.

[10] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 123.

[11] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 124.

[12] See Robert Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics," *Communication Theory* 10 (2000), 424-446.

[13] In fact, in "multiplying" the public sphere, Fraser theorizes precisely this kind of circumstance. Her critique of the "actually existing public sphere" stresses that public discussion proceeds differently in different public spheres. Some of these are, presumably, *counter*publics.

[14] Ronald N. Jacobs, "Race, Media, and Civil Society," *International Sociology* 14 (1999), 357.

[15] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 124.

[16] Jacobs, "Race, Media, and Civil Society," 357.

[17] This organization still exists, known as PROMAX, and describes itself as, "the world's premier body for promotion and marketing professionals working in electronic and broadcast media." See, http://www.promaxbda.org/about.asp?n=promaxbda. Retrieved March 30, 2008.

[18] "Negro Press Closest to Black Community, Broadcasters Are Told," *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 15, 1969.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] "Role of Black Press Told As 145th Anniversary Commences," *St. Louis Argus*, April 27, 1972.

[22] Charles Rangel, "Publishers Salute AFRO on its 80th Birthday," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 12, 1972.

[23] Ibid.

[24] G. James Fleming, "No Political Gains Without Black Press," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 19, 1972.

[25] "Role of Black Press Told As 145th Anniversary Commences," *St. Louis Argus*, April 27, 1972.

[26] Robert Asen, "Imagning in the Public Sphere," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 35 (2002), 351.

[27] Asen, "Imagining in the Public Sphere," 351.

[28] Ibid.

[29] "Broadcasters Are Responsible for Damage Done Black People By Negative Images Projected," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 30, 1970.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: Volume 1, The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1996; Harper & Row, 1944) 48. Emphasis in original.

[34] Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 12.

[35] Jacobs, "Race, Media, and Civil Society," 366.

[36] Ibid.

[37] "Four Score Years," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 21, 1972.

[38] Jacobs, "Race, Media, and Civil Society," 366.

[39] Ronald Wolesley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1990; 1971), 393. Wolesley in this section cautioned that the black press was a "moral press."

[40] "Role of Black Press Told As 145th Anniversary Commences," *St. Louis Argus*, April 27, 1972.

[41] Jeffrey Alexander, *The Civil Sphere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 277.

[42] "Four Score Years," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 21, 1972.

[43] John Sengstacke, "Publishers Salute AFRO on its 80th Birthday," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 12, 1972.

[44] Ibid.

[45] John T. Belden, "Publishers Salute AFRO on its 80th Birthday," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 12, 1972.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics," 432.

[48] Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics," 438.

[49] In my estimation, this may render "emergent collectives" critically pointless. Because of Asen's assertive constructivism, the social facts do not get in the way of counterpublicity. In other words, counterpublic speakers may misrecognize their exclusion, making a case for inclusion to a public sphere that has already permitted their participation. (For example, as when a mainstream news institution like FOXNews claims to give voice to underrepresented "conservative" arguments while decrying the intolerance of CNN and MSNBC to diverse viewpoints.) If Asen's reply is that such recognition is "false," then his conception implicitly relies on the social facts of subordination, making his idea conceptually indistinct from Fraser's. By contrast, if misrecognized exclusions amount to counterpublicity, then the effort to "seek the 'counter' in counterpublic might be theoretically frivolous. He might simply assert that critical interest should be piqued by any instance in which a speaker explicitly or implicitly claims to be excluded from public life. Indeed, this seems to be his position, and a worthwhile idea, but one wonders, then, ofabout the importance of establishing the conditions according to which a counterpublic may be one properly-so-called.

[50] Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics," 427.

[51] This difference is similar to Stuart Hall's distinction between the "relations of representation," and the "politics of representation." In the context of popular culture and racial identity, Hall says that altering the relations of representation by working for inclusion and creating a positive black image are necessary, but insufficient political steps. These moves cover important ground, but contain an essentialist error: assuming the unified and revolutionary subjectivity of blackness. Entering the "politics of representation" means coming to terms with blackness as a culturally contested category and interrogating its mode of representation in particular historical and political contexts. Sometimes, in other words, when blackness is asserted, the consequences can be troublesome. But, when the representation of race is assumed in cultural policy to be inherently progressive, the "revolutionary" black subject has inadvertently done the work of dominant culture. Changing the relations of representation without interrogating the politics of representation invites hegemonic influence. See Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 441-449.

[52] Jonathan Scott Hollaway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 202.

[53] E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: Free Press, 1957), 166.

[54] Ibid, 174.

[55] Frazier can be read as arguing that the black press constitutes the political imagination of the black middle-class, not just in Asen's sense of a discursively constructed world of political possibility, but in the sense that the black press is the instrument of a false reality designed to obscure the black bourgeoisie's self-loathing.

[56] Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics," 442.

[57] "Four Score Years," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 21 August 1972.

[58] "Role of Black Press Told As 145th Anniversary Commences," *St. Louis Argus*, April 27, 1972.

[59] Manning Marable includes the National Urban League among those "inclusionist" organizations representative of "traditional leadership" and "the majority of the older and more influential black middle class, professionals and managerial elites." See Manning Marable, "History and Black Consciousness," in *Beyond Black and White* (New York: Verso, 1995), 219.

[60] Whitney Young, "Unity, Coalition, Negotiation are Sound Strategy for 70s," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 4 August 1970.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 24.

[63] "Role of Black Press Told As 145th Anniversary Commences," *St. Louis Argus*, April 27, 1972.

[64] Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 165.

[65] Ibid.

[66] I am not creating a straw argument that reads black newspapers through Frazier's critique of *Ebony*. In fact, in the early pages of his chapter on "The Negro Press and Wish-Fulfillment," Frazier indicates that in addition to *Ebony* and *Jet*, he is concerned with The *Pittsburgh Courier*, The *Afro-American* newspaper chain, the Chicago *Defender*, and the Norfolk *Journal and Guide*, the first three of which I cite extensively in my analysis of news coverage of Curt Flood.

[67] Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 189.

[68] Ibid.

[69] "Majors to Get First Black Manager," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 13, 1970. The headline of this article helps to make Frazier's point; it is obviously misleading.

[70] Doc Young, "Jackie's Strange Way," *Chicago Defender,* February 14, 1972.

[71] "Vida? No Guts," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 11, 1972.

[72] "Blacks Saved Majors From 'Skids,' Six Whites Made Grade Then Faded," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 7, 1970.

[73] Chuck Andrews, "H. Aaron's $200,000 More Than Nixon Gets," *New York Amsterdam News,* March 4, 1972.

[74] "Color of Sports: Black Blends Well With Green," *Afro-American Magazine*, April 1970, 4. (This magazine was an insert to the 28 April 1970 Baltimore *Afro-American* newspaper.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Marable, "History and Black Consciousness," 218.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 213.

[79] The book was published originally in France, and in French.

[80] Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 213.

[81] Baker, "Critical Memory," 21. Emphasis in original.

[82] "Who Speaks For Blacks? Today's Answer Is, Many Do," *Atlanta Daily World,* November 27, 1969.

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Roy Wilkins, "There's a Smarter Way," *Washington Afro-American*, September 23, 1969.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Whitney Young, "Which Way For Blacks?," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 29, 1970.
[88] Roy Wilkins, "A Warning on Black Slogans," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 12, 1971.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Lin Hilburn, "In Lieu of the Black Power Pimp — The Black Nationalist," *Los Angeles Sentinel,* January 29, 1970.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 116.
[99] Ibid, 126.
[100] Erik Doxtader, "Characters in the Middle of Public Life: Consensus, Dissent, and *Ethos*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 33 (2000), 343.
[101] Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 212.
[102] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*,118.
[103] Ibid., 118.
[104] Ibid., 121.
[105] Ibid., 122.
[106] Early, "Curt Flood, Gratitude, and the Image of Baseball."
[107] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 116.
[108] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 18.
[109] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 120.
[110] Wilson, *Reconstruction Desegregation Debate*, 102.
[111] Suzanne M. Daughton, "The Fine Texture of Enactment: Iconicity as Empowerment in Angelina Grimké's Pennsylvania Hall Address," W*omen's Studies in Communication* 18 (Spring 1995), 24.
[112] Sam Lacy, "Cheers for Flood and His Compatriots," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 6, 1970.
[113] Bayard Rustin, "In Support of Curt Flood's Anti-Trust Suit Against Baseball," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 17, 1970.
[114] Lacy, "Cheers for Flood and His Compatriots."
[115] Sam Lacy, "AFRO Foresees Tumbling of the Reserve Clause," *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 29, 1972.

[116] Jess Peters, "Jess' Sports Chest," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 22, 1972.
[117] Sam Lacy, "AFRO Foresees Tumbling of the Reserve Clause."
[118] Jess Peters, "Jess' Sports Chest."

Chapter 5

Jackie Robinson in the Black Public Sphere

In 1938, Jake Powell, a mediocre outfielder for the New York Yankees, announced on a local radio show that he spent his winter months keeping in shape for the baseball season by "cracking niggers over the head with his nightstick"[1] as a police officer in Dayton, Ohio. Kenesaw Mountain Landis, baseball's first commissioner, responded to (black) public outrage by suspending Powell for ten games. Though a "delegation" of black citizens had called for a much harsher penalty — they had presented a petition to baseball umpires seeking Powell's lifetime ban from baseball — Landis' decision to administer punishment was, according to the *Sporting News*, "the first time that a major league player was suspended for a racist remark."[2] In a detailed analysis of black press coverage of "L'affaire Jake Powell," Chris Lamb argues that the situation "provided a single incident to unify segregation critics in the press — Black, Communist, and liberal — who had become increasingly impatient and vociferous in their criticism."[3] Lamb's argument views the Powell case as a microcosm, not just of the disturbing racism that existed within baseball in the 1930s, but more importantly as representative of the early efforts of black newspapers to crusade against social injustice more broadly. Says Lamb, "To Black weeklies, such as the *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Chicago Defender*, *New York Age*, *Amsterdam News*, *Atlanta World*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, *Dayton Forum*, and the *Afro-American* chain, the Powell

incident provided a opportunity to channel their longstanding indignation at a single act of racism that represented the laws and customs of the country."[4]

The idea that baseball is a microcosm of American racial politics is not new; it tends to be reinforced, explicitly or implicitly, each time another observer insists on sport's social significance. The interesting dimension of Lamb's claim is his reading of the Powell incident as both a formal and substantive antecedent to the black press' civil-rights era agitation. Reaction to Powell's self-promotion as a purveyor of racist violence prefigured, on this view, the public influence of the black press: "It demonstrated the ability of the black press to mobilize public opinion and organize a significant protest to challenge racial injustices, something that would become obvious to much of the country during the civil rights movement. While the integration of baseball was still years away, those journalists who wanted to end segregation became unified over a racist remark to make their case loud and clear. In doing so, they won an early victory in their campaign to erase baseball's color line."[5] The essence of this argument is that the response to Powell worked as a kind of early exercise in protest — batting practice, if you will — that habituated the black press to the social struggles in which it would become involved over the following decades. In the meantime, baseball would come to be understood as a "crucible" of social progress, a perpetual referent for both guiding and measuring national movement on the question of race.

According to the "mobilization" model of public influence, Lamb accepts the fight for baseball integration as a commendable dimension of the black press' contribution to civil rights history. Such a view squares easily with other recent accounts of the "fighting press" and baseball's integration in the mid-1940s. Roberts and

Klibanoff, for example, argue that black newspapers offered Brooklyn Dodger general manager Branch Rickey the public infrastructure necessary to execute his "secret plan" of signing a black ballplayer. Jackie Robinson would become that player — very visibly — in 1945 when he signed a contract with the Montreal Royals, a Dodger farm club. The story goes that Rickey strategized baseball's integration well in advance of 1945, and had waited for the ideal circumstances (and the ideal player) before making history. Among those circumstances was the increasing attention paid to discrimination in baseball by black newspapers. Roberts and Klibanoff observe:

> From the front office of his baseball organization, Rickey had seen the tide starting to turn. Months before the end of the war, he had quietly begin making preparations. Looking for studies that might make the desegregation of his team easier, he had read widely in sociology, history, and race relations, including [Gunnar Myrdal's] *An American Dilemma*. The crusade by the Negro press was providing the precise dynamic that Myrdal felt most essential for improvement of blacks' lives: creating publicity. The Negro press was making Rickey's secret plan more plausible.[6]

The successful integration of baseball, on this account, depended on the serendipitous accumulation of a variety of factors, including the enlightened attention of a liberal white bureaucrat, the shifting social terrain, and the publicity given to baseball on the pages of black newspapers.

Two interrelated issues complicate this rendering of baseball's history. First, the black press did not merely advocate baseball's integration in opinion columns. Publishers, editors, reporters, and columnists for black newspapers in the early 1940s used their institutional positions to effectuate the ideals they espoused in print. Some,

such as the *Pittsburgh Courier*'s Wendell Smith and the *Afro* and *Defender*'s Sam Lacy, attempted to schedule meetings with the commissioner to discuss integration, lobby Major League general managers through personal contacts, and personally scout individual players best qualified to be baseball's "pioneers."[7] Second, the confluence of public advocacy and institutional pressure resulted in an integration effort that took on a specific character. The limit of Lamb's analysis is that it operates within a frame that sees baseball's integration as an inevitability either fruitfully hastened by advocates in the black press or regrettably delayed by the intransigence of baseball's racist conservatives. Such analyses tend to reduce the fight for baseball's integration to a binary problematic that skips over the texture and influence of baseball's integration discourses. This frame begs the question of progress in both assuming the wisdom of the black press' choices relative to a better present, and in arresting criticism of the broader political imagination the fight for baseball's integration helped to animate and foreground.

A similar problem exists, as I implied in my criticism of his biographers, with Curt Flood's case. The central question for Snyder and Weiss in their examination of black newspaper coverage revolved around determining the extent of their support for Flood. Most often contrasted with the "white mainstream press," who in the view of most treated Flood with scorn, the black press is usually commended for its generally positive assessment and, thereby, is deemed an advocate. The sheer fact of their advocacy, though, does not help to explain the rhetorical consequences of their support. Instead, beginning with the assumption that Flood's cause was noble, black newspapers are rendered as an extension of that nobility, regardless of what was required to make the case. I do not make this observation to suggest the opposite, that Flood's cause was

objectionable, and that so, therefore, was the advocacy of the black press. Instead, I mean that advocacy is never rhetorically transparent, never simply a matter of support or opposition. The tenor of black press advocacy both was framed by specific historical circumstances and helped to frame future discourse — relative to Jake Powell, Jackie Robinson, or Curt Flood alike — sometimes with contradictory, frustrating, or even exclusionary, results. Inasmuch as it narrated the association between Rickey and Robinson, the liberalism of the black press, assembled in and through talk about baseball, produced political dissociations and racial disarticulations worthy of critical investigation.

The Black Press' Communist Purge

Noteworthy events occurred in the years leading up to 1947, the year that Jackie Robinson played his first game in a Brooklyn Dodger uniform, that staged the dynamics of black newspapers' political influence. During baseball's annual winter meetings in 1943, a group of black newspaper representatives managed to secure an audience with Commissioner Landis to present a case for baseball's racial integration. This meeting was made possible by Wendell Smith, the reporter and sports desk editor of the Pittsburgh *Courier-Journal*, who persuaded Landis to meet with the Black Newspaper Publishers' Association that December.[8] In addition to the commissioner, forty-four other major league owners and officials were in attendance. Making the case for integration were Smith, Publishers' Association president and *Chicago Defender* manager Robert Sengstacke, Pittsburgh *Courier* president Ira Lewis, Baltimore *Afro-American* business manager Howard H. Murphy, and, perhaps most importantly, well-known athlete and reputed Communist Paul Robeson. Kenneth Wiggins highlights this

event for two reasons: first, because it was the first ever official meeting dedicated to discussing baseball's racial integration, and second, because it was a useful opportunity for the commissioner to announce publicly (and obtusely) that baseball did not, in fact, have an official policy that prohibited black players from the field. This second point does not signal Landis' enlightenment; evidently, his comment was intended as summary dismissal. When Ira Lewis pointed out that the real problem was an "unspoken rule," Landis interrupted the proceedings with histrionic indignation. In the end, baseball owners and officials issued the following now-infamous press statement: "Each club is entirely free to employ Negro players to any and all extent it pleases. The matter is each club's sole decision, without restriction whatsoever."[9] Between the lines existed an obvious implication: Baseball would take no deliberate policy action to promote or hasten the arrival of black major leaguers.[10] Institutionally, it had adopted formal policy of "see no evil."

The first point, however, invites attention to the political opening that this meeting provided black newspapers, to the opportunity it afforded them to shape the nature of the agitational discourse that might be waged against decades of racism in baseball. Put differently, the meeting between the Black Newspaper Publishers' Association and the Major League Baseball power structure resulted — through the official affirmation of the status quo — in the opportunity to adopt and shape an ethos, a political identity and civic disposition proper to the dawning horizons of inclusion. Black newspaper representatives, seated across the table from their adversaries, learned how baseball would defend itself, keep its circle closed, and institutionalize its racism. The seat at the table itself, however, indexed the invitation to discursive exchange. To

prevent its revocation and ensure continued conversation, to make *progress*, the ethos of rhetorical opposition required careful assembly.

It is important, therefore, to contrast Wiggins' account of that December 1943 meeting with the one presented by Roberts and Klibanoff. Wiggins writes his history through primary sources in the Pittsburgh *Courier-Journal*, the paper represented by Wendell Smith. Roberts and Klibanoff argue instead that the meeting was made possible not by Smith primarily, but by the urging of Sam Lacy, at the time a reporter and columnist for the Chicago *Defender*. According to this version of the story, the presence of Paul Robeson at the meeting was neither accidental nor fortuitous. Instead, Paul Robeson was the *Defender*'s choice, over Lacy specifically, to represent the black press in their case to the owners. Lacy left the *Defender* early in 1944 over this turn of events, and finished his prolific sportswriting career with the Baltimore *Afro-American*. The differing accounts matter not just for tracking the organizational life of black newspapers, which is certainly interesting in its own right. More to the point, Lacy (in addition to being offended) believed that Robeson's presence would produce the opposite of its desired effect. As Roberts and Klibanoff put it, "Fine actor and credit to the race, Lacy thought, but Robeson had too many Communist ties at a time when Lacy and Wendell Smith had decided the Communist Party's efforts to integrate baseball were backfiring. The team owners listened to Robeson, then did nothing."[11] Other accounts assess the situation similarly: "Landis was no doubt annoyed that one of the speakers was Paul Robeson [...] who was one of the most outspoken communist sympathizers in the country. Baseball evidently could reject integration simply because of communist involvement."[12]

The "decision" to dissociate baseball's integration from communism can be traced to the interactions between Wendell Smith, Sam Lacy, Brooklyn Dodger general manager Branch Rickey, and Lester Rodney, a sportswriter for the Communist Party newspaper, The *Daily Worker,* who until the early 1940s had written often and stridently about racial discrimination in professional baseball. Far from treating professional sport as a trivial pursuit, Rodney and the *Worker* "brashly challenged the baseball establishment to permit black players; condemned white owners and managers for perpetuating the color ban; organized petition drives and distributed anti-discrimination pamphlets outside ballparks; and criticized the mainstream press for ignoring the race issue."[13] The *Daily Worker*'s interest in baseball can be explained by ulterior symbolic motives; as Rusinack and Lamb point out, "The Communist Party seized upon the issue of segregation in baseball because it represented one of the more obvious evidences of discrimination. [...] While the CP was certainly interested in using sports to advance its own political philosophy, its most effective effort to influence American society — the campaign against segregation in baseball — emphasized democracy, not communism."[14] Indeed, the Communist Party emphasized a point that would be made dramatically about thirty-five years later by Curt Flood: "Communist Party sportswriters placed the U.S. professional sports establishment within the framework of capitalist exploitation, declaring that professional athletes, too, were workers, who labored but did not receive a fair share of the fruits of their labor."[15]

This argument would, of course, be recontextualized by Flood and his circumstances, but Sam Lacy and Wendell Smith's mutual disavowal of communist participation in baseball's public affairs would have broad effects, particularly in relation

to what such disavowal made possible — a working relationship with Major League Baseball. Rusinack and Lamb, in quoting Lester Rodney, provide insight into why, perhaps, Robeson's appearance at the winter meetings in 1943 may have stung Lacy so acutely: "At least one sportswriter, Sam Lacy, who worked for the Chicago *Defender* and the Baltimore *Afro-American*, did not want to have anything to do with the CP — or communism for that matter. 'From the beginning, he would have nothing to do with the *Daily Worker*,' Rodney said."[16] They further argue that Wendell Smith, "who with Lacy comprised the two most influential black sportswriters of the 1930s and 1940s," had a close relationship with Rodney by virtue of an agreement between the *Courier* and the *Worker* to print each others' opinion columns on the issue of baseball desegregation. However, "Smith changed his mind when he began working with Brooklyn Dodgers' president Branch Rickey, an anti-Communist who denounced communism for interfering with baseball."[17] By August 1947 (Jackie Robinson's rookie summer), in a Pittsburgh *Courier* column, Smith had reversed his position on the *Worker* completely: "The Communists did more to delay the entrance of Negroes in big league baseball than any other single factor."[18] Wendell Smith and others in the black press learned, apparently, that one must choose one's friends wisely.

Baseball's communist purge, initiated in 1943, complete by 1947, and executed institutionally by the black press' "most influential" voices, was motivated by a calculating logic. In the late 1930s, and perhaps for some time in the early 1940s, the *Daily Worker* and black newspapers forged a convenient articulation of interests — the Communist Party was able to attack a highly visible American enterprise on the basis of a concrete social justice claim, and papers like the *Defender* and *Afro-American* were

able to secure a partner in the pursuit of agitational activities very much in the spirit of Nancy Fraser's "multiple public sphere." As Jules Tygiel suggests, "The *crusade* waged by the Communists, the black press, and a small coterie of white sportswriters helped to alleviate the apathy that nourished baseball's segregation."[19] As soon as the black press began to achieve gains relative to baseball's legitimate structures — specifically through the attention of Branch Rickey — the benefits of such an articulation began to collapse under its own weight. I do not mean to recuperate the wisdom, correctness, or authority of the Communist Party with this observation. Instead, I mean to suggest that as the black press moved forward into the 1940s and 1950s, into the atmosphere saturated by post-war race politics, risky associations — even those built on common argumentative topoi and themes — were abandoned strategically. The black press did not want the Communist Party to participate in their "kind of scene," especially once Rickey became an ally.

Black newspapers, in pursuit of negotiation strategies with professional baseball, left "Communism," and communists such as Paul Robeson, behind. To be sure, the "communist" argument in favor of Flood, which identified him as an exploited labor subject, would reappear under reconfigured terms in 1970. But, the result of the disjunction from communism in the early forties was not simply the creation of a "non-communist" ethos, but a template for political action drawn, in part, as an explicit rejection of communism and deepened investment in American national identity. All of this was rewarded with a promising view of inclusion. Above all, black newspapers derived two crucial learning experiences from the mid-1940s: first, a divorce from radicalism could purchase effective negotiation, and second, the right symbolic

representative could make quite a public splash. Taken together, the black press found an ideal black citizen through whom it might construct an activist ethos and wage its crusade in sport: Jackie Robinson. He was both the spoils of victory and the discursive means through which more victories could be achieved. Black newspapers' termination of their relationship with communist media, such as the *Daily Worker*, is a history that has been written, and seen within a frame like Lamb's, which takes the liberalism of black politics for granted, one would be inclined to view these developments as naturally occurring by-products of a process judged by history to have worked. In the context of contemporary anxieties regarding the status of the black activist athlete, though, one wonders if the side-effects of the Jackie Robinson moment in the mid-40s weren't more consequential than they appear.

"The principle had been established...": Jackie Robinson's Speaking Moment

Investigating this proposition requires reading Robinson's public address against the most sacrosanct dimension of the Robinson memory. In 2008, *New York Times* columnist Dave Anderson reported on a rare event in Cooperstown: the alteration of a player's Hall of Fame plaque. The story goes that when Robinson was inducted in 1962, he refused to allow any mention of integration on the official plaque. Of course, this deferral of race only heightened the colorblind ethos for which Robinson already stood, but forty-six years later a remarkable sentence was added to the list of statistical accomplishments adorning the old bronze memorial: "Displayed tremendous courage and poise in 1947 when he integrated the modern major leagues in the face of intense adversity."[20] Authorized by his widow and daughter, the change merely registered in the Hall what serious public address repeats ad infinitum, that Jackie Robinson was not just

the first black major leaguer, but an exemplary figure of virtue in the fight for reform. Jackie Robinson did what needed to be done with "courage and poise." Without mentioning it explicitly, the change reminds new audiences that Robinson experienced overt, venomous racism both on and off the field in his first year with the Dodgers. Certainly, sensing before his first game that the experience would tax his spirit to previously unknown depths, Jackie Robinson qualifies as a courageous person. "Courage and poise," however, narrate more than his status as a pathbreaker, they mythologize his response to the threats and epithets: two years of public silence on race.

Noting that "Americans — both black and white, players and fans — needed time to accommodate themselves to the idea of blacks in baseball," the significance of Robinson's silence was not lost on Jules Tygiel, who accounts for Jackie's stature stridently:

> The saga of Robinson's first season has become part of American mythology — sacrosanct in its memory, magnificent in its retelling. [...] Epic in its proportions, the Robinson legend has persevered — and will continue to do so — because the myth, which rarely deviates from reality, fits our national perceptions of fair play and social progress. The emotional impact of Robinson's challenge requires no elaboration or enhancement. Few works of fiction could impart its power.[21]

All at once, the story of Jackie's silent years delivers drama, explains Robinson's profound effect, and canonizes him. In 1947, Jackie Robinson was courageous, but the rhetoric of Jackie's courage works both to abet his hegemonic presence in public discourse and and erect the rhetorical constraints set by the black press' liberal progress narrative. Jackie Robinson was surely not, as he once put it, a "patient black freak."[22]

Be that as it may, the steady public application of virtue to his sublimation of internal conflict set a threshold at which speech, as either an expression of anger or mode of resistance, became warranted politically. Jackie Robinson had plenty of things that he wanted to say, but he *waited*. Once mediated by liberalism's white embodiment in baseball, Branch Rickey, Robinson's voice acquired broad importance. Every time he spoke in public, he performed the advantages of patient interracial cooperation and thereby enacted liberal integrationism's foundational political requirements.

In his 1972 autobiography, *I Never Had It Made*, Robinson describes a legendary moment in the meeting with Branch Rickey that consummated baseball's "noble experiment." This passage, worthy of lengthy quotation, is central to the Robinson ethos, and it illuminates primary steps in the rhetorical path from silence to virtue:

> "Have you got the guts to play the game no matter what happens?"
> "I think I can play the game, Mr. Rickey," I said.
> The next few minutes were tough. Branch Rickey had to make absolutely sure that I knew what I would face. Beanballs would be thrown at me. I would be called the kind of names which would hurt and infuriate any man. I would be physically attacked. Could I take all of this and control my temper, remain steadfastly loyal to our ultimate aim?
> He knew I would have terrible problems and wanted me to know the extent of them before I agreed to the plan. I was twenty-six years old, and all my life back to the age of eight when a neighbor girl called me a nigger — I had believed in payback, retaliation. The most luxurious possession, the richest treasure anybody has, is his personal dignity. I looked at Mr. Rickey guardedly, and in that second I was looking at him not as a partner in a great experiment, but as the enemy — a white man. I had a question and it was the age-old one about whether or not to sell your birthright.
> "Mr. Rickey," I asked, "are you looking for a Negro who won't fight back?"
> I will never forget the way he exploded.
> "Robinson," he said, "I'm looking for a ballplayer with guts enough not to fight back." [...]

> Suppose I was a shortstop. Another player comes down from first, stealing, flying, in with spikes high, and cuts me on the leg. As I feel blood running down my leg, the white player laughs in my face.
>
> "How do you like that, nigger boy," he sneers.
>
> Could I turn the other cheek? I didn't know how I would do it. Yet, I knew that I must. I had to do it for so many reasons. For black youth, for my mother, for Rae, for myself. I had already begun to feel I had to do it for Branch Rickey.[23]

Robinson lends painful presence to his internal dissonance over the "noble experiment's" critical factor — his self-abnegation — and pieces together a series of rhetorical threads that form the fabric of his identity as a (non)speaking subject. In this moment, loyalty to integration began to trump his impulse to retaliation, and silence replaced angry expression as dignity's revised imperative. Branch Rickey had transformed gutsiness from "payback" into "turning the other cheek," and Jackie Robinson agreed to bear the heavy burdens of racial representation, both for the future of blackness (the black youth), and for the interracial project(s) his association with Rickey made possible. All at once, Jackie Robinson modeled blackness to audiences whose racism could be rebuked only by distinguished humility, and he modeled interracial cooperation to black audiences who might come to see the pragmatism of carefully planned reform. As "steadfast" loyalties were redrawn, the moment to speak was postponed.

At the end of the 1948 season, Rickey and Robinson had another meeting. As Jackie remembers it, "I was relieved when Mr. Rickey finally called me into his office and said, 'Jackie, you're on your own now. You can be yourself now.'"[24] After two years of bitter abuse, including a particularly disturbing incident with the entire Philadelphia Phillies' dugout in 1947, Robinson admitted, "It is true that I had stored up a lot of hostility [...], keyed up and tense because I hadn't been able to speak out when I

wanted to."[25] As might have been expected, Robinson discovered that his suddenly outspoken persona had perilous effects: "I learned that as long as I appeared to ignore insult and injury, I was a martyred hero to a lot of people who seemed to have sympathy for the underdog. But the minute I began to answer, to argue, to protest — the minute I began to sound off — I became a swellhead, a wise guy, an 'uppity' nigger."[26] Nevertheless, Robinson expressed surprise at the nature of the reaction from the mainstream news media: "It was hard to believe the prejudice I saw emerging among people who had seemed friendly toward me before I began to speak my mind. I became, in their minds and in their columns, a 'pop-off,' a 'troublemaker,' a 'rabble-rouser.'"[27] Despite all this, Robinson spoke eloquently and passionately on questions of racial justice, both in and out of baseball, beginning in 1949 and through the remainder of his life. In *I Never Had It Made*, he reveals the warrant that finally authorized his transition from a silent symbol into a speaking subject: "I wanted to be Jackie Robinson, and for the first time I would be justified because by 1949 the *principle* had been established: the major victory won. There were enough blacks on other teams to ensure that American baseball could never again turn its back on minority competitors."[28] The moment to speak had arrived, but only after the principle of integration had been established and Robinson had secured what he took to be an irrevocable pathway for black players into baseball.

The "principle," though, expressed through this narrative, bespeaks a political strategy and form of symbolic expression that establish liberalism's proper rhetorical mode. In this sense, Robinson's association with Rickey is crucial to the story, and Paul Robeson returns to the scene. In 1949, Jackie Robinson was summoned to testify before

the House Un-American Activities Committee in order to "give the lie to statements by Paul Robeson,"[29] who had, allegedly, once claimed that the facts of racial injustice would prevent conscientious black Americans from fighting the Soviets. Though Robinson admitted in 1972 that he would "reject such an invitation if offered now,"[30] he explained that he was compelled to provide testimony in 1949 primarily because "people shouldn't get scared and think that one Negro among 15,000,000 of us, speaking to a Communist group in Paris, could speak for the rest of his race."[31] Like his advocates in the black press in the mid-1940s, Robinson worried that the imagined connection to communism would be used to discredit "blacks in the eyes of whites,"[32] which would interrupt the progress Jackie himself had been instrumental in producing. In response, Robinson's testimony for HUAC displaced Robeson's voice with his own, refused the errors of communism, and strengthened the bonds of commitment between progressive black politics and the promises of American national identity:

> I can't speak for any fifteen million people any more than any other person can, but I know that I've got too much invested for my wife and and child and myself in the future of this country, and I and other Americans of many races and faiths have too much invested in our country's welfare, for any of us to throw it away because of a siren song sung in bass.
>
> I am a religious man. Therefore I cherish America where I am free to worship as I please, a privilege which some countries do not give. And I suspect that nine hundred and ninety-nine out of almost any thousand colored Americans you meet will tell you the same thing.
>
> But that doesn't mean that we're going to stop fighting race discrimination in this country until we've got it licked. It means that we're going to fight it all the harder because our stake in the future is so big. We can win our fight without the Communists and we don't want their help.[33]

Interestingly, Robinson did not say that the communist critique, expressed by either Robeson or others, of American racial inequality was wrong. Instead, he worried that the public criticism emerged from a problematic trajectory. Remembering his rationale for offering HUAC testimony, Robinson wrote in 1972,

> I felt that we had made some progress in baseball and that we could make progress in other American fields provided we got rid of some of the misunderstandings the public still suffered from. There had been a lot of misunderstanding on the subject of Communism among Negroes in this country that was bound to hurt my people's cause unless it was cleared up. Every Negro worth his salt hated racial discrimination, and if it happened that it was a Communist who denounced discrimination, that didn't change the truth of his charges. [But,] this talk about 'Communists stirring up Negroes to protest' only made present misunderstandings worse.[34]

Baseball's progress, on Robinson's view, contained potential energy threatened not by the communist argument, but by the fact that it was communists doing the arguing. Robeson and others may have spoken truthfully, Robinson thought, but to be recognized by *the public*, those criticisms would have to come from someone else. The difference between Robinson's HUAC statement in 1949 and his memory of it in 1972 is slender, but revealing. At HUAC, Robinson seemed to shun communism, but in the autobiography, he worried merely about "the Communists" as confounding, but not quite as threatening. One could argue that this difference was mediated by the dubious reputation HUAC had earned by the late 1950s, but one thing hadn't changed: the wrong speakers, like "the Communists," would send the wrong public message and therefore obstruct progress.

From Robinson's perspective, Paul Robeson seemed to represent a challenge to the formation of a black public ethos. But, as word of Robinson's testimony spread, Paul Robeson became central to establishing Robinson's public identity. Just like black newspapers, who found the coalition with the *Daily Worker* to be bad publicity once Major League Baseball began listening to their protests, Jackie Robinson found that, however righteous, Robeson's politics were ill-suited for contextualizing an argument in favor of integration, which required a performance of blackness that represented an investment in American democracy and its institutions. Relative to the way that this performance was received in the country's most widely circulating daily newspaper, the *New York Times*, Paul Robeson was a foil, Jackie's negative instance, crucial to his emergence as the distilled embodiment of black public discourse.

At the time, the issue was one of "black loyalty," following widespread *Times* reports that Paul Robeson had, "said that he loved the Russians and asserted that American Negroes would refuse to fight in a war against the Russians."[35] HUAC Chair John S. Wood invited Robinson to testify so that he might "give the American people an idea of how the Negroes stand in the event of war which we hope will not develop."[36] When asked about it by the Associated Press, Robinson said, "Paul speaks only for himself."[37] On July 13, 1949, Robeson's comments were slated as the only topic in public HUAC hearings intended to provide "minority groups with a forum on which to defend their patriotism and declare that Communist drives to dominate them had failed."[38] That day, HUAC spoke with Thomas Young, publisher of the black newspaper *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, who assured the committee that Paul Robeson had "'betrayed his race' and could no longer be declared a spokesperson for it."[39] When

asked if Robeson ought to be subpoenaed, Young worried that "very little useful information" would be gleaned and that HUAC testimony would merely provide Robeson with a counterproductive "sounding board" for his distortions of black opinion.[40] When Robinson appeared to testify on July 18, the *Times* regarded it as front page news, announcing, "Jackie Robinson Terms Stand of Robeson on Negroes False."[41] The paper reprinted Robinson's statement in full, where Jackie reinforced the link between progress and public perception: "We're going to make progress in other American fields besides baseball if we can get rid of some of the misunderstanding and confusion the public still suffers from."[42]

The full weight of Robinson's testimony evinces a curious tension in his public persona, one that might be traced to a basic irony in the liberal public sphere. On the one hand, Robinson attempted to quarantine the scope of his comments, relative to both the significance of baseball and the limits of his own speech. He opened his statement by insisting that baseball "is as far removed from politics as anybody can possibly imagine,"[43] and he extended the point by attempting to deliberately undercut his authority to speak about politics, saying, "I don't pretend to be an expert on communism or any other kind of a political 'ism.' Going to college at UCLA, helping to fight a war with about ten million other fellows, trying to break into professional baseball and then trying to make good with the Dodgers, and trying to save some money for the time when my legs lose their spring — all this, together with my family life, has been enough to keep me busy without becoming an 'expert' — except on base-stealing or something like that."[44] On the other hand, Robinson acknowledged his status as a symbolic representative, asserting to the committee that, "you can put me down as an expert on

being a colored American, with thirty years experience at it," adding, "It's true that I've been the laboratory specimen in a great change in organized baseball."[45] The tension here resides in attempting to discern exactly what Robinson was trying to accomplish. Was he muting the importance of his own racial achievement in baseball, or was he recognizing it? Was he speaking on behalf of "colored Americans," or was he refusing to speak for them? The answers here, of course, are both and both. Accepting the invitation to speak with HUAC thrust Robinson into politics, whether he liked it or not, and despite all contrary stated intent, his voice boomed with authority through the eager ears of a curious nation as he rejected Paul Robeson's "silly" statements about black (dis)loyalty.

The *New York Times* recognized what was occurring instantly. In an editorial the day after Robinson's testimony, the *Times* declared "Jackie Robinson scored four hits and no errors in his testimony in Washington on the relationship of Communism to the struggle for Negro civil rights," which "reveal that Jackie Robinson is a whole lot more than one of America's great baseball players."[46] The editorial summarized Robinson's argument about Communism ("just because it is a Communist who denounces injustice… doesn't change the truth."[47]), cited Robinson's comments to assert that "Negroes have a deep personal interest in the growth of American democracy,"[48] and offered Robinson as a "public" correction to the perceived problem of black loyalty. The *Times* concluded by lauding Robinson's statement as an "impressive testimony to the vitality of American democracy, to keep on 'fighting race discrimination until we've got it licked,' a fight that is of supreme importance 'because our stake in the future is so big.'"[49] Editors continued to cover the story in a Robinson vs. Robeson frame, quoting

Robeson's "no comment" a day later,[50] and publishing a reply letter four days after that from William L. Patterson, then National Executive Secretary of the Civil Rights Congress, a communist civil rights organization with whom Robeson was closely associated. Patterson put a fine point on things: "Today the Negro is faced with a monumental task. He must elect to go with or against his oppressors here at home. If he elects the course of struggle, then, of course, he needs the aid of communists, who openly and everywhere expose this policy."[51] Both the *Times* and Jackie Robinson saw this choice as false, and even Congress was quick to agree with them. On July 30, 1949, Democratic New York Representative Arthur G. Klein asked Congress to print half a million copies of the Robinson HUAC testimony, declaring that it should be made available "to schools, churches, libraries, and other groups," including Congress itself. Said Klein, "This great American athlete has spoken successfully for all minorities — and for all Americans."[52] Jackie Robinson had been anointed the public face of black politics despite *and* through his relentless retreat from his own symbolic significance.

One might call this Jackie Robinson's "public moment," the signature rhetorical event in constructing Robinson as a subject of national public address. Coming in the heat of the summer in which he broke his silence and "spoke his mind," some in fact would see him as a "rabble-rouser." But, Robinson accomplished a number of things which would for years follow his persona through the news cycles and remembrances that constituted his life as a political symbol. Jackie Robinson affirmed his story as a crucible of progress in baseball — all while bracketing its significance, he disjoined black politics from communism through a negation of Robeson's authority to speak for others —- all while claiming to speak for no one but himself, and enacted liberalism's

black civic ethos by indexing his stake in idealized images of America — all while assuring integration's position on the national political agenda. Robinson's initiation into publicity, sterilized by his mute mediation through Branch Rickey, performed a spectacle of blackness that was fundamentally fit for politics: black but loyal, and determined but measured.

Later in the Fall of 1949, Jackie Robinson was named National League MVP; he had been the key player on a Dodger team that lost the World Series to the Yankees. Against unfair rumors that Robinson's racial identity had secured an award more deserved by perhaps Stan Musial or Enos Slaughter, *Times* columnist Arthur Daley mounted a spirited defense of both the award and the colorblind qualifications of the sportswriters who give the award. "Prematurely curious outsiders frequently asked this reporter," Daley admitted, "'Will the Baseball Writers' committee vote for him, though?' The answer was obvious: That they were honest, objective reporters. If Jackie deserved the award, he'd get it."[53] Daley referenced Jackie's silent patience vaguely, insisting that "Jackie has won for himself complete freedom as a ball player, with the right to be judged only as a ball player."[54] Thus set free to play *and* speak, Robinson was baseball's most meritorious individual, and the problem of race, concluded Daley, was neither here nor there: "He didn't win the MVP honor because he is a Negro or in spite of the fact that he is a Negro. He won it because he was the most valuable ball player in the National League. And don't let any professional rabble-rouser try to tell you differently."[55] Once everyone was colorblind — Jackie, his teammates, the press who covered him, the nation, the public — the pragmatism of patience transformed "rabble-

rousing" into the dishonest vocation of those, black and white, who spoke superfluously about race.

Jackie Robinson and Black Civic Ethos

Though the national Robinson spectacle began in April 1947, prior to then Major League Baseball was not the only game in town. Its history is marked by discontinuities and variable levels of economic viability, but "Negro League" baseball provided the setting in which black ballplayers participated in the game at a professional level before World War II. According to Brian Carroll, black press coverage of the Negro Leagues helped to establish its players as cultural heroes, noting that "media attention is the agency that makes contemporary heroes as well as unmakes them."[56] Carroll cites Amiri Baraka, who once wrote of the Negro Leagues:

> The collective black aura that can only be duplicated with black conversation or music ... these were professional ballplayers. Legitimate black heroes. And were were intimate with them in a way and they were extensions of all of us, there, in a way that the Yankees and Dodgers and whatnot could never be! ... It was like we all communicated with each other and possessed ourselves at a more human level that was usually possible out there in cold whitey land.[57]

Speaking to the facts of racial segregation, this account of the Negro Leagues recognizes their unique position in constituting the texture of black cultural experience before the Jackie Robinson era. But beneath Amiri Baraka's eloquent nostalgia lies the strained politics of legitimacy underwritten by segregation, the same kind of distant longing for recognition expressed in Du Bois' double-consciousness, the kind of insight that arrives

as an insult the moment one finds oneself saying, Who needs the Dodgers and Yankees, anyway?

Within the context of the black press in the 1920s, this tension translated into a pointed emphasis on baseball coverage that presented heroic ideals through careful attention to Negro League business legitimacy. Explaining the sheer extent of black press Negro League coverage, Carroll asserts that, "Unlike football, boxing, or basketball, baseball in the 1920s was covered by the black press as a black-owned, black-run business offering job- and income-creation rather than merely being a source of diversion and entertainment. Baseball in the pages of the black press, therefore, served as a point of pride for the black community."[58] The most interesting dimension of Carroll's analysis, however, is the historical shift he notes between the 1920s and 1940s with respect to Negro League baseball's heroes. According to him, the Negro Leagues were founded on a partnership of the black press and black businessmen as an effort to "showcase [...] the accomplishments of the race," resulting in an "emphasis in coverage on baseball as business."[59] The black baseball "heroes," then, of the 1920s were black owners, "uninterested in their own gain but instead in the uplift of the black community."[60] Negro League baseball, in other words, turned black public life inward, focused on forms of social life proper to the black middle class.

But by the 1940s, the burden of black baseball heroism had shifted to those who excelled at the actual playing of baseball. Carroll accounts for the difference by appealing to the changing times:

> For the black press, the Negro Leagues provided an important test case in entrepreneurism and self-help, which was the major reason the newspapers co-founded the leagues with leading black businessmen. Demands for social change, equality, or for an end to racial discrimination were not made by baseball in this initial period. But by the late 1930s and early 1940s, as the black community's goals shifted more toward challenging and competing against mainstream society, these demands began to be made. The heroes naturally became those who could compete with the best that mainstream society had to offer. DiMaggio struck out trying to hit [Satchel] Paige and then called him the best he had ever faced. Robinson extended into October the seasons of the previously all-white, April-to-September Brooklyn Dodgers, a team nicknamed "Dem Bums" for their habitual ineptitude.[61]

Carroll is undoubtedly correct to observe that the nature of baseball heroism in the black press moved in tandem with coterminous social and cultural circumstances. But, he hints at a relation of causality that is more complex than it appears.

If the black press helped to set the cultural agenda for the "black community," then it would seem that they refracted the new black baseball hero to at least the same extent that they helped to shape the meaning and direction of race politics in the 1940s. I do not mean to say that black newspapers did not "react" to public demand, but it is an error to assume that the notion of public demand is prior to or determinative of the "demands for social change, equality, or for an end to racial discrimination" made in the black press by the 1940s. The fight for integration was of a piece with the shifting identity of the black sports hero. Black newspapers, once the narrators of Negro League business achievement, found in baseball the discursive means of imagining inclusion by staging the formation of black cultural identities that could "compete." The Negro Leagues and their proprietors, in other words, were important to the processes of "withdrawal and regroupment" that helped to build communal forms of middle class

black identity throughout the 1930s. The new emphasis on players, commonplace by the 1940s, signaled black newspapers' outward movement toward interaction with white society. To be sure, such interaction was conflictual, but the new black baseball hero became one who would excel in competition with whites and perform the basic truths of integration. Integration politics for the black press, even as constituted within its own institutional imagination — its hope to disappear — both animated and was animated by Jackie Robinson. On the sports pages, what was once a test case in black entrepreneurism became a test case for the social and cultural consequences of racial integration that could be promoted in print. In a comparison of the coverage given to Robinson by black newspapers and "mainstream" newspapers during spring training in 1947, Lamb and Bleske observe an important difference: "For the black press, the Robinson story transcended sports and touched on racial issues neglected by both the mainstream press and society at large. The mainstream press, on the other hand, rarely gave the story the social or cultural context it deserved."[62] With respect to the Robinson's signing with the Montreal Royals, William Kelley offers a similar comparison with a pointed emphasis on the *Courier* and the *Defender*: "Negro publications tended to focus more on the Robinson event as a significant historical occasion. They showed an energetic job of emotionalizing the story, in particular the Pittsburgh *Courier* and the Chicago *Defender*. [...] The metropolitan newspapers tended to take the story as another occurrence in the sports world."[63] The point of these comparisons, generally speaking, is to disclose the "racial bias" of the nation's largest daily newspapers. Be that as it may, the comparisons also illustrate the influence of Robinson's story on the strategies employed by black newspapers to inaugurate new

forms of black publicity. As the black press began to direct their discourses toward inclusion, black heroes in black papers became those that, in the words of Gunnar Myrdal, "achieved something extraordinary [...] in competition with whites," those who might "offer every Negro a gloating consolation in his lowly status and a ray of hope."[64] Jackie Robinson emerged in 1947 as a racial "competitor" of vast importance to the black press' effort to stage effective racial performances. As a superior baseball player, as a symbol of inclusion's developing pathways, and as a living demonstration of liberal reform, Jackie Robinson offered a subject position well-suited for the black public sphere's pivot from "withdrawal and regroupment" to interaction and "agitation."

This proposition, admittedly, runs the risk of reductionism. Jackie Robinson, after all, did not individually determine the direction of race politics after 1947. Nevertheless, the space Robinson occupied and continues to occupy cannot be overemphasized. If Houston Baker's argument about King rings true — that he presided over the emergence of a national scene — then contemporary observers are surely on to something when drawing the comparison to King in order to explain Robinson's influence on history. For example, the *Times*' Dave Anderson recited a line of reasoning applied commonly to Jackie Robinson. In the summer of 2008, he wrote, "More than a decade before Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King put the phrase civil rights into the nation's vocabulary, Jackie Robinson taught millions of baseball's white fans that black was beautiful."[65] This argument of prefiguration does double-duty; it invests each individual with the other's symbolism and asserts a lineage from Robinson to King. Moreover, it places baseball history and civil rights history into an ancestral relation, the former being the precursor to the latter. Jackie Robinson, many are quick to remember, "came first."

Along these lines, Jules Tygiel (Robinson's most prominent biographer) wrote, "In 1954 when the Supreme Court declared school segregation illegal in the famous Brown v. Board of education decision, a majority of major league teams already fielded black athletes."[66] In addition to all of this, Jackie Robinson refused an order to the "back of the bus" while in the Army in 1944 (an offense for which he was court-marshaled), eleven years prior to Rosa Parks' famous gesture. As a purported figurative antecedent to the civil rights movement, Jackie Robinson is many things to many advocates, and as these memories of his significance accumulate, a binding assumption becomes visible beneath them: Jackie Robinson was the central figure in a national drama, which in the mid-1940s unfolded on the pages of black newspapers. For them, Jackie Robinson had made a *scene*.

Into the late sixties and early seventies, Jackie Robinson remained a powerful scene-maker. In December 1969, about a week before Curt Flood met with player representatives in Puerto Rico and then filed suit in federal court, Robinson appeared on New York public television to discuss a problem in sport that was receiving increasing attention. The *Amsterdam News* reported, "Jackie Robinson, the first black player to be admitted into major league baseball, has noted 'little,' if any, progress on the coaching lines and managerial offices for black men since he broke the color line on the playing field a quarter-century ago."[67] Though not the first of its kind, the *Amsterdam News*' article signaled the placement of managerial and executive positions in sports onto liberal integration's political agenda. The front office was taken to be a logical extension of the path Robinson had broken in 1947, the next phase of progressive reform. As the *Amsterdam News* characterized Robinson's position, the paper was careful to highlight

the significance of sport to achieving larger goals. On the television program, Robinson had appeared with Fritz Pollard, a star professional football player in the 1920s who had also become the National Football League's first black head coach in 1922. The *Amsterdam News* said, "Both men underscored the importance of athletics as a means for black men to get into the mainstream of the nation's economy and as a common denominator for integrated living."[68] Robinson was quoted as saying, "I believe that athletics offers a lesson in human rights. It shows that people must work together to be successful and what can be accomplished when they pull together as a team."[69] The problem of black coaches and executives in sport, for Robinson and others, constituted the next barrier in the ever-expanding quest for interracial progress, not just within sport, but also relative to the promise of integration writ large.

On the same day that the *Amsterdam News* reported on Robinson's television appearance, Dick Edwards' column suggested that the "play-only" double standard for black baseball players was both a case of exploitation and a threat to viability of the game. Edwards wrote:

> Baseball doesn't want blacks in any capacity, other than players. [...] Yep. Blacks can help carry The Man to the promised land, but once he gets there — that's the end of the line for the guy of color. Unless it is a lead-pipe cinch that he can exploited next season [...] The black player can turn over and die, as far as management is concerned. [...] Until baseball gets around to a single standard for black and white players, only miracles like the Mets can keep it alive.[70]

Edwards was referring to the 1969 "Miracle Mets" who rose from expansion mediocrity to win the World Series in striking, unexpected fashion. The lack of black managers and

executives in the Major Leagues, apparently, posed a danger to baseball that only aberrational spectacles like the '69 Mets could mask. Given baseball's importance to integration strategies, the problem of the black manager was seen as crucial to its mass appeal and institutional preservation.

Thus, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* offered an optimistic report in 1970 that detailed the findings of the "Race Relations Information Center (RRIC)," a "nonprofit journalistic research agency in Nashville." Among the many findings of the report, which included an analysis of black sports participation in the intercollegiate Southeastern Conference, the *Sentinel* stressed one hopeful prediction in particular. "Major league baseball's first black team manager is likely to be named within the next three years," promised the *Sentinel*, "possibly as early as 1971, according to an exclusive, two-part report released this week by the Race Relations Information Center."[71] Moreover, the Sentinel named names: "The report raises the possibility that three National League stars, Willie Mays, Ernie Banks, and Maury Wills, could be likely 'first black manager' candidates."[72] The first black baseball manager, Frank Robinson, would not be hired until 1975, but the Sentinel report was surely encouraging to those, like the *Chicago Defender*'s Doc Young, who saw baseball as both a locus of political activity and mirror of racial progress.

In the 1940s, black newspapers regarded the integration of the playing field as the principal battleground in sport, but some twenty years later, matters had shifted. On December 29, 1969, the *Defender*'s Doc Young noted that "the entire managerial area of baseball is as lilywhite as it was in 1947, when Jackie Robinson made his debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers."[73] Invoking Jackie's integrationist symbolism once again, Young asserted that the "moguls" of professional baseball "have not yet exhibited a willingness

to come to grips with one of their most pressing problems — the plight of the aging Afro-American athlete who wants to remain in the game after his playing days have ended."[74] And, as references to Jackie Robinson often do, Young's criticism of baseball deepened the black investment in American national identity and held baseball to account for its universal possibilities. "Baseball likes to call itself the 'national pastime.' It boasts often, and not improperly," Young opined, "about the job it has done in the area of integrated rosters. But baseball falls light years short of the American Ideal when it continues to ignore the Afro-American who is qualified for executive, administrative, and field leadership positions."[75] Jackie Robinson was offered as evidence of potential, but as-yet unfulfilled reform.

Nearly two years later, Doc Young addressed the same issue, once again with Robinson as a tropological metric for plotting baseball's progress. Asking, "Who will have the guts to make the next move?," Young remembered the importance of Branch Rickey to the Robinson fable. He cited a story told in Roger Kahn's now-famous memoir of growing up a Dodger fan, *The Boys of Summer*, in which Kahn reveals that Branch Rickey's desire to integrate baseball could be traced to a 1938 conversation with St. Louis Cardinals pitcher Preacher Roe. At the time, Rickey was a Cardinals executive, and would have to join the Dodgers to execute his integration plans. According to Young, in Brooklyn, "the racial climate was better," and "the primary club owners also had guts."[76] As Young summoned nostalgia for the courage of Rickey and Robinson, he pointed toward what he took to be a largely ignored feature of the 1971 World Series, which happened to mark the 25th anniversary of black participation in the fall classic: "The black player had become so commonplace by now that nobody remembered to note

the anniversary year. But both managers and the coaches and the top front office executives were white."[77] A problematic circumstance, Young thought, especially given the significance of anniversary that had just passed without notice: "When Robinson joined the [Montreal] Royals in the spring of 1946, he — and Rickey, of course — brought an end to the vicious practice of racial discrimination in major mass-appeal American sports."[78] Decades after Jackie Robinson joined the Dodgers, memories of his partnership with Rickey were still operating in the service of integrationist reform rhetoric.

For Doc Young, though, these memories, which meant to lay bare the truth of integration, imposed limits as well. As debate about a black manager in baseball proceeded into 1972, Young became anxious about Jackie Robinson's contributions to the conversation. With caution, Young wrote in the *Defender* that he had "to be critical of 'my hero.' I have to be critical about him because he is wrong in the way he constantly puts down the leading black candidates for managerial posts in major league baseball."[79] At specific issue was Maury Wills, one of the candidates mentioned in the RRIC report, and cited by the *Los Angeles Sentinel* in 1970. Young noted the conspicuous absence of Wills' name from list of potential black managers offered by Robinson in response to a question from a white reporter. From Young's perspective, Jackie's error was in violating the colorblind principles he purportedly established in 1947. When it came to accomplishing an important racial goal, Robinson, Young feared, was being too "militant." He said:

> Jackie erroneously judges black managerial potential on the basis of militancy. That cannot be the primary role of the first black manager in major league baseball. This man, whoever he is, must be able to manage black and white players alike, all players, regardless of race, creed, or color. Jackie sometimes seems to forget — though he DOESN'T forget — that for and important racial goal, he, himself, made personal feelings secondary. If he is going to be true to the cause he must give the Maury Willses every conceivable break.[80]

Apparently, Jackie Robinson was not enacting the Jackie Robinson ethos in a manner consistent with the black press' political imperatives: inclusion, integration, and symbolic representation. The abstraction of Jackie Robinson into public space, by 1972, had outpaced the particularity of his beliefs.

Put differently, Jackie Robinson established a burden of racial representation that was, in this instance, too heavy for even him to bear; the scene-making power of Robinson had exceeded his own rhetorical command. Through him, because of him, and, as Doc Young's last point demonstrates, sometimes even in spite of him, Jackie Robinson dramatized a conception of political activity in the black press characterized by the relentless pursuit of inclusive, colorblind institutional reform. Just as black newspapers premised their own existence on the telos of their disappearance, Jackie Robinson gave voice and body to liberalism's narrative of progressive integration. His insertion into the black manager debate identified a new structural barrier that demanded breaking, affirmed the importance of baseball (but held both it and the nation to baseball to account for its ostensible universality) produced memories that politicized and idealized interracial cooperation, and established Jackie Robinson as a frame of reference that structured the black public subject.

Notes

[1] Chris Lamb, "L'Affaire Jake Powell: The Minority Press Goes to Bat Against Segregated Baseball," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 76 (Spring 1999), 21.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 22.

[4] Ibid., 27.

[5] Ibid., 30.

[6] Roberts and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*, 20.

[7] Chris Lamb and Glen Bleske, "Democracy on the Field," *Journalism History* 24 (Summer 1998), 51. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 3, 2009).

[8] David K. Wiggins, "Wendell Smith, the *Pittsburgh Courier-Journa*l and the Campaign to Include Blacks in Organized Baseball, 1933-1945," *Journal of Sport History* 10 (Summer 1983), 21.

[9] Wiggins, 23.

[10] This is a classic example of the type of institutional circumstance that policy options like affirmative action were designed to combat. The cumulative response of Landis and owners radically privatized the the injustice, reducing it to a notion of personal freedom that allows the racist institution to throw up its hands and say, "We're not officially racist." The unspoken implication is that they are collectively, unofficially racist. To the extent that the effects of each are indistinguishable, pointed attention to racial identity is necessary to open the institution — in this case, baseball.

[11] Roberts and Kilbanoff, *The Race Beat*, 20.

[12] Kelly Rusinack and Chris Lamb, "'A Sickening Red Tinge': The Daily Worker's Fight Against White Baseball," *Cultural Logic: An Electronic Journal of Marxist Theory and Politics* 3 (Fall 1999), http://clogic.eserver.org/3-1%262/rusinack%26lamb.htm, last retrieved October 1, 2009.

[13] Rusinack and Lamb, "A Sickening Red Tinge."

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 3. One of the problems with this divorce from the Communist Party, then, would become both the owners' later refusal to see themselves as business owners, and, at least according to Curt Flood, the players ignorance of any professional understanding of labor negotiations.

[16] Rusinack and Lamb, "A Sickening Red Tinge," 6.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Wendell Smith, "Sports Beat," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 23, 1947. Smith is quoted in Rusinack and Lamb, "A Sickening Red Tinge."

[19] Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 37. Emphasis added.

[20] Dave Anderson, "New Plaque, Same Giant of a Man," *New York Times*, June 26, 2008.

[21] Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 206.

[22] Jackie Robinson, *I Never Had It Made* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995; New York, Putnam, 1972), 59. One could guess here that within the rhetorical confines of black public culture at the end of sixties, Robinson was constantly fighting this perception; in *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, Harry Edwards had called him "the infinitely patient and understanding Negro." See Edwards, *Revolt*, 27.

[23] Robinson, *I Never Had It Made*, 34.

[24] Ibid., 77.

[25] Ibid., 79.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Robinson, *I Never Had It Made*, 81. See also, Associated Press, "Jackie Robinson Disputes Robeson; Baseball Star Offers to Tell House Group He Would Fight Against Russia," *New York Times*, July 9, 1949.

[30] Robinson, *I Never Had It Made*, 83.

[31] Ibid., 85.

[32] Ibid., 83.

[33] Robinson, I *Never Had It Made*, 85. See also, Jackie Robinson, "Text of Jackie Robinson's Statement to House Unit," *New York Times*, July 19, 1949.

[34] Robinson, *I Never Had It Made*, 85.

[35] Associated Press, "Jackie Robinson Disputes Robeson."

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] C. P. Trussell, "Red Failures Here Told By Minorities," *New York Times*, July 14, 1949.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] C. P. Trussell, "Jackie Robinson Terms Stand of Robeson on Negroes False," *New York Times*, July 19, 1949.

[42] Robinson, "Text of Jackie Robinson's Statement."

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] *New York Times*, "Communist Shut-Out," July 20, 1949.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] *New York Times*, "Newark Pickets Robeson," July 21, 1949.

[51] William L. Patterson, "To Secure Civil Rights," letter to the editor, *New York Time*s, July 25, 1949.

[52] *New York Times*, "Robinson Text Praised: Representative Klein Asks that 500,000 Copies Be Printed," July 31, 1949.

[53] Arthur Daley, "The Valuable Jackie Robinson," Sports of the Times, *New York Times*, November 23, 1949.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Brian Carroll, "Early Twentieth-Century Heroes: Coverage of Negro League Baseball in the Pittsburgh Courier and Chicago Defender," *Journalism History* 32 (Spring 2006), 36.

[57] Baraka quoted in Carroll, "Early Twentieth-Century Heroes," 36. See also, Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (New York: Freundlich Books, 1984), 34.

[58] Carroll, "Early Twentieth-Century Heroes," 36.

[59] Ibid., 37.

[60] Ibid., 38.

[61] Ibid., 40.

[62] Lamb and Bleske, "Democracy on the Field," 51.

[63] William Kelley, "Jackie Robinson and the Press," *Journalism Quarterly* 53 (Winter 1981), 640.

[64] Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 734.

[65] Anderson, "New Plaque."

[66] Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 9.

[67] *New York Amsterdam News*, "Pollard, Robinson Decry Lack of Black Sports Execs," December 20, 1969.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Dick Edwards, "Double Standard Blacks To Play-Only," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 20, 1969.

[71] *Los Angeles Sentinel*, "In Three Years Majors to Get First Black Manager," August 13, 1970.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Doc Young, "Big Job for Bowie Kuhn," *Chicago Defender*, December 12, 1969.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Doc Young, "Rickey and Roe," *Chicago Defender*, November 2, 1969.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Young, "Jackie's Strange Way."

[80] Ibid.

Chapter 6

Race, Class, and Principle: The Disappearance of Curt Flood's Blackness

Recent scholarly interest in Curt Flood has generally taken the form of revisionist history that works to discover and then disclose the racialized dimensions of his public challenge to the reserve clause. Working from various assumptions, including that Flood was vilified in the national press, a handful of contemporary critics have attempted to recover a narrative that connects the "principle" for which he claimed to fight to the meaning, significance, or influence of his blackness. Michael Lomax, for example, counts "black rage" as Flood's primary motivation to file suit.[1] Though he recognizes the awkward dynamic produced by Flood's need to find common cause with white players, Lomax attributes Flood's decision to "Black Power," which "exemplified a mood, a disillusionment and alienation from white America, race pride, and self respect or 'black consciousness,'" a historical construct out of which Flood's "sensitivity" tends to emerge.[2] Gerald Early offers a more nuanced analysis of two basic features of the public rhetoric both from and with regard to Curt Flood: the slavery metaphor and the pointed resistance to the owner's rhetoric of "gratitude." For Early, these themes fit historically within the kinds of civil rights discourses that provided Flood the resources to offer a principled critique of baseball's investment in American democracy: "In the velvet glove of the myth of baseball as the Great American pastime, the game of heroes, the sport that symbolized our democratic impulses, was the iron fist of its absolutist

corporate power, a power it enjoyed for far too long in the form of the unrestrained exercise of its reserve clause."[3] This line of reasoning is incisive, but in the same allusive manner that the insistence on Flood's "sensitivity" makes race visible only at the periphery, Early advocates Flood most persuasively only once the error of the reserve clause becomes something other, and perhaps larger, than race.

The arguments from Lomax and Early labor to engage one side of a contemporary debate about where Flood fits in the history of sport's social influence. Located in mismatched popular and interdisciplinary locations, one side seems to argue (from Bill Rhoden to George Will) that Curt Flood was sensitized by experiences with racism to challenge organized baseball in a way that had nothing to do with race. The other side, exemplified in Lomax and Early, attempts to thicken the racialized political context that surrounded Flood in an effort to draw out a denser understanding of the role his blackness played in the case's unfolding. Perhaps the most interesting and provocative instance of the latter comes from David Leonard, who measures recent memories of Flood against the historical record to conclude, "[Flood] was hated then because of racism yet now loved because of and evidenced by the fact that we see him as a baseball player first and as a black man in America second."[4] For Leonard, the central problem lies not in recovering the black "roots" of Flood's case, but in observing that what Flood was fighting was, in fact, racism. But Leonard overstates both sides of his case; Flood was not universally vilified then, and neither is he universally beloved now. Leonard mentions contemporaneous support from the black press only in passing, and underestimates both the extent and influence of the advocacy Flood received in the national daily press. In particular, the *New York Times*' Leonard Koppett and several

columns in *The Sporting News* offered plenty of favorable opinions. By skipping over the black press while dismissing Flood's "mainstream" support, Leonard misses a crucial connection in his central claim that Flood's case represents "the continuity of demonization, denigration, and denunciation of blackness in the name of protecting whiteness."[5] The whiteness story rings true, especially if one dwells closely on what it means to be a "baseball player first." But as Leonard calculates that "much of the media erased [Flood's] place within a larger revolt of the black athlete," he overlooks the way that *support* for Flood in the early 1970s may have enabled that erasure in ways that had little to do with racist demonization. Furthermore, it is clear that Flood is not exactly written out of "the revolt of the black athlete"; he may hold a frustrated relationship to the list of activist luminaries as it is typically presented, but if Flood is anywhere now, he exists within this memory of activism, just as he was appreciated by plenty of public advocates as courageous and noble back then.

The effort, in any case, to identify Curt Flood as a black public subject or to demonstrate, in Leonard's terms, "the centrality of race,"[6] belies the strategic ambiguity of Flood's rhetorical performances in *The Way It Is*, on television, and in the papers. Like Jackie Robinson, whom Leonard ignores, Flood was a fighter for "principle." But, unlike Jackie Robinson, who spoke his mind once "the principle [of integration] had been established," Curt Flood's "principle" was never grounded explicitly in a claim about racial injustice. Looking back, it might be fairer to say that Flood's "principle" was prudently equivocal on the question of race. For those who still saw baseball as a vestige of racism or sport as a dehumanizing social institution, Flood's "principle" summoned the surrounding discourses of racial (in)justice, and for those who looked at matters with

the enabling distance of liberalism and colorblindness, Flood's principle summoned emerging criticisms of baseball's ownership plutocracy, nascent conceptualizations of sporting labor, and anxieties regarding the inevitable modernization of sport's economic structure. For this latter group, Flood's race and salary were each besides the point; fair was fair, and Curt Flood was being treated unfairly by a system designed to enrich the overprivileged few. The "principle" could be one of two things, then, each of which attracted support: a racial principle or an economic principle — a "black thing" (as Tom Haller had put it) or an economic "thing," each of which might have been understood as, in Flood's terms, a "basic principle of human life."

It was easy, then, for public rhetors to lose sight of his blackness when addressing the challenge to the reserve clause in the early 1970s. Since Flood's condition of supposed bondage extended to his white teammates, the argument from blackness — incipient in the imagery of slavery and inflecting Flood's own speech — was safely quarantined in Flood's consciousness and removed from the external social and structural facts of the case: Flood was "sensitive" and "principled." At the same time, the labor argument — its logic and implications — became the locus of extended discussion and analysis. The slave metaphor had piqued the interest of black newspapers eager to establish baseball as a measure of progress (an achievement for which Jackie Robinson can be credited), and it had certainly drawn the attention of a national sports press already narrating baseball's economic minutiae. In both, Flood indeed found support, but along the way, the symbolic significance of blackness to the slavery argument got lost in the commotion. Supportive public discourse turned its rhetorical activity toward universalizing a labor narrative and figuring out a way to save baseball. Race became

superfluous, part of the story but not part of the argument, something for which his advocates would have to account in order to set aside. This chapter argues that public discourse produced the disappearance of Curt Flood's blackness in three interrelated rhetorical movements: First, both the black press and the national sports press privatized Flood's racial discourse in characterizing him as a uniquely principled individual. Second, black newspapers elaborated the labor argument in terms that fit Flood into a colorblind and economically neutral space. Third, and perhaps most importantly, both black newspapers and his supporters in the *Times* and *TSN* strengthened the public investment in baseball by preserving it as an institution capable and worthy of reform. Before turning to an analysis of these moves, I consider the utility of Flood's slave metaphor as a response to his most vociferous and influential public critic.

Freedom, Principle, and Race

For many contemporary narrators, including Lomax, Early, Snyder, and Leonard, Flood's representative detractor was Bob Broeg, the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*'s baseball beat writer whose articles on the highly successful sixties Cardinals often appeared in the nationally circulating *The Sporting News (TSN)*. In January 1970, Broeg delivered the most direct attack on Flood's position to gain widespread attention. Calling him "a bit overdramatic," Broeg insinuated, through a pithy play on words, that Flood was just pouting for more money: "[I]t is difficult indeed to be sympathetic to the little man, particularly when it really is not a matter of principle, but of principal."[7] Broeg expressed brief reluctance at personalizing the reserve clause debate, but then alluded to Flood's salary in mentioning, "It is difficult not to get personal in Flood's case because Curt benefited from a large measure of personal consideration."[8] Broeg made the

argument that seemed to bother Flood the most: that he was too well-paid to complain. "If the legality of the baseball reserve clause were being contested by a player less affluent than Curt Flood," Broeg insisted, "the sympathy would be considerably greater."[9] Instead, citing the damages Flood sought in litigation ($3 million), Broeg attempted to test the limits of Flood's "principle": "If principle were really involved in his legal assault on baseball's reserve clause as violating the federal antitrust laws, Flood would have asked for $1 and the right to negotiate for himself."[10] Though it is possible to read through Broeg's paternalism to what Leonard calls a "modern form of lynching,"[11] his obtuse defense of baseball's status quo ignored Flood's blackness explicitly until *The Way It Is* was released in December 1970. In a book review published in both *TSN* and the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* in the spring of 1971, Broeg wrote that Flood "emerges as a cynic and as an unforgiving guy whose racial resentment runs deep."[12] And, quoting Flood's assertion that "black experience teaches that the American white is guilty until he proves himself innocent," Broeg issued a tired scolding about colorblindness, saying that Flood "penned what has to be the most discouraging sentence to all who think they've learned to accept a man for what he is and does, not for what he looks like."[13] That Broeg ignored what Flood took to be meaningful racialized experiences became obvious in the review's final sentences: "Through most of the 236 pages of 'The Way It Is,' whether bedding, boozing or playing ball, Curt is indeed curt. I never knew he was so damned unhappy."[14] Even the fairest historical interpretation of Broeg's commentary would have to admit that he missed Flood's point entirely.

Such an admission, though, fails to get any closer to what Flood's point was precisely, especially since he often left the "principle" for which he was fighting up for

public grabs. A quick look at *The Way It Is* reveals on the one hand that Flood's "principle" may have been a direct reply to Broeg, but on the other hand that his "principle," because it was pregnant with possibility, was also highly elastic. In the book, Flood asserted "principle" explicitly when addressing media perception that he was simply holding out for more money. In response to the prediction that he would take the Phillies' offer sooner or later, he said, "Members of [the baseball] establishment, including its wags, were entirely incapable of understanding that a basic principle of human life was involved. More to the point, they recognized no principle so basic that it could not be nullified by payment of a few extra dollars."[15] Later in the text, Flood clarified the identities of the "wags" in making the same point: "Comparatively few newspaper, radio, and television journalists seemed to be able to understand what I was doing. That a ballplayer would pass up $100,000 a year was unthinkable. The player's contention that he was serving a human cause was somehow unbelievable. Who had ever heard of anyone giving up $100,000 for a principle?"[16] Perhaps Flood felt compelled to invoke "principle" in relation to money because Broeg had set it against "principal," and though the principle itself seemed to lack any real positive elaboration, its assertion ennobled the totality of his claim and cast his critics as *un*principled. But, the intricate sense of humanism — the "human cause" — that seemed to cohere conceptually in *The Way It Is* never quite made it into the ways in which "the principle" would be contextualized in public discourse.

Despite his ambiguity, one eventuality was certain: Flood's lawsuit would drive him out of baseball. His "basic principle of human life," however it may have been defined, was enacted in the lawsuit, a choice which entailed sitting out the 1970 baseball

season. In this sense, Flood did not stand for "a" principle as much as he took a principled stand, and since he demonstrated the sincerity of his cause by refusing to play ball, Flood's supporters found ways to animate the "basic principle of human life" with arguments, narratives, and themes that may or may not have been faithful to the sophisticated humanism Flood attempted to formulate. The *stand* authenticated the principle, which was then elaborated in terms that reflected the interests, motivations, and political imaginations of his supporters. In suing and refusing to play, Curt Flood (to borrow a sporting vulgarity) had put his money where his mouth was, and so his commitment to conscience could only be challenged disingenuously. Across the support he received — from the black press to the *New York Times* to *The Sporting News* — Broeg's uncharitable accusations of greed were falsified easily and dramatically.

Nevertheless, according to the view of many, Flood was already a rich man. The problem was not the fact that he was seeking more money, but instead that baseball had allowed him to become an individual of considerable financial means.[17] Perhaps, then, it is reasonable to say that the least mercurial principle contained within Flood's rhetoric had something to do with freedom. This is the point at which observers like Leonard tend to overstate the "centrality of race." Although Flood's rhetorical performances evinced an interest in finding common cause with agitational black discourses, in describing himself as a "well-paid slave" to Howard Cosell's national audience, Flood also exercised a strategic understanding of public argument. The figure of the slave, as I argued in my analysis of *The Way It Is*, performed double-duty; it evoked racial imagery and simultaneously analogized baseball's basic institutional moral error. Anticipating the colorblind platitudes (which Flood had learned to identify and disdain) that would be

repeated by numerous detractors, the "well-paid slave" could be regarded, if deployed skillfully, as intrinsically raceless. Certainly, his self-characterization would attract little sympathy from the likes of Broeg, but supportive commentators attended closely to the bare structural logic of Flood's slave metaphor — Flood was a freedom fighter with the conviction and sincerity to act on principle. The pricelessness of freedom, by contrast, made Broeg's lecture look distasteful and churlish.

Having said all that, the slave metaphor proved itself to be racially slippery and symbolically perilous. In contemporary debate, Flood's case is frequently caught up in a binary problematic that puts his argument from blackness at odds with his labor argument; was Flood's case really "about" race, or was it "about" baseball? Obviously, each side recognizes the intractability of the other, but those who make the argument from blackness assume the role of psycho-biographers hoping to explain what Flood really meant, and those who defend the labor argument merely account for the "mood of the era" in explicating the broad economic effects Flood's challenge prefigured in sport. Either position is defensible given the historical evidence, but neither position comes fully to grips with the irony and shrewdness of the slave metaphor. The figure of the slave, though evoking graphic racial imagery for those who wanted to see it and seeming absurd to those who marveled at his paycheck, contained symbolic difficulties and, paradoxically, built-in symbolic solutions relative to the race and class identifications that sometimes vexed his advocates. For Curt Flood, the "well-paid slave" was a flexible resource that rhetorically condensed the uniqueness of his circumstances — the American pastime imposing professional bondage on a wealthy black man — and rhetorically captured the complexity of a professed humanism grounded in racial

experience. Once released into public circulation, however, the slave metaphor forced his advocates to cope with the complicated representational obstacles imposed by the facts of his salary and blackness. Broeg's columns gave voice to a naive populism that used Flood's class and race against him. Broeg said, in essence, Flood's not poor and he shouldn't be talking about race. Why, Broeg ultimately asked, should anybody root for Curt Flood? Who does he represent besides himself? The answers here revealed the ingenuity of the slave metaphor: Freedom as a principle rested on the abstract condition of Flood's slavery, and once regarded as a freedom fight for which Flood was willing to sacrifice, the principle, for many others, trumped the size of his salary *and* the color of his skin. The slave metaphor, which might have symbolized systemic articulations of race and class, centered the reasoning through which race and class were disarticulated from the "basic principle of human life."

The First Move: "You would have to know Curt Flood the man…"

In January 1970, days after appearing on national television with Howard Cosell, Flood was featured in an occasional *New York Times* column called "Man in the News." Sportswriter George Vecsey's profile appeared under a large photograph of Flood standing next to a oil portrait of Martin Luther King, which Flood had once painted for an Atlanta charity auction. Although the *Times* sensationalized his case in typical fashion with a headline that read "$90,000-a-Year Rebel; Curt Flood," Vecsey offered a sympathetic, and nearly tender, portrayal. Clearly, the image of Flood next to King presented a racialized allusion, however oblique. But, much in the same way that the slave metaphor performed double-duty in *The Way It Is*, the Times' photo of Flood with his painting of King brought race into view so that it might be pushed out of focus.

Vecsey's column coped with Flood's blackness, but in a way that rendered its meaning unique to Flood's individual experience and conscience. Vecsey depicted Flood as a kind of Renaissance Man, an impressive person in words, deeds, and creative expression. Through Vecsey, Flood obtained a refined persona defined by the unique talents of an individual who could inspire flattering jokes that he "was not helping his [shoulder] injury by staying up all night to paint portraits."[18] Vecsey even quoted Cardinals owner Gussie Busch's once-proud boasts about Flood: "'The best damned center fielder in baseball and he paints, too,' Busch told his friends."[19] This persona contextualized the rhetorical appearance of the slave. As Vecsey put it:

> The wiry little center fielder was known to return to his apartment after a night game and take out his oil brushes and work until dawn. The shoulder healed in due time, but the Cardinals never got him to change his hours.
>
> This is the man who filed a suit yesterday against baseball and its so-called "reserve clause." Flood had resented being traded to the Philadelphia Phillies last October, partly because he hated to leave "Cardinal-land," as he calls St. Louis, but also because he felt he had put too much time into his profession to be shuttled around "like a slave."
>
> Out of this proud reaction, Flood is mounting one of the most serious challenges ever made on baseball's control of its hired hands. Flood is in a more independent position than most players because of his future as an artist and his business interests in the United States and Denmark.[20]

In this characterization, Flood appears as a man committed to baseball and creative pursuits with equal fervor, thoughtful enough about both to remain loyal to a principled professional ethic, and successful enough at each to assert his independence with a steady and confident temperament. The slave was just Flood's way of putting things.

As Vecsey came to terms with Flood's blackness, he considered the way that racism may have influenced the development of Flood's baseball career: "while playing in the Carolina and Sally leagues in 1956-57, he encountered southern bigotry, living in a Negro college dormitory and often going hungry after night games because there was no place that would serve him. But, he has recalled that the experience made him play better, in an inspired rage."[21] A generation later, Lomax would call this "black rage," but for Vecsey in 1970, Flood's "rage" inspired his individual success. So, in 1958, "the little man proved he belonged with the Cardinals."[22] Apparently, Vecsey had asked Flood about the King painting, and Flood replied that "this is one of the rare instances where I integrated my feelings about the subject. This is more expressive because there's more of me in it."[23] Bigotry made Flood play baseball better, and thinking about Martin Luther King made Flood paint better (or at least more expressively). In the end, Flood emerged from Vecsey's profile as thoughtful, intelligent, and sensitive, as someone who knew how to properly channel the anger of racialized experiences into an acute professional instinct. As an international businessman, world-class ballplayer, and portrait artist who held Dr. King close to his heart, Flood was ultimately a remarkable individual — well-qualified, on the view of the *New York Times*, to be a "man in the news."

Vecsey's article, published just as the slave metaphor began to circulate in the sports press, helped to initiate Flood into public discussion. As the case took shape in the national imagination, other similar profiles would appear, in places that ranged from (the nationally circulating) *Sport* and *Newsweek*.[24] Generally speaking, these articles, even when parroting the owner's concerns about the destruction of baseball, constructed a

persona similar to the one in the *Times*. The result was a kind of professionalization of Curt Flood in a glance that shifted from Flood as he was known — as an elite ballplayer, to Flood as he could be publicized — as an insightful and principled individual, as a genuine professional, a newsmaker, a bona fide. To be sure, this depiction would not always hold up. The detractors would have their say, and cynics would would moan about the loss of baseball's innocence, but Flood fit smoothly into a professional ethos that helped his supporters translate his case into a political rhetoric of freedom. After all, Flood never got anything for free. He excelled at his job despite long odds, was rewarded as such, claimed roots in the St. Louis community, dwelled creatively on Dr. King, and fairly felt punished for having done everything right. Is this, some supporters wondered, how you treat a pro? Just as Flood had expressed passionately in *The Way It Is*, the whole business was an insult to a dignified man of substance.

In the black press, Flood found a similar advocate in Bill Nunn, Jr, the sports desk editor of the Pittsburgh *Courier*. The *Courier*, like other black newspapers, had attended to Flood's case from its initial moments, the most notable being the January appearance on *Wide World of Sports* in which Howard Cosell had quoted his salary to a nationwide audience. In May, a few weeks before Flood's federal trial would begin, Bill Nunn asked a rhetorical question presumed to be on everyone's mind: "Why would a man want to rebel against a contract that could have meant $90,000 in salary and fringe benefits for the year 1970?"[25] The question set Flood's rebellion against his contract, not baseball, and the answer sounded much like the *Times*': "To understand that you would have to know Curt Flood the man as well as Curt Flood the ballplayer."[26] Characterizations like these helped to develop Flood's public persona, which offset and reversed the

confounding aspects of the "well-paid slave." $90,000 made him neither spoiled or ungrateful; instead, the unusual size of the salary he refused dramatized the depth of his character and demonstrated the sincerity of his personal, and *individual*, sacrifice.

Moreover, Flood had earned Nunn's endorsement by virtue of his professional commitment to the Cardinals, and his keen sensitivity was indicated in the persona that contextualized that commitment; Flood was a smooth dresser, a *businessman*. Nunn continued:

> As a major league star Flood had always been a manager's dream. Day in and day out Curt performed his duty with class. He had a keen desire to win. He never shirked his duties. He could be counted on when the chips were down. Curt Flood, in other words, came to play. Off the playing field, there is another side to Flood. Soft spoken, articulate and a smooth dresser, he could easily be taken for a 9 to 5 business man on Wall Street. A successful businessman we might add. Curt Flood is also a sensitive man. He's sensitive to the problems that surround us everyday. He's sensitive to the cast in which he wants to mold his life.[27]

Nunn's sketch evoked sporting clichés of team play that might have been (and still are) applied to any number of pro athletes: Flood was a classy guy, Flood was dependable, Flood came to play, Flood wanted to win, etc. Beyond that however, as Nunn was sure to emphasize in triplicate, the same Flood who put the team first possessed a rare personal sensitivity. Similar to Vecsey's Renaissance Man, Nunn's Flood was profiled through the individualism and individuality of his ethos. What bound Flood to his teammates, what made him a "manager's dream," was not necessarily a collective team identity (i.e. that he was a "company man"), but a personal commitment to a professional ethic expressed rhetorically in the ethos of the "sensitive" and "successful businessman."

Unlike Vecsey, however, Nunn did not account for Flood's racial identity explicitly. Of course, one might argue that he did not have to; Flood's appearance in the black press was bound to manifest the support of black newspapers through familiar representational logics. Instead, Nunn offered an iteration of the slave metaphor linked to Flood's personal sensitivity and individual impulse to rebellion. Flood was not someone to take mistreatment lightly, Nunn insisted: "Instead of accepting the news that he was no longer a Cardinal in good graces, Flood rebelled."[28] The figure of the slave then appeared, for Nunn, out of Flood's emotional reaction as a comparison befitting his bitterness over the insult: "One day he was a Cardinal. The next day he had been peddled down the river. Slaves, Curt felt with bitterness, were treated the same way. He decided to fight."[29] Nunn's characterization of Flood and his motivations made no mention of his race, and though it is difficult to draw inferences out of omissions, it is fair to say that Nunn, like Vecsey, presented a view of Flood that privatized his motivations relative to the uniqueness of his conscience and thereby muted the importance of race in public argument. It bears repeating that intransigent critics saw Flood's motivations differently. But among those who advocated Flood's position, profiles like Vecsey's in the *New York Times* and Nunn's in the *Pittsburgh Courier* cooperatively stitched a persona that countered Bob Broeg's infantilizing portrait of an impetuous ballplayer in a fancy suit pouting over a trivial and manufactured injustice. Having performed his professional duties in baseball with class and pride, Flood operated as an exemplar of the kind of self-determination that could be achieved through the offices of vocational excellence and individual talent. Baseball had, in essence, punished him for his success, and Flood, as a sensitive man, was remarkable for his refusal to stand for it.

To be sure, this was probably the best argumentative strategy for addressing the rhetoric of gratitude that Lomax, Early, and Leonard each identified as racist. Why, many advocates asked, should Curt Flood be grateful for what he earned rightfully? Early is certainly correct to insist that the owners' paternalistic tenor and line of reasoning seemed to emerge from the same discursive well that produced the racist rhetorical question, "What do you people *want*?"[30] In this instance however, determining that the argument from gratitude was "racist" in the way that Early intends depends on a puzzling counterfactual. Had the reserve clause's first "serious challenger" been white, would baseball owners have responded differently? Would a white player have had to face the accusation that he was ungrateful for what baseball bosses had benevolently provided? Clearly, it is hard to say, but such a thorny scenario becomes even more difficult to address in a rhetorical context that consigns race's meaning to Flood's individuality. Racialized experiences seem to have made Flood into a sensitive person uniquely attuned to injustice, but did not produce an oppositional public rhetoric directed at a *racial* injustice. Black newspapers omitted the matter of Flood's blackness from their advocacy, and though it is possible to interpret from that omission that the black press believed that race was "beside the point" (as Sam Lacy had attempted to make clear in the *Afro*)[31], the irrelevance of race was belied by the rhetorical appearance of the slave, the image of Flood's black face on national television and in the papers, and the black press' persistent and vociferous support. To cope with Flood's blackness, black newspapers constructed the image of an exceptional individual, and to counter the image of the ingrate, black newspapers translated Flood's struggle into one inspired by a sophisticated professional's cultivated sense of right and wrong.

Among the first articles to appear in the national news regarding Flood's lawsuit was a standard summary of the case's basic issues by the *New York Times*' Leonard Koppett. Koppett's article reviewed the facts of the trade that prompted the suit, briefly explained the history of the reserve clause, reported on Flood's meeting with the Players' Association in Puerto Rico, and pondered the possible outcomes of litigation. In one paragraph, the report made passing mention of Flood's presentation to the player reps:

> Flood spoke with considerable emotion about his feelings. He expressed no objection to playing in Philadelphia; he declared he had no intention of using this action as a wedge for receiving more money, as some players did in "retirement" cases last year, he said that the central issue was not central to his objections, although, he said, being black made him more sensitive to issues of freedom and dignity. He said the main goal was to establish, once and for all, that a player could establish his value in an open market, as in other spheres of life.[32]

This meeting was, of course, the setting of Tom Haller's crucial question following Flood's brief speech: "Are you doing this because you're black?" No, Flood had assured them, what l have been through may motivate me in ways that cannot motivate you, but we ("all players, equally") stand to gain by acting on principle.[33]

The *Times* never mentioned the question from Haller, but their early coverage of the Flood case operated as a public version of the Tom Haller moment. Koppett's syntax is odd in this passage, but his report seemed to divide Flood's "central issue" (race?) from that which was "central to his objections."[34] The problem of race, whatever it was, in other words, was a private matter, unique to Flood, internal to and accounting for the sensitivity of the man. The matters worthy of public debate — the *central objections* — were those that applied to baseball, "the player," and "the open market." While

nationally circulating publications like the *Times* and *TSN* accounted for Flood's blackness by rendering it a private concern, the black press followed a similar theme in avoiding any positive elaboration of its meaning. Depictions like Nunn's individuated Flood at the same time that they conferred an intrinsically race-less professional identity; Flood's blackness was left to speak for itself as the black press highlighted the valor in his path to individual success. Together, the *Times*, *TSN*, and black newspapers professionalized Flood's ethos and privatized his blackness, removing race from both public debate and the modes of identification into which Flood could be inserted. Questions of freedom and dignity were imagined to be universal as the case developed in the news, erasing blackness from the image of the slave and encouraging forms of collective identity better fit for public discussion. Race was part of Flood, but not part of the Flood debate; but if one was curious to know how anyone could turn all that money down? Well, for that, you would have to know Curt Flood the man.

The Landscape of Public Debate: Chaos and the Public Interest in Baseball's Dystopia

In late January 1970, Joe Cronin and Chub Feeney, presidents of the American and National Leagues respectively, issued a press release concerning Flood's federal lawsuit. The concise statement summarized baseball's official public position in defense of the reserve clause, and it set baseball's preservationist discourse into motion. In various press outlets nationwide, such as the *New York Times*, the *Sporting News*, and black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, Cronin and Feeney's statement characterized Flood's legal action as a potentially fatal threat to baseball's future. The AL and NL presidents scolded Flood for selfishly refusing his "reassignment" and spoke in catastrophic terms regarding a successful lawsuit's potential consequences:

> When a player refuses to honor an assignment, he violates his contract, in which he agrees that assignments may be made, and he violates the fundamental baseball rules, including the reserve clause, which experience has shown to be absolutely necessary to the successful operation of baseball.
>
> The court action commenced by Curt Flood attacks these fundamental rules and makes the same charges that have been made in the past and rejected by the Supreme Court of the United States. We have complete confidence that the rules of professional baseball, which have been central to the success of the game over many decades and which have permitted players such as Curt Flood to reap rich personal rewards, will withstand this new attack. […]
>
> A congressional committee, after an exhaustive study of baseball and weeks of hearings, concluded as follows:
>
> "Baseball's history shows that chaotic conditions prevailed when there was no reserve clause. Experience points to no feasible substitute to protect the integrity of the game or to guarantee a comparatively even competitive struggle."[35]

Given what would follow, a detailed and bulleted list of what might happen — *chaos* — if Flood were to win in court, Cronin and Feeney's "complete confidence" that baseball could withstand attack reads like petty, misplaced bluster:

> The chaotic results that would be created without the reserve clause should be obvious:
>
> 1. Without the reserve clause the wealthier clubs could sign an unbeatable team of all-stars, totally destroying league competition.
> 2. Clubs of more limited resources would be stripped of their stars and their ability to field a team which the public would accept.
> 3. The integrity of the game would be threatened as players could negotiate with one club while playing for another.
> 4. Clubs could no longer afford to spend millions of dollars to scout and sign new players and to subsidize their development in the minor leagues. No club could build with assurance and no intelligent person would continue to invest the large capital required for player compensation, and unmatched pension and benefit plan costing $5,450,000 per year, minor league subsidies and other costs of operating a minor league club.

> 5. The minor leagues, which exist only because of major league support, would be destroyed. Professional baseball is the only team sport that finances the development of its players.
> 6. Mutually advantageous trades would become impossible if the players' consents were required, thus preventing contract assignments which have been beneficial to both clubs and players and which are exciting to those who support the game of baseball.
> 7. Professional baseball would simply cease to exist.[36]

This statement can be read in various ways. One possibility is that it is an honest declaration from baseball's chief bureaucrats in a panic over the security of the institution they were installed to protect. Another is that it is a set of alarmist talking-points meant to induce public panic about baseball's demise. From a more critical perspective, one might also call it a careful, albeit unintentional, analysis of the political economy of Major League Baseball, a naked iteration of the slave-like conditions described by Curt Flood, or a performance of the kind of dehumanizing rhetoric Flood identified as necessary to the preservation of the owners' power. In any case, Cronin and Feeney's statement established the terms of baseball's public position, which put "chaos" and "collapse" at the center of its unabashedly dystopian rhetoric.

Whatever the truth of the financial math, public debate about Flood's case in the nation's largest sports news outlets proceeded in a rhetorical context saturated by worries about professional baseball "simply ceasing to exist." Observers critical of baseball, however, such as the *Times*' Koppett, pointed to statements like the one from Cronin and Feeney as evidence of the owners' traditionalism, painting baseball as out of touch, stuck in a different time, inherently conservative, and, most tellingly, "obtuse."[37] For observers like Koppett, sport was in the middle of experiencing massive shifts relative to the desires and expectations of its athletes, the spiking growth of its economic structure, and

its public image — circumstances that the owners failed to see as obvious. Koppett's columns turned frequently to a trope that resonated with general announcements of shifts in the national psyche, and one that was a favored term of Flood's: "the sports establishment."[38] In a late January 1970 *New York Times* piece, he offered a history of baseball's labor organizations in an effort to make sense of the Flood case. Naming this history a "Brotherhood of War," Koppett dramatized the nature of the false choice presented by ownership on the matter of the reserve clause:

> A review of the Brotherhood of War, therefore, sheds some light on the intensity of emotion in today's struggle, which centers on Curt Flood's antitrust suit. The hardest thing to understand, for most outsiders, is the apparent obtuseness of the baseball establishment in resisting any and all change. […] After all, it sounds silly for supposedly responsible business men to hint at "total destruction" of their affairs if so much as a comma is changed.
>
> But everything has its origins, even unreason. It's easy enough for mid-Twentieth Century lawyers to say "devise a less restrictive reserve substitute." Driven into baseball consciousness, however, is the idea that the present system, which did evolve gradually, has worked profitably; that alternatives tried in the past—even if it was the dim past—did fail; and "alternatives" presented in theory can lead to numerous booby traps in reality.
>
> In this light, the reluctance of the establishment to confront change is more comprehensible, if not necessarily more justified. Perhaps the real criticism of today's baseball brass should be on other grounds. Its rigid stance implied timidity, a self-confessed lack of confidence in its ability to act imaginatively, constructively and with goodwill, to devise improvements.[39]

Koppett, in adopting a reformist line of reasoning, provided a reading of Cronin and Feeney that simultaneously exposed "the baseball establishment" as, on the one hand, bellicose, blustery, and foolish, and on the other hand, acting expectedly (however irrationally) to secure its self interest. At the same time that Koppett demystified the

owners' dystopia, he recognized the symbolic advantages that the dystopian vision conferred.

Owners operationalized their catastrophic rhetoric through shamelessly frightening terms like "chaos," "destruction," and "cease to exist," choices which carried with them at least three benefits. First, the owners were able to expand the scope of the problems associated with reserve clause abolition coterminously with Flood's rhetorical escalation to "principle." Public debate turned into an age-old conflict between deontology and consequentialism, with the owners attempting to demonstrate the asymmetrically destructive outcome of an ill-measured appeal to principle, a kind of "*they* would throw the baby out with the bath water" argument. Beset by the charge that they were slave-holders and tyrants, owners attempted to illustrate the catastrophes that would ensue if the disloyal subjects had their way. Second, "chaos and destruction" helped to reclaim the public ground that had been undermined by the revelatory rhetoric emerging from Flood and his advocates. Flood claimed to be showing "the public" a truth obscured by an ideological trick, his advocates saw that sports had a "public image" problem, and the owners projected a "public" victimized by Flood's threatening gestures. After all, they had said, modifications to the reserve clause would erode competitiveness beyond the point of public acceptability. Finally, baseball's dystopia concretized the emerging malaise in sport in a way favorable to the "sports establishment." As critics groaned about the increasing influence of big-money in sports and the loss of baseball's iconic national status, the baseball owners could swim downstream rhetorically with a complementary narrative of player greed. For them, Flood was exacerbating the problem

of baseball's decline, not reforming a grand old institution, and his case was the latest evidence that baseball needed saving.

Critiques similar to Koppett's circulated widely but also abetted ownership's effort to construct a dystopian scene animated by labor disagreements. "Chaos and destruction" fit easily within the national sports press' controlling thematic at the beginning of 1970. Flood's case had become a matter of public attention as December 1969 turned to the new decade, which occasioned a variety of predictable articles attempting to make sense of the sixties and speculate on the seventies. On January 4, 1970, Joseph Durso wrote the lead article in a special section of the *New York Times* on sport at the dawn of the decade. Titled "Color the Next Decade a Lush Green," Durso's column lamented the effect that money would have in sports relative to labor problems:

> It's green, it's abundant, it's inflated. It buys oats for race horses, llama rugs for quarterbacks, domed stadiums for cities. It's money, and it will make the sports world go round in the seventies as never before.
>
> Economics — the "dismal science" — will bring more teams to more cities in more areas of the world at higher prices and on more artificial surfaces with the color of currency. But economics will also bring more lawsuits by athletes, unions for umpires, boycotts by players and strike deadlines for all sides.
>
> In short, as the sports world acquires the affluence of big business, it will continue to acquire the economic, legal, and political problems of big business, with everything wrapped in dollar signs from television time to lawyer's fees.[40]

As Durso depicted sports in a mythic fall from innocence, his first case-in-point was hardly surprising: "Curt Flood, an outfielder famous for catching the ball, may become even more famous as the man who attacked the 'reserve system' that governs most major spectator sports. As the seventies begin, he is suing for his 'freedom' from baseball's

reserve clause, which binds a player to his team until he is traded or quits."[41] Moreover, as Flood, his advocates, and the owners each insisted for their own purposes, "the public" was left to watch helplessly as matters spiraled out of control. Flood's case was in Durso's view "all part of the scramble for the public's growing leisure time and leisure cash. And sports in the seventies will spiral upward with the economy into the chase for big money, big security, big pensions, big investments, big payoffs. The gold rush is on."[42]

On the view of the *Times*, the influence of money in sport had become so intolerable by the fall of 1971 that the paper published a column by "New York Lawyer and sports fan" Alan Schwartz advocating the creation of a formal federal regulatory commission to oversee professional sports. The problem? "Squabbles on the professional sporting scene involving matters of high (and low) finance and some finer points of contract law lead me to speak brazenly out in a desperate attempt to bring the sporting element back into sports."[43] Schwartz presented a list of "squabbles" that amounted to "a whirlwind of condition precedents, negative pregnants and other legal folderol," including the case of "Curt Flood, long gone but still fighting the reserve clause in baseball."[44] Schwartz's argument rested on the same assumption as Durso's, namely that it was all the fault of "economics." Schwartz, however, summarily rejected Curt Flood's approach to changing things: "The application of laissez-faire economics to sports has served increasingly to alienate players from owners, and fans from both. Surely some kind of federal intervention is called for. But arbitrary application of anti-trust laws is not the answer."[45] Instead, Schwartz paralleled the problems in sport to a moment in US history containing an ostensibly instructive solution for restoring public trust:

> Doesn't the problem sound familiar? It should. It existed earlier this century as businesses exploded into corporate giants whose every action affected the public interest. So what did we do? Well, first we recognized that these businesses were different from those which our grandfathers had run, precisely because they had become affected with the public interest. Some third force was needed to represent the public, to insure that the profit motive did not result in harm to society. […] Why not a Federal Sports Commission?…[46]

The provocative dimension of Schwartz's argument is not the sincere possibility of having developed such a commission (an idea which in 1971 may have sounded farcical), but instead in the way it indexed sport's profound investment in "the public." Despite the strident objections to federal regulation that baseball owners doubtlessly would have raised were it even realistic, they surely appreciated Schwartz's essential stipulation: that economic squabbles in sport were doing harm to society, so *someone* needed to protect the public, as long as that someone was not enforcing an anti-trust law.

Relative to Curt Flood, this was a useful line of reasoning, as all the talk about money and economics and labor accelerated the crumbling of the sentimental image essential to ownership's self-anointed status as guardians of the public trust. Put differently, as long as "the dismal science" was responsible for a public harm, Flood could be characterized as the final, fatal factor in a gathering threat, thus producing and justifying well-worn recitations of "the good of the game." Obviously, Flood had an interest in demythologizing baseball, but he did so in an attempt to reveal the owners' duplicity. One problem for Flood in addressing the public consisted in disjoining his challenge from the economic and labor issues, writ-large, thought to be contaminating sports — a complicated task given the way sport's shifts were being narrated in places

like the *Times* and *The Sporting News*. From a broad perspective, baseball's loss of economic innocence operated as the canvas on which owners painted their dystopian images. Absent the "third force needed to represent the public," the public itself became a rhetorical battleground. Flood said the public was being fooled; the owners said Flood would cause catastrophic public harm in undoing the reserve clause. With a national sports press asserting in similarly histrionic tones that sports "squabbles" over "the gold rush" entailed protection of the "public interest," the owners secured the symbolic protection of baseball's fall. The *Times* and *TSN* had offered a narrative that said, in essence, "Money will destroy the game we love." About Curt Flood, the owners agreed and said, in essence, "We told you so." In the weeks and months following Flood's first appearance in the papers as a litigant, baseball officials (the "establishment") appealed to phrases such as "good will," "rapport," and "discipline" in order to subordinate the substance of the "squabble" to the game's "public image." This had advantages as well; in one move, they could position themselves rhetorically on the side of "the public" and at the same time undermine the legitimacy of players' labor organization.

Bowie Kuhn, for example, gave a March 1970 interview to *The Sporting News* that was quoted extensively in an editorial about baseball's "chief concern." Under the headline "We Believe…," summarizing the position of the newspaper, editor and publisher C. C. Johnson Spink helped Kuhn lend voice to the "establishment's" version of events:

> As the commissioner of baseball, Bowie Kuhn is facing some serious problems, but the most serious, he believes is the damage being done to

> the game's public image by the lack of rapport between the clubs and the players and between the players and the fans.
>
> "These other things are important," he said, referring to Denny McLain's troubles and Curt Flood's suit to abolish the reserve clause, "but the image is more vital than the legal aspects. And I felt that even before I became commissioner a year ago."[47]

Spink expressed concern that baseball must "convince a new generation that the game is both 'now' and 'relevant.' It won't be easy, especially if some of the people in the game keep blackening baseball's eyes."[48] With Kuhn in command of baseball's public image, Curt Flood was simply another "black eye," further evidence of the erosion of public confidence that Kuhn was charged with preventing.

Similarly, a February 1970 *TSN* article (published originally in the *Los Angeles Times*) presented both a diagnosis and cure as understood by Walter O'Malley, president of the Dodgers. The *LA Times*' Ross Newhan catalogued O'Malley's concerns, including the assertion that "What is needed in baseball is an 'era of goodwill,' a restoration of the rapport between owners and players rather than the negativism produced by Marvin Miller, executive director of the Major League Baseball Player's Association."[49] "Good will," on the view of Flood, was a ruse that sustained the owner's paternalism, particularly when they claimed that organized labor intervened on otherwise amicable management-player relations. In *TSN*, O'Malley cited Flood's case as expressive of the Player's Association's deleterious influence:

> Formerly a practicing attorney, O'Malley said he did not care to participate in the judicial semantics of the Flood case. He did, however, discuss freely the work of Marvin Miller.
>
> "I'm sure," said O'Malley, "that Miller is a capable man who believes he is working in the best interests of his clients.

> "I can only say that I'm disappointed in the methods he's used. He's created an aura of negativism that has harmed the image of the sport.
>
> "Last year, for example, it was the threat of a strike. This year it's the threat of litigation. The cumulative effect is that baseball is always in a negative position without substantial reason."[50]

In contrast to the kind of careful analysis issued by the likes of Leonard Koppett, the details — the "judicial semantics" — were, for O'Malley, nonsense. The image of baseball was under assault from an interloper using unbecoming methods to chase false causes. That baseball's image problem was a function of the owners' reactionary impulses was unthinkable. Instead, O'Malley externalized the causes of "negativism," reifying the image problem through a dismissal of baseball's principled critics. His assessment was not personal, though, "If Mr. Miller would use his office to build up baseball, to help improve its image, then there would be that much more money to siphon off to his players."[51] Perhaps statements like these are what led Koppett to call the owners "obtuse"; one is left to wonder how Miller might have both "built up baseball" and protected the players from the predatory desires of ownership if he had to work behind closed doors. After all, O'Malley used the catastrophic possibilities of Flood's case as an opportunity to reassert his own benevolence, "Selfishly, [the Dodgers] would benefit by removal of the reserve clause. Realistically, there would be such an imbalance that the game couldn't exist."[52] On this common establishment view, it was only the sagacious selflessness of the owners that sheltered baseball from destruction by shortsighted, carpet-bagging labor agitators.

Deep into the 1971 baseball season, the *Times*' Murray Chass commented on what seemed to be an alarming rise in player "incidents," including clubhouse fights,

premature retirements, failed comebacks, and "Curt Flood," who "ran away to Europe."[53] Chass wondered whether these incidents were bound by an underlying cause: "Is this cascade of controversies that has inundated baseball this season a series of unrelated incidents, the individual acts of players troubled for individual reason? Or is there a thread that runs through the incidents that is symptomatic of some evil spirit that has wormed its way into the game that is supposed to be played for fun?"[54] Chass sought out "the more enlightened" baseball officials, such as Baltimore Orioles player personnel director Harry Dalton and Yankee general manager Lee MacPhail, for insight into what he labored to describe as an "evil spirit." Dalton expressed concern for "the breakdown of discipline in sport," having "looked at the disquieting frequency with which these things have occurred."[55] Dalton, however, could not "say yet there is a common reason for all of it."[56] MacPhail, on the other hand, offered a concise explanation, "the communications media and the Players' Association":

> Communications, he believes, are more intense than ever and tend to magnify certain incidents. In the Boyer-Richards clash, for example, the player and his boss too public positions in the newspapers from which they were unable to retreat.[57]
>
> As for the Players' Association, MacPhail feels it has somewhat disrupted communications between players and management, at least on some clubs.
>
> "The Players' Association has sort of injected itself as a third force in between players and management," the Yankee executive said. "They maybe aren't as close as past years. Sometimes I don't think players and officials relate as well as before. Instead of going to the club, the players take their problems to the Players' Association."[58]

The problem of the Players Association, on MacPhail's view, was that it ran ill-intended communicative interference. The owners attempted to give the impression that until

organized labor became involved, players and management were perfectly capable of resolving their disagreements in good-faith private communications. In Chass' *Times* column, The Players' Association was portrayed as a unpredictable public instrument that achieved marginal benefits relative to the way that it leveraged the baseball's reputation and player discipline to achieve them. Once problems were made public, MacPhail seemed to insist, they became intransigent and protracted.

With nostalgia and regret, the papers narrated the evolving relationship between money and professional sports, developments that were taken to be contrary to public enjoyment, and in some cases detrimental to the very health of society. The owners seized this narrative as an opportunity to rehearse their typically paternalistic rhetoric and project dystopian images for which labor agitation could be conveniently blamed. Thus, in *TSN* and the *Times*, public address about baseball operated according to a feedback-loop logic: The commentary on baseball's fall from innocence intensified, and terms like "chaos," "collapse," and "destruction," merged into the discursive landscape with attenuating effects. Of course, this is precisely why Curt Flood had regarded the owners and the press as a complex of interlocutors — they worked together to elevate the primacy of the game's "public image" beyond the point of constructive labor relations and, perhaps more importantly, humane labor standards. And just as obviously, this pattern urged the Players Association into existence as a useful public instrument — in private, nothing ever changed. So, regardless of how forward-thinking observers like Koppett may have regarded themselves in supporting Flood's cause and authenticating new player demands, the underlying story of regret, a wistful goodbye to the golden era, blended Flood seamlessly into the fog of baseball's pre-existing war. Inserted into this

scenery, the justness of his cause was no match for widespread reports of sheer public exasperation with baseball and its financial foolishness.

The Second Move: Labor, the Principle, and the Black Press

In a defense of Flood printed during the week of Flood's first federal trial in the summer of 1970, the *Times*'s Robert Lipsyte sought advice from baseball's most famous "innovator,"[59] Bill Veeck, who had testified on Flood's behalf. Veeck chastised ownership for their recalcitrance as mockingly as Lipsyte did for their greed:

> Ultimately, after all this talk of balance of power, honor, reputation and serfdom, this case, too, is about money. The owners are fighting the suit so hard because their tightly-structured control of the acquisition and movement of talent keeps the costs down. That such a tight control is best for baseball has yet to be proven. During a recess [of Flood's trial], Veeck described baseball owners as having "intractable minds that respond only to necessity."[60]

Veeck had previously owned the Cleveland Indians, the St. Louis Browns, and the Chicago White Sox. His infamously outspoken criticism of fellow owners had left him outside of baseball's cliquish management establishment, and Flood's case supplied him with an additional opportunity to deliver taunting public commentary both in the courtroom and through the press. In many ways, Veeck's voice embodied the rhetorical spirit of Flood's public advocates in the large national news outlets. As an individual deeply invested in the symbolic significance of baseball through his status as an outsider, and as one reputed to hold a uniquely close relationship with "the fans," Veeck reflected the rhetorical ethos of a baseball lover, directing his cynicism not toward dystopia, but in the direction proper to Flood's cause. He mocked the owners as self-righteous and self-

serving while those who quoted him doubted that the reserve clause was anything but a way to limit the cost of labor. Instead of seeing Flood as a specter of baseball's demise, for Veeck, Lipsyte, and others like them, Flood indexed the owners' stubborn grip on the past.

For black newspapers, Flood's cause was certainly one worth advocating. Following Jackie Robinson, sport in general and baseball in particular had become prized cultural spaces for showcasing the progressive promise of liberalism. Robinson had, in fact, transformed baseball into a crown jewel in the black press' liberal project — he had forged the "crucible." Oriented around spectacles of racial inclusion, black newspapers had long been accustomed to dramatizing the mistreatment and marginalization of black athletes. Prior to Curt Flood, their attacks on the baseball establishment — such as the Jake Powell incident in 1938, the integration of the playing field in 1947, the integration of spring training in Florida in 1962, and Robinson's increasingly urgent demands for a black manager by the late 1960s — generally took the form of explicit claims regarding racial injustice. Thus, when Flood called himself a "well-paid slave" on television, he may have seemed to represent the type of cause well-suited to the black press' typical form of public advocacy in sport: A black man being unfairly expelled from baseball. And certainly Flood may have understood the likelihood of receiving their support as he deployed the slave metaphor (even if a recognition of that support never materialized in *The Way It Is*). But unlike the frustrated character of the the fight for racial inclusion, which was replete with internal tension over black newspapers' ultimate desire for their own non-existence, Flood's case inverted the logic of representation that often strained to establish forms of black identity fit for inclusion into the bourgeois public sphere.

Relative to the ways in which the black press structured public discourse and public subjects, Flood's case was not merely uncomplicated, it was ideal. The representational burden assumed by Jackie Robinson, especially as enacted in his HUAC testimony, had been to show that black identity could be mediated by liberalism into a colorblind civic ethos. Black newspapers had assembled a self-reckoning premised on the imaginary future of race's hopeful social and political irrelevance. Consequently, they were forced to negotiate the vicissitudes that existed between the universal and the particular, between self-effacing public assertions of race's insignificance on the one hand and exemplary public performances of blackness on the other. E. Franklin Frazier had called this space-in-between (which rejected identification with the black masses) the black bourgeoisie's "world of make believe" and accused the black press of being its principal architects. For better or for worse, the stationary spin of this liminality resulted in an exclusive representational politics in which certain individuals, and not others, became qualified to speak blackness into the public sphere. At HUAC and throughout the course of his career as a public advocate for integration, Robinson had occupied this strange space masterfully. He operated both as a demonstration of black achievement and as a symbolic investment in the universality of American national identity. Subjects like Robinson, however, were hard to create. Public subjectivity in the black press was perpetually at risk from blackness itself, constantly threatened by the rhetorical implications of the Tom Haller question: Are you saying this because you're black? Curt Flood provided a rejoinder that few others could offer with such obvious sincerity. And, Flood *was* black.

Curt Flood, in other words, was a black public subject in 1970 whose blackness didn't have to matter. Black newspapers were not enjoined to render race superfluous; it already was. More precisely, talk about race could be pushed aside easily as Flood and his advocates made the case that reserve clause abolition would benefit white players, too. His appeal to principle, once emptied of racial content, enacted the black press' liberal fantasy of the black universal, an escape from liminality not into the confined, enclaved regions of "withdrawal and regroupment" in which the meaning of black particularity underwent agonizing definition and redefinition, but into the rarefied public space in which a black man could be promoted as a fighter for universal freedoms. Curt Flood was not simply fit for the pivot toward what Nancy Fraser called "the wider public," he *embodied* the pivot as the black stand-in for a universal subjectivity. He just wanted what anyone and everyone would want: the freedom to sell his labor.

One issue, however, complicating black press uptake of Flood's cause was the doubt about sport's ballooning economic structure that saturated the discursive atmosphere of the national press. Even the mischievous, eye-rolling cynicism of Bill Veeck was a questionable means of cashing out the political investments black newspapers had made in baseball. As Jackie Robinson had illustrated in the black manager debate that raged in the late sixties, things in baseball were far from perfect, but they were improving — and they had to, since Robinson had established baseball as an index of racial progress. The owners dystopian vision of reserve clause abolition had achieved a measure of plausibility in the context of baseball's fall from economic innocence. Absent a legitimate counter-narrative that could instantiate Flood as baseball's savior, or at least negate the image of chaos and collapse, Flood's principle

became the crucial rhetorical terrain for his advocates. Moreover, Flood offered the black press the means by which it might formulate and defend the upwardly-mobile aspirations of the black professional class in the context of a shared national identity. As the "principle" became animated on its pages, black newspapers' deliberative inclination toward universality resolved the confounding difficulty of Flood's wealth, which critics like Bob Broeg had assumed could thwart public sympathy. As long as Flood could be anyone, he stood for everyone; and as long as his circumstances were those of bondage, the black press could write his injustice onto a racially unmarked body politic. On this view, the consequences of reserve clause abolition (*chaos*) were inimical to the principle, and the details of Flood's particularity — his blackness and his wealth — dissolved into an encompassing bourgeois imaginary. Flood's $90,000 salary was, for black newspapers, neither a marker of baseball's inevitable collapse nor a factor that alienated him from average folks. Quite the opposite, Flood was a protagonist whose labor subjectivity qualified him to represent the interests of universal justice, regardless of the size of his paycheck.

For example, the *Chicago Defender*'s Doc Young managed the problem of Flood's extreme wealth by imbuing Flood's principle with a notion of freedom premised on Flood's earnings as an employee:

> Flood's salary is irrelevant. The Cardinals paid Flood $90,000 only because he was an outstanding fielder. Flood earned the money. It was no gift. What he is fighting is a clause in baseball law which ties a player to the club with whom he signs initially and permits the club to sell or trade him, at will, regardless of his feelings about the matter. He is seeking, in a broad sense, more freedom for the professional athlete. He is

> not attempting to wreck organized baseball, nor does he object necessarily to joining the Philadelphia Phillies.[61]

Young's last assertion, that Flood did not object to the Philadelphia, was slightly inaccurate. Flood had called Philadelphia "the nation's northernmost southern city,"[62] meaning, of course, that he worried about the racism that he expected to experience there. Regardless, Doc Young's point (supported by this inaccuracy) was that the size of Flood's salary bore no relation to the abstract principle for which he stood. "Chaos and destruction" were not Flood's goals, anyway. What mattered most, since he had earned his money fairly, was that he be treated fairly according to professional standards.

Similarly, the March 1970 photo-editorial in *Ebony* magazine featured a full-page, full-color photograph of Curt Flood next to a full-page column appearing under the headline, "Found—An 'Abe Lincoln' of baseball." *Ebony* asked its readers to consider the following hypothetical scenario:

> [I]magine yourself with a great talent for doing plumbing and, at the age of 17 or 18, signing a contract with a plumbing firm for a bonus of $1000 and the chance to work at perhaps $100 a week. Three years later you are one of the best plumbers in the business and your contract holder has raised your pay to $500 a week. But you feel that you are worth $1000 a week and, in fact, a number of other plumbing firms would gladly pay you for what you want or even more. Then you find you cannot leave your job—your contract is for life. You cannot change jobs when you wish but your contract holder has the right to sell your contract to another plumbing company in another state without consulting you and—if you want to continue as a plumber—you have to go no matter how much the move might inconvenience you. In addition, no matter what price a contract is sold for, you will not realize a penny for the sale.[63]

Comparing this situation to the circumstances in which baseball players found themselves, *Ebony* asserted that baseball was "able to enslave its players in plush fetters."[64] Baseball players, the magazine pointed out, "are still bought and sold like property[.]"[65] But, said the editors, "This year, before the long, long season is over, there just might be some changes made. It just might be that baseball's long needed 'Abe Lincoln' has finally shown up in the person of Curtis Charles Flood."[66] *Ebony*'s analogy incorporated Flood's impressive salary into an imaginary labor subject and offered Curt Flood as Abraham Lincoln's negative racial instance. Lincoln, of course, was a white hero who set black persons free; Curt Flood, according to *Ebony'*s hope, was a black man who would set his white colleagues free. Concretizing the principle in the figure of the plumber, Ebony abstracted Flood's labor identity and disarticulated blackness from the figure of the slave.

The suggestive interplay of racial identities at work in *Ebony*'s argument underscores the way in which black press accounts of Curt Flood managed his blackness in public address. After the Supreme Court ruled against Flood in 1972, *Baltimore Afro-American* sports columnist Sam Lacy made this interplay explicit. He said, "Generally overlooked in the comments of both sides following last week's 5-3 ruling [...] is the fact that a young black man from the ghetto voluntarily committed suicide so that his teammates—the majority of whom are white—might have a better life. [...] He assailed the [reserve clause] as an instrument which denied him the civil right of controlling his own destiny."[67] Lacy's column, which reads like an epitaph, emphasized the racial interchangeability — or universality — of Flood's "sacrifice." He said, "The challenge was in the nature of a suit against baseball which was designed to to free not only

himself, but all his fellow athletes as well.... Yet, while any benefits derived from his action would be shared by all his colleagues, a loss would be suffered by him alone .... That is the supreme sacrifice."[68] Lacy's complaint turned out to be too true. Flood disappeared to various locations in Europe after leaving the Washington Senators in 1971, and by 1975, well after Flood's baseball skills had atrophied, an early version of free agency was incorporated into Major League Baseball's collective bargaining agreement when an independent arbitrator released the contracts of two white players, Dave McNally and Andy Messersmith.

An unattributed opinion piece in the *New York Amsterdam News* understood Flood's situation in similar terms, putting an explicitly colorblind spin on employment freedom in baseball:

> The reserve clause is, according to Goldberg [Flood's attorney], harmful to all players, black and white. The highest paid players in baseball today are black. They are, Hank Aaron $175,000. Willie Mays, $165,000. Bob Gibson and Robert [sic] Clemente, $150,000 each. Frank Robinson, $140,000. Ferguson Jenkins and Willie McCovey $125,000 each and Billy Williams $115,000. The reserve clause did not curtail the salaries of the players but according to Goldberg it curtailed the free movement of players. It stopped them from taking the highest bid which is the American way. It stopped free enterprise.[69]

Race and class were bracketed together as the *Amsterdam News* made its pitch against the reserve clause. Worry not, it seemed to say, black players are profiting from baseball, so it is not that baseball is racist; rather, the problem is that baseball is obstructing everyone's path toward wealth. The operational telos in this defense of Flood was neither racial justice nor class justice, but the fair play of equal antagonists on a field of

free enterprise, a process expressed under the putatively inclusive sign of the "American way."

This narrative of free American enterprise precipitated a rhetorical shift, whereby Flood's specific identity as a wealthy ballplayer was replaced in political and economic terms with more identifiable forms of labor, including those that in another context might not have found common cause with a person making $90,000. Here, it is worth recalling *Ebony*'s discovery of baseball's Abe Lincoln in Curtis Charles Flood, who might have been a plumber. The plumber metaphor was popular among Flood's public advocates[70], I would argue, not just because it worked an an illustrative analogue relative to baseball's economic structure, but also because its mode of illustration was defined by the way in which the problem of socioeconomic class could be resolved: rich baseball players could be seen as working class figures. The *Pittsburgh Courier* offered an illustration similar to *Ebony*'s, this time through the auto worker:

> Look at the situation for example, or even more so, this analogous stupor. Imagine an auto mechanic employed by General Motors whose salary is determined by annual review. On Jan. 1, he is offered a new contract for the new year at a salary of $1,000 less than he received the previous year.
>
> The mechanic is now allowed to offer his services to Chrysler or Ford. If he quits, he may not work at his trade for any employer. If he has not signed by Feb. 1, GM is entitled to tell him: "Sign now for what we've offered or go dig ditches, Buddy."
>
> Major league baseball players, of course, are rewarded more handsomely for their services that are auto mechanics. But their career expectancies are far shorter. The tiny minority of players who get to the big leagues only last for an average of four years.
>
> The real point is that the professional athlete is the only civilian in America who cannot bargain for his service with any employer he chooses. He is the only American who does not work in a free market economy.[71]

In addition to the face value of the analogy, the *Courier* offered an analysis of the career window for baseball players, resolving the problem of Flood's high salary by both comparing his aggregate earnings to that of the auto mechanic and pointing out that the average baseball player does not earn what Flood does. Unlike auto workers, these Americans — baseball players — were unfairly prohibited from availing themselves of the free national labor market.

In the *Philadelphia Tribune*, Bayard Rustin pointed out that it was not Flood's identity as a baseball player that made his lawsuit significant, but rather his identity as an employee working to expand the rights of others: "All of the points of contention in Flood's suit may not, at first, seem relevant to baseball as a sport. But it is also an enterprise and a profession, and Flood, in addition to being a player, is an employee. His suit, therefore, represents an attempt to expand the rights of a specific group of employees who are now at the mercy of their employers."[72] In the *Baltimore Afro-American*, Sam Lacy explicitly compared baseball to "any other job," despite Flood's high pay: "On any other job, although he doesn't get paid nearly as well, the worker does his best or gets fired.... If he is dissatisfied with conditions on the job, he quits and goes elsewhere."[73] Both Rustin's and Lacy's arguments relied on the premise that Flood's principle was grounded in a group identity dissociated from the facts of his race and the size of his salary. As an employee or worker, Flood was entitled to basic labor freedoms, and claimed his access to them by sacrificing on behalf of others.

In the Pittsburgh *Courier*, Bill Nunn emphasized Flood's career sacrifice in an analysis of his salary:

> By fighting the structure upon which baseball says it exists, Curt could be through as a player. There is no certainty how long his case will be allowed to drag on in the courts. It could be months or it could be years. At age 32 any years Flood gives away are being done at a terrific sacrifice. As a player Flood has made over $20,000 only during the last six years. While his salary has expanded tremendously during that time so have his taxes. It has been estimated from one source that over his first nine years in professional baseball Flood had averaged $11,500 a season. At that time he was rated as one of the top players in the game. That is why I believe Flood should be commended for the battle he is waging. He isn't doing it for personal gain. He's fighting for something he believes in. Few men are willing to pick up the sword of battle under such circumstances.[74]

Nunn's analysis presented a catalog of factors mitigating against the criticism that he was too well-paid to complain: Flood is an aging player, his salary increases have come only recently, his taxes have also increased, and he was underpaid while an established star. Instead of merely dismissing salary debate, Nunn engaged in it directly, refuting Broeg's sanctimonious accusation that Flood's real interest was "principal, not principle."

The basic rhetorical strategy black newspapers employed in covering Curt Flood's case between 1970 and 1972 was to assert a sequence of transpositions that exchanged Flood's particularity for forms of collective identity that reflected their political imagination. When addressing Flood's blackness in public, it was for the purpose of showing that he was the inverted racial image of Abraham Lincoln, or that he was a poor black kid from "the ghetto" fighting for rich white athletes' freedom. Though this was a mode of representation unlike those that commonly appeared on the sports pages of the black press, it was one that enabled the effacement of blackness in defense of a universal principle. Thus, the transposition of Flood's racial identity entailed the transposition of his socioeconomic identity. Of course, Flood was a wealthy baseball

player, but as *Ebony*, the *Courier*, and the *Amsterdam News* each attempted to show, he might as well have been a plumber or auto worker. All at once, black newspapers rebutted the angry contention that Flood was stalling for a bigger contract, moved the reserve clause debate back to the abstract ground of principle, and redoubled their rhetorical investment in both baseball and "the American way." This is why Flood's case was ideally suited for black press uptake and advocacy. As a public subject, he could be emptied of the racial particularity that problematized the struggle for inclusion, and his labor identity could be universalized in a way that demonstrated the consonance between black politics and the national interest. Flood's case, in other words, was a way for black newspapers to rhetorically perform the universality of the public sphere.

In Chapter 3, I presented an extensive critique of the black press by investigating the hypothesis that it constituted a counterpublic. There I argued, on the one hand, that black newspapers' reflexive rhetoric indicated that they understood themselves to be parallel public arenas in which oppositional discourses could be cultivated and advanced. On the other hand, however, I argued that black newspapers' self-understanding was predicated on the liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere, an organizing assumption which demanded modes of representation suitable for engagement with the "wider public." Moreover, I argued that this view of counterpublicity is democratically unreliable in that it is often exclusive and self-limiting. The problem with a "counterpublic" that attempts to replicate the bourgeois public sphere is that it sacrifices its oppositional quality by both balking at transformative criticisms and producing exclusive forms of public subjectivity.

From 1970 to 1972, black newspaper coverage of Curt Flood illustrated three chief dimensions of this critique. First, in effacing Flood's blackness to support a universal principle, the black press exercised what Jeffrey Alexander called "the art of translating their particular injustices into the more universal language of civil justice."[75] The concern here is that this "art" helps to elide the imperative that "alternative publics" oppose the "framework" of civil justice. Second, Flood's case functioned as an illustration of what Asen calls "collective imagining." *Ebony* urged its readers to "imagine" themselves with a talent for doing plumbing, and the *Courier* urged its readers to "imagine" that Flood were an auto mechanic. As an instance in which "advocates explicitly call upon their audiences to rethink relations to one another,"[76] the plumber and auto worker metaphors allowed black newspapers to conceptually collapse the potential differences between Flood and their audiences in a turn toward "free enterprise," and "the American way." Third, then, Flood's case operated as a rhetorical building block in what E. Franklin Frazier called the "negro world of make-believe." Frazier's main concern was that the black bourgeoisie used the press as an instrument by which it installed itself as the collective voice of blackness. This, for Frazier, was a profound political error; it entrenched class-based social stratification and foreclosed the possibility of structural critique. Curt Flood helped to crystallize "the American way" as a collective aspiration: he was said to be anyone and everyone, the instantiation of a common labor identity, unfairly restricted from availing himself of a universally beneficial economic framework that just happened to be in need of some reform.

The Third Move: The Principle and Its Alternatives, or "Modification, Alteration, Adjustment and Reform"

It should be clear by now that Curt Flood enjoyed abundant support in both the nationally circulating sports press and in black newspapers. Perhaps Flood was attempting to characterize himself strategically as a lonely fighter in offering such a scathing assessment of sports reporters, enthusiastically accepting the role of martyr by making the uphill angle of his battle appear steeper than it actually was. From this perspective, there is no question that Flood was interpreting his own coverage in a slightly uncharitable fashion. But, as events began to unfold publicly in late 1969 and early 1970, much of the country's sports press attended to the details of his case carefully and thoughtfully. In particular, the St. Louis-based *TSN* narrated the case diligently, and though it would be an overstatement to call *TSN* unconditional in support of Flood's cause, the nationally circulating sports paper advocated Flood conscientiously within the rhetorical confines of a news frame that put Flood in relation to ongoing labor disputes between baseball owners and players. Within this frame, *TSN* and other advocates, such as the *Times*' Leonard Koppett, moderated Flood's appeal to principle by offering suggestions for reserve clause "modification" and "improvement." As they observed the modernization of sport's economic structure, they defended some adjustment to the reserve clause as an essential and inevitable reform. In many ways, this position accepted the owners' contention, as expressed in their dystopian vision, that abolition would cause irreparable damage to the game. Consequently, news coverage of the case emphasized repeatedly that reserve clause alteration would be enough to mollify Flood and the Players' Association, thereby saving baseball's basic economic structure.

At the time Flood filed suit, there had already been conversation between the players and baseball management over the reserve clause. Most of it had been unproductive, but it had allowed each side to offer something in the way of a public position in the newspapers rather quickly. The main disagreement by January 1970 centered on a common negotiation dilemma: The owners said that the players had not offered any plausible alternatives to the reserve system, and the players said that the owners had refused to take any of their recommendations seriously. In an editorial following reports that Flood had filed suit, TSN summarized the situation concisely:

> Commissioner Kuhn says major league club owners feel the players have failed to offer any acceptable changes in what most baseball men consider the heart of their administrative apparatus. It should be emphasized that the players have never demanded complete freedom to negotiate with any employer. They are asking for modification of the reserve clause. The Major League Player's Association contends the owners foster the impression that the reserve clause is an all-or-nothing device: Change it one iota and all is chaos. The owners have not, the Association claims, offered a single counter-proposal to any idea the players have broached. The players have suggested, the owners have rejected, and there the matter apparently stands.[77]

Amid this standoff, *TSN* offered a few underdeveloped ideas, including a variation of the contract system in the National Football League, but also expressed grave concern (oddly keeping in theme with all the talk about plumbing) about what might happen if matters were allowed to proceed in the court system: "While baseball is saying no to these proposals, the courts might well rip out the whole plumbing system, not merely divert a bit of the flow in the players' direction."[78] "Collapse," indeed.

Largely speaking, *TSN* expressed sympathy with Flood's case, but attempted to push the issue away from the courts and toward collective bargaining. Wondering "what would happen if baseball granted Flood free-agent status," *TSN* wrote that a court decision "could prove devastating if the reserve clause were knocked out completely, which the courts might very well do."[79] Nevertheless, *TSN* noted that "the players want the reserve clause modified, not torpedoed," and that "Flood says he'll drop his suit if the reserve clause is altered to the satisfaction of the Major League Players' Association."[80] Instead of the courts, *TSN* suggested "a better alternative: Some genuine bargaining now between players and owners over possible revisions which both sides could live with."[81] The problem, however, with moving the reserve clause dispute to labor negotiations was that owners used the Flood case as a reason to further stall meaningful debate. As *TSN* reported at the end of January 1970, Cincinnati Reds president Francis Dale took the Players Association decision to support Flood's case to mean that they players had lost interest in negotiation: "[Marvin Miller] asked whether he should keep bargaining or did the players want to support Flood's action. They voted to back Flood. So, this would infer they're taking the reserve clause off the bargaining table. How can we negotiate anything that's in the courts?"[82] Dale's rhetorical question indicated the owners' willingness to play chicken with the players in court as they heralded the dystopian specter of baseball's collapse.

Despite that, the national sports press continued to insist that Flood had no interest in the game's destruction, and that "Flood is on record to the effect that any negotiated modification to the reserve system, satisfactory to the Players Association, will lead him to abandon his antitrust suit."[83] Furthermore, they seemed to be firmly on

Flood's side of things. The *New York Times*, in a May 1970 editorial — about a week before the first federal court trial, affirmed all of Flood's essential points in the antitrust suit, including that "There is no question that baseball today is big business," and that "the interlocking system of player contracts and club rules may well come within the jurisdiction of Federal anti-trust and various civil rights laws."[84] At the end of the editorial, the *Times* fully advocated a change to the reserve clause: "Some modification of the reserve clause — which Hank Greenberg, who was both a player and a club owner, testified is 'obsolete, antiquated and definitely needs change' — is in order."[85]

The *Times*' Leonard Koppett, whose columns also often appeared in TSN, was perhaps Flood's most consistent supporter throughout the various stages of his challenge. Koppett's position embraced the inevitability of baseball's changes and maintained that, since neither the owners nor players were foolishly self-destructive, the two sides were likely to figure things out in a way that would benefit everyone. Taking a distant view, Koppett asserted that, "despite the alarming and fearful cries of the baseball establishment, it is inconceivable that all concerned are so lacking in ingenuity and common sense that they will fail to work out appropriate arrangements."[86] Believing that everything would balance out satisfactorily in the end and that ownership was expressing unfounded alarmism, Koppett asserted "plain facts": "The plain fact is that baseball, like everything else, changes all the time and always has. And for each change, some response re-establishes a suitable equilibrium."[87] After learning about a year later that the US Supreme Court had agreed to hear Flood's case, Koppett reiterated his beliefs that the owners were wrong about "chaos" and that reserve clause modification was Flood's only real demand: "It is highly unlikely that chaos will result from any decision. A

victory for Flood will only begin the process of working out new contractual arrangements between club owners and athletes, and these new arrangements will be arrived at gradually. The suit itself argues for modification of restrictions on free movement of players from club to club."[88] By the time the Court had ruled against Flood in a 5-3 decision, Koppett credited Flood with having forced the kind of collective bargaining both sides knew would be necessary all along:

> As it is, the terms of a modified reserve system must be hammered out across the table, and the players can get as much modification as they are willing to fight for.
>
> But even this is possible only because Flood's case was pursued. Until Flood raised the issues, the club owners flatly refused to consider any kind of modification. They offered to bargain only in an attempt to get the case dropped. Then, in arguing the case before the Supreme Court they adopted the defense that the reserve system was really a matter of compulsory collective bargaining and therefore not an anti-trust matter at all. They can't retreat from that position now. They must bargain. But it was the Flood case that moved them into that position.[89]

Occasionally and in passing, the national sports press would mention the matter of "human rights," or would point out that Flood thought of himself as a slave. But the overriding and persistent rhetorical approach for Flood's advocates in places like the Times and TSN was to apprehend Flood's case in the context of a pre-existing player/owner conflict. For these outlets, the image of baseball's chaotic implosion was merely a productive illusion the owners used to defend their negotiating ground, and the business about slavery was a similarly useful counter-ruse. Cooler heads, they figured, would prevail. The essence of their advocacy took the form of repeatedly emphasizing the necessity of modifying the reserve clause, which made Flood the figure who might

frighten the owners out of their obstinacy. Flood, on this view, hastened (or at least helped to realize) the inevitable.

Koppett, in fact, offered a brief (and admittedly insightful) quasi-rhetorical criticism of the public discourse produced by the court trial in June 1970:

> Three catchwords, used repeatedly throughout the trial, have obscured much underlying simplicity, and misled people.
>
> One was "slavery," employed by Flood's side. It is strictly an emotion word, an unnecessary exaggeration. The baseball arrangements are one-sided enough, and the players lack of choice clear enough, without dragging in a deliberately inflammatory term.
>
> But two phrases employed by the defense were even more misleading, because they were subtler and had the appearance of responsibility. These were, "baseball is unique," and "baseball as we know it." […]
>
> The real questions don't deal with "baseball as we know it" but with "baseball as it can be" with respect to the legal, social and economic context of the present day. That is what Judge Cooper has to decide. But changes will continue no matter what he rules, and they will continue to be gradual rather than traumatic.[90]

Koppett's analysis emphasized the need for rhetorical moderation: Flood's slave metaphor was "inflammatory," and the owners' traditionalism ignored the inevitability of baseball's changes. For Koppett, the facts of Flood's case were plain to see, and the talk about slavery and baseball exceptionalism hid the banality of an eventual compromise. Sensible reform would emerge, insisted Koppett, despite both Flood's incendiary language and the owners' dystopian objections.

The black press adopted a similar emphasis on pragmatic reform. In late December 1969 and early January 1970, a United Press International article effectively announced the beginning of the Curt Flood debate in a variety of black newspapers,

including the Chicago *Defender*, the Pittsburgh *Courier*, and the Baltimore *Afro-American*. The article, built on quotations from Marvin Miller, Joe Torre, and the infamously provocative Jim Bouton, essentially reported on the proceedings of the Players Association meeting in Puerto Rico. Though the UPI warned that Flood's suit might "strike at the very heart of organized baseball," it quoted Miller's understanding of Flood's motivations: "Curt felt he had the rights of any other citizen. He has nothing against Philadelphia as a city or a team, but saw no basis for being confined to a limited market."[91] It seemed, though, that asserting the "rights of any other citizen" entailed a recognition of the reserve clause's constitutive importance to baseball: "Miller, Torre, and Bouton emphasized that the players were not attempting to create chaos in organized baseball by simply out-lawing the reserve clause but wanted certain changes in it."[92] More directly, the UPI promised that Bouton was speaking about "certain modifications in which it would retain the structure of baseball but at the same time enable players to have negotiating privileges which they now do not have."[93] And days after Flood and Miller appeared with Howard Cosell, the Philadelphia *Tribune* quoted Flood as saying, "I cannot be bought. I have too much integrity for that."[94] The statement was a rejoinder to the possibility of a financial settlement to drop the suit, but the paper was careful to emphasize that "it is doubtful that Flood will go beyond the goals of the Players Association," and that "Miller will be happy to get a similar [to football] option clause for major league players. He would settle for less as a start."[95] Later in January, after the details of the lawsuit began to circulate widely, the *Afro-American* printed another UPI article explaining that Flood had the support of at least one white player, Baltimore Oriole third-baseman Brooks Robinson. Above all, the story of his endorsement operated

as a pledge that Flood would not ruin baseball: "Major League players don't want destruction of the reserve clause, only modification of the rule, veteran Baltimore third baseman Brooks Robinson said […]. The All-Star Oriole infielder […] said elimination was not the intention of the club representatives who voted support of Curt Flood's suit challenging the controversial reserve clause."[96]

The reports and UPI articles about Flood issued by the black press in early 1970 consistently offered reassurances that though Flood's cause was principled and righteous, a fair re-calibration of the reserve system would be sufficient to mute the threat posed to baseball by the lawsuit. Affirming Flood's status as an "employee," or "worker" entailed an appreciative recognition of the basic economic architecture of sport. Defining Flood's principle in terms as various as "the American way," the "free enterprise," the "free market economy," and asserting a collective labor subject on whose behalf Flood was fighting, black newspapers simultaneously critiqued baseball ownership and inscribed the game itself with institutional legitimacy. In rhetorical strokes that shadowed the logic of liberal inclusion, baseball was characterized as a path of opportunity obstructed by recalcitrant gatekeepers. As an argument, however, this offered little rejoinder to the gatekeepers' alarmist claim that reserve clause abolition would devastate baseball's economic foundation. Relative to this position, the rhetorical problem for Flood's public advocates turned on the choice between Flood's "rights" and the collapse of the institution they venerated — unless the terms of the debate could be shifted. Thus, constructs like the American way, free enterprise, and the free market brought with them the basic vocabulary of reform, expressed variously as modification, alteration,

adjustment, or improvement. Reserve clause *abolition*, in any case, became terministic anathema to those in black newspapers voicing support for Curt Flood.

The compromising impulse of the black press raises questions about the moral force implied behind the assertion of Flood's principle and demonstrates the extent to which the owners' catastrophic spectacle determined the rhetorical choices of Flood's public advocates. With "chaos" and "collapse" looming in the background, many opinion columnists in black newspapers found themselves conceding the owners' anxieties. When news of Flood's suit began to spread among players in early 1970, the Chicago *Defender* registered the dissent of Minnesota Twin star Harmon Killebrew, who warned, "This is just the way baseball is. There has to be control. Without control there would be no baseball."[97] And, a March 1972 *Amsterdam News* piece worried that a Supreme Court decision in Flood's favor may deal a death blow to all of the major professional sports: "The Supreme Court may not give a decision and then again they may rule the reserve clause a slave master. Then again, if the Supreme Court rules against the reserve clause it may lead to the end of the major sports like football, baseball, and basketball as we see it today."[98] But, the *Defender*'s Doc Young defended both Flood and baseball owners on the way to making the case for reserve clause modification. Young argued:

> Baseball, to be sure, has a legitimate argument. Owners and teams are entitled to some protection for their investment. Total abolishment of the reserve clause very well may cause some chaos in the game, with the richer clubs grabbing off the best players. Chet Walker, player representative of the Chicago Bulls, admitted that there is need for some sort of legal tie between player and club when he said, "I don't think the

> reserve clause should be abolished. It should be modified so as not to bind a player to one team for his entire life."[99]

Interestingly, he quoted a basketball player, which placed the reserve clause debate relative to sports in general. Like the argument in the *Amsterdam News*, the suggestion was that the effects on baseball could ripple outward in a way that potentially threatened other sports. Young's rhetorical choices also indicated sympathy with the owners; as opposed to a language of human rights, Young regarded players as "investments" that the owners had the right to protect. Moreover, Young used the owners favored term — "chaos" — to describe the results Flood's victory might produce. In the end, the quotation from Chet Walker balanced the argument back in Flood's favor: the reserve system ought to be modified. Young showed support for Flood, but tempered that support with the presumption that professional baseball deserved structural protection.

As Doc Young continued his case for modification, he returned to principled ground. With reference to "rights" and "respect," he elaborated the justness of Flood's cause not in absolute terms, but instead in a sense reliant on Flood's status as a professional:

> The reserve clause should be modified in some way too, it seems here, so that the player may at least earn the right to "play out his option" or to make a deal for himself as a free agent after a certain period of time, providing he and his team can no longer agree. As it now stands, a veteran ballplayer like Flood is traded to another team without having so much as a word to say about it. He is not informed of the deal, all too frequently, until after the deal is made — and, then, he may hear the news on radio or TV or read it in a newspaper. Flood is a 12-year major leaguer. He should, certainly, be able to protect the "equity" he has built up over the years in his city. He is entitled to respect, both as a professional and as a person.[100]

Young highlighted the same kind of disrespect that most irked Flood when he wrote in *The Way It Is*, "If I had been a foot-shuffling porter, they might have at least given me a pocket watch. But all I got was a call from a middle-echelon coffee drinker in the front office."[101] Following the spirit of Flood's assessment, Young offered an image of professional baseball that foregrounded its unprofessional conduct. Thus, the reserve clause's error was its institutionalization of a labor-relation dynamic which undermined the promise of personal affirmation that baseball's professionalization should have presumably endowed. Doc Young (and others) supported Flood, in essence, through an argumentative retreat: if only the reserve clause were adjusted to meet reasonable standards of professional respect, baseball's error could be resolved and the game could go on.

At its core, however, the modification compromise indexed the flexibility of Flood's "basic principle of human life," not just relative to its moral force, but also in terms of its applied scope in public address. Stated differently, the call for reserve clause modification, as opposed to abolition, revealed cracks in the commitment to principle opened by the need to preserve the progressive legitimacy baseball's institutional existence, which in turn involved stretching Flood's principle past his individual interests to fit it over the collective interests of professional baseball players as a group. In the *Philadelphia Tribune*, Bayard Rustin illustrated this maneuver:

> Over 80 years ago John Montgomery Ward, a star outfielder with the New York Giants, called the reserve clause a form of "slavery." The term is still appropriate. Flood was traded to the Phillies last October after twelve

> successful years with the Cardinals. The years of work he put into his profession, his desire to remain in St. Louis, his well being as an employee were all irrelevant beside the wish of some top management official to send him somewhere else. He was being treated, as Flood appropriately put it, "Like a slave." Out of a sense of violated rights, he is mounting a campaign which in the end may benefit not only himself but all of his colleagues.[102]

Echoing Doc Young's point about professional "equity," Rustin enacted the tropological elasticity of slavery. John Montgomery Ward was a nineteenth century baseball player who became disgruntled with the "reserve rule's" effects on the innocence of the "pastime" and thus attempted to start a "player's league" that would operate according to the model of a cooperative.[103] Rustin's reference to Ward, a white player who had successfully sued the National League in 1890 (in state court) over the reserve clause, removed the facts of Flood's racial identity from the basic structure of the slavery argument. Moreover, by locating the consequences of the reserve clause in the violation of Flood's professional "rights," Rustin preserved baseball's ground and observed Flood's potential to protect the interests of a labor class broadly construed. Baseball treated its players like slaves, implied Rustin, but not in an exercise of racial prejudice; instead, encouraged by a system rigged to enable their abuses, owners and management treated employees like possessions. The importance of Curt Flood, then, lied in his potential to set his colleagues free.

Public address on reserve clause modification amounted to this: Together, both the nationally circulating sports press and black newspapers pursued routine coverage of Flood's case in rhetorically congruent ways. The *New York Times* and *The Sporting News* fit Flood within the broader unfolding of baseball's labor-relations events,

apprehending his lawsuit as the latest, and maybe even most formidable, indicator of the Players Association's accumulating influence. Change was inevitable, they said, and each side had overstated things. The *Times* and *TSN* offered the inevitability of a negotiated compromise in place of either side's extremist rhetoric; they replaced both the owners' consequentialist dystopia *and* Flood's deontic appeal to slavery with the pragmatism of adjustment and reform. The black press narrated events similarly, accepting and promoting the reformist dimension of Flood's challenge with a vested symbolic interest in the protection of baseball. "Modification" operated to domesticate the rhetorical hubris of Flood's slavery argument. The black press' interpretive charity extended to the recognition that Flood's lawsuit was a matter of principle behind which Flood stood conscientiously, and ended at the concession that baseball owners may have been onto something with "chaos." In elaborating a principle that resided ultimately in Flood's professional identity — in the unique labor subjectivity of the ballplayer — the black newspapers that covered his case regularly urged a path of sensible reform. Players were recognized "investments" whether black or white, "slavery" was printed in quotes, and the racial symbolism of slavery was safely neutralized by the practical wisdom of compromise. For the *Times* and *TSN*, Flood was a symbol of change-already-underway, and for the black press, Flood was a worthy agent of institutional amelioration. In any case, the owners were purveyors of a false choice and Flood was no mortal threat. Flood was right and baseball would flourish.

Conclusion

Despite what from 1970 to 1972 seemed like such high-stakes, it is important to remember that Curt Flood was a loser in court and that the games did in fact go on. In at

least this sense, Leonard Koppett was right to suspect both Flood and the owners of engaging in self-indulgent rhetorical brinkmanship. In Spring 1973, owners had locked the players out of camp for about a week before agreeing, among other things, to salary arbitration[104] and the "10 and 5 rule," which gave players the right to veto trades provided they had ten years of major league service and at least five with one team. That March, the *Baltimore Afro-American* announced that the agreement, which occurred only after the cancellation of eighty-six spring training games, "gave everyone remotely connected with sports cause to breathe relief."[105] The *Afro*'s editorial, however, was centered not on a rhetorical exhale, but instead on Curt Flood, to whom "the players owe a debt of gratitude," and "who, after only two years, is virtually forgotten."[106] Under the headline "Curt Flood Pointed Way," in an editorial printed inside the paper's front page, *Afro* editors wrote:

> Curt Flood turned his back on a $95,000-a-year — and a career estimated at a quarter-million dollars — in order to battle singlehandedly against the reserve restriction that impales a player to the whim of a club which holds his contract.
>
> Flood went all the way to the Supreme Court, with no Marvin Millers, no threat of strike, no nothing. He lost, but it must be acknowledged that the battle they were forced into by him had a distinct softening effect on the owners.
>
> It is true that the Players' Association supplied the money for Curt's suit, but that means little. It is like the boxing promoter who furnished the gloves for two guys to fight to fill his pockets.
>
> Besides, of what value is martyrdom?[107]

This, ultimately, was the early legacy of Curt Flood. Even the *Afro*, which through Sam Lacy had supported Flood categorically, strained to remember him through the thick of baseball's labor haze as it assailed the error of the reserve clause. Flood's importance, on

this view, rested on his status as a martyr to a compromise — he had a "softening effect" — even if the case had destroyed him personally. Just as Koppett had asserted in the days after the Court ruled, the *Afro* insisted that baseball players benefited from the negotiating position in which Flood had put them.

The *Afro*, no doubt, inquired perceptively about the value of martyrdom to Flood, but failed to recognize the value of Flood's martyrdom to black politics. Flood helped black newspapers record three rhetorical achievements: First, supporting Flood meant supporting a black player whose blackness could be relegated to the margins of the cause, thereby enacting the political rhetoric of colorblind justice with rare effectiveness. Having prudently inserted the meaning and significance of Flood's racial identity into the limited confines of his individual consciousness, black newspapers fit Flood into a mode of representation that was explicitly non-racial. Speaking in a rhetoric consistent with that found in outlets like the *Times* and *TSN*, they removed the question of race from serious public debate. Nevertheless, the black press, marked by its blackness and accustomed to fighting injustice, still found ways to advocate Flood's cause with demonstrable principled intent. Second, then, Flood's circumstances were abstracted not relative to a collective black subject, but instead in relation to a universal labor subject with righteous claims to "free enterprise," "the free market," and "the American way." All at once, black newspapers rebutted the bellicose accusation that Flood was acting greedily and identified his circumstances as representative of an upwardly mobile black middle class. The plumber and the auto mechanic, as Flood-analogues, were crucial to this, since they collapsed the differences internal to blackness in a transpositional movement toward universality and redoubled the black civic commitment to a shared, i.e.

integrated, national identity. Third, once professionalized and emptied of racial and class-inflected meaning, the principle for which Flood stood, and the slavery metaphor, each of which contained embryonic threads linking freedom to race, labor, and human rights, became subject to the political discourse and logic liberalism. The value of "principle" was cashed out in terms of institutional reform, and "slavery" was exposed as a mere expression, a dramatization, or a regrettable rhetorical gambit essential to pushing the two sides closer toward acceptable reform. In essence, they could have things both ways; they advocated Flood in a persuasive defense of universal justice and simultaneously fought to protect an institution — baseball — with nearly unmatched symbolic importance to liberal integrationism's progress narrative. All things considered, Flood served as a protagonist elegantly. He was a black man fighting for the right cause against the right establishment, and through it all, his blackness could be made to disappear.

In *The Way It Is*, Curt Flood measured press coverage of his case pessimistically. Invoking a general "myopia," Flood said, "I can say with conviction that the preponderance of material I read and heard was distressingly cynical and ill-informed. Nothing I said in interviews got through to such people. These guys evidently felt that responsibility to principle was the hallucination of a nut."[108] Though writers like Broeg might have been Flood's main concern and target, this was an unfair generalization. The nationally circulating sports press (including the St. Louis-based The Sporting News) defended his cause, as did black newspapers virtually without hesitation. For the black press in particular, commitment to Flood's principle was hardly a hallucination; instead it

was the means by which their liberal political imagination made its way into public address.

Notes

[1] Lomax, "Curt Flood Stood Up For Us," 61.

[2] Ibid., 62. Lomax's essay is an exceptionally loyal retelling of Flood's *The Way It Is*, and thus offers little nuance relative to the notion of "sensitivity" as it would be elaborated in both black newspapers and the national sports press.

[3] Early, "Curt Flood, Gratitude, and the Image of Baseball."

[4] Leonard, "Curt Flood," 44.

[5] Ibid., 33.

[6] Ibid., 40.

[7] Broeg, "Just What Prompted?"; Broeg, "Does 'Principal' or 'Principle'."

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Leonard, "Curt Flood."

[12] Bob Broeg, "Cynical Flood Bathes Prose in Acid," *The Sporting News*, March 27, 1971.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 15.

[16] Ibid., 197.

[17] This point anchored the "gratitude" rhetoric that many observers, including Lomax, Leonard, and Early take to be the rhetorical signature of a racist discourse.

[18] George Vecsey, "$90,000-a-year rebel; Curt Flood," *New York Times*, January 17, 1970.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Find Sport and Newsweek cites. *

[25] Bill Nunn, "Change of Pace," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 30, 1970.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Flood had identified this as a racist expression in Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 74.

[31] Sam Lacy, "Cheers for Flood and His Compatriots" (see chap. 3, n. 112).

[32] Leonard Koppett, "Flood Backed By Players," *New York Times*, December 30, 1969.

[33] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 17 (see chap. 2, n. 4).

[34] I have a suspicion that this amounts to a Freudian typo, because if one reads this passage as "the racial issue was not central to his objections," the passage makes more sense. In any case, I have reproduced the original text here.

[35] Leonard Koppett, "Flood's Suit Could Cost Baseball $3 Million," *The Sporting News*, January 31, 1970; Leonard Koppett, "Baseball Chiefs Attack Flood Suit," *New York Times*, January 18, 1970. The full text of the Cronin-Feeney statement was also published via the United Press International by a number of black newspapers, including the *Chicago Defender*, "Cronin, Feeney: Curt Flood Suit A Sports Threat," January 19, 1970, p. 26. The congressional committee in question was assembled by U.S. Representative Emmanuel Celler in 1951, about twenty years before Flood's "attack." The quote in question was offered as a defense of the reserve clause.

[36] Koppett, "Flood's Suit."

[37] Leonard Koppett, "Reserve Clause Breeds Bitterness," *New York Times*, January 25, 1970.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Joseph Durso, "Color the Next Decade a Lush Green," *New York Times*, January 4, 1970.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Alan U. Schwartz, "And Now, Sports Fans, the F.S.C.," *New York Times*, September 30, 1971.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] C.C. Johnson Spink, "We Believe...," *The Sporting News*, March 14, 1970.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ross Newhan, "Baseball Needs Era of Good Will — O'Malley," *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1970.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Murray Chass, "The Next Step: A Couch in Every Dugout," *New York Times*, July 17, 1971.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Clete Boyer was a valuable third baseman for the Atlanta Braves before being released in May 1971. He had criticized management for failing to develop talent adequately, was labeled a "troublemaker" by Braves owner Paul Richards, and then cut from the team.

[58] Chass, "The Next Step."

[59] Bill Veeck, *Veeck As In Wreck: The Autobiography of Bill Veeck* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). I could cite any number of biographical entries quoting this description of Bill Veeck, but since I've never seen an article about Veeck that does not call him an "innovator," I hope here to use the term without controversy.

[60] Robert Lipsyte, "Expert Witness," *New York Times*, June 11, 1970.

[61] Doc Young, "More About: Flood's Suit," *Chicago Defender*, January 27, 1970.

[62] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 188

[63] *Ebony*, "Found—An 'Abe Lincoln' of Baseball," March 1970, 110.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Sam Lacy, "Flood Delivers His Last Sacrifice," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 27, 1972.

[68] Ibid.

[69] *New York Amsterdam News*, "Vida, Curt May Change Baseball Reserve Clause," March 25, 1972.

[70] Perhaps these advocates took their metaphor from Flood himself, who made such a comparison in *The Way It Is* (p. 15). It's also possible that Flood borrowed this metaphor from his coverage in the press. In either case, the effect is the same: to resolve the disjunction between high pay and oppression through a comparison to baseball players and working-class forms of labor.

[71] Jess Peters, "Jess' Sports Chest," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 22, 1972.

[72] Bayard Rustin, "In Support of Curt Flood's Anti-Trust Suit Against Baseball," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 17, 1970.

[73] Sam Lacy, "Cheers for Flood and His Compatriots," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 6, 1970.

[74] Bill Nunn, "Change of Pace," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 30, 1970.

[75] Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, 277.

[76] Asen, "Imagining in the Public Sphere," 351.

[77] *The Sporting News*, "On a Collision Course," Jan 17, 1970.

[78] Ibid.

[79] *The Sporting News*, "Genuine Bargaining Only Solution," January 24, 1970.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Earl Lawson, "Will Barry Case Set a Precedent for Flood's Suit?," T*he Sporting News*, January 31, 1970.

[83] Leonard Koppett, "Camps Expected to Open Calmly," *New York Times*, February 1, 1970.

[84] *New York Times*, "Batter Up in Court," May 28, 1970.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Leonard Koppett, "Baseball Will Survive Lawsuit," *New York Times*, June 14, 1970.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Leonard Koppett, "Baseball's Next Inning," *New York Times*, October 20, 1971.

[89] Leonard Koppett, "Hot Issue Now on Bargaining Table," *The Sporting News*, July 8, 1972.

[90] Leonard Koppett, "Baseball Will Survive."

[91] United Press International, "Flood Might Sue Baseball Clause," Chicago Defender, December 31, 1969.

[92] Ibid.

[93] United Press International, "Players to Back Curt Flood in Test of Reserve Clause," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 3, 1970.

[94] *Philadelphia Tribune*, "Flood Will Stick to His Guns in Suit to Have Option Clause Revised," January 6, 1970.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Baltimore Afro-American, "Brooks Robinson Backs Curt Flood," January 24, 1970, p. 19.

[97] Chicago Defender, "Killebrew Hits Flood Court Suit," January 29, 1970, p. 37.

[98] *New York Amsterdam News*, "Vida, Curt."

[99] Doc Young, "More About."

[100] Ibid.

[101] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 187.

[102] Rustin, "In Support of Curt Flood's Anti-Trust Suit."

[103] For an insightful discussion of Ward, as well as a brief history of the attempted Player's League, which had dissolved by 1890, see Andrew Zimbalist, *Baseball and Billions* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 4-6. Ward's challenge to an early version of the National League's reserve clause proved successful in the New York Supreme Court, but by the time his legal victory was achieved, the Player's League had dissolved due to insolvency. See also, Bryan Di Salvatore, *A Clever Base-Ballist: The Life and Times of John Montgomery Ward* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2001).

[104] It was this agreement to arbitration that led to Peter Seitz, the owners' appointed arbitrator, releasing the contracts of Messersmith and McNally in 1975. See Miller, *A Whole Different Ballgame*, chap. 13, 238-253. The damage, as far as the owners were concerned, had been done; nevertheless, Seitz was promptly fired. For an account of Seitz's firing, see Miller, *A Whole Different Ballgame*, 250-1.

[105] *Baltimore Afro-American*, "Curt Flood Pointed Way," March 3, 1973.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 198.

Chapter 7

"A Bit Of Poetic Justice": Race, Slavery, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete

Ebony's March 1970 photo-editorial on Flood was as brazenly self-congratulatory as it was enthusiastically supportive in defense of his cause. The same article that had discovered Abraham Lincoln "in the person of Curtis Charles Flood" and described baseball as restraining its players in "plush fetters" took the space — the opening words, in fact — to document *Ebony*'s foresight six years earlier on the question of the reserve clause: "In April 1964, Ebony published an editorial entitled, 'Needed — An Abe Lincoln of Baseball.' The editorial took up cudgels for what may be the highest paid group of slaves in all history — the players in that All-American Game called professional baseball."[1] *Ebony*'s foregrounding of slavery, however, did not entail the foregrounding of Flood's racial identity, except at the very end, where the magazine offered him their best wishes: "So, best of luck to you, Curt (Abe Lincoln Flood). It will be a bit of poetic justice should it turn out that a black man finally brings freedom and democracy to baseball."[2] Instead of exploring the *poesis* of Curt Flood's blackness, *Ebony*, like the black newspapers that narrated his case on their sports pages, issued another reassurance that baseball would survive:

> But don't worry about baseball disappearing from the American scene if Flood is victorious. If it were truly a sport, a major decision against it might cause it to be dropped. But baseball is too big a business to disappear. It will be with us for a long time—as long as people will pay to get into ballparks and TV and radio will pay for the privilege of bringing it into the homes of literally millions of baseball fans.[3]

Just as black newspapers had moved rhetorically between the slave metaphor and analyses of sport's labor structures, *Ebony* pointed to the fact that baseball was now big business. Of course, this point was crucial to his lawsuit and a recurrent feature[4] of pro-Flood advocacy; if baseball were interstate commerce, then it would surely be subject to the prerogatives of anti-trust law. Be that as it may, *Ebony*'s editorial found quarter in those discourses that held baseball accountable not to its purported values as a sport, but to the economic values thought to be infiltrating sport's innocent pastures. As the *New York Times*' Robert Lipsyte had put it under the headline, "Revolt of the Gladiators," sport in 1970 was witnessing "the mounting demand by athletes that the principles they are paid to symbolize be applicable to them, too. But economics rather than philosophy is the guiding discipline."[5] Lipsyte's passive voice disguised an important question: economics was the "discipline" guiding what and whom?

The previous chapter detailed the manner in which the black press, in adopting a reformist line of reasoning similar to the one operant in the national news media, took up Flood's "cudgels" in rhetorical terms that stressed the economic/labor dimensions of the "principle." Functioning collectively as the Tom Haller of public address, black newspapers elaborated a compelling case for economic justice in baseball while promising that Flood's case wasn't really a "racial thing." Effacing Flood's blackness and urging sensible reform, the black press protected baseball as a privileged cultural and political space for expressing the benefits of integration and colorblindness. This chapter attempts to illuminate the racialized dimensions of Flood's case systematically occluded in public memory: the ways in which Flood's case might have resonated within a social imagination that was deeply racialized and unapologetically committed to a world-

making project informed by black experience. I contend that the "argument from blackness," as opposed to being confined to Flood's consciousness or spread thinly over the amorphous "mood" of the sixties, instead consisted in discernible rhetorical articulations (located most creatively in the slave metaphor), to the radicalism of Harry Edwards' "revolt of the black athlete." Furthermore, I argue that such radicalism was grounded in an assertion of black identity and consequently posed a symbolic threat to the colorblind political imaginary that underwrote the discursive logic of the black press. To stabilize the rhetorical volatility of radicalism, black newspapers positioned Flood in relation to the "new black athlete," proudly announced the emergence of a new ethos of protest, and then rhetorically constituted that ethos through the principles proper to liberalism. In short, this chapter argues (1) that the public discourses orbiting Curt Flood in the early seventies generated rhetorical energy in an alternative public space, one that committed blackness publicly and politically to a particular mode of protest, and (2) that black newspapers appropriated and domesticated the threat by fitting Flood into the representational logic of colorblind inclusion.

To accomplish this, this chapter moves through the following stages: First, I examine the historical connections between Jackie Robinson and Curt Flood both in contemporaneous public discourse and in present memory. Second, I discuss the importance of the "ethos of protest" in the liberal imagination that often produces distinction-collapsing lists of courageous activist athletes. Flood is sometimes on these lists today, just as he was in the early seventies. Third, I present an analysis of the ways in which the national daily sports press and the black press narrated the arrival of "the new black athlete," an emergent condition accepted widely by public speakers, but for

independent and often contradictory reasons. Fourth, this chapter offers an extensive analysis of what I call the idiom of *Revolt*: the world of public discourse about blackness in sport assembled poetically by Harry Edward, but also by others, out of the corporeality and affect of black experience. Finally, I explain and highlight the features of the black press' co-optive process through Curt Flood, which labored to deny the significance of that which *Revolt* had persistently attempted to speak into positivity: blackness.

From Robinson to Flood: Finishing "the Revolution"

Perhaps the most enduring memory of Curt Flood's federal trial in the summer of 1970 is the moment Jackie Robinson set foot in the courtroom. A number of historians have speculated on exactly what prevented Flood's playing contemporaries from testifying on his behalf while the trial was in process. The most common explanation is that although the Players Association had the organizational strength to diffuse the decision to pay Flood's legal fees, individual players who showed up at trial would have risked direct scapegoating and the wrath of an ownership backlash. This calculation, then, tends to rhetorically manifest not only contrasts between the courage of Flood and the cowardice of everyone else, but also comparisons between Flood and Robinson, who during the trial presumably re-enacted his characteristically fearless outspokenness.[6] Thus, the moment between them in the courtroom is frequently remembered as particularly poignant. In Cal Fussman's collection of oral histories titled *After Jackie*, Flood's widow, Judy Pace, offers her account of the scene:

> Curt wore No. 21. Half of 42.

> Jackie was Curt's hero from childhood. Curt wore 42 in the minor leagues. But 42 wasn't available when he got to the Cardinals. So he took 21.
>
> The moment that Jackie and Rachel walked into the courtroom for Curt's trial — well, that was one of the hight points of Curt's life.
>
> To have Jackie Robinson tell him, "Young man, I respect you. What you're doing is right. You have the courage to stand up. I am here for you."
>
> That brought Curt almost to tears.[7]

Judy Pace's recollection sketches a riveting scene. One can only imagine how Flood must have reacted upon being addressed by Jackie personally. In addition to that, though, memories such as these help to establish (or rehearse, as the case may be) public recognition of Flood's comparable courage, even if — symbolically speaking — he was only half the person Jackie was.

Sentimental remembrances of the courtroom encounter between Robinson and Flood are hardly rare in contemporary discourse. But, as part of the trial's lore they merely gesticulate toward the ways in which the two figures are frequently and explicitly connected. Broadly speaking, Robinson and Flood are commonly placed in relation to each other in order to establish two features of Flood's historical influence. On the one hand, the invocation of Robinson serves to spotlight Flood's credentials as a person of principle, as an individual willing to speak and act on the courage of his convictions. The idea that Robinson was Flood's "hero," a claim repeated by Judy Pace and others, often works to magnify the ethos of protest for which Flood presumably now stands; bound by a kind of common civic spirit, they are often insinuated into a kinship. On the other hand, many recognize that Robinson and Flood pursued different goals. But by placing Robinson in an historical relation to Flood, the distinctiveness of their aims are bound in

an ancestral relation, with Robinson's integration of baseball seen as a necessary precondition to Flood's attempt to set the players free. In this scheme, Flood is an *extension* of Robinson, a noble expatiation of Jackie Robinson's contribution to history.

Brad Snyder, for example, whose painstakingly detailed *A Well Paid Slave* exists as the most complete account of Flood's life and challenge, quite literally bookends his text with this Robinson/Flood relation. In the opening pages, Snyder asserts a connection that amounts to a prescriptive memory:

> In 1947, Robinson started a racial revolution in sports by joining the Brooklyn Dodgers as the 20th century's first African-American major leaguer. Nearly 25 years later, Flood started an economic revolution by refusing to join the Philadelphia Phillies. The 31-year-old Flood sacrificed his own career to change the system and to benefit future generations of professional athletes. Today's athletes have some control over where they play in part because in 1969 Flood refused to continue being treated like hired help. But while Robinson's jersey has been retired in every major league ballpark, few current players today know the name of Curt Flood, and even fewer know about the sacrifices he made for them.[8]

Speaking in a tenor that superficially bespeaks a radical's vocabulary — "revolution," "the system," and "sacrifice," Snyder simultaneously posits a relation of representation and a diagnoses a error in collective memory. Recognizing Flood's sacrifice establishes him as a martyred representative for legions of wealthy athletes in the present who, according to Snyder, are stricken with amnesia over the economic revolution from which they presently benefit.

Snyder's biography, then, operates as a rhetorical restoration of Flood's significance expressed through complementary "revolutions," one "racial," and the other "economic." Snyder completes the task in *A Well Paid Slave*'s closing paragraph:

> Robinson and Flood took professional athletes on an incredible journey—from racial segregation to well-paid slavery to being free and extremely well paid. Robinson started the revolution by putting on a uniform. Flood finished it by taking his uniform off. Robinson fought for racial justice. They never stopped fighting for freedom. The struggle took years off their lives. Neither man lived into his sixties. Curt Flood dedicated his life to making Jackie Robinson proud.[9]

It is fair to say that Flood and Robinson share some biographical similarities, especially considering that both men died young. Beyond that, the argument of extension, expressed in the idea that Flood attempted to finish what Robinson had started, demonstrates vividly the extent of Jackie Robinson's hegemonic presence in the discourses of sport. Through the implied relation, the legacies of Robinson and Flood are supposed to be symmetrical, complementary, and symbiotic. As Snyder slides from one kind of revolution to the next, he naturalizes the correspondence between the struggle for racial inclusion and the economic maturity of sport as measured according to the size of black athletes' paychecks. Elsewhere in his book, Snyder attempts to elucidate this connection through an assertion of what Flood must have known:

> Flood sought to take what his hero, Jackie Robinson, had accomplished one step further. Unlike Robinson, Flood came of age during the civil rights movement and realized that a seat at a lunch counter, a house in a white neighborhood, or a spot on a major league roster was not enough. Flood recognized that racial equality could not be achieved without the freedom to sell one's talent to the highest bidder.[10]

I have no quarrel with Snyder's account of Flood's experiences; Robinson and Flood certainly lived within different "ages" relative to the meaning and consequences of their racial identities. The grounds for insisting that Flood must have "recognized" the relationship between racial equality and the errors of the reserve clause, however, are unclear, especially considering Flood's deliberate attempts to separate these matters when speaking with the Players Association in Puerto Rico and the hard rhetorical work performed by the black press to aver the irrelevance of race. Instead, it seems that Robinson operates for Snyder as an allusive convenience, a tropological shortcut that makes Flood worthy of mention and praise in the construction of public memory.

Others, to be sure, have taken similar shortcuts. One of Flood's St. Louis teammates was Hall of Famer Lou Brock, who retired in 1979 as Major League Baseball's all time leader in career stolen bases. In Fussman's *After Jackie*, Brock remembered Flood along lines similar to Snyder's:

> Curt and Jackie were two different things. Jackie Robinson showed you how not to live in the shadows. Curt Flood showed that you could take your talent and market it to anybody you wanted to.
>
> Curt was an expansion of Jackie because his message went out to other sports. If Curt Flood hadn't tested the reserve clause, Brett Favre might still be playing football in Atlanta today.[11] He wouldn't be working in Green Bay. Curt opened the doors so that players could take advantage of the free-market system, just like other Americans.
>
> That changed everything.[12]

Brock's account adds a layer to the Flood/Robinson kinship, in spite of the assertion of difference, with an emphasis that evokes the black press' defense of Flood's principle.

Flood, from Brock's perspective, helped to reconcile not just baseball, but all of professional sport, with the ostensible framework of the free market system, with the "American way," as the *Amsterdam News* had put it in 1970.

As matters stand in the popular imagination, Jackie Robinson and Curt Flood were responsible for discrete achievements — Robinson's was "racial," and Flood's was "economic." Differences aside, they are joined by both a common spirit of protest and the fact that Robinson's accomplishments made Flood's possible. Alex Belth's biography of Flood, tritely titled *Stepping Up*, is less committed to extrapolating the Robinson connection than is Snyder's assiduously documented text, except in one crucial respect. Speaking about the early days of Flood as a sandlot player in Oakland, Belth asserts perhaps the most binding connection of all: "What Wilson and Robinson offered boys like Flood was something that was a birthright for white kids: the dream of playing professional ball. They also gave them the opportunity to view themselves differently. Robinson offered a black kid the chance to look at sports and say, *Here's a playing field where I can be viewed as equals with a white kid, where I can be judged on my own merits, pure and simple."*[13] In short, Belth provides Flood with an identity, conferred by integration, appropriate to *extending* the meritocratic playing field instantiated by Jackie Robinson in 1947. Curt Flood, as a beneficiary of baseball's ostensible meritocracy, rightfully entered his playing career under the operational assumption that merit would determine the value of his labor and right to self-determination. When meritocracy choked on the owners' greed, Flood "recognized that racial equality could not be achieved without the freedom to sell one's talent," "sacrificed his own career to change the system," "finished [the revolution] by taking his uniform off," "showed that you

could take your talent and market it to anybody you wanted to," and finally, "changed everything." As goes the dominant story of Robinson and Flood in contemporary memory, so goes the narrative that Flood made everyone rich.

Adrift in the anxious waters of a possible Flood-related calamity in baseball, black newspapers in the early seventies were in no position to foresee the staggering monetary values of current player contracts. Besides, publicly predicting that free agency would usher in an era of unprecedented player wealth would have likely intensified the fear-mongering that fueled the owners' dystopian rhetoric. Neither clairvoyant nor foolish, the black press underplayed the argument of "economic extension," but capitalized quickly on the potential link to Jackie Robinson as a symbol of black athletic protest. Detecting and defining a moment of player awakening was a far better rhetorical strategy for trying to strip baseball of its hard-shelled romantic mystique.

Providing Flood with a nascent historicity by inserting him into a proto-lineage of socially conscious black athletes in 1970, the *Pittsburgh Courier*'s Bill Nunn urged a broad view of Flood's case, regardless of where one happened to stand on the details of the reserve clause:

> Even if you don't agree with Curt Flood in his fight against organized baseball concerning the reserve clause, his fortitude in fighting for what he believes to be right has to be admired. Flood thus joins a growing list of black athletes who have placed principal [*sic*] above personal gain. Jackie Robinson was one of the first when he quit organized baseball rather than join a new club after being traded by the Brooklyn Dodgers. Others who come to mind, Cassius (Muhammad Ali) Clay, Jim Brown, Arthur Ashe and Bill Russell.[14]

The golden comparison to Jackie Robinson, in addition to the others on this "growing list," presciently silhouetted the catalog of activist luminaries that would be canonized by Harry Edwards, Spike Lee, and others in the annals of public memory some thirty years later. This reference, however, is directed not toward April 15, 1947, which is for many Robinson's defining moment, but specifically toward the end of his career, when he retired from baseball. At the end of the 1956 season, the Dodgers traded him to the New York Giants. According to Robinson, he had planned to retire anyway, but as he admitted in his 1972 autobiography, *I Never Had It Made*, "My impulse was to tell [the front office] that Jackie Robinson was no longer the Dodgers' property to be traded."[15] Although Robinson never mentioned Flood, his characterization of baseball's dubious prerogative resonated with Flood's letter to Bowie Kuhn in December 1969.[16] The substance of Nunn's comparison, then, resides not in Jackie Robinson's pioneering act, but in a kind of courageous refusal, an ethical disposition reflected in "fighting for what he believes to be right" — Flood had done as Jackie Robinson did.

Along lines similar to Nunn's list, Bayard Rustin's defense of Flood in the *Philadelphia Tribune* contained one more argument, this time with a more explicit elucidation of the meaning of Flood's fight:

> [Flood's lawsuit] is an attempt to reform an institution in which black athletes have acquired prestige and wealth and have become a source of pride for other Negroes. As such, Flood stands in the tradition of such black athletes as Jackie Robinson and Muhammad Ali who, in addition to achieving great status within their professions, took courageous stands on issues of human rights. For these reasons, Curt Flood deserves our support and our respect.[17]

Rustin's show of support spliced a variety of recurrent rhetorical threads. First, insisting on "reform" like other advocates in the black press, he attempted to preserve organized baseball as an institutional structure in which black professional success could be secured. Second, he observed that black athletes had become a source of racial pride, linking a very liberal understanding of sport to the constitution of a positive black identity articulated in such success.[18] Third, he assembled a mini-list of new black athletes organized politically by a courageous stand for "human rights." Perhaps Rustin found their consonant courage according to a theme of self-sacrifice — Ali lost the prime of his career, Flood lost his career altogether, and Robinson willingly endured insults and ostracism for a year under an agreement to not "fight back"[19] — but, the meaning of "human rights" coheres only in the context of each athlete's particular self-sacrificial act. Ali stood with a black-inflected Islam against the Vietnam War, and Jackie Robinson embodied colorblindness in assuring the nation that black Americans would fight in it. With emphases on prestige, wealth, pride, and professional status, Rustin offered in Flood a composite subject that articulated human rights to the reform of baseball's labor structure. Flood was principled, acting on behalf of his conscience, standing in the tradition of courageous black athletes who spoke only at great personal risk. If he were successful, this seemed to imply, the symbolic rewards would be substantial.

The Ethos of Protest, the Slave Metaphor, and Public Address

As it is often imagined these days, the lineage from Robinson to Flood consists not in the pursuit of directly shared political goals, though the lineage would not obtain were Flood's objectives not regarded as a logical extension of Robinson's. More to the point, finding its rhetorical genealogy in the black press' advocacy of Flood some forty

years ago, the lineage from Robinson to Flood consists in a shared ethos of protest. Similarly assuming great personal risk and demonstrating a willingness to sacrifice, Robinson articulates to Flood through a mode of political action defined by the participation in public discourse under perilous circumstances, of enacting the liberal-democratic imperative to speak one's way into inclusion. Idealized as courage, the ethos of protest enacted by Jackie Robinson and Curt Flood bears a homologous similarity to the political imagination harbored by black newspapers at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies. Whether acting as a lonely "cry in the fight for justice" or as a "watchdog" for imperfections in American democracy, the black press valorized and exercised the compulsion to speak.

Despite a reflexivity that tended to discipline radical rhetoric and shelter the political imaginary of liberal integrationism, the black press played host to a discursive contest over the constitution of a collective black political voice, a struggle over the meaning and importance of blackness to political action. Generally speaking, political effectivity was defined according to the logic of inclusion as the black press regulated the movement of rhetorical currency in their discursive marketplace. My choice of the market metaphor is intentional; in the spirit of the "marketplace of ideas" through which American democracy is often imagined, black newspapers offered themselves as spaces of deliberation modeled on the liberal public sphere. They idealized the spirit of protest as essential to democratic action while aligning the substance of protest with the progressive success of integration. Accordingly, the injunction to speak courageously resolved the tension between the facts of internal difference and the perpetual assertions of unity. Curt Flood, standing "in the tradition of Robinson and Ali," and "Jim Brown,

Arthur Ashe and Bill Russell" — in spite of the ways in which their respective ambitions may have been at odds — deserved support and respect for being principled participants in public life. In speaking, they added to an ongoing conversation. Regardless of what they "stood for," they stood for *something*; admirable black public subjects each, even if, as Bill Nunn had asserted, you didn't agree with Curt Flood.

Michael Warner offers a reason to think that the conversation metaphor of public address, upon which these articulated appreciations of Robinson and Flood depend, relies on a worrisome "language ideology": "Discourse is understood to be propositionally summarizable; the poetic or textual qualities of any utterance are disregarded in favor of sense. […] Other aspects of discourse, including affect and expressivity, are not thought to be fungible in the same way."[20] For Warner, a public consists in the circulation of speech protocols that enact the kind of subjective self-effacement necessary to understanding public discourse as "rational-critical dialog." Seen from within the confines of this language ideology, the black press functioned as a vibrant public forum though which Robinson, Flood, and other black athletes contributed maturing course corrections to black politics. But, viewing public address as transparent conversation holds only to the extent that the self-effacing protocols that enact and sustain it can be taken for granted and systematically hidden from view. The canonical lists of courageous black athletes that began to emerge in the late 1960s provided what Warner might call a "utopia of self-abstraction," a rhetorical mechanism that symbolically collapsed the internal differentiation of blackness. Figures like Robinson and Flood were rendered politically vital precisely through their commitment to speak, a rhetorical move that worked to mask meaningful differences and discontinuities, not just relative to a

political project, but also in relation to the way that blackness was presumed to function *in* a political project. As Warner puts it, "the perception of public discourse as conversation obscures the important poetic functions of both language and corporeal expressivity in giving a particular shape to publics."[21] Black newspapers expressed the corporeality of blackness, to be sure, but often decided the meaning of blackness according to its irrelevance and contained expansively poetic expressions of blackness through the logic of the public conversation.

I will address what I mean by "expansively poetic expressions" momentarily, but first it is important to remember that Warner concedes the important relationship between the conversation metaphor of public discourse and the useful illusion that publics have agency; after all, "they exist to deliberate and then to decide."[22] What most observers tend to miss, from those who footnote Flood in popular culture to those who have written his biographies, is the way in which Flood was not merely expressing the courage of his convictions, but also enacting at least two analytically distinct *kinds* of public discourse simultaneously. Whatever Flood's "true" motivations, there's no question that he wanted to win his case whether it was regarded as a "black thing," or a "baseball thing," a false binary that continues to vex his advocates. Flood's reluctance to close the question of race as a "primary motivation," combined with his ambivalence over race's significance, register his participation in multiple publics as well as his refusal to commit his public rhetoric to any one. Stated differently, Flood seemed to understand that it was possible to marshal the discursive resources of both black liberals working for colorblind institutional reform and black radicals who made the poetic expression of blackness central to their social identities and political rhetorics. This, then, is the cash value of my

observation in Chapter 2 that the slave metaphor in *The Way It Is* was productively polysemic: Flood maximized his chances for success as he auditioned for further circulation within the public spaces that mattered, in the publics whose deliberative habits would help to decide things in his favor. Wittingly or not, Flood strategically elided the tension that existed between the insistence on race's irrelevance and the critique of colorblindness; hopefully, both would come to his aid.

By "expansively poetic expressions" of blackness, then, I mean the kind of discourse whose "further circulation" depended not on the abstraction of blackness into a racially unmarked public sphere (however fanciful that hope might have been), but instead on pointed and elaborate assertions of black identity as the basis of one's experience and political expression. I do not mean to suggest that black newspapers attempted to pretend that they were not in fact marked, marginalized, or subordinated by blackness. But, the significance of blackness to the truths contained in their public arguments more generally was subject to constant disavowal. At the same time in the early 1970s, sport figured prominently into an emerging discourse that alternatively placed urgent demands on the black body as a rhetorical resource. As figures such as Harry Edwards seemed to demonstrate in the late sixties and early seventies, corporeal expressivity helped to constitute a field of public address in which being black meant something more than being devoted to inclusion. Being black in this public entailed a sense of "stranger relationality" that positioned blackness as the starting point of one's political impulses and challenged the instinctive demand for institutional reform immanent in the rhetoric of colorblindness. Treating differences within collective black identity not as a regrettable indicator of unity unrealized but instead as determinative of

one's politics, Harry Edwards and others offered rhetorical performances that forced "the poetic-expressive character of counterpublic discourse to become salient to consciousness."[23]

The distinction between the two types of public discourse I am proposing here is illustrated most vividly in the different ways that Flood's slave metaphor was mediated into public argument. If it is fair to say that the errors of slavery reside in at least two problematic relations of domination and subordination, one grounded in the exploitation of labor and the other grounded in racist dehumanization, then it is also fair to say that Flood's slave narrative produced coterminous lines of reasoning that emphasized these power relations differently, each of which could work in Flood's favor. On the one hand, black newspapers seized the opportunity to demonstrate the reciprocal benefits of integration. As a black man fighting (ironically?) to bring justice to a racially unmarked class of exploited laborers, Flood represented both the universal advantages of colorblind justice and the urgency of labor reforms that would accelerate the arrival of a racially neutral economic meritocracy under the sign of the "American way." On the other hand, public rhetors like Harry Edwards saw in Flood's slave metaphor a dramatic expression of integration's limits and errors. As a black man treated like the subhuman property that had historically characterized the social identity conferred on blacks by whites, Flood dramatized the invitation to indignity that integrated sport had become. On this version of the slave narrative, Flood operated to disclose the fallacious intent of appeals to meritocracy and the entire system of dehumanizing social relations on which the predicates of incremental reform rested. Flood's blackness was neither incidental nor ironic — not simply "poetic justice" — but enjoined the insistence on justice poetically

expressed under the sign of what being black in America meant. The former version of Flood's slave narrative eagerly concealed the importance of Flood's blackness to his cause, and the latter version was expansively poetic in making political meaning out of Flood's racial identity.

Beyond the tendency to oversimplify things, one problem with attempting to fit Flood's case into this category or that, into a "baseball issue" or a "black issue," is that such a frame imposes the consequences of its unimaginative politics onto the history of black public address. Flood's case was available for uptake and further circulation in unique and multifaceted ways that complicate (and in fact urge an interrogation of) the familiar binaries that position the "civil rights movement" against the "black power movement." These binaries, of course, surely possess interpretive and historiographic utility, but Curt Flood resists them. Instead of linking Flood to a stable or continuous body of political thought (regardless of how easy it might be to name him an agent of "black power," as Lomax does), I would argue that Flood exists at the fault lines between these binaries; Curt Flood best fits into the space between a mode of black politics that tried to erase racism by erasing race, and another that made the facts of one's race central to its public rhetoric. Calling Flood a "liberal integrationist" short-circuits on the racialized reckoning that inflected *The Way It Is*, and calling him an expression of black power fizzles on the depth of his rhetorical investment in the familiar tropes of integrationism. Just as certainly as categories like "liberalism" and "radicalism" can be customized to suit the political purposes of those who command them, Curt Flood's strategically situated slave metaphor was open to purposive configuration. By 1970, the figure of the black athlete had begun to occupy a widening zone of the cultural landscape.

The protean appearance of Flood's slave metaphor bespoke the difference between modes of public activity, between the effacement of blackness and its principled assertion, between the black athlete who would help to tell the progressive story of sport's evolving meritocracy and the black athlete who would deliver his criticisms in the name of his blackness.

"Human Life in Microcosm": Evidence of Sporting Volatility

About a week before the start of the 1970 baseball season, Flood's familiar nemesis in the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, Bob Broeg, wrote a feature on Cardinals owner Gussie Busch appearing also in *The Sporting News*. Busch had given a series of melodramatic press conferences that spring, and the latest happened to concern star pitcher Steve Carlton's desire for a significance salary increase.[24] Busch, frustrated with what must have seemed like widespread sedition, grouped the Carlton problem together with his annoyance over the salary demands of Richie Allen (one of the players for whom Flood was traded) and, of course, the lawsuit filed by Curt Flood. Announcing his ostensibly sacrificial commitment to resist the assault on ownership, Busch said, "I can't understand Allen. I can not understand Flood. We have to take a stand for the good of baseball. I hate to be the sucker to do it, but I'm willing to do it."[25] Gussie Busch was certainly not the only owner experiencing anxiety over the players' surging boldness in contract negotiations. Speaking for his colleagues, Busch expanded the scope of the problem and attempted to reverse the perception of exactly who was being treated like a fool. As he told Broeg:

> "The fans are going to resent this situation. I can't understand it. The player contracts are at their best, the pension plan is the finest, the fringe benefits are better, yet the players think that we (the owners) are stupid asses.
>
> "I'm disillusioned," Busch added. "I don't know what's happening among our young people — to our campuses and to our great country. We've taken a stand, anyway, and I just hope that some of the other clubs have the guts to do what I've done to get the situation back to normalcy."[26]

Busch's harangue was simply the latest showy display of paternalism that comprised the owners' rhetoric of gratitude. From the perspective of the players, what Busch could "not understand" was why the players refused to accept their salaries gratefully, as if they did not deserve them in the first place. More importantly, though, Busch's comments to *TSN* presented a line of reasoning that was beginning to operate as common sense in public discourse: that the issues in sport were reflective of deeper patterns of social unrest. Quite explicitly, Busch sought to normalize expressions of unrest — for the benefit of the fans, for the good of the game, and for the love of country, *someone* had to take a stand.

In the *New York Times*, the consequence of this theme was extended by Arthur Daley, who advanced twin claims regarding sport's shifting present: sport had become a microcosm of American life and athletes had been consumed by a concurrent spirit of rebellion. Under the headline, "Paging Sigmund Freud," which invoked the symbolism of mental disorder to diagnose sport's presumable disease, Daley worried about what changes in society would mean for the "sphere" of athletics: "The world of sports has always been a microcosm, a little world in itself. It faithfully reflected the outer world, of which it was a tiny part. When life was simple in the old days, the sporting life was

also simple. But when it grew complicated, those complexities spilled over in tumbling fashion to engulf the entire sphere of athletics, professional and amateur, and that vast murky shadowland in between."[27] After poking fun at professional hockey player Mike Walton for having been diagnosed by a psychiatrist for depression that could be cured only a trade away from the Toronto Maple Leafs, Daley observed what he took to be a widening generational divide: "Perhaps it seems proper enough to the Now generation but even the more numerous 30-plus generation just can't get used to the way authority is challenged and eroded in sports just as it is to a greater extent everywhere else. The prime example, of course, is Curt Flood's lawsuit against the baseball reserve clause and that has to wind up as a legal milestone because it is now on the road to the Supreme Court."[28] Curt Flood, it would seem, became the representative exemplar of the times, a symbolic crystallization of the way in which the challenges to tradition and authority were spilling over from "life" to "athletics." Shortly after the Supreme Court released their decision against Flood in the Summer of 1972, Daley did his best (as did others) to explain how and why the Court tortured logic. His support for Curt Flood took the form of support for a new generation:

> Ever since Abner Doubleday did not invent baseball, the owners have been insisting that the reserve clause is an absolute essential to survival in every sport. If it is an evil, the piously affirm, it is a necessary evil to prevent the rich from raiding the poor and cornering the talent market to make mockery of competition. […]
>
> The mood of the players has changed with the times. The golden eggs have come cascading down from the geese in management and greed begets greed both on the field and in the front office. The players are more militant than ever before and are now making full-bodied demands that players of an earlier generation would not have dreamed of making.[29]

Daley's characterization of ownership was not new, nor was his suggestion that everyone involved had succumbed to the worst of their greed. But, as the "necessary evil" confronted "full-bodied demands," what began to emerge quite clearly was the recognition that the changing times, in addition to producing hippies and anti-war protesters, had also produced a new form of political identity through sport: the young, angry, activist athlete.

In sum, Daley's pair of interrelated observations — that the troubles in sport were reflective of the troubles in society and that a new generation of athletes had emerged with new demands — combined to shape an emergent politics of sport which, at the beginning of the 1970s, was narrated with a combination of anxiety, confusion, and anticipation. Perhaps most significantly, in the national newspapers that gave sport its daily presence in cultural life, the activist athlete was increasingly regarded as an agent of social volatility. Moreover, as it became obvious that black athletes were cutting the edge of sport's relationship to politics, the "crucible" conjured into existence by Jackie Robinson's "noble experiment" reinvested sport as the reference point for measuring national progress on race. This dynamic helps to explain some of the difficulty in accounting for the rhetorical consequences of the owners' argumentative tenor toward Curt Flood. Gerald Early and David Leonard, for example, draw a racialized explanation from the owners' traditionalism, paternalism, and greed.[30] Though it may be fair to say that baseball owners as a class were probably no less racist than anyone else, the expressions that produced very reasonable accusations of reactionary paternalism fit better within the colorblind narrative of sport's loss of economic innocence. Flood's strategic identification with white players neutralized the possibility that the new

economy of baseball was racially inflected, and so in protecting baseball's economic traditions, the owners were characterized as no worse than nakedly greedy. Thus, arguments like Daley's in the national papers produced volatility at exactly the point that owners were attempting to stabilize sport's public image. In other words, the activist athlete emerging in the late sixties became an idealized form of political subjectivity operating to move sport from the old to the new, away from the craggy sensibilities of ownership toward the economic modernization of sport. The inclination to describe Flood's challenge as anti-racist arises from the unmistakable formal similarities between what the owners had to say and what racists often have to say: *This is ours and you're lucky that we will even share it with you*. Be that as it may, the tale of Flood became a tale of "the economy," and the activist athlete became the privileged ethos through which to render destabilizing claims that may or may not have had anything to do with race.

The *Times*' Murray Chass, echoing Daley's mockery of the Toronto Maple Leafs, suggested that in "today's world, the sports psychiatrists might very well turn out to be the most important doctors of all."[31] Chass' point was made with tongue-in-cheek, but his interviews with Yankee executive Lee MacPhail and Player Association president Marvin Miller revealed some of the absurdity involved in the "sports establishment's" efforts to quarantine the effects of the new black athlete. MacPhail recognized that, "Baseball players, we sometimes forget, are like everyone else. […] As far as these various incidents are concerned, you would have to think they probably indicate some additional pressures on the players. Individuals seem to be more intense than ever before. I think these things are happening all over, not just in baseball."[32] Miller refused

"to see a single thread that would tie it all together," but Chass summarized the situation neatly:

> [T]he rash of player problems in the past three months would seem to indicate there exists something more serious than a disgruntled player here, a troubled player there, all of whose problems could be individually explained away. […] Baseball officials — and football officials, too — wouldn't like to think so, but they don't appear to be the people to figure out what's happening in professional sports today and try to solve what could be a seriously mushrooming situation.[33]

Chass' story amounts to this: as a collective agency, the new athlete posed a burgeoning threat to sport that owners were ill-prepared to withstand. Someone, he figured, had better call a shrink.

The erosion of the sports establishment, however, was nowhere more starkly narrated than by Howard Cosell in the *New York Times* in April 1971. Cosell, of course, had relentlessly used his position in the televised sports media to advocate Muhammad Ali's right to fight, and had hosted Curt Flood and Marvin Miller on ABC in January 1970. With the same sense of sarcasm that had saturated Flood's rhetoric in *The Way It Is*, Cosell offered a scathing critique of the owners' self-nominated guardianship of the public trust:

> Once upon a time, the legend had it, there was a world that remained separate and apart from all others, a privileged sanctuary from real life. It was the wonderful world of sport, where every competition was endowed with an inherent purity, every athlete a shining example of noble young manhood, and every owner was motivated by his love of the game and his concern for the public interest.[34]

Cosell's tone made Flood's assurance that "you will get no such mythology here," seem fitting to move to disclose the intentions of "the sports establishment," (a term also preferred by Leonard Koppett):

> The sports establishment — the commissioners, the owners, the leagues, the National Collegiate Athletic Association — would have us believe the legend. Their unceasing chant is that sport is escapism, pure and simple; that people have enough daily problems to cope with in a complex, divided, and even tormented society; and that the relief provided by sport is essential to the maintenance of an individual mental and emotional equilibrium. There is something to be said for this argument, but this hardly means that the sports establishment should be left untrammeled and that individual injustices should not be exposed.
>
> The plain truth is that sport is a reflection of society, that it is human life in microcosm, that is has within it the maladies of society, that some athletes do drink, that some athletes do take drugs, that there is racism in sport, that the sports establishment is quite capable of defying the public interest, and that in this contemporary civilization sport does invade sociology, economics, law, and politics.[35]

Eloquently pushing past the by-then common insistence that sport and society were interrelated in reflective and homologous ways, Cosell identified the righteous facilitator and agent of the new, improved era:

> The young people of this nation are absorbed with Indochina, with continuing military conscription, with ghettos, with poverty, with the ecology and with all the rest. Like all of us, they need and enjoy the escape that a sports event can provide. They do recognize that sport has a place, a role in American society, that it can be an important fabric of that society. But they will only be turned off — not on — by simplistic parodies tied to the past. Their quest is for truth everywhere, and in that quest they do not carefully exclude sports. And so the ancient sports establishment legend must forever be put in a bottle, capped, and sent off to sea. For the good of sports.[36]

Speaking as a member of the establishment's generation, Cosell presented what he took to be the "true" solution to saving sports — not the owners sanctimonious refrains about escapism, but rather an embrace of the youthful spirit that was pressing sport into the present with political urgency. Moreover, Cosell identified a frame of reference that came to structure the opposition between protagonist and antagonists in sport's broad public narrative. With the establishment on one side and the kids on the other, sport's prognosis depended on a progress-oriented resolution to a dialectic fraught with myth; only the forward-looking would survive, and only the kids were looking forward at serious problems and "all the rest."

Perhaps sensing the weight of these connections or perhaps arriving at them on their own, many of Flood's advocates in the black press placed him in specific relation to an emergent black athletic ethos made translucently visible by individuals such as Harry Edwards and Floyd McKissick (about whom I will say more below). In response to the owners' claim that reserve clause abolition would destroy baseball's financial structure, the *Afro-American*'s Sam Lacy described baseball as a quaint anachronism, out of touch with a new way of seeing and doing things, both within sport and in the broader culture. Lacy said that the owners' argument in favor of the reserve clause "is good, sound argument — or was good, sound argument in the twenties and thirties. Today, young people of the prime age of professional athletes are throwing off the yoke of custom in every corner of the world. In every walk of life.... And in the world of professional sports, only baseball has been permitted to continue at the status quo."[37] Hardly a "sedentary member" of baseball's cast, as Flood saw most sportswriters, Lacy stressed

baseball's active ignorance of disruptive new realities and positioned his critique as a disclosure of the owners' malignant traditionalism.

Similarly, the Chicago *Defender*'s Doc Young urged the owners to give Flood's case an honest hearing, since he recognized that professional baseball's institutional intransigence stacked the odds against him:

> Flood is in for a rough time. Baseball is a powerful, multi-million dollar entity with important connections. The baseball moguls might do well, however, to give the issues raised by Flood the full consideration they deserve. They should accept the facts that times have changed, their old ways aren't necessarily the best, and modern ball-players are neither dumb, helpless, nor likely to accept old rules which violate their welfare, or their conception of it, merely because those rules are written down. [...] Baseball, over the years, has not been noted for its progressive thinking. It has been a sort of head-in-the-sands operation. It is time now for baseball to come up for air, and also to take a look around the new world.[38]

Like Lacy, Young characterized baseball as holding to a naive but stubborn orthodoxy that ignored the facts of social change. Implying cautiously that the owners' interests might best be served by embracing new player attitudes, Young both admitted that Flood posed a plausible threat to baseball's continued institutional existence, and nervously affirmed the rising status and political legitimacy of the rebellious, socially conscious black athlete.

As might have been expected, the turn to the new decade also occasioned reasons for the black press to pause on the meaning of the new athlete that seemed to have emerged out of the thicket of the sixties. In January 1970, the *Philadelphia Tribune* promised that the 1970s would be "vintage years for the black athlete," according to Claude Harrison's assertion that "During the 1960s, especially the last part of the decade,

black athletes took steps toward gaining their full rights, on and off the playing field."[39] Just like Cosell, Harrison recognized the newly-visible relationship between sport and society, proclaiming that "Sports, like education, labor, and every other venture can no longer hide behind scholarships and salaries. It must face the issues and not try to escape the social changes that are upon this great nation."[40] Presumably, then, the social changes "upon this great nation" were those that could not be forestalled by more scholarships and larger contracts, but only by careful attention to the substance of dissent. "Demonstrations and dissensions of the 1960s clearly proved that in the seventies, college and pro club directors will have to deal honestly with black athletes or learn to live with boycotts and protests that can be costly in both money and spirit," Harrison insisted.[41] Even as he acknowledged the unique role of the black athlete as the agent of change, Harrison was sure to tincture the substance of dissent with a colorblind imaginary. Regarding the increasing likelihood of a black manager in baseball, Harrison intoned, "Baseball knowledge and the ability to handle men doesn't come with the color of one's skin. You have it or you don't. It's that simple."[42] Progress was inevitable, he persisted, especially since the "men who run the nation's collegiate and professional teams […] will see the handwriting on the wall and make the 1970s a vintage decade for the black athlete."[43]

In late December 1969, the Chicago *Defender*, through the voice of a familiar activist luminary, took the decade's transition to mean something even stronger. Without quite as much optimism as the Philadelphia *Tribune*, the *Defender* presented a bulleted list of "items" that worked both descriptively — an account of what was happening, and prescriptively — an assertion of what would be required. The list included organized

demands made by black players on the campuses of Brigham Young University and Indiana University, the successful campaign for an outsized contract by O.J. Simpson with the NFL's Buffalo Bills, the hiring of Lenny Wilkens as the second ever black NBA head coach, retired Chicago Cub Ernie Banks' appointment to the board of the Chicago Transit Authority, and the outspokenness of tennis' Arthur Ashe, who characterized all of this activity as revelatory. The *Defender* said:

> For many Negroes, what surfaced at the college level in 1969 certainly had its beginnings at an earlier age and one of the persons most cognizant of that fact is Negro tennis star Arthur Ashe, himself a victim many times of racial prejudice.
>
> "Athletes have influence and charisma and we could do a lot to get these kids to believe in themselves and fulfill their potential," Ashe said. "The name of the game now for all of us on sports is: Get committed. Each one of us who has a name has an obligation to the blacks that need help."[44]

From Gussie Busch's disillusionment to Howard Cosell's indictment to Arthur Ashe's compulsory call to conscience, the appearance of the "new black athlete" was in fact a reality with which any observer of sport would have to cope. For "the establishment" the new athlete was a worrisome threat that resulted in the paranoid issuing of disciplinary injunctions, and for legendary renegades like Howard Cosell the new athlete was simply the inevitable result of society moving forward. However athletes might have fit themselves into this position, the start of 1970 presented an image of volatility that made the imperative (like Ashe's) to act available, intelligent, and politically rewarding. The widespread announcements of instability (racially-induced or otherwise) indexed fissures measured by some as a threat but measured by others as

opportunity. It produced, in short, both worry and excitement, a combination indicative of a potential energy that might occasion social change. As the figure of the new black athlete was contested in black newspapers and other racially marked public fora, however, the question of where the new black athlete would take them remained open.

The Radicals

Chapter 5 told the reformer's story of Curt Flood in detail. In black newspapers, Curt Flood operated propitiously as a symbol of justice universally denied, a circumstance which afforded them the opportunity to synthesize Flood into the colorblind integration narrative that shaped their political rhetoric. Flood really might kill baseball, they worried, but he is right, and fair is fair, so there must be a way to adjust, alter, modify, or reform baseball as an institution into compliance with American business standards. Bearing reluctant witness to baseball's loss of economic innocence, and perhaps recognizing the value of symbolic investments already made, the black press built rhetorical dikes to protect against the threat of Flood. At the same time, the potential energy produced by the appearance of the new black athlete found its most elaborate expression not in the ephemeral (and often quixotic) calls to conscience smattering black press coverage, but rather elsewhere: in the fresh memories of the 1968 Olympics undergoing useful configuration at youth conferences, in the shifting texture of the black intelligentsia, and in the rare press pieces which, in their immediate contexts, may have resonated as little more than angry slogan-toting, or, in the words of Lin Hilburn, "the rhetoric of the ghetto."[45] And, a few pieces like this did in fact appear occasionally in places like the *Defender* and *Amsterdam News,* but they were jarringly infrequent. With unmatched depth, the new black athlete was articulated most fully in

Harry Edwards' *Revolt of the Black Athlete*. Originally written in 1969, *Revolt* attempted to organize and concretize the ideas that emerged from Edwards' Olympic Project for Human Rights. Though the "project" failed to produce the international black boycott of the Mexico City Olympics that had provided its rationale, the photograph of John Carlos and Tommie Smith raising their fists in "black power" endures as an image of both the turbulence of history and the timelessness of protest. By Spring 1970, however, Edwards was more sociologist than activist, and the circulatory fate of *Revolt* might be described better as a seminal work in the sociology of sport than as a founding document for a social movement.

Nevertheless, Harry Edwards had quite a bit to say and found spaces in which to say it not only by publishing *Revolt*, but also by helping to formalize, in places like *The Black Scholar*, an image of the black activist athlete quite different than the one generally appearing in the black press. Admittedly, he personally had very little to say about Curt Flood, but much of what Edwards and others speaking like him had said bore striking resemblance to much of what Flood had said. Within the discursive context characterized in and through *Revolt*, Flood had only a few explicit advocates. Brad Snyder complains that the "alphabet soup of civil rights organizations — the NAACP, SNCC, SCLC, CORE, the Urban League, and the Black Panthers — failed to make the connection between Flood's lawsuit and the freedom struggle,"[46] perhaps because they were distracted by what they took to be more serious challenges. This inference may be fair, but repeats the kind of unfair agglomeration that allows Flood's historical specifics to disappear into the "spirit of the sixties" and condenses the distinctions internal to black thought and public address into a putatively self-evident "civil rights movement."

Perhaps Snyder is right to say that the organizational response outside of baseball was tepid or dismissive, but relative to the way in which Flood imagined the significance of race to his cause, his challenge to baseball evoked Edwards' *Revolt* with heretofore unexplored depth. In contrast to the way Flood's story was told in black newspapers, harboring a profound suspicion of the commitment to racial integration, and expressing political conviction in a language modulated heavily by corporeality and racialized affect, the public space projected by Harry Edwards resisted false assertions of black unity under the banner of colorblindness and readily labeled reformers Uncle Tom.

Racialized Sports Reporting, or, The Idiom on the Agenda.

In *Revolt*, Harry Edwards attempted to open a critical space through which an intervention on prevailing wisdom about race politics might be mounted. Like Flood had shown in *The Way It Is*, this move relied on a critique of the sociology and political economy of sportswriting. Howard Cosell, whose support of Ali had conferred him with the same "renegade" reputation that followed Bill Veeck, re-enacted his outsider status with his criticism of the "sports establishment." Flood had devoted sustained attention to the damage done to players by sportswriters, and Cosell similarly saw that exposing sanctimonious pretense was crucial to understanding the determinate dynamic of the emerging age. After his sarcastic rendering of the "sports sanctuary" in the *Times*, he addressed the source of the mythology: "The legend never had much truth behind it, but it has persisted to an astonishing degree largely because of the daily propaganda of many of the nation's sports writers and virtually all of the nation's sports announcers."[47] Curt Flood fit here for Cosell, as well, because Flood had provoked a reactionary response: "How else can one explain so much indignation in so many places over the recent books

by Jim Bouton, Dave Meggysey, Curt Flood, and Johnny Sample — books that disturbed the establishment by dealing with such un-American matters as drink and drug and racism and blackballing in American sports?"[48] Cosell put critical insight on a point by identifying the logic of propaganda, which often reveals its coercive nature in institutional responses to principled challenges. His observation called attention to the constitutive and contingent features of sport's public: its trusty mediators were lying, and Curt Flood was among those helping to spot the lies.

Though Cosell was not named specifically by Edwards in *Revolt*, Edwards did offer a list of trustworthy exemplars — synecdochically labeled "the black sportswriter" — who spoke in genres similar to Cosell's. In fact, the figure of the sportswriter gave Edwards the opportunity to strategically structure the kinds of divisions into black politics that might produce new demands and thus help to reorganize the political imaginary of blackness itself. In *Revolt*, Edwards conceded the bygone benefits of white media coverage to the "black liberation struggle," but insisted that "the mass media has on frequent occasions been harsh, insensitive, and indifferent to the plight of black people," and remained in 1969 "an unofficial arm of the establishment in America."[49] When it came to sports, Edwards asserted, "Most news reporters in America, however, are towers of morality, ethics, and truth when compared to this country's sports reporters."[50] Curt Flood had tiptoed a difficult argumentative decision in issuing his sportswriting critique; it was not easy to both give voice to "the player" and avoid making the players feel like fools. He tended to solve this problem by claiming to say aloud what all of them already knew, but Flood had to speak, of course, for *all* of them. Edwards was under no such rhetorical constraint. He would, instead, become

expansively poetic in describing what race meant to the quality of one's public expression. Through a pointedly racialized typology, he established a hierarchy of sportswriting identities in order to accurately disclose the politics of his antagonists and protagonists.

"The White Sports Reporter," according to Edwards, committed three errors. First, they *became* white sports reporters. It was, in other words, fallacious to assume that the practice of journalism, the canons of journalism, or journalism school transformed one's social consciousness. According to Edwards, "A racist white man who becomes a journalist becomes nothing more than a racist white journalist."[51] Such a claim certainly took aim at the "objectivity" often underwriting the specious "common sense" of race politics. Second, sports reporters, according to Edwards, were beholden to counter-oppositional interests, and thus subject to co-option: "sports reporters must be responsive to the desires and needs of the sports industry. This is roughly analogous to a situation where the jury is chiefly responsive to the needs and desires of the criminal."[52] This looked to both reverse the valorization of sport as a "big business," (a stipulation through which black newspapers had sought to protect baseball's legitimacy), and invert the rhetorical criminalization of black athletic protest. Third, according to Edwards, the white sports reporter promulgated the representational logic of tokenism, exploiting black athletic heroes in a stroke of self-congratulation over continuing progress.

As Edwards became specific, an alternate narrative also began to develop for Jackie Robinson:

> [T]he sports world in America (on the basis of a few exploitative "breakthroughs" such as Jackie Robinson's entering white dominated professional baseball) has been portrayed as a citadel of racial harmony and purity, and this distorted image has been fostered primarily by sports reporters and by persons who control the media through which sports news and activities are communicated to the public. The simple truth of the matter is that the sports world is not a rose flourishing in the middle of a wasteland. It is part and parcel of that wasteland, reeking of the same racism that corrupts other areas of society.[53]

This is only one example of Edwards' attempt in *Revolt* to destabilize Robinson's symbolic influence. To be sure, calling Jackie Robinson a token was not a line of reasoning that held up well in circulation (lest one question Jackie's *courage*), but it offered at least some rhetorical redemption to an ethos already under attack by a broader offensive on the wisdom of integration — Jackie bore no ill-intent on this score, he had simply been manipulated, a characterization that would become damning as Edwards and others described themselves as "intelligent." The persuasiveness of that aside, Edwards' critique of "the white sports reporter" centered on the tendency to make self-serving spectacles out of limited achievements. For Edwards, the mediated optimism of progress was liberal propaganda.

Edwards' criticism of "The Negro Sports Reporter" was far more damning. In *Revolt*, one gathers the impression that as detestable as he may have found the activities of white sports reporters, he regarded them as perfectly rational extensions of racism and corruption. Negro sports reporters, on the other hand, had "deluded many of their own followers with fanciful myths that belie the truth about the world of sports."[54] In terms that seemed to draw directly from E. Franklin Frazier's sociology of the black bourgeoisie, Edwards said that the "chief concern" of the Negro sports reporter was to

"keep everyone happy, though deluded. Most of the time they are too busy looking the other way, keeping the boat steady, to report objectively and with conviction."[55] Obviously, Edwards meant something different by "objectivity and conviction" than did most sportswriters in the black press. But, in Edwards' understanding, the conditions of objectivity existed outside the logic of progress and false optimism. The insidiousness of tokenism gained strength in the kind of sports reporting that glamorized the achievements of the black bourgeoisie through the effacement of black identity. Edwards' position reads as an even sharper iteration of Frazier's black press critique in *Black Bourgeoisie*:

> A publication, of course, is no better than the people who write for it — black or white. Many high-circulation magazines that purport to speak for America's Blacks actually are more concerned with maintaining a "respectable Negro image," meaning the image that portrays black people striving as hard as possible to be like white folks. At the very best, such publications take a middle-of-the-road position when it comes to approaching and handling critical racial questions. Invariably, in their worst guise they fill the pages with irrelevant, defensive drivel about the social life of the Bourgeois Negro, the latest wig crazes, the experiences of the "only big-time Negro hunting master," the only Negro airline pilot, and so forth. But when it comes to socially, politically, and economically relevant issues, most of them play it right down the middle or worse. For they have their white advertisers to consider, who buy pages of space to advertise bleaching creams, hair straighteners, wigs, and other kinds of racially degrading paraphernalia. In the area of sports, one generally encounters innocuous stories about Willie Mays' ability with a bat or the speed of halfbacks Walt Roberts and Nolan Smith, little men in a big man's game. But seldom, if ever, has the truth about the sports industry in America and the situation of black athletes found its way to the pages of these publications.[56]

In essence, Edwards argued that Negro sports reporters — operating presumably in the black press — performed the nastiest of all ideological tricks: they gained false bourgeois status by performing ugly forms of tokenism and black self-hatred in the service of

racists. White-controlled public expression was bad enough, but white-mediated public expression, i.e. "Negro" expression, was worse: it was complicit. Hence, intoned Edwards often, "Uncle Tom."

Above all, Edwards utilized the Negro sports reporter as a lens through which he could challenge the prevailing representational logic of black politics. The Negro sports reporter, like the white sports reporter, also made spectacles out of limited achievements. The division that Edwards attempted to forge within black collective identity turned on how one represented black experience in political discourse. From his perspective, the Negro sports reporter represented blackness in the same manner as the white sports reporter, as simultaneously damning and irrelevant. "The Black Sports Reporter," by contrast, represented blackness assertively, unapologetically, and in a manner appreciative of human dignity. Colorblindness as practiced in the black press seemed to Edwards to do the work of the establishment. Alternatively, the "black sports reporter," was characterized by "certain qualities" that generally positioned "him outside of, and in many instances in opposition to, the sports establishment."[57] Edwards sidestepped the specifics of those "certain qualities," but promised that "he differs significantly in attitude, philosophy, and guts level."[58] Interestingly, Edwards seemed to be describing a kind of "guts" precisely opposite to that which Jackie Robinson had enacted. In a direct refutation of guts's transformation into "turning the other cheek" through the mediation of Rickey and Robinson, the "black sports reporter" for Harry Edwards possessed a representational tendency presumably unmediated by the corrupting forces of the racist establishment. Hence, only the black sports reporter had access to the objective facts.

Alluding not to specific political aims, but instead to competing modes of political expression, Edwards conducted a shrewd rhetorical maneuver: "[N]either the designation 'black' nor the differentiating qualities are necessarily directly related to skin color or racial heritage."[59] He presented a list of six sportswriters "on the contemporary sports scene," including Dick Edwards of the *Amsterdam News*, before revealing of the list that, "The last-mentioned four just happen to be white."[60] The ingenuity of this maneuver consisted in its dual work. It helped to recover some of the colorblind argumentative ground that underwrote the hegemonic absurdity of "reverse racism" (whether this worked or not is unclear even today). At the same time, the collapsing racial distinctions led him not toward an affirmation of the black press' "colorblind" reckoning, but instead toward the elaboration of an authentically oppositional voice informed by blackness, or a willingness to speak in an idiom uninfluenced by the diluted (and deluded) discourses of "the establishment." Said Edwards,

> The black sports reporter writes not only about developments on the field of play, but also of those influences that might effect athletes off the field. He does not pause to consider how the sports establishment will respond to his story. If his editor refuses to print it, he may soften it, be he always presses to maintain its central focus. The black reporter is undeterred by risks to his job or personal attacks against his reputation. For him such considerations are secondary to justice, fair play, personal character, and conscience. For the black reporter actually believes in all the principles and ethical considerations supposedly fostered by sports. His fight is against those who have violated these standards and sought to profit from their debasement. It will be men of dispositions and persuasions such as these who will write the true history of American athletics.[61]

Undeterred by personal risk, holding sport accountable to sporting values and not their corrupted economic versions, "black sportswriters," regardless of their skin color, would write a true history.

The cleavage between racial identities, as it were, got transposed into distinctions between how one spoke about justice. Racial particularity consisted in the quality of one's public voice, not in the facts of the body. White persons could be black sports reporters if they characterized the world in the right way. Edwards' approach was poetic and productive; he forged a means of inserting black corporeality and affect into public discourse out of a slippery equivocation on what black newspapers seemed to regard as "colorblindness." His critique, as perhaps Howard Cosell's criticism reveals, was not limited to speakers who identified themselves as "white," "Negro," and "black," but instead traced an individual's racial authenticity to their function in public address. Whiteness, Negro-ness, and blackness referred to speech genres and their connection to anti-establishment political interests, not to observable physical differences. In *Revolt*, Harry Edwards put the meaning of blackness onto the political agenda explicitly, and the case of the black sports reporter who "just happened to be white" illustrated that authenticity, objectivity, and conviction were expressed in only one kind of idiom, and not another.

Slavery and Split Loyalties in the Press

Leonard Koppett was undoubtedly Curt Flood's most consistent advocate in the nationally circulating sports press. In Edwards' typology of sports reporting, though, he might best be regarded as a "Negro sports reporter," one who took a middle-of-the-road position on critical racial questions. Koppett seemed to always be on Flood's side,

asserting logic and reason in his advocacy of sensible reform. In the *New York Times* at least, Red Smith was also on Flood's side consistently, but persisted with a line of reasoning that better exercised the idiom Edwards assigned to the black sports reporter. Smith narrated Flood's case within a context characterized by a corporeal rendering of the slave metaphor. Specifically, Smith emphasized not the abstract "economic" relation implied in the gesture to slavery, but instead foregrounded the dehumanizing relation and the "sports establishment's" role in imposing it. In the Spring of 1972, Steve Carlton had once again inspired widespread reports of player movement and salaries. For Smith, this meant "the busiest flesh market in many years. More bodies were bought, sold, and bartered, and more players of distinction changed address than in any comparable period within memory."[62] Amid worries that "the Curt Flood case might limit [the owners'] freedom to make such deals in the future," Smith opined, "not since the days of Nat Turner have escaped slaves wrought such destruction, especially at the expense of their former masters."[63] Smith attended closely to the movement of bodies and the dehumanizing vocabulary that allowed slavery to work without calling attention to itself:

> The employers aren't necessarily bad guys. If they are sometimes less than sensitive in their dealings with the help, it's probably because they have grown so accustomed to regarding the players as possessions that they forget they players are people. Their speech betrays this, "The strongest arm in the league," they say of this man, or a "great pair of hands," or "I want his bat in the line-up." Taking refuge in the vernacular they can forget that they are dealing with human lives.[64]

Smith offered no such vernacular sanctuary. Indeed, he attempted to shift sport's vernacular to one in which corporeal expressivity became possible. On Smith's view of

sports, bodies were real, and the owners, though perhaps even well-intentioned, concealed the objective conditions its bondage from public view with a reifying and dehumanizing rhetoric. A few months later, in June 1972, Curt Flood lost his Supreme Court case. Explaining his disappointment that the Court had "passed the buck" of illogic to Congress, Smith said, "It is a great disappointment because this Court appears to set greater store by property rights than by human rights."[65] For Red Smith, slavery was not an analogy that shed light on an economic relation, not *mere* metaphor, but a real, corporeally significant social relation cloaked in a dehumanizing mode of address. In contrast to the assumptions of the reformers, property rights and human rights for Red Smith were in *opposition*, and the Supreme Court, perhaps itself committed ideologically to the same dehumanizing rhetoric, had discursively legitimated the facts of slavery.

The slave narrative's appearance in the national sports press, though, sometimes produced awkward results when its speakers attempted to expand its scope past the abstract economic relation in baseball. In *A Well-Paid Slave*, Snyder rightly notices that the *Los Angeles Times*' Jim Murray, though speaking sarcastically, ultimately came to Flood's defense. After all, Murray had in fact written, "If Curt Flood wants to remain in St. Louis, baseball (and society) should let him."[66] Murray's column appeared directly beneath Broeg's infamous "principle or principal" article in *The Sporting News* as a kind of counterpoint, but managed only to show how the lampooning power of sarcasm easily becomes ignorant and acidic in a misplaced rhetorical context. In a bizarre attempt to represent the experience of baseball's slaves, Murray wrote, "The 'reserve clause,' to be sure, is just a fancy name for slavery. The only thing it doesn't let the owners do is flog their help. You can't flee over the ice, there's no underground railway. All you can do is

pick up your glove and hum spirituals. You can wrap an old bandanna around your head and call the boss 'Marse,' if you like. Lift that bat, chop that ball, git a little drunk and you land in sale."[67] The inanity contained in these stereotypes should be obvious, but their function became apparent as Murray wondered about the owner's handling of the reserve clause: "You would think […] the slave owners would be more careful with it. I mean, you all know what happens to slavery when it gets out of hand and word of it leaks up to Washington. Recall how upset Mr. Lincoln got, and Jon Brown's body, and Harriet Beecher Stowe? 'Uncle Curt's Cabin' may hit the bookstalls any day now."[68] In the end, Murray's advice was to baseball officials: "If I were Bowie Kuhn — or Gussie Busch — I would try to keep that Flood right between its banks. Otherwise, when baseball sends those doves out, they may come back with salmon in their teeth. And every baseball park in America may have a sign 'No Game Tonight — On Account Of Flood.'"[69] This brand of support was nearly worse for Flood than a naked rebuttal. Murray may have attempted to represent the experience of the players as "slaves," but the cruel foolishness of his sarcasm neutralized its insight; it led straight back to the owners' criminalizing dystopia.

Just as Red Smith's elaboration of the slave narrative in the *Times* illustrated the occasional entry of the Edwards idiom into the nationally circulating sports news, Curt Flood found advocates in the black press deliberately positioning themselves outside of the "sports establishment." In January 1970, Dick Edwards (whom Harry Edwards had identified personally as a "black sports reporter"), offered his opinion of Flood in the *Amsterdam News*. "Sock it to 'em Curt!," he wrote under the headline, "The Principle."[70] Like the *Defender*'s Bill Nunn, who had insisted that understanding the slave metaphor required understanding Flood "the man," Edwards noted that "to really understand Curt's

point in suing baseball for treating him like a rich peon — you must understand Flood-the-individual."[71] But unlike Nunn, who explained Flood in accommodating terms, Edwards presented uncompromising choices: "There are howls that baseball is dead if Flood wins his suit. That's tough, because if making the Lords obey one of the basic tenets upon which a democracy is built will kill baseball, it's time it was dead anyway."[72] Catastrophic consequences were utterly beside the point here: to affirm democracy, baseball might have to be destroyed. Edwards recommended that Flood hold a generalized antagonist to account for perversions in democracy: "we hope Curt Flood stays as cold-blooded as the Man — and the establishment. [...] So, Curt Flood, stay cold. Stick it to the Man, elbow deep — and twist it. If you kill baseball — it needs to die anyway."[73] Instead of urging improvement or modification, or anything else which might stabilize the volatility of revolt, Dick Edwards rapaciously welcomed the potential black divestiture of baseball if it meant realizing the genuine meaning of democracy — by sticking it to the Man.

Red Smith's rendering of the slave narrative had found the rich tropological territory of slavery, which in addition to the rejection of baseball "reform" also found other entry points in the black press. The Chicago *Defender*'s William Lloyd Hogan wrote a pair of columns in late 1969 (around the time that Flood was meeting with the players in Puerto Rico), that racialized a slave narrative for baseball's black manager debate. Of course, Jackie Robinson was campaigning openly for a black manager as well. But, Robinson would never have been caught saying the kinds of things Hogan said. Robinson surely saw the slow pace as regrettable, but also personally understood and advocated the pragmatism of patience. Hogan, in stark contrast, pointedly inserted

racism into the fabric of sport: "The racially bigoted powers that be in these two big businesses [baseball and football] should hang 'for white only' signs on the doors of their front offices. It's my strong conviction that something should be done about the brutal discrimination practices of these flesh-peddling exploiters of black athletes."[74] Harry Edwards had hailed speakers with "conviction," and Hogan advanced his freely. "Flesh-peddling" brought the body back to public debate in a manner that lent dramatic presence to racist exploitation.

Hogan, moreover, offered a form of political action modeled on the urgency of Harry Edwards' *Revolt*. Assessing the unfair advantages white baseball players enjoyed in a post-athletic labor market, Hogan exposed flaws in the rhetorics of race neutrality and political patience, wondering "how can [the black athlete's] problems not be peculiar to the color of his skin?"[75] The solution for Hogan lied in direct political pressure: "To get some action from the fat cat racial bigots who sit atop their thrones on their wide behinds and lord over the destinies of professional athletics, the black athlete must have a separate player's association, a black pressure group with a singular goal!"[76] As Curt Flood figured out in his encounter with Tom Haller, however, "black things" would not get very far in public disputes with baseball's establishment. Unimpressed, nonetheless, by the allure of colorblindness, Hogan suggested that black professional athletes take political cues from campus activists: "All the black athletes in pro sports should get a black association going to present their demands to the robber baron bigots. The black pro should take a page from the black college athletes' book, doing their thing against the bigotry and racial prejudice confronting them at every turn … make their commitment and go on strike."[77] Hogan's extension of the black athlete's "obligation" (as Arthur

Ashe had put it), resisted the compulsion to interracial coalition demanded by integrationism, reflected the strike and boycott approach of Harry Edwards, and ultimately attempted to capitalize on the potential energy produced by the new black athlete's volatility. About a month later in a commentary on Muhammad Ali, Hogan made the implications for black politics explicit:

> It takes more pride to obey your conscience, doing what you think is right in the face of detestable obnoxious majority who think you should bow down to it, bend to its will because it's the Great White Father.
>
> The black mechanical robots who go off to fight in Vietnam are stupid fools beyond the comprehension of any black man who has an ounce of gray matter … the war is here, within the confines of this racist nation. The Black Revolution has begun … it is being fought against poverty degradation, and for the right to maintain our self-respecting human dignity![78]

Like Edwards, Hogan was deliberate in his attempts to locate political differences within collective black identity. Furthermore, Hogan lent powerful salience to the expressivity of blackness in public address by placing the urgency of social change on the rhetorical registers of black self-respect and racial self-recognition. Not only was this an implied repudiation of nearly everything Jackie Robinson ever symbolized, but it also separated blacks "with an ounce of gray matter" from "mechanical black robots" — a choice of subject positions delimiting loyalties to correspondent and mutually exclusive modes of political expression.

Here it is worth recalling the history of Jackie Robinson's public address. In the weeks in 1949 following Robinson's testimony to HUAC, the *New York Times* (on its front pages instead of its sports pages) had pursued the Robeson/Robinson angle with

standard journalistic "objectivity," meaning that they covered, however superficially, support for each. In Chapter 4, I presented the letter from the Civil Rights Congress' William L. Paterson, who in repudiating Jackie's guarantees of black loyalty to American anti-communism had forced a choice similar to Hogan's: "Today the Negro is faced with a monumental task. He must elect to go with or against his oppressors here at home."[79] In the Cold War context of 1949, which included the notoriously anxious paranoia of HUAC, the choice was between the freedom fight of communism and the frustration of unkept racial promises. Communism had by no means been completely written out of the revolt of the black athlete (though its fifties iteration met with variable success in the seventies). Domestic opposition to the war in Vietnam, especially as characterized in and through Muhammad Ali, had provided for the reintroduction of a protest genre in sport characterized by the explicit injunction to choose sides. Similarly comparing an authentic freedom fight to the abusive sham of a shared, interracial American identity, Hogan put matters as bluntly to black folks as Patterson had twenty years earlier: *You're with us, or you're against us*. And, once again, this line of reasoning found its way back toward the faulty symbolism of Jackie Robinson. Hogan's indictment of those "bending to the will of the Great White Father" similarly helped frame Harry Edwards' synecdochic indictment of Jackie:

> For Jackie Robinson to challenge a white pitcher who may have bean-balled him or to go after a white fan who may have spit on him or insulted him was unthinkable. Such behavior would have branded him an "uppity nigger" or at the very least with having a chip on his shoulder. White athletes could sling bats and heckling spectators or rough up a pitcher suspected of throwing a spit ball at them, but not Jackie Robinson, the infinitely patient Negro. For had he lost control of himself, he also would

> have lost his job and Mr. Rickey's experiment would have failed. Jackie Robinson took it — and then returned to the locker room to wonder if it had really been worth it.[80]

Edwards represented Robinson's experiences within a narrative that evoked Flood's account of life in the minors in North Carolina, where he would cry himself to sleep at night. According to Edwards, the patience Robinson practiced in choosing false loyalties entailed his daily self-degradation. Branch Rickey had famously asked Jackie Robinson if he had the "guts to not fight back." For Harry Edwards (and Dick Edwards, and William Lloyd Hogan), choosing the right side and having guts meant doing the opposite of what Robinson had done and saying the opposite of what he had said.

The Black Scholar

In late 1969 and early 1970, a number of black newspapers published editorials alerting readers to the birth of a new scholarly publication called *The Black Scholar*. The first issue of the journal, founded by Dr. Nathan Hare, was released in January 1970, and for these black newspapers at least, its introduction heralded the possibility of something they had found elusive: a unified definition of black identity. In December 1969, the *Chicago Defender* traced the journal's origin to the the social fissures they labored to narrate on a weekly basis: "Out of the chimera of the ghetto convulsions and college campus tremors has come a scintillating, soul searching, edifying new journal, called The Black Scholar."[81] For the *Defender*, the contemporary moment was one of transformation and thus the appearance of *The Black Scholar* was ideally timed: "It comes at a propitious moment when the old social order which had tied the nation's feet to a virulent racist tradition, is undergoing drastic transformation."[82] Having diagnosed

the virus of racism as weakening, the *Defender* saw the hope of *The Black Scholar* as residing in its potential to effectuate "the conversion to the theology of racial equality."[83] "The pathology of American race prejudice," announced the *Defender*, "is yet an unplumbed phenomenon."[84] Whether *The Black Scholar* could produce a new "theology" was unclear, but the *Defender* was sure that "It remains the task of black intellectuals, unwavering in its dedication and pursuit of liberating aims, to convince doubting white America of the reality and substance of its black components. It is a process in which the black man himself will find a true definition of his own intrinsic values and place in the struggle for power."[85] With admittedly strident rhetoric, the *Defender*'s logic (which seemed to rehearse its constitutive self-understanding) amounted to this: *The Black Scholar* might produce performances of blackness that whites would take seriously, and through those performances reveal an empowering self-definition of black identity.

The *Los Angeles Sentinel* hoped similarly that *The Black Scholar* would "provide meaningful definitions of black existence," in what they called "a crucial period of divisiveness in the American Community — divisiveness between and within groups."[86] This recognition of divisiveness, however, was something the *Sentinel* welcomed only in the context of an aspiration that division might be overcome in the figure of the "black scholar," "defined as one who recognizes this divisiveness. He is a man of both thought and action, a whole man who thinks for his people and acts with them, one who honors the whole community, a man who sees the entire group all sharing the same experience of blackness, with its complexities and rewards."[87] Charged with the responsibility of representing black experience by "thinking for" and "acting with" the "entire group," the

black scholar in *The Black Scholar* might, on the view of the *Sentinel*, solve the crucial problem for the "'Black'-American Negro population," which "with or without design," "has historically lacked unity and definition."[88] Like the *Defender*, the *Sentinel* seemed to sense the movement from an old social order to a new one and place the appearance of *The Black Scholar* at the fulcrum of the transformation. Furthermore, both the *Defender* and *Sentinel* hoped that the journal would produce politically efficacious bonds of black unity out of frustrating internal tumult. Maybe such unity was desirable, and maybe such unity even organized *The Black Scholar* teleologically. But, for rhetors like Harry Edwards, many of whom used *The Black Scholar* as a forum in which to speak, the logic of performing politically effective forms of black unity for the benefit of whites was, in a word, repugnant.

Perhaps more fairly stated, the black press' citational gestures toward *The Black Scholar* contained more instability relative to the formation of collective black identity than their editorializing had admitted, or even probably had in mind. The meaning of blackness was in fact a matter of open debate in *The Black Scholar* in its early years (and beyond), but it was a debate that existed only in and through speakers making demands for *revised* meanings. Though an imperfect comparison, it might be fair to say that the black press attempted to assign themselves "agitation" and delegate "withdrawal and regroupment" to *The Black Scholar*. But, speakers in *The Black Scholar* simply did not regard their own discursive activities as purely academic or in any way self-sealed. While speakers in black newspapers addressed black audiences with a self-consciousness of how blackness was being represented to whites, speakers in *The Black Scholar* addressed black audiences with a self-consciousness of how blackness was being

represented to *itself*. And although this sounds in theory like Nancy Fraser's "withdrawal and regroupment," the placement of the political meaning of blackness onto a public agenda depended on a rhetoric that would separate truth from lies *for the purpose* of authenticating agitational activities. They may have been glad to hear that the *Defender* and *Sentinel* were on their side, but, especially for Harry Edwards, unity was a knot of complicity to be diligently untangled before it was a hope to be rendered. False hope, after all, seemed to be his most formidable opponent. That is not to say that Edwards (and just about everyone else) failed to claim the voice of the masses, but *The Black Scholar*, like *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, freely addressed white audiences with hostility in order to perform revelations about liberalism, tokenism, and indignity. Revelation emerged only from internal division, and the kind of unity *The Black Scholar* held in its imagination bore little resemblance to the kind being both beckoned and asserted in black newspapers.[89]

Getting from *The Black Scholar* to *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, however, is not a self-evident move, and pausing on it presents a minor historiographic puzzle worth mentioning. Two years into its existence and after its mention in the *Defender* and *Sentinel*, in November 1971, *The Black Scholar* ran an issue devoted almost exclusively to an elaboration of the black athlete. Harry Edwards contributed an essay on "The Sources of Black Athletic Superiority,"[90] which, along with founder Nathan Hare's piece on prizefighting and Charles Aikens' article on Curt Flood (more on that in a moment), advanced an understanding of black athletes heavily informed by what came to be known as the "sociology of sport." Having said that, the third article in the issue was titled "The Emergence of the Black Athlete in America,"[91] with Michael Govan listed as author.

Identified as "a teacher at Havenscourt Junior High School in Oakland, California," and a graduate of the black studies program at California State-Hayward, Govan drew heavy influence from Edwards' *Revolt*. The influence was so evident, in fact, that one suspects (especially through the potential California bay-area connections) that Edwards probably gave (or solicited his) explicit permission for a reprint of the first three chapters of *Revolt* under Govan's name. It is impossible to know if this occurred because *The Black Scholar* was trying to create the impression that Edwards' single voice was instead many, but in Govan's piece, massive swaths of text (nearly the entire essay) were copied from *Revolt* without any meaningful paraphrase. Of Govan's twenty-nine footnotes, nineteen cited *Revolt*, and the remaining ten cited that which *Revolt* had cited to make the same point — verbatim. It seems that Govan's piece was, essentially, a partially masked attempt to directly insert *Revolt* into paired circulation with *The Black Scholar* by bypassing the cumbersome and unpredictable step of *mere* citation. *Revolt* represented, in other words, precisely what *The Black Scholar* wanted participating in its "kind of scene."[92]

Govan's piece, which was quite literally Edwards' under a different name, excerpted the major substance of *Revolt*'s first three chapters. In *Revolt*, however, those three chapters had attempted to both contextualize and discursively formalize a recent history of black athletic protest (the rest of the text was filled with press clippings, letters of support and derision, photographs, and appendices — the "history itself," one might say). *Revolt* shaped this history with Edwards' account of important events. For instance, on November 23, 1967, two hundred athletes convened at a Black Youth Conference in Los Angeles into a boycott workshop chaired by Harry Edwards. They

voted unanimously on a draft resolution to boycott any individual competitions at the following year's Mexico City Olympics that included athletes from Rhodesia or South Africa. According to Edwards, "The evening newspaper and television and radio news and sports shows clearly registered the impact the resolutions had on the white establishment and its Negro flunkies."[93] It turned out that many national newspapers had covered the meeting in the kind of catastrophic terms that might have made baseball owners blush: "Mob Rule in Los Angeles: 200 Negroes Vote Unanimously to Boycott Games,"[94] proclaimed a New York *Daily News* headline. Edwards went on to list a number of sensationalized headlines, each of which had given the impression that a rowdy group of black misanthropes had decided to reject the games in their entirety. Opportunistically sensing the potentially illuminating effect of "the white establishment's" overreaction, Edwards initiated construction on an Olympic Committee for Human Rights (OCHR) designed to both demystify establishment rhetoric and express a coherent series of principles and observations.

Harry Edwards and the Olympic Project for Human Rights

From the beginning of the project, Edwards was careful and deliberate in his attempts to secure the legitimacy of his organization, and sometimes explicitly so. About three weeks after the vote in Los Angeles, Edwards held a meeting with "as many recognized leaders as possible," in order to "strengthen the forces behind the Olympic Project for Human Rights [OPHR]."[95] Those in attendance were Edwards, Louis Lomax, Floyd McKissick, and Martin Luther King, Jr[96], a recognizable crew, to be certain. Moreover, Edwards took extra effort to ensure (and explain) that the OPHR would be oriented with the proper philosophical disposition: "Leaders of other organizations that

we regarded as primarily 'Negro oriented,' such as the Urban League and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, we purposely avoided."[97] Once again separating revolutionaries from sell-outs, Edwards reinforced the distinction between Negro-ness and blackness operant in his alternate racial typology; "Negro flunkies" would *not* speak for them. Lomax, King, and McKissick each "agreed to become formal advisors."[98] The meeting generated a list of six demands, including the restoration of Muhammad Ali's title, the firing of "the anti-semitic and anti-black personality Avery Brundage,"[99] official action against South Africa and Rhodesia, and the appointment of blacks to prominent coaching and policy-making positions on the 1968 US Olympic team. Those were the demands, and though the OPHR had yet to discover useful points of leverage, Edwards was sure in *Revolt* to point out that a complete black boycott of the 1968 Olympics was plausible. The idea, he said, had come from King, who according to Edwards had actually advocated deepening the protest's commitment level: "Dr. King stated that perhaps the conditions of race relations in the United States today demanded a total boycott of the Olympic games by black people for little else in the way of non-violent protest was left to them."[100] This telling of history in *Revolt* worked, in essence, to announce the authenticity and legitimacy of the OPHR.

A specter, then, was haunting sport? The mawkish reference to Marx's Communist Manifesto is apt from at least one critical perspective. Donald Clark Hodges argues that the Manifesto intended to persuade the infamous "specter" that it in fact had a mass and density that it really did not.[101] More than it reflected any genuine trend toward unity among revolutionary groups in 19th century Europe, the Manifesto attempted to reveal points of thematic and ideological unity spread among factionalized revolutionary

organizations. *Revolt*, looking back, reads the same way, especially if one considers that it was, essentially, the OPHR's last official communicative act, not its first. Douglass Hartmann argues that the ultimate failure to enact a proper boycott, and the consequent internal dissension among athletes in Mexico City, rendered the OPHR a flop through the lenses of the national news media. Edwards would release another version of *Revolt* in 1970 (virtually unchanged from the first), and then spend most of his time in academic circles, publishing *Sociology of Sport* in 1972. Hartmann, however, refuses to settle on this version of Edwards' story, insisting that "such a disappointing ending to the story, is as inaccurate as it is unsatisfying."[102]

Hartmann points to a number of features of the OPHR's "legacy," such as the enduring image of John Carlos and Tommie Smith's medal-stand protest as a "contested terrain," the prosecution of lingering struggles (like Curt Flood's), destabilized notions of labor and national identities set in motion by a new orientation toward "human rights," and the enactment of Title IX, which presumably initiated a process by which gender equality could be achieved in sport.[103] In my view, Hartmann's discovery of a vibrant and enduring Edwards "legacy" bespeaks the ways in which Edwards made a new political vocabulary of sport publicly expressible. Hartmann places a large emphasis on "style," noting Edwards' tendency to appear, like the Panthers often did, in dark sunglasses and a beret.[104] Edwards' public address certainly evinced the desire to hang with the right kind of radicals, but this also entailed innovative rhetorical strategies designed to both divide blackness from the inside-out and reverse the symbolic power of integration. *Revolt* attempted to reconstitute sport as a publicly mediated political experience, moving it from its sacrosanct position in dominant progress narratives to a

dominant position in an oppositional narrative inflected, above all, by what it meant to be black. From reflecting blackness to refracting it, as it were, outmoded systems of representation were under assault.

In 1969, Edwards' announcement of the "athletic revolt" amounted, then, to a synthetically articulated invitation to action motivated by three basic factors: deep resentment over continued racial violence, a presumably mounting sentiment of race-conscious obligation among black athletes, and the emergent recognition that the racial meritocracy of sport was a depressing, fitful sham that unfortunate black athletes had been used to perpetuate. In *Revolt*'s introduction, Edwards explained:

> The athletic revolt springs from a disgust and dissatisfaction with the same racist germ that infected the warped minds responsible for the bomb murders of four black girls as they prayed in a Birmingham, Alabama church and that conceived and carried out the murders of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Medgar Evers, among a multitude of others. The revolt of the black athlete arises also from his new awareness of his responsibilities in an increasingly more desperate, violent, and unstable America. He is for the first time reacting in a human and masculine[105] fashion to the disparities between the heady artificial world of newspaper clippings, photographers, and screaming spectators and the real world of degradation, humiliation, and horror that confronts the overwhelming majority of Afro-Americans. An even more immediate call to arms for many black athletes has been their realization that once their athletic abilities are impaired by age or injury, only the ghetto beckons and they are doomed once again to the faceless, hopeless, ignominious existence they had supposedly forever left behind them.[106]

Edwards explicated that the source of the revolt as a kind of dissatisfaction with both establishment conservatism and the errors of gradual reform. Waiting was no longer possible in a "desperate, violent, and unstable America." Summoning the symbolism of recent martyrs, Edwards lent presence to the presumably unmediated realities of daily

black experience. And in sport specifically, the disparate social conditions and economic opportunities afforded to black and white athletes indexed the dehumanized relation on which the use and abuse of black athletes was predicated, as did the obtuse persistence of false hope.

Edwards' announcement enabled another inversion of Jackie Robinson. In Chapter 4, I argued that Robinson's post-World War II symbolism articulated to a line of reasoning used persuasively by black war veterans: black sacrifice for the nation demonstrated black investment in the nation, and their mistreatment upon return home warranted the timeliness of a political solution. After having fought for freedom, asked black soldiers, shouldn't freedom be practiced at home? As a rhetorical question that urged public consideration of the common investments — black and white — made in American success, integration was pressed into political service, and Jackie Robinson, himself an Army veteran, and Rosa Parks before there was a "Rosa Parks," was pressed into symbolic service. For Edwards, the athletes who had followed Jackie Robinson into the fight for inclusion were disillusioned, dispirited, and dehumanized by the actual experience of racial integration. Just as black soldiers had identified hypocrisy in post-War America, Edwards identified hypocrisy in integration. *Revolt* classified integration as a mere invitation to indignity, a complicit stride into dehumanization. After having gained access to sport, asked Edwards, shouldn't it resemble the meritocracy it promised? Perhaps it should have, but Edwards offered a different reality: a "faceless, hopeless, ignominious existence." Though Edwards was as kind as possible to him throughout *Revolt*, the reversal of integration implicitly put Jackie Robinson on trial for collaborating with the enemy.

Presciently anticipating the worries of contemporary critics[107] regarding the damaging allure of sports as a model of fast success among black youth, Edwards took aim at the myths surrounding black athletic achievements, which depended on the dehumanization of the machine-like black athletic body: "So thoroughly has this myth been perpetuated that athletic excellence, even today, looms second only to education as a prescribed path for blacks to follow in escaping the humiliations and drudgery of their "second-class" citizenship. But what has integration really meant to the black athlete? What has this move really meant psychologically, socially, and educationally for him? Is the Afro American athlete significantly better off in predominantly white schools than he was in all black institutions?"[108] The integration of college and professional sports had, on Edwards' view, created a false spectacle that merely invited indignity and mistreatment, and so his line of questioning worked to challenge dominant assumptions about the benefits of racial integration.

Integration & Loyalty, "From a Black Point of View"

In a December 1969 *Amsterdam News* column (a serial titled "From a Black Point Of View"), under the headline "Is Integration Necessary?," Floyd McKissick, who had served in an official advisory role to the OPHR, doubted integration in no uncertain terms. The consequence of integration, asserted McKissick, was to "reinforce the myth of white racial superiority."[109] Using integrated education as an example, McKissick argued that "Helpless Black children in a white dominated classroom, taught from white-oriented textbooks, by a white, middle-class teacher have slight chance of developing strong, assertive, Black-oriented personalities."[110] Moreover, as McKissick found promise in Ben Holman, Director of the Justice Department's Community Relations

Service, he worried about how Holman's similar doubts about integration, though representative of "both Black and white folks," would "offend some middle-class, still Negroes."[111] After acknowledging his inability to persuade middle-class "Negroes," McKissick asserted the voice of the masses: "[Holman] said if he had children, he would not want them put on some 'damn bus' and sent off to 'integrate' a hostile white community. The fact that his words reflect the prevailing opinion in our community is indisputably true. Black people never have wanted to go to white schools to be with or near white folks."[112] The real goal of early integration efforts, said McKissick, was to ensure the equitable distribution of government resources, and "as the Black community has increased in political power, it has correctly perceived that a better route to our goal is to bring the money and resources to our own community."[113] McKissick's plan, one could argue, was in retrospect just as damning as integration; it rendered black politics available for co-option by Nixon's "Black Capitalism."[114] Be that as it may, McKissick closed by describing Holman as a "vanguard member" of "this cleansing and refreshing reformation," and by appealing to the same divisions in black identity preferred by Harry Edwards — and Malcolm X: "This is the kind of position that Black professionals and leaders need to take. The day of the house nigger who spends his life trying to get close to the white boss man is fast coming to a close."[115]

In *Revolt*, Edwards had offered the same critique in sport and made similarly foreboding claims about the shifting meaning and direction of black politics. Integration on campus had exposed college athletes to the indignities of institutional racism: "Perhaps the grimmest, most dehumanizing experience for black athletes arise from the dismal and repressive social conditions they encounter on white campuses. Particularly

relevant here are the restrictions — formal and informal — involving participation in fraternity and sorority life, school dances, parties, and decisions affecting utilization of fees and funds."[116] On this view, black athletes on campus were simply invited into systematic alienation. In addition, Edwards rendered the dehumanizing circumstances of integration dramatically: "The black athlete on the white-dominated college campus, then, is typically exploited, abused, dehumanized, and cast aside in much the same manner as a worn basketball. His lot from that point on does not differ greatly from that of any other Afro-American. His life is riddled with insults, humiliations, and all other manner of degrading experiences."[117] Edwards' rendering offered, in many ways, a better context for understanding the experience of Curt Flood, who expressed resentment about a year later in *The Way It Is* over having been treated like "a used bottle cap," or an "IBM card." The press' response (both "Negro" and "white establishment" press, on Edwards' view), when it was not Broeg's offensive declaration that Flood was too rich to be insulted, was to say that Flood may have a point and so baseball should, once again, be reformed. But, Edwards removed the problem of dehumanization from the compromising temporality[118] of press coverage and slowed the narrative down to a social fact structured into black experience. "Worn basketball," "used car," "insult," "humiliation," "dehumanization": these, in *Revolt*, were the masses' experiences with integration.

When Edwards pivoted from the sociology of amateur athletics to his analysis of professional sport, the dehumanization problem didn't disappear, it intensified. "By and large, the same humiliations and degradations that plague the athletic careers of black amateurs also haunt black professionals,"[119] he said. Then, Edwards moved to a point

that Curt Flood had tried to make repeatedly: "All professional athletes — black and white — are officially and formally classified as property. They exist to make money for the club owners."[120] Flood knew this, and persisted with it publicly, often to rolling eyes and patronizing pats on the shoulder, even from those who claimed to be on his side. Of course, Flood used this point — "all players, black and white" — to demonstrate the colorblindness of his cause so Tom Haller (and the political ethos for which he stood) would buy into its justness. Edwards, in identifying the players as "official property," took a different turn with this move, however. All players may exist in a dehumanizing relationship to owners as human capital, "But here the similarities between black and white professionals cease. Racism and discrimination are the exclusive lot of the black professional. And, unlike the amateur scene, practitioners of hate are seldom subtle."[121] Edwards continued with a list of indignities, the *practice of hate*, if you will, precipitated by the integration of professional sport: black athletes earned smaller salaries than whites despite superior or equal achievement, blacks athletes were excluded from the lucrative endorsement deals that white athletes found easily through sport, and the accommodations of black athletes (both on the road and at home) were degrading in comparison to those available to whites. After the basic structural classification of professional sport as intrinsically dehumanizing, the social life of the black athlete, as presented by Edwards, was *experienced as* a piece of property. White athletes and black athletes, in other words, both *were* property, but only black athletes were *treated* as such. As Curt Flood may have seen it, as well, *black* athletes were still slaves.

The New York Times, *The Sporting News*, and the black press (with rare exception), each saw the slave as nothing more than a sensitive black man's way of

putting things. But, *Revolt* enacted a way of putting things that referenced, by political necessity, the bodily facts of daily experience. Blackness could not even be quarantined into the mind; Edwards identification of the white "black sports writer," had proven that much. Instead, blackness structured a field of experiences taken by Edwards and others — possibly even Curt Flood — to be constitutive of one's social and political existence. The black press, on the whole, oriented themselves rhetorically according to supposition that the meaning of blackness was damaging and regrettable. Their attempts to revise the meaning of blackness ran through the logic of inclusion, rendering the revised black public subject, paradoxically, both colorblind and hoping for the day when race would disappear. This is not to say that Flood would have been better off by taking Edwards' turn toward racial expressivity. Indeed, it is probably fairer to say that he never would have received the symbolic and financial support of the Player's Association that came in Puerto Rico in December 1969. What if Curt Flood, as he put it in *The Way It Is*, had instead "exhausted the point" about race in that meeting? Robert Brown Elliott quotations were not going to impress Tom Haller or any other baseball player who heard echoes of Stokely Carmichael in his voice. There were legal bills to be paid, after all. The counterfactual may be academic, but the *Revolt* approach to the significance of blackness, for Curt Flood, would have been self-marginalizing and self-defeating. Regardless of how well his case fit within the circulatory space imagined and projected by Harry Edwards, participating in its economy with a full commitment to its discursive resources was an efficient route only to personal bankruptcy, a fate that befell Flood nevertheless.

Put differently, Curt Flood's public address bespoke a doomed attempt to defer choice in a political context increasingly characterized by the imperative to declare one's race loyalties. On the one hand, the interconnected fates of organized labor, anti-trust law, the federal court system, and the modernization of sport's economic framework were crucial to his success. Here, no one would take "slavery" seriously.[122] On the other hand, Harry Edwards, who had called all that "the establishment," already took slavery, and its ability to describe the dehumanization of black folks in integration, very seriously. The "revolt of the black athlete," however, as imagined by Edwards, Floyd McKissick, and others, demanded a kind of loyalty to blackness that Curt Flood could not give without imperiling himself even further. In *Revolt*, mere outspokenness was not enough. In contrast to the cobbled ethos of black athletic activism offered on countless occasions in black newspapers (and into which Flood was frequently inserted between 1970 and 1972), Edwards insisted that *what* one said mattered a great deal. The facts of one's speaking disclosed an obvious black intellect hidden by historically degrading stereotypes, a welcome development, according to Edwards — but insufficient: "Robert Kennedy with Rosy Grier and Rafer Johnson, Hubert H. Humphrey with Ralph Metcalf, Richard Nixon with Wilt Chamberlain, and Nelson Rockefeller with Jackie Robinson attest that the stupid, plow-jack stereotype of the black athlete is no more. Whether they made a truly significant contribution to black progress or merely prostituted their athletic ability for the sake of other aims is a matter of keen debate among politically conscious blacks."[123] As Edwards own mini-list of speaking athletes developed, it seemed that the only way to be sure that blackness was operating in the service of blacks was to be on the

alert for sell-outs; intellect alone did not make a political consciousness. These men would have to choose.

About a week before Flood attended the Puerto Rico meeting in December 1969, McKissick opined on the significance of black athletes to contemporaneous struggles for racial justice in an *Amsterdam News* column. Coming one week before he attacked the wisdom of integration in the same space, and extending on themes formalized in *Revolt,* McKissick announced that "a Black athlete is expected to play ball like a white man, but live like a Black man in a white world."[124] McKissick painted a portrait of the black athletic revolt which, like Edwards, identified the moment as a turning point:

> The white public has no problem loving the docile, semi-literate Black athlete who through his strength and coordination can outrun, outhit, and outshine his white competitor. He can be fitted into the racial myth. Black folks are supposed to be able to run, jump, and throw balls. And, indeed we can! What we are not supposed to do, however, is stand toe-to-toe and eyeball-to-eyeball to a white racist and tell him to go to hell. Young, Black athletes who are doing just that are being faced with all kinds of threats, recriminations, and criticisms. The whites clearly ain't ready. They don't know how to deal with this kind of Black man.[125]

"This kind of Black man," the black athletic revolutionary, enacted the truth of black intellect in resisting the white establishment. Like Edwards, McKissick assailed the social ostracism that black athletes experienced on campus, recognized the symbolic significance of Carlos and Smith's protest in Mexico City, and argued that Muhammad Ali's refusal to be drafted into the Vietnam war "added several inches to the stature of the Black athlete in this country."[126] In *Revolt*, Edwards had called Ali "*the saint of this*

revolution in sports," for having "maintained and enhanced the most crucial factor in the minds of black people anywhere — black dignity."[127]

McKissick' spoke a language of "manhood and dignity,"[128] characteristic of both Harry Edwards' injunction to a revolutionary social consciousness and the notion of humanism that underpinned much of Flood's rhetorical performance in *The Way It Is*.[129] Despite the obvious extent of the thematic, tropological, and argumentative commonplaces between Edwards, Flood, and McKissick, the consequential and provocative dimension of McKissick's observation resided in its concomitant announcement of how revolutionary forces were aligning: "Frequently, the Black athlete is torn between two loyalties — to the team or to his Black sisters and brothers who sometimes demand that they participate in the white university's athletic program, or that he use his influence to change the school's racial policies and practices. The number who speak out against racism is increasing rapidly."[130] Though offered in the context of university athletics, McKissick explained that black athletes acting on their consciences must often do so at the expense of their "team." The conflict became especially acute, asserted McKissick, when collegiate athletes considered their prospects in professional sport:

> The white press is bemoaning the fact that these men are risking future professional careers, that they are causing white coaches to hire fewer Black players, and they are jeopardizing their own positions on the team. White America would undoubtedly be more comfortable with the inarticulate, humble Black athlete who would depend upon the good white man to look out for his interest. It is clear that the country is not ready for the independent, fearless, militant athlete ready to make whatever sacrifice necessary to protect his own manhood and to liberate and uphold the honor of his people.[131]

For McKissick, the choice, though difficult, was clear; liberty and honor depend on the type of independent black militance that both justified sacrifice morally and made sacrifice rewarding politically. In an idiom that evoked Flood's case — replete with all of the evocative rhetorical indicators, "dignity," "manhood," "independence," "sacrifice" — McKissick valorized the political ethos of the new black athlete not merely for the willingness to speak, but for the willingness to settle inevitably torn loyalties on the side of racial justice.

Radicalizing Curt Flood

Perhaps, then, there should be little wonder that there were very few extended elaborations of Flood's case expressed in the idiom of *Revolt*. As I have argued, Curt Flood could offer only a diluted form of black loyalty, a generalized loyalty immanent in his blackness, but purposefully disarticulated from the specifics of the cause, simultaneous facts which complicated his uptake everywhere. Such complications, however, did not mean that Flood lacked *Revolt*-oriented advocacy completely. In the same issue of *The Black Scholar* in which Govan's reiteration of *Revolt* appeared, there also appeared an essay titled, "The Struggle Of Curt Flood," by Charles Aikens, listed as a former professional baseball player in the Baltimore Orioles organization in the early sixties, and a graduate student in journalism at California-Berkeley. If there were any question that Flood's story, like in *The Way It Is*, could not be modulated by racialized affect (lest one stray from the "facts"), Aikens erased that pretense in the opening paragraphs of his essay, which recounted the author's reaction upon first hearing of Flood's lawsuit: "I looked at the paper, angrily tossing it to the floor. I could not eat

dinner that evening following work. Flood felt the same way I'd felt seven years earlier after finding out I was an indentured servant bound by the reserve clause."[132] Aikens' offered his own feelings of disgust as confirmation of Flood's, rendered from within a black player's experience in baseball under the reserve clause regime. Flood had "consulted a beer" upon waking up the the day he was traded, but Aikens had lost his appetite completely just hearing about it.

Tellingly, Aikens saw reform rhetoric as a fraud. Recalling Flood's last day in a Major League uniform, in which Washington Senator manager Ted Williams had used a pinch-fielder to replace Flood in centerfield mid-inning,[133] Aikens put the embarrassing episode in the pervasive context of baseball's structural condition of slavery: "The substitution [in centerfield] also followed Judge Ben Cooper's August 12, 1970 ruling which said that the reserve clause Curt Flood was fighting should be modified by the players and owners. This was like telling the slavemasters that they should modify slavery. The slaves and any fool knew that couldn't happen."[134] Aikens' deep suspicion of reformist reasoning accompanied his deployment of the slave as a tropological force in his representation of the power relations shaping Flood's experience. Ted Williams' "benching of Flood put him in the position of the slave overseer who flogged the rebellious slave by the embarrassment of a benching as he ran toward the outfield for the next inning."[135] And, in the spirit of Edward's instinct to demystify the sensationalism of the news, Aikens quoted a headline without citation, reading "Flood Hits Famine: Just One of Nats Many Headaches."[136] To be fair to the anonymous headline writer, Flood was playing very poorly (simply living up to his reputation for slow starts, insisted Aikens), and he was not Washington's only problem. The team was dreadful.[137]

Nonetheless, Aikens announced, "This was a blatantly racist headline," adding, "This indicates how writers can place the blame for a team's failure on a particular ballplayer who isn't liked because he is a rebel."[138] Perhaps positioning himself as one of Edwards' "black sports reporters," Aikens in many respects enacted the kind of sports journalism Edwards had endorsed in *Revolt* and Govan had repeated in the *Revolt* excerpt in the same *The Black Scholar*. Telling the truth about black experience in sport, for Aikens, entailed an eye to the functioning of race in those experiences. Once establishing the fitness of the slave narrative to Flood's case, Aikens disclosed their shared experiences with a "black sports reporter's" inflection.

"[Flood] contended he was being sold as 'chattel' and being made to word as a 'slave,'" explained Aikens, who used this observation to offer a comparison that Flood had also presented: "Flood's suit is mindful of the Dred Scott decision in 1857 (the same year organized baseball clubs started). Chief Justice Roger B. Taney ruled against Scott, a slave, saying that blacks could not be citizens of the United States because they formed no part of 'the people' referred to in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and had 'no rights which white men were bound to respect.'"[139] The narrative that followed from the fact of Flood's slavery had little to do with abstractions — it instead illuminated its principled ground by weaving the implications of slavery into a representation of Aikens' (and by extension, Flood's) experience with blackness. Claiming to have seen Flood play in front of scouts in Oakland's sandlots, Aikens noticed, "a gravel voiced man standing behind the backdrop, who said, "Them scouts up there in the stands are watching that boy. He's going to be another Jackie Robinson."[140]

Once again casting the symbolic influence of Jackie Robinson into doubt, Aikens recalled,

> I looked across to the stands behind the first base side of the dugout and saw two well-tanned men who looked different from the usual pale-faced whites who lived in West Oakland or came there to work. They reminded me of plantation owners coming to buy slaves at a slave auction. I saw them jotting down information in the small notebooks they had, so I curiously went over to see what they were up to. One told the other, "That kid Flood can do everything."[141]

As Aikens developed the scene, which was as vivid as a Hollywood film, he elaborated through this conversation with white scouts a form of interaction with whites that he would later critique as dehumanizing:

> "Do you see anyone who might make some money?," I said.
> "Yea," the cigar smoking one said, "that kid [Frank] Robinson might make some dough one day if he keeps his nose clean."
> "You mean a baseball player has to keep his nose clean to play baseball?"
> "Yea kid, if a player stays out of trouble with the law and is a nice boy and don't ask too many questions, he might be able to get a chance and go out and play for money."
> "Flood is also a good-looking player along with that catcher (Gonder). But you can't tell what might happen to a youngster who grows up in this area."
> "Whut you mean."
> "I mean, if a player chases women all the time he might not be able to play ball like we want him to. He also has to stay in at night and keep out of night clubs at late hours."
> "Um gonna be a ballplayer one day," I said.
> "Ok — Ok kid, be anything you want to be but would you leave us alone so we can watch Flood hit."[142]

Obviously, it is impossible to know if this transcript is entirely accurate, but faithfulness to the facts was not Aikens' point in sharing it. Keeping one's mouth shut, keeping one's nose clean, being a nice boy: these were the conditions, on Aikens' account, of a young black player's entry into baseball. With the "nice boy" alluding opaquely to Jackie Robinson once again, this would be a story with a much different ending.

Aikens returned to an account of his own experience in Oakland's black ghetto, which included success on the sandlots and trouble in the streets. Remembering a brief stint in juvenile detention following an accusation of "purse-snatching," Aikens — like Flood before him in North Carolina — had begun to receive revelations. "That horrible experience of being caged up like an animal and seeing a juvenile hall almost full of blacks had a lasting effect on me and my approach toward life and freedom."[143] Baseball, he hoped, just as Flood had hoped, would provide him with a path out of squalor. But, such a path, as the conversation with the scouts had hinted, was circumscribed by the way in which the expression one's black identity would have to be muted, limited, or abandoned. Remembering stories told by Oakland sandlot heroes returning from the majors (like black soldiers returning from World War II?), Aikens continued with his disclosure:

> They were bitter because they felt that the white people in control of professional baseball clubs eliminated any black who did not fit into the humble role of a dumb, stupid know-nothing ballplayer who would go out and break his neck, sweating like a slave in a cotton field, in order to get an advancement to the majors. I realized that I could not be my usual arrogant self if I ever got the opportunity to play professional baseball because scouts usually frowned when you talked to them like you had sense or knew the value you would be to the club.[144]

With slavery analogizing not the abstract economic relation contained in the reserve clause, but instead the experiential features of racialized life in baseball, painted here as a sporting plantation, Aikens figured the intelligence that he possessed and that Harry Edwards revered would be criminalized through his blackness. The "bitter pill of accommodation" thrust in the face of black athletes (on the view of Edwards), found expression here in Aikens' slave narrative as a refusal of blackness to one's sense of self, as a form of disembodied confinement damaging not only to one's abilities, but also of one's confidence and voice.

Like Edwards had done, Aikens listed some of the the economic inequities black baseball players faced, including those influencing salary negotiations and access to endorsement deals. He lamented, "when it came to negotiating, they [black players] were all unprepared to deal with the racist white man who was in control of the dollar bills and could not bargain on an equal level as white players could."[145] But, economic analysis was not Aikens' point. As his story moved toward a conclusion, it acquired a rhetorical shape similar to Flood's *The Way It Is* in at least one other respect. Speaking in a voice seemingly positioned behind the veil of race, Aikens announced a final awakening occasioned by having observed years of racial inequality in integrated sport:

> I was awakened to the facts of life about the intelligent black athlete in professional baseball. Poor, racist, white baseball, managers and scouts despised the intelligent black, and he was the first to be put on the release roster, no matter how good his ability. Other intelligent blacks from the Oakland area like Curt Motton and Tommy Harper were able to remain in uniform because they managed to act humble. Motten[146] acted as if he didn't know A from Z when he was coming up in the minor leagues. Serious black guys like Alex Johnson always got labeled strange, distant, or as of late, rebellious.[147]

Fully awakened to the racial realities of sport, Aikens saw how baseball punished black intelligence and rewarded black humility, life-denying circumstances which, in the context of both the revolt of the black athlete and the *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, were fated for reversal — provided the right voices spoke blackness into politics. In the end, then, it was time to insert Flood back into the racialized social order:

> Today, Curt Flood and other black athletes are hip to the white sports establishment's game. Black athletes are no longer willing to play by the racists' rules. Flood's suit is among many events in the black struggle that have heightened awareness of a brutal system where people are still treated as "chattel," although slavery was supposed to have ended over 100 years ago. The Curt Floods, the Alex Johnsons and Duane Thomases form the vanguard of the recent emergence of the militant black athlete who is striving to attain human rights and equal opportunities in the sports world.[148]

With a final rhetorical gesture to Edwards and Govan, Aikens placed Curt Flood at the center of the "emergence of the black athlete"[149] destined to transform sport not just from an old economic order to a new one, but instead from a dehumanizing plantation into the space of freedom and opportunity that had often been promised. In Aikens' account of Flood, race was hardly "beside the point." Black experience had permitted a way of putting things that revealed not only the cold economic analogy to slavery to be found in the reserve system, but also its consequences for black experience. From behind a racial veil, Aikens narrativized the master/slave relationship in dehumanizing detail and assigned Curt Flood, the protagonist in this performance of *Revolt*'s idiom, to the revolutionary vanguard.

These features of Aikens' essay evince its rehearsal of the Harry Edwards model of public address: Beginning with a racialized identification with Curt Flood expressed in the loss of his appetite, Aikens suspected reform rhetoric of being disingenuous and described the experiential texture of the player/manager relationship; both occurred through figure of the slave — slavemasters were liars and Ted Williams was their cruel overseer. As Aikens disclosed the facts of black experience in baseball, he read race into dominant media representations like one of Edwards' "black sports reporters." Dred Scott, for Aikens (as he had for Flood), illuminated the official status of baseball players as slaves, a fact which led Aikens not toward economic analogues and consternation about baseball's legal troubles, but instead toward a revised narration of black experience in integrated baseball. Revealing, like Flood, what racism sounded like through allegorical memories of conversations with snarling white authority figures, Aikens identified the master/slave relationship as one grounded in the degradation of the slave. The likelihood that Aikens' dialog was idealized purposefully, and not a product of precise memory, demonstrates the importance of black corporeality and affect to the truth of his insights. Operating as a point of articulation between Edwards and Flood, "The Struggle of Curt Flood" depended on what the experience of blackness meant and on how blackness actually felt in integration's dehumanizing spaces.

Of What Value *Is* Martyrdom?

For some, Curt Flood may have been on the vanguard, but only revolutions need vanguards. Hardly revolutionaries, the black press instead went looking for "voices," and in Flood found one that helped them find an active role in an epochal shift. The "new black athlete" was a reality, to be sure. Its identity, and the meaning of the shift,

would be defined very differently on their pages than in *Revolt*, which operated as not much more than a rhetorical shadow, a looming, murky figure that activated their inclination to constitute themselves as the agents of black activism. The latest addition to the list, Curt Flood, was sure to get their support. Apart from a handful of rhetorical gestures, Flood symbolized a new age of sport's economic modernization, a development crucial to protecting its availability for a form of symbolic representation carefully hewed through integration and, thus, its position as a crucible of social progress. The new age would be, hopefully, a colorblind one, and Flood's protest showed how a man did not need his blackness to fight for a universal freedom. After all, it was "poetic justice," that "baseball's Abraham Lincoln," would set the white folks free, too. That, of course, is not at all what happened. The Supreme Court awarded owners an awkward victory, declaring baseball seemingly subject to anit-trust laws, but bound by Congress' "positive inaction" to a nearly century-old loophole in federal law, otherwise known as baseball's "anti-trust exemption," repealed partially in 1997, with the passage of the Curt Flood Act. As it were, baseball players achieved free agency, but the Abraham Lincolns in question offered no *poesis* at all. Dave McNally and Andy Messersmith were not "new black athletes."

But, during the Spring of 1972, with Flood out of baseball and awaiting the Court's ruling, Marvin Miller and the Players' Association engaged in their first labor strike. A number of factors drove the dispute, but by the time eighty-six April games had been cancelled, the owners had agreed to add $500,000 to the existing $5.5 million player pension fund.[150] On December 31, 1972, the collective bargaining agreement between players and owners expired, and a new three year labor agreement had been negotiated.

Among the gains for the Players Association were: salary arbitration for any player with two years of service, reduced maximum salary cuts from one year to the next, and perhaps most importantly, the adoption of the "10-and-5" rule, which allowed any player with a total of ten years of service in the league, provided that the last five had been with one team, to veto any trade. For the first time in baseball history, some players had earned the right to determine their movement between baseball's clubs.[151] Flood would have been among them.

When, in March 1973, the Afro-American wondered about the value of Flood's martyrdom, they took stock of the "10-and-5" rule, and lamented what they believed players would soon forget: "For this latter concession by the owners, the players owe a debt of gratitude to a man who, after only two years, is virtually forgotten."[152] Curt Flood, said the editors, sacrificed his career "in order to battle singlehandedly against the reserve clause restriction that impales a player to the whim of a club which holds his contract."[153] The editorial emphasized the loneliness of Flood's fight, pilloried the Players' Association's reluctance to take dramatic symbolic action, and identified Flood as a martyr who gained nothing personally. Despite all that, the professed consequence of his martyrdom was to empower the evolving labor organization and help to secure for it gains that otherwise could not have been achieved without Flood's sacrifice.

This theme was well understood by the Pittsburgh *Courier*'s Ric Roberts in February 1970, only a few weeks after Flood had filed suit in federal court. Unlike most observers of his case, however, Roberts understood Flood's problem in terms of those similar to other black baseball players. First, he asserted what Flood and his other advocates seemed to know well, that baseball owners were dubiously and relentlessly

conservative: "Curt Flood has burned all bridges behind himself. Baseball is a vicariously administered sport, in which the deck is never shuffled. Any man who dares rebel against his lot, or decided to challenge the status quo, unknowingly tugs at the rope which makes the bells toll, for himself."[154] Then, Roberts compared Flood to Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby[155]: "We mention Jackie and Larry, of course, because they led the black parade — from top black administered baseball, into the majors. Baseball's punitive code struck down both men. Unless Flood is the seventh son of a seventh son, the obit index rests upon the ex-St. Louis Cardinals star."[156] Roberts' brief narrative took an unexpected turn, though, in a reference to Flood's costly error in the seventh game of the 1968 World Series:

> Embittered, the ego-wounded Flood decided to make somebody pay for his personal mortification. Hence, the historic court suit. As a matter of fact, Curt may eventually be permanently rusticated from the majors.
>
> If the past is relevant, with regard to the disabilities visited upon Jackie and Larry, Flood's batting talents will be lost; and that is something no player can survive. He has chosen the role of martyr and, on the surface, will remain representative of that dubious legion of the suddenly doomed and/or damned, of major league baseball.[157]

Roberts argument prefigured the one that Stuart Weiss would feature in his biography; he inferred Flood's motives, in part, as a reaction to an embarrassing play that may have cost the Cardinals a championship title. In this context, Roberts predicted that Flood would be a tragic figure whose obituary was already written onto a lawsuit against baseball and whose role as a martyr, however self-inflicted, sealed an unfortunate fate.

Roberts' assessment of Flood vacillated between an appreciation for the structural limits that constrained black athletes and the suggestion that Flood might have brought it

all upon himself. Relative to the recognition of Flood's status as a martyr, however, Sam Lacy's assessment was unequivocal. Like the *Courier*, who forecasted Flood's tragic loss in February 1970, Lacy, in the *Afro-American*, offered a prediction about what would happen to Flood in the public's memory following the Supreme Court's decision in 1972: "By 1982, the average American, hearing the name mentioned, will want to know, 'Who was Curt Flood?' It is a harsh premonition, but such is the way of death for the martyr who fails in his self-appointed task."[158] As Lacy peered ten years into the future, he saw Flood's martyrdom as a failure — not just in terms of Flood's court loss, but also relative to the type of influence he might have had on the public's understanding of baseball history. More to the point, Lacy expressed the worry that since Flood lost in court, his attempt at martyrdom was futile; Flood was destined to be forgotten.

Operating across temporal registers, martyrdom rhetoric functions to make sense out of a tragic present and simultaneously to define loss for future observers. This is not to say that martyrs are not, ultimately, contested terrain, but black newspapers were hardly shy about trying to explain the ultimate meaning of Flood's ill-fated challenge, which on their view seemed to contain two basic lessons: (1) Flood was right, but we told you this would happen, and (2) We will try to remember what he did for baseball, but probably will forget. Of course, Flood's martyrdom was figurative, not literal; as Lacy pointed out in the aftermath of the Court ruling, "the former baseball star is alive and kicking, somewhere in the world."[159] Rather, Flood relinquished his baseball career, and as enthusiastic public defenders, the black press mourned that loss in a way that often did lend dramatic presence to the righteousness of the sacrifice. Here, the notion of Flood's "principle" returned to the rhetorical scene, but once again animate only through the

political reckoning characteristic of black newspapers' self-understanding. If martyrs die in the name of a cause, and it was the black press that named Flood as a martyr, then the definition of Flood's martyrdom was bound to express the cause that gave the black press its reflexive cultural, social, and political significance. With colorblind liberalism centering their descriptive habits, Flood was a *baseball* martyr, an unfortunate casualty in a pre-existing war. Blackness, when there, as it appeared to murmur in Ric Roberts' 1970 worries about "Flood's big gamble," in the end, suffered mere collateral damage.

Along these lines, Sam Lacy's *Afro-American* column in June 1972 stands out as an early attempt to shape the meaning of Flood's significance through the figure of the martyr. Titled "Flood Delivers His Last Sacrifice," Lacy took the adverse Court decision as an opportunity speak in a tenor proper to a eulogy:

> Since his distaste for baseball led him to defect from the then Washington Senators in the early summer of 1971, Flood has been reported in the Netherlands, the Balkans and the Far East — stoic in his beliefs and firm in his desire to be away from it all.
>
> But the whereabouts of Curt Flood is not the concern of A to Z in this piece.... The concern is that the young man "played the game" right up to the end.... He sacrificed himself in the hope that his team might score.... In his case, though, it was not in the form of the bunt which is normally employed — Curt's took the shape of a clout that frightened the whole ball park before it was caught and thrown out by the Supreme Court.[160]

Lacy's baseball metaphor, though awkward-sounding, portrayed Flood in a way that knotted his persona, his principle, and his sacrifice into the kind of tangle Harry Edwards would try, sure enough, to undo. Lacy characterized Flood as a potential threat to professional baseball, neutralized by the stabilizing force of the US Supreme Court,

perhaps a fair characterization by anyone's standards. The "bunt" metaphor helped Lacy link Flood to a "team" far different from the alliances Floyd McKissick had hoped black athletes would develop. A "bunt" is typically employed when a batter concedes an out in order to advance a runner to the next base, a play otherwise known as a "sacrifice." Flood's sacrifice, according to Lacy, benefited not just the Cardinals, nor any particular group of players, but all of them — anyone in a baseball uniform. And since the opposing defense was now the owners, expressed institutionally in the synecdochic figure of the "whole ball park," the "bunt" was a lyrical, but insufficient term. Flood issued a clout — indeed, Flood *had* clout — until the whole ball park was rescued by the Court.

As Flood's reformulated collective identity took shape, Lacy offered an explicit interpretation of his martyrdom:

> Flood's martyrdom is rooted in the fact that he had the strength to quit a well-paying job rather than surrender his principle.... At the time he was traded, he was earning $92,000 a year and enjoying the prestige that goes with being one of the two finest centerfielders in his profession.... Baseball custom dictates a token raise in pay whenever a player is traded, which means he might have expected not less than $95,000 from his new team.... At the age of 32, he had reason to expect at least another three years of big league employment, and with it an estimated quarter-million dollars in salary.
>
> To prove the faith he had in his cause, Flood remained out of baseball through the 1970 season, and when he attempted a comeback with assurances that it would not prejudice his case, Curt found that the year's idleness had dulled his talents.... Dissatisfied with his own performance, he abandoned the playing field, broken by the realization that, had he remained in action, neither his experience nor his earnings would have ended so abruptly.
>
> In the meantime, the "team" for which he delivered his final sacrifice continues to thrive, and strike, and reap more dividends....while he awaits that day in the not-too-distant future when America will be asking: "Who is Curt Flood?"[161]

This passage from the *Afro-American* crystallizes the rhetorical texture of the black press' coverage of Flood's case when it was at its most impassioned best. The logic, however unassailable, came straight from the liberal narrative that had made Flood such an easy protagonist: his wealth and prestige were coincident, his professional stature was unimpeachable, his financial losses were unfair, and loyalty to conscience went unrewarded. Not a "black thing," by any means, but an experience, nevertheless, destined to result in Flood's disappearance from the scene of public life.

Conclusion

From a broad perspective, Curt Flood operated as a figure through whom the black athlete's dilemma, as envisioned by Floyd McKissick and others, could be reconciled with the black press' liberal imagination. McKissick had worried about the paternalistic and infantilizing social dynamics of integration. For he and Edwards, the political commitment to integration entailed the kind of racialized experience that forced black athletes to trade dignity for opportunity, manhood for education, and principle for inclusion. According to the poesis of *Revolt*, the proper political conscience of the black athlete demanded the kind of fearless sacrifice involved in telling white racists to "go to hell," which is presumably what Harry Edwards meant in announcing that America's "'colored boy' in athletics is rapidly becoming a man."[162] In practical terms, the willingness to alienate white teammates (with all due respect) and the courage to deny oneself the social and economic opportunities offered as liberal tokens each helped to constitute the ethos of *Revolt*. Circumscribed by a principled assertion of black identity, self-sacrifice was construed as a politically conscientious disavowal of the social

advantages obtained through a relationship with the white establishment. I do not mean to reduce the racial politics of sport in 1970 to McKissick's division of loyalties, but his December 1969 *Amsterdam News* column provides a heuristic counterpoint to black press coverage of Curt Flood because of both its timeliness and its dramatization of political choices available to black athletes in the context of the "revolt." Its insertion into the *Amsterdam News* evinces a public struggle to define the meaning of the new black athlete, to be sure. But, it would also be fair to say that McKissick's view of the "dilemma" was a rare exception to dominant sport narratives occupying the pages of black newspapers. Apart from a generically valorized sense of courageous speech that could collapse the differences between Jackie Robinson and Muhammad Ali, Harry Edwards might have believed, this seemed to make courage awfully cheap.

Certainly, the type of martyrdom assigned to Curt Flood cannot be understood in the same way that civil rights era martyrs such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, or even Emmett Till are often described. But the difference between Flood and those martyrs goes beyond the fact that they lost their lives and Flood merely lost his baseball career. The socially unique dimension of his martyrdom is that the sacrifice he made for others was said to benefit not just blacks, but every player in Major League Baseball, *whites included*. McKissick's dilemma highlighted *conflicting* loyalties: should black athletes stand with their white teammates, or should they stand for racial justice? Furthermore, McKissick's dilemma critiqued the legitimacy of institutionalized sport for its requirement that black athletes rely on whites to protect their interests. On these points, the stakes were high since they posed a rhetorical threat to the story of progress that sport (especially baseball) helped black newspapers tell. But, coverage of Curt

Flood settled the question elegantly: Flood was a black man fighting for a universal principle whose enforcement would reform professional sports, hold baseball to account to the inclusive potential of American free-market democracy, and illustrate the political merit of interracial coalition. Curt Flood's martyrdom both protected baseball as a field of progressive symbolic representation and provided a concrete exemplar of what might be accomplished when racial difference was left behind in the effort to defend universal principles. In short, black press coverage of Curt Flood worked to reveal the errors of radicalism by placing him in relation to radicals — the "angry black athletes" — and then animating him with the civic persona proper to liberal integrationism.

Black press coverage of Curt Flood's challenge to Major League Baseball, from the early advocacy of Sam Lacy to the exhortation in *Ebony* to the sentimental treatments from Bill Nunn, relied precisely on an inversion of McKissick's dilemma. Faced with the volatility of the new black athlete and the dystopian aura following Curt Flood around (a problem, in part, of their own making), black newspapers domesticated the potential energy of the revolt by confining Flood's blackness to the limits of his individual consciousness, announcing the presence of another courageous black speaker, and invoking a self-consciously constructed colorblind principle when it seemed like the threat to baseball was real. Concerned for why Flood has not become "a politicized sports hero for a new generation of blacks," Gerald Early explains that "Flood was fighting a particular legal advantage that baseball owners had that was not explicitly racial. In other words, what was done to Flood in trading him against his will, was not done to him because he was black, nor was it something that was only done to black players."[163] Early's point is that there was nothing intrinsic to Flood's cause that lent

itself to an argument about racial injustice. Brad Snyder, explaining why "the alphabet soup of civil rights groups," failed to come to his spirited defense, supposes that "they lacked sympathy for a small group of athletes perceived to be spoiled and overpaid, rather than subjugated and oppressed. The reserve clause was not strictly a racial issue."[164] Although Early and Snyder are right that the facts of Flood's case, all things being equal, dealt with an institutional arrangement that could be divorced conceptually from racism with ease, not all facts were equal. Some of Flood's advocates, as Charles Aikens showed, could summon a racialized idiom with evocative force. But, Early and Snyder see the discourse surrounding Flood in the late sixties and early seventies as occupying the kind of public space Harry Edwards imagined "white sports reporters" and "Negro sports reporters" as addressing. They are right that the reserve clause was not strictly a racial issue, but not for the reasons they think they are. Curt Flood's case had nothing to do with race because he told Tom Haller so, and the nationally circulating press, along with black newspapers, constantly assured the public that it was so. Thirty-five years later, why would one think of race except to deny it?

Notes

[1] *Ebony*, "Found—An 'Abe Lincoln' of Baseball," March 1970, 110.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] This was the point made by Sam Lacy when he sarcastically wondered if his definition of reason was "all fouled up" (chap. 3, n. 114).

[5] Robert Lipsyte, "Revolt of the Gladiators," *New York Times*, January 5, 1970, p. 52.

[6] This was the dominant story in black newspaper accounts. Of course, this narration was at odds in some significant ways with the story of Robinson's HUAC testimony, a problem I intend to explore below.

[7] Judy Pace, quoted in Cal Fussman, *After Jackie: Pride, Prejudice, and Baseball's Forgotten Heroes* (NY: ESPN Books, 2007), 193.

[8] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 2-3.

[9] Ibid., 351-2.

[10] Ibid., 68.

[11] Brock's point is made even more acute by the fact that the National Football League's free agency rules allowed Brett Favre to forestall retirement for a year by playing quarterback for the New York Jets during the 2008 season, after having played every game of seventeen seasons with the Green Bay Packers. Brock's choice of Favre to make this point is clearly not random; in many circles of sports debate, Favre is regarded as one of the greatest football players in history, if not *the* best quarterback. Favre flourished in Green Bay after one year as an erratic rookie with the Atlanta Falcons. One wonders, though, if Brock's analogy is really all that well-placed — Favre was *traded* to Green Bay by Atlanta in February 1992, and not even for another player. He was traded for the Packers' first round draft pick.

[12] Lou Brock, quoted in Cal Fussman, *After Jackie: Pride, Prejudice, and Baseball's Forgotten Heroes* (NY: ESPN Books, 2007), 197.

[13] Alex Belth, *Stepping Up*, 18. Emphasis in original.

[14] Bill Nunn, "Change of Pace," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 30, 1970.

[15] Jackie Robinson, *I Never Had It Made*, 121.

[16] In that letter, Flood had written, "After twelve years in the major leagues, I do not feel that I am a piece of property to be bought and sold irrespective of my wishes." For the full text of the letter, see Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, 194.

[17] Rustin, Bayard, "In Support of Curt Flood's Anti-Trust Suit Against Baseball," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 17, 1970.

[18] There is no question that this gesture would have evoked Jackie Robinson, even if Rustin had not mentioned him explicitly. This is the argumentative shell into which Robinson's integration narrative is typically fit.

[19] This narrative surrounds Jackie Robinson, both today and in the early 1970s. Without question, it is an essential component of the Robinson mythos, as it can be found in even the briefest biographical passages about him that circulate in public discourse. In

Chapter 7, I critique the rhetorical consequences of this narrative. Specifically, I argue that it sets a limit at which speech is warranted politically, a limit imposed by the need for liberalism to mediate political discourse.

[20] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 115.

[21] Ibid., 115.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 120.

[24] Carlton, after posting the National League's second best earned run average for the 1970 season (2.17), asked for a raise from $24,000 to $50,000. The Cardinals had countered with an offer of $30,000, and by March 17, 1970, the two sides had agreed to a two-year deal worth $40,000 per year. Carlton, known later in his career as "Lefty," was eventually voted into the Hall of Fame on the strength of a distinguished pitching career with the Philadelphia Phillies; he had retired as arguably the best left-handed pitcher of his generation.

[25] Gussie Busch quoted in Bob Broeg, "Redbirds Owner Busch Admits 'I'm Disillusioned,'" *The Sporting News*, March 28, 1970.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Arthur Daley, "Paging Sigmund Freud," *New York Times*, February 3, 1971. 2/3/71, p. 23.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Arthur Daley, "The Sad Story of the Leaky Umbrella," *New York Times*, June 22, 1972.

[30] Early, "Curt Flood, Gratitude"; Leonard, "Curt Flood," 31-47.

[31] Murray Chass, "The Next Step: A Couch in Every Dugout," *New York Times*, July 17, 1971.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Howard Cosell, "Sports and Goodbye to All That," *New York Times*, July 5, 1971.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Lacy, "Cheers for Flood."

[38] Doc Young, "More About: Flood's Suit," *Chicago Defender*, January 27, 1970.

[39] Claude E. Harrison, "1970's: Vintage Years for the Black Athlete," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Jan 13, 1970.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] *Chicago Defender*, "Black Athletes 'Get Involved' in 1970," December 23, 1969.

[45] Hilburn, "In Lieu" (chap. 3, n. 91).

[46] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 115.

[47] Cosell, "Sports and Goodbye."
[48] Ibid.
[49] Edwards, *Revolt*, 31.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 32.
[53] Ibid., 34.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., 34-5.
[56] Ibid., 35.
[57] Ibid., 35-6.
[58] Ibid., 36.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Red Smith, "Lively Times in the Slave Trade," *New York Times*, April 21, 1972.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Red Smith, "The Buck Passes," *New York Times*, June 21, 1972.
[66] Jim Murray, "Uncle Curt's Cabin," *The Sporting News*, February 7, 1970. Snyder quotes Murray in *A Well-Paid Slave*, 113.
[67] Murray, "Uncle Curt's Cabin."
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Dick Edwards, "The Principle: Sock It To 'Em Curt!," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 24, 1970.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] William Lloyd Hogan, "Now's The Time!," *Chicago Defender*, November 18, 1969.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Patterson, "To Secure Civil Rights" (chap. 4, n. 51).
[80] Edwards, *Revolt*, 27.
[81] John Sengstacke, "The Black Scholar," Chicago Defender, November 17, 1969.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

[86] *Los Angeles Sentinel*, "The Black Scholar," January 22, 1970., p. A-6

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] *The Black Scholar*, Mission Statement, *The Black Scholar* 1 (1969), inside cover. Here, the new journal attended to the problem of black unity: "We cannot afford division any longer if our struggle is to bear fruit, whether those divisions be between class, caste or function. Nothing black is alien to us." But, this was a unity which first entailed divisions: "We recognize that we must redefine our lives. We must shape a culture, a politics, an economics, a sense of our past and future history. We must recognize what we have been and what we shall be, retaining that which has been good and discarding that which has been worthless." Explicitly, the meaning of blackness to politics was on the agenda, "THE BLACK SCHOLAR shall be the journal for that definition. In its pages, black ideologies will be examined, debated, disputed and evaluated by the black intellectual community. Articles which research, document and analyze the black experience will be published, so that theory is balanced with fact, and ideology with substantial information."

[90] Harry Edwards, "The Sources of Black Athletic Superiority," *The Black Scholar* 3 (November 1971), 32-41.

[91] Michael Govan, "The Emergence of the Black Athlete in America," *The Black Scholar* 3 (November 1971), 16-28.

[92] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 120. Warner uses "this kind of scene" to describe counterpublic activity. To be clear, I do not intend to suggest that the rhetorical texture of *The Black Scholar* was determined by or determinative of Edwards' *Revolt of the Black Athlete*. Instead, I am arguing that in *The Black Scholar*, *Revolt* found a public proxy, or what what Lauren Berlant (in Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 164) might call a "prosthetic," an "identification with a disembodied public subject," giving Harry Edwards the "negativity of debate" necessary to contest prevailing definitions of black identity.

[93] Edwards, *Revolt*, 56.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid., 58.

[96] Ibid. According to Edwards, the OPHR had attempted to contact H. Rap Brown as well, but could not.

[97] Edwards, *Revolt*, 58.

[98] Ibid., 59.

[99] Ibid., 58-59.

[100] Ibid., 58.

[101] Donald Clark Hodges, *The Literate Communist: 150 Years of the* Communist Manifesto (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 67-86.

[102] Douglas Hartmann, *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 169.

[103] Ibid., 251-270.

[104] Ibid., 124-6.

[105] I will address the sexist implications of *Revolt* below.

[106] Edwards, *Revolt*, xv.

[107] Hoberman, *Darwin's Athletes* (chap. 1, n. 58); Harry Edwards, "Crisis of Black Athletes on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century," in *Sport and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth-Century America*, eds. Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins (New York: Routledge, 2004), 345-350.

[108] Edwards, *Revolt*, 7.

[109] Floyd McKissick, "Is Integration Necessary?," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 20, 1969.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, 83-4.

[115] McKissick, "Is Integration Necessary?"

[116] Edwards, *Revolt*, 11.

[117] Ibid., 20.

[118] For a detailed discussion of the way in which publics organize their temporal logics, see Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 96-114.

[119] Edwards, *Revolt*, 22.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Flood's original lawsuit included a 13th Amendment claim which was ultimately abandoned on appeal to the US Supreme Court; Neil F. Flynn, *Baseball's Reserve System: The Case and Trial of Curt Flood v. Major League Baseball* (Springfield, IL: Walnut Park Group, 2005), 291.

[123] Edwards, *Revolt*, xvii.

[124] Floyd McKissick, "Dilemma of the Black Athlete," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 6, 1969.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Edwards, *Revolt*, 89.

[128] McKissick, "Dilemma."

[129] It is also characteristic of what Scott and Brockriede call the "rhetoric of black power," in Robert L. Scott and Wayne Brockriede, *The Rhetoric of Black Power* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

[130] McKissick, "Dilemma."

[131] Ibid.

[132] Charles Aikens, "The Struggle of Curt Flood," *The Black Scholar* 3 (November 1971), 10.

[133] By contemporaneous (and contemporary) baseball standards, Flood's benching was a tremendous insult. Defensive players are rarely replaced by managers while the

defense is on the field; such a move is an embarrassment, and in Flood's case was uniquely hurtful. Flood had literally made a living in baseball through his reputation as the best defensive centerfielder of his tenure. As Aikens wrote, Flood "functioned on pride and desire, and Williams must have destroyed all of it on that particular day"(10). Indeed, perhaps he did: Curt Flood played about another week, and then never again. This is not to day that Flood didn't deserve the benching; after all, managers do not typically factor the self-esteem of the players into their management decisions. But, for Flood, it had to be downright humiliating.

[134] Aikens, "The Struggle of Curt Flood," 10-11.

[135] Ibid., 11.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Even without Flood's services "slowing them down," as Ted Williams may have thought, after May 1, 1971, Washington finished the season with a record of 63-96. In Flood's 13 games with the Senators, he batted only .200, and managed zero extra-base hits.

[138] Aikens, "The Struggle of Curt Flood," 11.

[139] Ibid., 11.

[140] Ibid., 12.

[141] Ibid., 12.

[142] Ibid., 13.

[143] Ibid., 13.

[144] Ibid., 14.

[145] Ibid., 14.

[146] The difference in the way these names are spelled exists in the original text.

[147] Aikens, "The Struggle of Curt Flood,"15.

[148] Ibid.

[149] This was the title of Govan's piece, which followed immediately after Flood's in *The Black Scholar* in 1971.

[150] Miller, *A Whole Different Ball Game*, 221.

[151] Kenneth M. Jennings, *Swings and Misses: Moribund Labor Relations in Professional Baseball* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 3; Andrew Zimbalist, *Baseball and Billions*, 20.

[152] *Baltimore Afro-American*, "Curt Flood Pointed Way."

[153] Ibid.

[154] Ric Roberts, "Flood's Big Gamble," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 28, 1970.

[155] Larry Doby integrated the American League with the Cleveland Indians eleven weeks after Jackie Robinson did the same for the National League in 1947.

[156] Roberts, "Flood's Big Gamble."

[157] Ibid.

[158] Sam Lacy, "Flood Delivers Last Sacrifice," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 27, 1972.

[159] Ibid. At the time, Flood was in Spain.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Ibid.
[162] Edwards, *Revolt*, 120.
[163] Early, "Curt Flood, Gratitude."
[164] Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 116.

Chapter 8

Curt Flood and the Public Cultures of Race and Sport

"The things that I did, I did it for me."
— Curt Flood, 1976[1]

"Activism has helped the black athlete get where he is today. That's what sets him apart from the white athlete in this discussion. Activism by Curt Flood and John Mackey, pioneers in free agency, made baseball and football players rich."[2] So says *Newsday*'s Shaun Powell in his 2007 book, *Souled Out*, an exegesis of and prescription for the selfish amnesia of contemporary athletes. With the type of disciplinary tenor exercised by those prone to syrupy bouts of nostalgia, Powell excoriates contemporary players for deferring obvious invitations to "activism." This, of course, is what makes his appreciation for the likes of Flood significant to his story (and mine), in which the new era has seemingly lost its soul. Nostalgic remembrances of Curt Flood, however, produce troubling anxieties when Powell seeks an explanation for the loss of the black activist athlete: "Highly paid black athletes are too busy hiding behind their precious public profiles and endorsement deals to lend a voice to activism, which means they've Souled Out in their worship of the almighty dollar."[3] Powell's puzzling chain of sentences arrives at the same point that Dayn Perry calls "ironic," that Curt Flood may have "heralded the sad demise of the activist athlete."[4] Powell and Perry, along with William Rhoden, and even recently, Harry Edwards, each participate in a dominant

contemporary narrative about sport that announces the disappearance of the activist athlete and holds the current generation of black players responsible for forgetting or refusing to acknowledge the fertile history of athletic protest that has made their success possible.

As easy as it is to judge the cultural performances of athletes these days and infer their ignorance and amnesia (a move which, in my judgement, is hasty and unfair), it is just as difficult to come fully to terms with the circumstances in which black athletes, including Curt Flood, found themselves in the 1970s. Douglass Hartmann, in detailing some of the ways in which a "radically localized" sports establishment "incorporated" the Olympic protests of the late 1960s, provides a reason to think that the demise of the activist athlete is grounded not in the selfish and selective memories of contemporary athletes, but instead in the convoluted politics of sport throughout the seventies and eighties, marked most significantly by the appropriating forces of Nixonian and Reaganite conservatism. Thus, he asserts "perhaps the most significant factor hastening the decline and eventual collapse of the African American athletic protest: the reforms undertaken by the various agencies and authorities of the sporting establishment."[5] In the end, Hartmann agrees, along with most other well-reasoned observers, that Edwards' *Revolt* was a flop that amounted, in itself, to little more than an academic exercise. The seventies and eighties, according to Hartmann, were defined in sport by "the complexity and contradictions of the racial rearticulation process the world of sport was working through."[6] Perhaps dispensing with the nostalgia reserved for the ethos of lost heroes permits a new line of sight relative to broad historical movements and social structures,

but the black activist athlete, it seems — whether forgotten by the selfish or consumed by the predatory — is no less lost.

A cursory look around, in all fairness, reveals little contrary evidence. ESPN's Stephen A. Smith, whose television persona is in many ways linked to a contemporary (and limited) sense of public truth-telling stylized through blackness[7], put it this way in the Summer of 2008: "In recent history we've seen Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods break records and break down stereotypes. But let's be real: When it comes to political activism, American sports has lacked a spokesperson for years. Muhammad Ali and Jim Brown are long gone from the spotlight, and Ashe left the stage far too soon. The closest thing we have to a truth-teller today is Charles Barkley, who's conveniently dismissed as 'Charles just bein' Charles' whenever folks want to ignore the legitimacy of his criticism."[8] Even this observation, however, which establishes the disappearance of the black activist athlete through distinctions finer than those typically offered, places demands on public memory easily satisfied by nostalgia. The problem with nostalgia, at least in the case of the activist athlete, is not just that it permits us to expound unreflectively on "the evils and shortcomings of today's (read: black) athlete,"[9] but also that in enacting such a disciplinary form, nostalgia requires the collapsing of difference into a voice, speaking not necessarily about anything in particular, but speaking loudly nevertheless — in a certain kind of *way* — that often times cannot be defined but through the allusive ethos of the sporting black speaker conjured out of a list: Muhammad Ali, Jim Brown, Arthur Ashe, and (what *has* it come to?) Charles Barkley.

After all, what do lists like these mean? It is fair to say that they reveal more about the list-makers than those peopling the list, but noticing that robs them of their

influence about as ineffectively as it slows their proliferation in sport's public discourse. Other than being able to safely assert that they emerge, at least in part, from a compulsion to canonize (e.g. in the various Halls of Fame) sporting heroes, I am not sure what else their form presents; obviously, they are all different. On one hand, the call to conscience, especially when the comparison between past and present is so acute and insightful, seems perfectly suited for the times. Stephen A. Smith wonders, "today's athletes show very little interest in standing up for something bigger than themselves — whether it's war, tyranny, economic deprivation, global warming. Who among them will have the conscience to embrace the challenges that lie ahead, no matter what the sponsors or, yes, the TV networks, think?"[10] This, on the face of things, is a fair and useful question. Then again, one suspects "the times," whenever they are, will always produce this line of criticism. Relative to the activist athlete, no less, this seems to be exactly Stephen A.'s point: "Think about it! The African-American stars of the 1930s through the 1960s, from Jesse Owens to Jackie Robinson to Bill Russell, met the obligations of their time."[11] This, then, is where some historical precision is in order, and perhaps some follow-up questions: Who defined the obligation of "their time?" And, what is the obligation of ours?

From one angle, the one along which contemporary athletes are scolded for having "souled out," black activists in the late sixties — Muhammad Ali, Jim Brown, Arthur Ashe — shaped their times in a manner that athletes in the present cannot risk repeating, let alone imagine in the first place. After having capitalized on the spirit of the sixties to challenge established institutions, including the state, with courage and conviction, individual athletes have become irresponsible with the power that wealth has

conferred. From another angle, however, the one along which sport as an institution got hijacked by reform, the demands of a previous age produced compromises in the next that leave us doubting whether it is even possible to summon activism in the service of something innocent or emancipatory in the "world of sport." Amid widespread concerns that the black activist athlete may be lost to history, one side problematizes the consciousness of the individual black athletic subject in sanctimonious befuddlement, and the other problematizes the (white/elite/conservative) institutional structures into which athletes are inserted and with which any potential challenge must cope politically. On the face of things, these angles correspond to two common assumptions in anti-racist praxis, the integrationist assumption that everyday social interaction will transform "hearts and minds," and the assumption that drives the criticism of institutions, which have been known to shelter racist practices even in the absence of individual racists. As surely as these assumptions often work against each other, they compete for attention in public space.

In the conclusion of this dissertation project, I want to make the case that these two angles of vision into the intersection of race and sport provide an insufficient account of the demise of the activist athlete or, at least, what gives rise to the current panic over the activist athlete's disappearance. Curt Flood's case is unique for what it reveals about the complicated, contradictory, and often self-defeating dynamics of black political culture in the early seventies. The "obligations of their time," as Stephen A. put it, for Jesse Owens, Jackie Robinson, and Bill Russell, were hardly self-evident *at the time*. This is why the contemporary call to conscience, especially as it takes the form of canonical inventories operating *a fortiori*, is hasty and unfair. Smith's list speaks wisely

to forms of protest separated in time, but Jesse Owens was saying things in the late sixties and early seventies that may have made Bill Russell bristle, and Bill Russell was saying things at the same time that would have embarrassed Jackie Robinson. The point here is that black public culture mediated the obligations of the era by nurturing preferred forms of black athletic protest and disciplining others. As I argued in Chapter 5, Flood was caught between formalized modes of public address, between competing ways of summoning blackness in the service of one's public case. Between the individualism associated with Powell and Rhoden and the sociological-institutional critique Hartmann offers, it is fair to say that I am more sympathetic to Hartmann's account of the black activist athlete's disappearance. Having said that, it seems to me that both positions miss the historical details of black public culture, which as Curt Flood demonstrates powerfully, often worked deliberately to make blackness disappear. The first arc of critical analysis in this dissertation project, then, works to disclose, both theoretically and empirically, the discursive forces that, in the early seventies, gave shape to the black activist athlete's "obligation."

This project, however, also tells a story about Curt Flood "the man," as his advocates in the early seventies liked to say, and his place in the history of black public address. If Flood can be fairly remembered as existing within the lineage of heroic black rebels, then his contribution to, influence on, or articulation with what is often called the "civil rights struggle" must have *mattered*. As I have tried to show throughout this project, Flood in some cases helped to advance the liberal narrative of progress in and through sport, but at other times he chafed against it, called it into question, or otherwise lamented its effects on his immediate aims. This project, then, is also a story about

Flood's ultimate fate, about how his argument for reserve clause abolition became ensnared in the vagaries of black political culture. Curt Flood, perhaps more than any other in the 20th century narrative of the black athlete, embodies the tensions in liberal culture and politics. Jackie Robinson may have "meant more," but his history fits easily into the national progress narrative — some might still say that with respect to race, Jackie Robinson is proof positive of liberal integrationism's triumph. Flood, of course, fails at telling the same smooth story. A loser at virtually every level except as a historic symbol of sport's unjust traditionalism, he is now seen as an individual "ahead of his time"[12] as the righteousness of his cause is rehearsed in public memory. David Leonard's reclamation project asserts that "Flood's [legal challenge to the reserve clause] may have been the most effective and determined; his was certainly the most demonized, denounced, and surveilled, which reflects the historic moment of his challenge, his blackness, and the realities of American racism."[13] Flood was, in fact, ultimately run out of the country, but was it merely the realities of American racism that organized and led the chase? Quite literally, that depends on how we are encouraged to see him, and herein lies a tension worthy of exploration: In black public life, Flood's case both was "racial" and not, and sometimes when it was, it was simply because it was said to be not. In any case, this project has attempted to demonstrate that Flood enjoyed more public support than that with which he is often credited. This second arc of critical analysis in this dissertation, then, involves Curt Flood as a historical figure, as a public rhetor seeking a concrete objective, as a hopeful agent — in no unambiguous terms — of his own destiny, coping with the treacherous terrain of a thoroughly racialized public culture.

Along these lines, and keeping in mind that these two arcs of critical analysis intersect more or less at a narrative register, this conclusion is left with the task of elucidating, essentially, two plot-lines: First, I sort out some of the theoretical relationships operant between the public sphere, public address, and politics of black public life. I do, in fact, think that Curt Flood was caught up in a relationship of co-option similar to the kind explicated by Hartmann, and here it is necessary to explain the "circulatory fates" of Flood's public address and that of his advocates, to determine the results of his rhetorical choices as they entered public circulation. Flood was, for all intents and purposes, forgotten to history for about thirty years. The basic question here might fairly be described as one in search of a critical memory: What, in the early 1970s, exactly happened to Curt Flood? The second plot-line pursues a corollary question. Since 1972, how are things said to have happened? Flood fits into the public memory of sport now, but is in a variety of ways trapped in the contradictions of the black activist athletes' purported demise. My argument here is that the relationship of co-option that doomed Flood in the early seventies manifests now in an anxiety that struggles to discover and reanimate a bygone civic spirit. Where are our black activist athletes now? They may or may not be around, and unquestionably, despite the hegemonic effacement of race crystallized for many in Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan, black athletes cannot be condemned as a class. But the call to conscience as it is issued today often takes such quixotic form, asking athletes to speak out for *something* in exasperation over their inability speak truth to power, that one wonders if this is a position liberalism has put *itself* in, and if what passes as critical memory too often merely writes its own psychosis

onto the subject position that has worked historically to sustain its political logic. As far as the black athlete is concerned, it seems, liberalism is left only to devour its young.

Narrative One: Of Race in Publics and Counterpublics

One way to put matters here is to say that what I have variously described as the "national sports press," and "nationally circulating newspapers,"[14] were *the* public, the black press was *a* public, and that the discursive universe constituted in and through the *Revolt of the Black Athlete* was a *counter*public. On the whole, I think that is a fair assessment, analytically speaking, of the conceptual scheme that underwrites this project. Chapter 3 outlines the black press' reflexive imagination at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies and assesses the question of whether they can be construed fairly as a counterpublic. Chapter 4 historicizes the public ethos embodied in Jackie Robinson and establishes the case that he helped black newspapers assemble a preferred form of public subjectivity aligned with the narratives of racial progress at work in the national press. Chapter 5 shows how black newspapers characterized Curt Flood rhetorically in ways that mirrored the abstract and universal logic of the national press, resulting in the disappearance of Curt Flood's blackness from public view. Finally, Chapter 6 argues that Edwards' *Revolt of the Black Athlete* delivered an expansively poetic assertion of blackness to the politics of sport that was appropriated and quarantined in the case of Curt Flood. Broadly speaking, the relationships I've identified are organized as such: the national daily press determined the shape of political discourse in sport, the black press attempted to insert speaking athletes into the mode of public address that would perform colorblindness and thus the truths of integration, and Harry Edwards advanced a (failed) challenge to the black press' given definitions of

blackness. In alternate terms, the taken-for-granted exclusivity of public discourse produced a "parallel discursive arena" oriented toward inclusion, which produced a counterpublic oriented around contesting the politics of inclusion; the public, a public, a counterpublic. In the end, my analysis may simply come to this, but I should clarify here some of the vexations that arise from my particular use of this typology.

The Trouble With Publics

The first is the idea that these analytically distinct public spaces exist in isolated relation to each other. By that I mean the reduction of the distinct modes of discourse I'm proposing to "vernaculars," "conceits," or "genres." Generally speaking, the most stable term I have employed is "idiom," which I use to express the poetic assemblage of vernaculars, conceits, and genres into a discrete form of political expression. As the introduction and latter chapters of this project should make obvious, this idea comes from Michael Warner, who suggests that a public consists in "poetic-expressive world making."[15] "Publics" discursively enact and circulate an idiom that hide the *poesis* of public address in metaphors of universality for individual and collective decision-making, known otherwise as the idiom of "rational-critical dialog." The danger of "the public," in this scheme, lies in its ability to hide the particular features (such as whiteness, maleness, or heternormativity) it abstracts into public space and thus conceal the participatory privileges held by the speakers to whom those particulars apply. "Counterpublics" discursively enact an idiom which similarly abstracts particulars, but the particulars that become "salient to consciousness" in the process of circulation are regarded as "indecorous" or out of place "in public." Thus, the difference between a "dominant public" and "a counterpublic" lies in the way that a dominant public takes its

speech protocols for granted — dominance consists in the weight of a discursive assumption concealed in "formal mediation": one that keeps itself hidden from view, and its "counter" that actively constructs novel ways of mediating one's marginalized particularity.

Two concerns result from this classification of public address. First, the discourses I've examined here, which shelter racial particularity differently, can be misconstrued as expressing "mere particularity." The particularization of all identities implied in the criticism of false universality sometimes mistakenly entails an avoidance of the careful examination of power relations instantiated and managed by race. As I argued in Chapter 1, the disclosure of racial particularity can be politically and ethically paralyzing when attached to the myth of colorblindness, as if observing the social construction of race just urges us to move along to other problems. The concern with this view is that racial identities are not on equal footing socially, nor are they in possession of equally available discursive resources. Counterpublics, I would argue, both index this power relation and seem to do things that are not erased in their disappearance. In essence, the "mere particularity" position is precisely what this dissertation project attempts to inveigh against: the paralyzing epistemology of colorblindness and the consequent inattention to racial particularity wrought in the name of pluralism and progress.[16] Second, and pushing from another direction, is the assumption that in counterpublics we have discovered a discursive form in which we might dependably place democratic faith, a deductive critical reasoning that takes the form of identifying a mode of address as a counterpublic for the purpose of securing its democratic or emancipatory credentials. Relative to the story this dissertation tells, the former problem

results in the equation that Edwards and the black press used different vernaculars, challenged power differently, offered different strategies or "methods," or had different things to say, and to the extent that we are better off now than we were then, the combination can be viewed as beneficial on balance. The "spirit" of the sixties survives, on this view, in the legacy of progress defined perpetually after the fact. Here, no ethical judgment is required (or desirable), since ethical judgment tends to upset pluralism's harmony. The latter problem results in saying that in Harry Edwards we have discovered the revolutionary subject that we should have put in charge then and that we wish could be in charge now — the idea that one's counterpublic status makes one a protagonist and that our political and ethical judgment are each connected, *prima facie*, to publicity's map. In response to both of these problems, I want to arrive at a way to approach the racial politics of publics and counterpublics that both respects the historical specificity of discursive arrangements and resists the easy politics of the binary. The question, then, after taking stock of what happened to Curt Flood is: Where do our race politics go from here?

For starters, Nancy Fraser critiques the Habermasian conception of the public sphere by highlighting its empirical exclusions and then labeling them "subaltern counterpublics," a construct useful for appealing to a democratic conception of participatory inclusion. Subaltern counterpublics, on this score, help marginalized or oppressed individuals acquire or recover public space, but from Warner's perspective are beset by the metaphors of debate and conversation that help to conceal public address' mediating influence on both discourse and identity. Robert Asen seems to give up on the politics of counterpublicity completely, insisting that they simply appear in critical

moments of imagined exclusion and consist in the the collective elaboration of that imagination whether done actively or as a "background process." On Asen's view, since publics are nothing more than discursive constructions, there cannot be a stable indicator of when a recognized exclusion is, critically speaking, worthy of rooting interest. For Asen, the logic of contestation is present, and as effectively as it empowers analysis, it seems to leave the question of praxis unresolved. Warner, it seems, avoids this problematic altogether by letting go of a counterpublic's intrinsic democratic promise as well, but only by simultaneously critiquing the conversation metaphor as the "language ideology" of the public sphere.

Unlike Fraser's conception, which makes counterpublics intrinsically advantageous, and Asen's conception, which renders them intrinsically inert, Warner's model illuminates the mediating influence of their form on both one's identity and the possibility of speech itself. A public constructs subjects that enable a disembodied sense of "stranger relationality," but not all bodies look like public subjects. What a counterpublic exposes, then, is the public sphere's dirty little bourgeois secret, that the liberation it promises through rational conversation is predicated on a principle of domination that must be perpetually hidden from view. As a public is a mediating form that acts both on and against individual agency, counterpublicity is the circumstance in which speakers who reveal the secret find themselves. Of course, the means of exposing and challenging the hidden subjectivity of the public sphere may or may not hold inherent promise, but inasmuch as Warner discloses a system of domination and subordination, he presents an opening for evaluating the ethics of public address according to the relationship between disembodied and corporeal modes of speaking,

ways of talking, or idioms. To be sure, counterpublics possess the promise and perils of being "publics"; they will also function to exclude.[17] But in making the critical claim that you have found a counterpublic, on Warner's view, you have also claimed discovery of the politics of representation, understood as a contested realm that produces conceptions of the self and other, as they exist at the level of public subjectivity.

Cultural studies critics, following the likes of Stuart Hall or Lawrence Grossberg, might, through "articulation theory,"[18] analyze the politics of representation in an examination of Flood's "conjuncture." For example, one obvious critique of Harry Edwards and and other *Revolt*-like rhetoric consists in an analysis of its hegemonic masculinity. Asked about what could have made the OPHR more "successful," Edwards put the problem of sexism this way in a 1998 interview: "We also didn't do the job we should have done in terms of women. Even with all of those black women athletes in the Olympics, we never really approached them. In today's language that means we were sexist, an indictment that could be extended to the whole civil rights movement."[19] Though one way to read Edwards here is to call his disclaimer an unethical abdication of responsibility that diffuses blame for his sexism into the contemporaneous social atmosphere, he points also to the possibility that the conjunctural manifestation of gendered discourse worked on the OPHR from the outside. Be that as it may, *Revolt* offered a representation of black corporeality and affect that the national sports press and black press could not offer without altering the norms of stranger relationality and associated political imagination on which they were predicated. The experience of blackness in integration — what it *felt* like — could not be reduced to propositional summary and thus exhibited a resistance to the self-effacing demands of rational-critical

dialogue. To be sure, Edwards' representation of black experience depended on an exclusivist[20] link between dignity and manhood, so it is not clear that women would have fit into *Revolt* had Edwards even wanted it; at least, the entire idiom would have been rewritten. Instead, Edwards crafted black male corporeality out of a colorblind move that allowed the physical facts of one's blackness to recede provided that one spoke the emasculation and re-masculation of blackness into politics. The corporeality of this counterpublic, no doubt, was shot-through with sexism, a way of viewing the self and other through the lens of manhood, and a way of linking black dignity to what men, presumably, are supposed to do.

Race, Inclusion, and the Representation of Black Experience

So, why a turn to theories of the public to explain Curt Flood, when a study of the "conjuncture" might more accurately disclose the multiplicity of surrounding discourses? Admittedly, the purpose of my project is not to account for the discursive history of Curt Flood comprehensively. Furthermore, the discourses surrounding Flood's case seemed to be one well suited to the analysis of public rhetorical forms for two interrelated reasons. First, inclusive of magnificent performances of public address, the inventional abilities, or attempts to influence public life and sway public opinion in doxastic fashion (as an Aristotelian might say) of speakers like Flood, Edwards, and other prominent public rhetors, deserves showcasing. Second, and more importantly, it seemed that from the moment Flood filed suit, "the public" was at stake. Always on the agenda (and not only relative to the "public interest," as it was for baseball owners), the public's very constitution, or the alleged fallaciousness of its recognized form, or the distorting potential of its mediating powers, or its implications for structuring the field of possible

narratives into which a speaker's racial particularity might be fit, were each matters of pointed contestation and detailed rhetorical elaboration, evincing basic anxieties about the facts of public mediation. Although the purpose of this dissertation project is not to write a full history of the politics of representation articulated in and through the black athlete in the late sixties and early seventies, that does not mean that the politics of representation were not centrally at stake. But, instead of examining them to understand how language and images represented or pushed along a political imagination elsewhere constructed, what occurred in black public life was a contest over what *mode of speech* would be in charge of authentically asserting black identity. Through a representational challenge to the public (in)significance of black particularity, Harry Edwards' counterpublic insisted that the expression of one's racial self-consciousness, as it consisted in one's experiences in racialized spaces, be taken seriously. Black newspapers treated blackness as a presumed marker of marginality, so exercised a compulsion to minimize its importance. Curt Flood was caught in the middle.

In addition to attempting to revise the commonly held view that Flood was uniformly reviled, I have chosen to focus this project on Flood's sources of support in order to establish the kind of "controlled variable" (as a social scientist might say) that would illustrate the various iterations of that support, and their respective consequences. There were many ways of being on Curt Flood's side, just as there were many angles to Curt Flood's own side. In *The Way It Is*, Flood's sophisticated sense of humanism and double-consciousness resulted in a public challenge to baseball's reserve clause that was both abstract and concrete. Carefully retold details of his own racialized experiences led him to be on alert for oppressive double-talk, but once the condition of slavery had been

established, racialized reckoning gave way to an assertion of abstract principle that seemed awfully difficult to define. As supporters like the *Times*' Leonard Koppett made Flood's case, his experiences with race were privatized, inserted into the uniqueness of his consciousness, and removed from substantive debate about the reserve clause's restrictive properties (although, Flood certainly appeared as the "cool cat" he called himself). Black newspapers explicitly denied the significance of race, and the "principle" became abstract and economic, safely confined to the labor practices of baseball. When blackness made an appearance, it was privatized in ways similar to national sports press.[21] Moreover, Flood enabled the eradication of internal difference in the representation of black labor; his principle was said to matter because he might as well be a plumber or auto mechanic, each of whom deserved the protections of the "American way."

Operating in complementary ways, the national sports press and the black press assembled what might be called Jackie Robinson's public sphere. I recognize the temptation to overdetermination in that label, but at least relative to what was being said on sports pages, Jackie Robinson was more than a stock example of black athletic accomplishment; he was the very embodiment of sport's contribution to the dominant national narrative of racial progress. Being compared to Jackie Robinson, or even being mentioned in the same sentence, was nearly always a compliment. It was a multi-dimensional compliment as well, capable of condensing athletic achievement, racial comportment, a pioneering spirit, and civic courage. In Jackie Robinson's public sphere, speaking politically meant rhetorically attaching oneself to "militance" and "outspokenness," but picking one's fights carefully, pushing the ideals of colorblindness,

and collapsing the internal differentiation of blackness into abstraction, often in the name of "unity." In Jackie Robinson's public sphere, his mediation through Branch Rickey (who Malcolm X once called Jackie's "white boss"[22]) was either left behind strategically or inserted back into a representational system in which interracial cooperation stood for progress and institutional reform. Furthermore, the Jackie Robinson abstraction was middle-class, upwardly mobile, and deeply invested in the fate of the nation.

In sum, Jackie Robinson crystallized what Manning Marable calls "the logic of inclusionism":

> Embedded deeply within the logic of inclusionism were two additional ideals. First, the intellectual foundations of inclusionism drew a strong parallel between the pursuit of freedom and the acquisition of private property. To unshackle oneself from the bonds of inequity was, in part, to achieve the material resources necessary to improve one's life and the lives of those in one's family. This meant that freedom was defined by one's ability to gain access to resources and to the prerequisites of power. Implicitly, the orientation of inclusionism reinforced the logic and legitimacy of America's economic system and class structure, seeking to assimilate blacks within them. Second, inclusionists usually had a cultural philosophy of integration within the aesthetic norms and civil society created by the white majority. Inclusionists sought to transcend racism by acting in ways whites would not find objectionable or repulsive. The more one behaved in a manner which emulated whites, the less likely one might encounter the negative impact and effects of Jim Crow.[23]

In Chapter 4 I argued that Jackie Robinson occupied the liminal zone of E. Franklin Frazier's "world of make-believe" ideally. Frazier had argued that the black bourgeoisie rejected identification with the black masses in the ill-fated hope of achieving identification with white "society." Marable's description of inclusionism helps to explain who Jackie Robinson was: the black press' main bourgeois character. He gained

access to the prerequisites of power and demonstrated the effectiveness of assimilating blackness into "the aesthetic norms and civil society" by performing the cultural philosophy of integration *tout court*. Of course, an inclusionist orientation presumes one's exclusion, a calculation that came to Flood's aid as he entered the world of make-believe. Jackie Robinson may have expressed integration's cultural philosophy peerlessly, but perhaps no other black athlete has ever better expressed the first of Marable's inclusionist ideals: "the logic and legitimacy of America's economic system and class structure." In the black press and in the nationally circulating papers that supported him, Curt Flood was, above all, a symbol of freedom as apprehended through that legitimacy.

The political idiom of *Revolt* was not merely "anti-inclusionist," but also demanded the expression of concrete experience to elaborate on the meaning and significance of racial particularity. But, in the national sports press, experiential knowledge was damning, and disincorporated address helped to explicitly limit the meaning and significance of race. "Sweet reason," Leonard Koppett had called it, eliding the problem of Flood's blackness as he explored the things that Flood could do for baseball and doubted the sincerity of dystopia. Flood was, on the view of the national sports press, more evidence that sport was amid an economic transformation that the owners were too greedy and stodgy to accept. Koppett's reasoning, however committed in its support of Curt Flood, accused everyone involved of dramatic rhetorical manipulations, and made the changes that were coming relative to baseball's labor situation seem inevitable. On this score, Flood was right, race was irrelevant, and regardless of whether he won his federal lawsuit, baseball's economic modernization was

on the way. Black newspapers (e.g. Sam Lacy) told basically the same story, but added two elements: they put Flood in relation to the new black athlete since, after all, they had to cope with the "coming changes" as well, and they also added that Curt Flood was a black man who was working to set white folks free. Most often observed as an historical irony, like it was in *Ebony*, this move translated slavery into a racially neutral description of a baseball player's labor status, a disincorporated trope for a universal injustice. Because the slave was racially unmarked, Flood's case was *everyone's* business.

These days, Flood's narrators and biographers suggest that he and his case were caught up in the "climate of the sixties," a claim Flood also once made of himself in an interview with the famous television documentarian Ken Burns.[24] Though I have labored against the generality of this claim throughout this project, the reality is that there is something to the "spirit of the sixties" argument, but it is almost never presented with nearly enough nuance. Perhaps afflicted with the same woozy nostalgia that idealizes the internal differences right out of the black activist athlete, the placement of Flood into the spirit of the sixties too often presumes a monolithic kind of protest activity that, all at once, makes it easy to romanticize the agonies of identity politics as they once operated and makes it difficult to understand the historical specificity of Flood's circumstances. In my view, the "climate of the sixties" explains more than Flood's private motive for challenging the constitutionality of baseball's reserve clause; it also captures a certain texture to the politics of public life, the one obviated by the infamous question from Tom Haller: "Are you doing this because you're black?" No and yes but not really, said Flood, a fine strategy for fitting himself partially within the political imaginations of both

the black press and of *Revolt*, but a poor strategy for fitting fully within either. Flood's attempt to split differences, in the end, made no difference for him at all.

When it came to the poetic expression of blackness, The *Revolt* case for Curt Flood certainly could be made. Charles Aikens did so with passion and complexity, but not without awkwardness. In a narrative structure that mirrored Flood's in *The Way It Is*, Aikens likened his own racialized experiences in baseball to those of Flood, explaining not just how it felt to be treated like a slave, but also what the voice of white oppressors sounded like. He made no mention of the important connection Flood had to his white teammates, and Aikens was sure to place Flood not just in the tradition of the activist athlete, but on the vanguard of a revolutionary movement designed to reverse the complicity of the "happy Negro" and bring justice to sport. The problem here is that despite Flood's similarly detailed descriptions of racialized experience (especially in the minor leagues), and despite the loftiness of his appeal to principle, Flood never really saw himself as revolutionary — even *The Way It Is* retreated in the end: "Not abolition. Improvement." Not the full force of freedom measured on a revolutionary's scale, but a little bit of freedom to exercise one's profession. Thus, the error of Stephen A. Smith, who insisted that athletes in a better age met the obligations of their time: the revolutionaries did not agree on what the obligations were. Some who enacted their black activist obligations, like Curt Flood and his supporters, coped deliberately with political realities that made the languages of cooperation and negotiation worthwhile. Others, such as the likes of Harry Edwards, saw cooperation and negotiation as demanding a political performance of black self-degradation. Admittedly, what is sometimes said of Malcolm X can also be said of Harry Edwards; the fact of his

exclusion from the realities of political life (conveyed in the lack of a coherently identifiable constituency) permitted an unchecked revolutionary rhetoric. Indeed, Harry Edwards sometimes seemed to act a little bit like Holden Caulfield, finding phonies everywhere while asserting a unity every bit as false as the one claimed by the black press. Be that as it may, in Aikens' *The Black Scholar* piece, the idiom of *Revolt* characterized Flood as meeting an obligation far different than the one defined in black newspapers.

Flood's hopes for success required an alliance — at least symbolically — with white players which, in *Revolt* and in McKissick's "dilemma," could be swallowed only as a poison pill. In fact, as a raw speculative hypothesis (for which I am willing to admit I have no evidence), I wonder if Curt Flood's case was consciously understood by Edwards and the editors of *The Black Scholar* to be a little bit of a problem. Just as they assembled in 1971 a coherent account of the meaning (or "obligation") of the black athlete in terms inflected by the principled assertion of black identity and experience, along came Flood to demonstrate the importance of interracial coalition politics to the pursuit of freedom in sports. If that was the case, then it may be that Aikens' piece was intended as a way of turning the provocative imagery of Flood's slave narrative back toward blackness. The risk, in other words, was that the "white sports reporter" and the "Negro sports reporter" would colonize the language of slavery in ways that reified establishment politics instead of critiquing them. In fact, in the 1970 reprint of *Revolt*, Edwards made mention of Flood in passing, suggesting that "if Flood is successful, he will have pulled off the greatest victory for justice in pro athletics since another black man turned a similar trick in the late 40s when Jackie Robinson entered professional

baseball."[25] Though it is fair to call Harry Edwards a Robinson apologist — perhaps by necessity, since nobody ever won any friends nor influenced any people by taking cheap shots at Jackie — Edwards was repelled by Robinson's symbolic effects. As such, the Robinson to Flood comparison in 1970 may not have been much of a compliment coming from Edwards, who saw Jackie as a representative of liberalism's foundational symbolic sham. "Infinitely patient Negroes" were unwelcome in the *Revolt*. But, Curt Flood, seeking a fairer share of what Malcolm X once called the "boss's crumbs," *needed* white allies.

A slave narrative saturated with racial corporeality, in short, would have forced Curt Flood into confrontation with the political discourse represented by Tom Haller. At the beginning of this project, I introduced Flood's exchanges with Haller and Howard Cosell as the two most significant rhetorical events in Curt Flood's public history. Cosell, of course, gave Flood the opportunity to announce that a well-paid slave was a slave nevertheless, and Haller allowed Flood to achieve the labor coalition he would need by erasing the slave's blackness. In essence, Tom Haller asked Flood if he was trying to make race "salient to consciousness," because if he was, Haller (and those for whom he stood) wanted no part of it. The abstract, race-neutral, universalized, and disincorporated turns the slave narrative took in 1970 were already in motion, in many ways, by December 1969 in Puerto Rico. The explosive imagery of slavery surely showed that Flood meant business, but as it circulated in places like the *Times*, *TSN*, and the black press, it became *mere* metaphor; perhaps it was a fair analogue to the baseball laborer, but public rhetors such as Leonard Koppett and Sam Lacy and Bill Nunn, Jr. saw that Flood would ultimately push owners and players toward meaningful labor negotiations.

On their account, Flood had said "slavery," the owners had said "chaos," and somewhere in between had lain the bare economic realities of baseball, which would adjust itself to the new age sooner or later. Nevertheless, in *The Way It Is*, Flood invoked his racialized experiences in an effort to lend voice to dehumanization. Bob Broeg had scolded Flood for refusing colorblind politics, but that was hardly the point. Flood did not attempt to repudiate colorblindness in *The Way It Is*; he instead attempted to identify the reserve clause, in and through race, as an intrinsically race-neutral dehumanizing structure.

The important point here involves observing the results of the different turns that followed the identification of baseball's dehumanizing architecture. Just as Curt Flood had spoken from the position of an insider who could expose the truth — i.e. "the way it is" — through a representation of his experiences, Edwards disclosed dehumanization by detailing the actual physical, psychological, and emotional experiences of "the black athlete," synecdochically expressed. But whereas Edwards became more concrete in delivering racialized corporeality and affect to the experience of the slave, as "property," Flood labored to keep his argument tethered to the principled, abstract ground of baseball's basic economic architecture, lest his case come to be damningly regarded as a "racial thing." Certainly, the way in which Edwards described the experiences of "the black professional athlete" in 1969 seemed to prefigure, nearly trope for trope, what Flood would say about himself in *The Way It Is* at the end of 1970. Nevertheless, Flood moved away from race, detailing his experiences in vivid fashion, but representing, quite self-consciously, the effects of the reserve clause on "all players equally no matter where." Edwards had made clear, however, that the reserve clause did not affect all players equally. Black players suffered acutely and uniquely in all of integration's

spaces, even those that were intrinsically dehumanizing. Edwards gave public expression to the particularity of blackness as experienced by black athletes, and Flood tilted the slave narrative toward the race-neutrality of the reserve clause's universal restraint. In short, Flood struggled to connect the racialized corporeality represented in sharing his experience to the self-abstracting territory of public discourse. He vacillated and parried, invoked Dred Scott and Frederick Douglass, enacted an ironic conceit worthy of Malcolm X, and told anyone who would listen that as much as his ill-fated lawsuit had everything to do with principle, it had nothing to do with race.

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Concerned with trying to solve the ethical problem associated with "the fundamental indignity" of speaking for others by claiming to speak only for oneself, Linda Alcoff asserts that "we cannot neatly separate off our mediating praxis which interprets and constructs our experiences from the praxis of others."[26] She names an important category here, the "mediating praxis," presumably understood as that which structures our understanding of the self and the other — the pictures in our heads, if you will, of who we are and what others are like. Alcoff alludes to a troublesome web of indeterminacy that problematizes all acts of speaking from the start by revealing the mutability, adaptability, and contingency of discursive effect: "We are collectively caught in an intricate, delicate web in which each action I take, discursive or otherwise, pulls on, breaks off, or maintains the tension in many strands of the web in which others find themselves moving also."[27] To settle the matter of publics and counterpublics, I want to suggest that Warner describes an important phenomenon that functions in tandem with Alcoff's ethic of speaking for the other, namely that a public is another name for a

formalized mediating praxis available for subjective identification. As Warner once again asserts the imaginary ontology of publics, he says, "A public, after all, cannot have a discrete, positive existence; something becomes a public only through its availability for subjective identification."[28] Speaking for the self, an inescapably problematic discursive activity Alcoff attempts to modulate into an ethical one, ultimately presumes ones' self-knowledge, which, if we are to believe Warner, is partially acquired through one's mediation in publicity. Alcoff says, "When I speak for myself, I am constructing a possible self, a way to be in the world, and am offering that, whether I intend to or not, to others, as one possible way to be."[29] In the context of publicity, Alcoff's assertion seems to evoke what Lauren Berlant calls a "prosthetic," the public body that provides "an identification with a disembodied public subject [one] can imagine as parallel to [one's] private person."[30] But Alcoff's "possible self," as a public prosthetic, is stylized according to the pragmatics of the public in which it participates. The mere presentation of other "ways to be," essentially, entails the appearance of the self in public life, which in turn entails the effacement of one's particulars. It is only in a counterpublic that the body and the speaker find meaningful articulations in discourse, when speaking for the self means bringing the self's particularities along.

Trying to both bring his blackness along *and* leave it behind, Flood got caught between "webs," between two modes of address, each with potential benefits, and each with crippling disadvantages. The players — meaning his white Players Association colleagues — could help him the most, because they might actually legitimate the lawsuit. *Flood v. Kuhn* was, all things being equal, an absurd display of judicial deference to baseball,[31] but the Players Association, at least in the memory of Marvin

Miller, had been "waiting for" someone like Curt Flood in almost the same way that Rickey had "waited for" Jackie Robinson.[32] In the short term, which required that Flood literally mortgage his future even with his bills to Arthur Goldberg settled in advance, the symbolic support of the Players Association was no less than crucial. In Puerto Rico, Tom Haller asked the "black" question. This was a pivotal moment for Flood, and as much as I would like to avoid the intentional fallacy here, Flood's reflection and ambiguity bespoke, at the very least, a self-conscious uncertainty about how to fit his blackness into things. Standing at the fulcrum between a Harry Edwards-styled "of course it's a black thing," and a black press-styled lurch toward universality, Curt Flood's middle-path, characterized by an assertion of black experience through double-consciousness, but also by a hop over the veil of race to join up with what the *Afro-American*'s Sam Lacy called "his team," (i.e. all of the players), provided Flood with access to both black experience as a political resource and to the principled universality of inclusionism. But in activating these resources, he had to endure their friction. The tropological consonances between *The Way It Is* and *Revolt* make it easy to label Flood an angry black man after the fact. But, the black press idiom, which in the end narrated Flood's history, worked in a colorblind way that concealed the contrary truths of black experience being expressed elsewhere. Above all, the black public sphere of the early 1970s domesticated the energy of the "revolt" through Curt Flood. *Revolt* would not speak for black politics. The black press and the national daily press narrated the racial particularity right out of Curt Flood, all in the name of the "new black athlete."

Narrative Two: Of the Triumph of Nostalgia

Yesterday's "new black athlete" is today's model black activist athlete. As surely as the obligation of the age was perpetually under black review, the nostalgic figure of the activist athlete, and the meaning of her or his[33] blackness, as imagined today is no less up for grabs. Before exploring the features of this contemporary dynamic in what Houston Baker calls "the black public sphere," I want to present Manning Marable's observations on the sources of racialized affect and their consequences on black self-understanding of "racism":

> At its essential core, racism is most keenly felt in its smallest manifestations: the white merchant who drops change, rather than touch the hand of a black person; the white salesperson who follows you into the dressing room when you carry several items of clothing to try on, because he or she suspects that you are trying to steal; the white teacher who deliberately avoids the upraised hand of a Latino student in class, giving white pupils an unspoken yet understood advantage; the white woman who wraps the strap of her purse several times tightly around her arm, just before walking past a black man; the white taxicab drivers who speed rapidly past African-Americans or Latinos, picking up whites on the next block. Each of these incidents, no matter how small, constructs the logic of the prism of race for the oppressed. We witness clear, unambiguous changes of behavior or language by whites toward us in public and private situations, and we code or interpret such changes as "racial." These minor actions reflect a structure of power, privilege and violence which most blacks can never forget.[34]

For Marable, racism, at its "essential core," is neither a grand idea nor an conspiratorial project. Racism is affective and experiential, both felt and observed. Producing what sounds much like racialized double-consciousness, racism is not just a matter *of* white attitudes, though it is in part that, it is also a problem *for* black identity. Racism is, in other words, not just a pathology whites must eradicate from consciousness, it is also a

experienced fact of daily life woven into the worldview of those constituted as racialized others. Marable's detailed gestures to the quotidian, from walking around Macy's to hailing a cab, lend expression to what experience with the markers of race mean to those who bear them, a "prism" that comes to structure one's understanding of the world.

My analysis of *The Way It Is* in Chapter 2 attempted to show how Curt Flood used baseball to express his experiences with blackness — his "prism," if you will — in an attempt to expose the dehumanization in oppressive discourses. More than anything, perhaps, this dissertation project invites attention to the perils of attempting to insert "the logic of the prism of race for the the oppressed" into public space. An ongoing question, in this vein, concerns the way in which opposition to racism manifests a political rhetoric. There is no question that both black newspapers and Harry Edwards imagined themselves to be anti-racist; let's not forget that just as Edwards offered what one might call a more "radical" vision of black politics, the black press viewed itself as the distilled essence of the public "fight for social justice." Each attempted to influence social, cultural, and institutional life through alternative modes of publicity. Their attempts to craft anti-racist agendas turned on the divergent manners in which they constituted public space in and through public address, not just as arguments with more or less "persuasive" effect, but in competing rhetorical performances that represented the relationship between speech, the black body, and black experience differently. In the late sixties and early seventies, black newspapers evinced a contest[35] over the public form of anti-racist praxis, but often decided its inclusionist form in advance. *Revolt* and *The Black Scholar* put "the prism" of race front and center, insisting that one was either an a-political dupe or a "prostitute" for the establishment in leaving blackness behind. In the present, Edwards gives

interviews, conducts speaking engagements, and is likely to appear on ESPN in occasional remembrances of 1968. The political rhetoric of colorblindness, however, circulates in perpetuity.

So, Edwards did not fall completely silent. In 1998, he was interviewed in the on-line magazine *ColorLines* by David Leonard (who himself would write the latest academic account of Curt Flood in 2008). Asked about the purported demise of the activist athlete on the thirtieth anniversary of the Mexico City protests, Edwards answered in reference to Michael Jordan's infamous covering of the Reebok slogan on the medal stand in 1992: "Thirty years ago there would not have been any issue of them covering the Reebok slogan because they would not have had the Nike contract that was in conflict with it. That would have gone to a white athlete. So what this change tells me is that black athletes are sufficiently integrated into the business matrix of sports … Thirty years ago that was not the case. We are talking about different times."[36] This account, cited also by Dayn Perry in an article appearing on the commercial website for Alex Belth's biography of Curt Flood, not only announces a changing of the times, but also alludes to a changing of black experience in sport. Integration into the business matrix, apparently, has meant that black professional athletes have lost their incentive and impulse to activism. Ever the sociologist, Edwards offered a detailed account of the problematic implications of the shift:

> Today's black athlete is very different. Their identity is different — they live in a rich, largely white world, a world where black individuality is tolerated so long as it is without reference to the black community. If you asked them about the history of the black athlete, many couldn't tell you much. They don't find that history relevant to their world. Some even get

> angry when you ask them about it. One up-and-coming NBA star was asked about Oscar Robertson and he said, "Don't know, don't care, and don't take me there." They don't care about whose shoulders they stand on. They have no idea about who set the table at which they are feasting. And the worse part about it is not that they are ignorant of this history, but they are militantly ignorant. The sad part about it is that when people forget how things came about, they are almost certainly doomed to see them go. And I think that is where this generation of black athletes may be headed in sports.[37]

And in an account of the activist athlete's demise wrought in response to the resurgence of interest in Curt Flood, Perry offers a similarly pessimistic diagnosis of black athletic amnesia:

> Elite athletes of any color are paid beyond their wildest hopes, and it's no surprise that, like many of the exorbitantly well heeled, whatever rabble-rousing edge they once had is-to pilfer T.S. Eliot for a moment-lying etherized upon a table. Sure, there are the perfunctory nods at imbalance and discrimination that Barry Bonds, Terrell Owens, Allen Iverson and others give us from time to time, but even the black athlete these days is so woefully removed from the hoi polloi that their laments are perhaps nothing more than nostalgic vacuities. This isn't to say racial discrimination doesn't exist-only a fool would suggest we've conquered bigotry. But today's athletes are so lavished in money that they no longer are in somber accord with the blighted classes in America.[38]

With black individuality forced out of articulation with the "blighted classes" in the business matrix, and with militant ignorance prevailing in the divorce from the hoi polloi, rich black athletes have lost any reason to care about anything at all but themselves. So goes the story of the demise of the activist athlete: today's black athletes lack the proper racialized experiences to be activists; they have been etherized by wealth.

Though I wish to challenge the consequences of Perry's epideictic tenor, which tends to lay blame for the contemporary absence of black athletic activism on the

malignant and deliberate amnesia of athletes themselves, he gestures opaquely toward a relationship that deserves fuller exploration. Perry implies that nostalgia over the activist athlete is bound up with an anxiety in public memory. Of course, there is vacuity in all nostalgia as it wishes for a past that never was, and one could argue that this is simply nostalgia's constitutive anxiety. In the case of the activist athlete, though, public memory wishes not only for a past that never was, but also expresses nostalgia for something that liberalism worked to erase: the representation of racialized particularity and experience in public discourse. What Edwards and Perry seem to be lamenting is the successful operation of liberalism in the universe of sport. Many black athletes have in fact struck it rich through the expansion of sport's racial framework over the last forty years, they believe, which has resulted in the distortion of black athletes' experiential contacts with the "blighted classes." The obvious moral error here is that this in many ways amounts to a wish that contemporary athletes had endured the afflictions of the past, a paternalistic position not unlike wishing that your spoiled children had it as badly as you once did. Taken more charitably, nostalgia over the demise of the activist athlete expresses anxiety over a lost representation of racial struggle, over the disappearance of a distinctly racialized form of protest from the scene of public life. Among the contemporary generation of black athletes, this worry goes, no one remains to represent the blight of the masses.

With respect to Curt Flood, Perry calls this an "irony," since it was Flood who set the stage for the high salaries of contemporary athletes. But this is an irony only to the extent that the present is measured against the nostalgic image of a past in which black athletes were discursively constructing a revolution with an alternative, and superior,

teleology. As such, the black activist athlete figures into a contemporary political rhetoric of sport that uses Muhammad Ali to castigate Tiger Woods, or uses Arthur Ashe to shame Michael Jordan. As Leonard says, "While today Flood can be viewed as courageous and willing to risk all for a cause, today's athlete can be easily spun as selfish and concerned only with money and material possessions."[39] This, unfortunately, is what passes for critical memory these days: blaming the athletes of today for having experienced race in ways that had been defined for decades by liberalism as progress. Thus, it is worth recalling Houston Baker's definition of the black public sphere, which he says is characterized by the twin rhetorics of nostalgia and critical memory. My critical narrative is essentially this: nostalgia has come to colonize the critical memory of the black activist athlete, as the active "substitution of allegory for history" has usurped the impulse to "judge severely" and "censure righteously."[40] It is not just that public memory of the activist athlete is dominated by idealized allegories of who and what once was, but more problematically, nostalgia and critical memory have collapsed onto each other, and idealized allegories have become the grounds from which judgment is rendered and censures are issued. Flood's contribution to the loss of the activist athlete is no irony — it instead indexes a critical psychosis intrinsic to liberalism: the triumph of nostalgia over critical memory. To advance this narrative, I first locate Curt Flood's appearance in public memory and then compare two recent (and elaborate) accounts of the black athlete's demise.

Remembered as Forgotten

Taking stock of the memories of Curt Flood that appeared following his death in 1997, David Leonard makes a point which, generally speaking, this dissertation project

attempts to prove with historical specificity. Leonard worries that Flood's recent appearance as a "superhero," has "erased his place within a larger revolt of the black athlete."[41] For Leonard, the discourse that emerged right after Flood's death "tended to minimize, if not discount, the importance of race and identity as it related to both his fight and the subsequent societal reaction."[42] At the center of his concern is that Flood's racialized experiences, both prior to his lawsuit and in the reactions that followed, shaped biographical details that are too easily omitted from contemporary memory. Regarding public discourse on Flood after 1997, Leonard says:

> Although he was linked to other so-deemed black troublemakers and agitators, his fight in their estimation was that of a baseball player. Although he received letters that began, "Dear Nigger," as used slave analogies within his fight, the vast majority of articles in an effort to reclaim Flood in a colorblind America celebrated him as a courageous man for who race means little now when it shouldn't have meant anything back then.[43]

Although I cannot quarrel with Leonard's assertion that race has disappeared from contemporary memories of Curt Flood, he commits two crucial errors. First, he compares the current erasure of "the revolt of the black athlete" to his revisionist interpretation of Flood's near-uniform racist demonization in the early seventies, which to me, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, is simply an untenable position. Second, Leonard unfairly places what he takes to be the racist facts of Flood's case as the contemporaneous truth. Put differently, Leonard presumes an obvious, if not conscious, connection between Flood an Edwards' OPHR. He is correct to say that Flood exists now as a symbol of colorblind justice and reform, but in virtually ignoring the support

that Flood enjoyed in the early seventies, from the *New York Times* to black newspapers, Leonard is at a loss to explain how the political discourses that imagined themselves as oppositional, agitational, and progressive abetted the mechanisms of colorblindness that helped to disarticulate Flood from the "revolt." Indeed, the colorblind memories of Flood underwent formulation as early as the mid-1970s, and virtually without exception claimed a rooting interest in the achievements of Curt Flood.

As most remember him, Flood has been forgotten. The awkwardness of that statement is intentional; Curt Flood may be one of the most remembered forgotten individuals in the history of professional American sport. This seems to be a paradoxical circumstance that began in 1973, when the *Afro-American* wondered about the value of martyrdom, or perhaps in 1972, when Sam Lacy predicted that folks would one day wonder, "who was Curt Flood?" Most baseball fans cannot forget the 1994 strike that canceled the playoffs and World Series, leaving MLB without crowning a champion for the first time in its history. When the strike finally ended in federal court, the New York *Daily News*' Bill Madden found a reason to remember Curt Flood: "It had to be the cruelest of ironies for the Lords of Baseball yesterday to have Judge Sonia Sotomayor drop the hammer on them in the very same courtroom where 24 years ago Curt Flood lost his case to have the reserve clause struck down. To the best of anyone's knowledge, that was the last time the owners beat the players in court. Since then the Lords have been on one of the longest legal losing streaks in modern history."[44] Putting aside the compulsion to figure Flood into historical irony one way or another, Madden's observation is an exemplar of the manner in which Flood is often cited — as a loser who inspired a winning streak for baseball players in their ongoing feud with ownership. But, just as the

Afro had imagined, public rhetors would in fact wonder what happened to Curt Flood. The subject of a feature by the *Times*' Murray Chass in 1976, Flood was remembered only four years after the Supreme Court loss as a forgotten man. "He challenged baseball's reserve rules that bound a player to his team for life, he lost and was forgotten," Chass asserted. Thirty-three years later, sportswriters are still registering the omission of Flood from baseball's self-defining spectacles. The MLB All-Star Game in the Summer of 2009 was played in St. Louis, and *Post-Dispatch* columnist Bryan Burwell conducted an interesting analysis of the tribute to Cardinals history that played on Busch Stadium's "jumbotron" during the game's festivities: "[E]ven the best parties have a few surprising no-shows and disappointing omissions, and this video tribute only highlighted the fact that one of the most historic names in St. Louis baseball history was neither present nor accounted for. And no it wasn't the defrocked home run king Mark McGwire, who remains in self-imposed exile, far away from those inquiring investigative eyes. […] No, the man whose presence was missing — and most surely needed — from the All-Star party was the late Curt Flood."[45]

Perhaps the reason that Flood is so frequently remembered as forgotten is that when the economic modernization of baseball is examined closely, or at least on the abstract register that sees him as the "Abe Lincoln" *Ebony* once hoped he would be, Flood's vivid symbolism begins to fade. The day after Flood's death, the *Times*' Murray Chass, who in 1971 worried that Flood's one-way trip to Europe betokened an "evil spirit" in baseball, wrote that "it is the players who came after him in the major leagues who should count their blessings for having had a man of his stature and dignity precede them."[46] But, in a 1979 *Times* analysis of baseball's anti-trust exemption, Chass clarified

the identities of those who *really* made a difference: "Peter Seitz is a name that will live in infamy as far as baseball owners are concerned. To the players, though, Peter Seitz was their Abe Lincoln, the man who freed the slaves."[47] Seitz was the labor arbitrator who released the contracts of Andy Messersmith and Dave McNally in 1975. Besides assisting in the perforation of Flood's blackness from his slave metaphor, the comparison of Flood to the free-agent triumvirate of Seitz, Messersmith, and McNally, helps to re-narrate the labor negotiation story advanced by the nationally circulating press in the 1970s. In Cooperstown in 2006, Ed Edmonds presented a history of Curt Flood that covered familiar ground: "Nearly six years to the day after Flood signed and mailed his letter to Kuhn, arbitrator Peter Seitz forced Major League Baseball to acknowledge the free agent status of two white players, Andy Messersmith and Dave McNally." Flood, however, "paved the way for changes in baseball's labor history, and players today owe a great debt to this graceful player and man who struck a simple blow for human dignity."[48] The point about Flood having "paved the way" is repeated with such frequency that the the story of Flood's influence operates as a mere recitation of the line of reasoning Leonard Koppett offered in the summer of 1972. As Edmonds puts it:

> Flood's courageous decision to fight against a trade that he felt abused his basic dignity as a human being did raise awareness amongst players, owner, and sportswriters about the true nature of the reserve clause and the system that rested upon it. It helped to make the efforts of the Players Association legitimate, but it did not signal the end to free agency. That would be done by James "Catfish" Hunter in his arbitration action against Oakland owner Charles O. Finley in 1974 and by pitchers Andy Messersmith and Dave McNally during the following year. The foundation for those two decisions was the result of tough negotiations between the players and the owners that created the 1970 collective bargaining agreement. That agreement also must acknowledge the legacy

> of salary arbitration inspired by the Don Drysdale-Sandy Koufax holdout of 1966.[49]

Flood was courageous, Flood raised awareness, and Flood legitimized the Players Association, but Flood did not create free agency in baseball. As Koppett had stated right after Flood lost the Supreme Court case, Flood's influence was merely indirect: "it was Flood's case that *moved them into that position*."[50]

It would be another project entirely to compare the frequency and texture of contemporary Seitz-Messersmith-McNally memories to those of Flood, but since at least the mid 1970s, the Flood story has assumed a clear trajectory — he should not be forgotten because he sacrificed so much to set his colleagues free, a process that took shape once Messersmith and McNally became free agents. In 1976, Chass insisted that, "the name — Curt Flood — should not be forgotten by anyone playing baseball today. […] But seven years ago, Curt Flood, boldly and at great sacrifice to his own career and future, pioneered an effort to gain some freedom for himself and his fellow players, an effort that has now reached fruition."[51] In his 1997 Flood obituary, Chass additionally acknowledged the importance of the Players Association to the case, saying, "With the board's support, Flood took his challenge all the way to the United States Supreme Court. He lost, but his effort eventually emboldened the other players, Messersmith in particular. Unfortunately, besides losing the case, Flood saw his career die."[52] A 1997 *Houston Chronicle* obituary observed that "Flood's case led to sweeping change, with baseball's system ultimately crumbling, when in 1974 an arbitrator ruled that major leaguers Dave McNally and Andy Messersmith should be granted free agency. In the years since Flood's case, every major league sport has opened doors for free agency.

Hundreds upon hundreds of athletes have benefited because of Flood's courage to stand up."[53] In a 2005 essay on Curt Flood for the on-line baseball source "At Home Plate," Jonathan Leshanski told a similar story: "Curt Flood, one of the finest centerfielders of his day, took baseball to court and sued them for unfair labor practices. He lost the case and at a huge price, it cost him his career and more. However it opened the door to the modern era of free agency, yet few people understand just what happened."[54] In late 2006, Bill Fletcher, credited by *The Berkeley Daily Planet* as a "long-time labor and international activist," implored Hall of Fame voters to reconsider the case of Curt Flood by noting, "Flood was the person who threw himself on the barbed wire that encircled the baseball players, making it possible for other to jump over not only the restrictions imposed by the reserve clause, but to jump over him as well."[55] And in framing a 2007 interview with Brad Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, Carl Bialik asserts that "Flood's trial failed in a questionable Supreme Court decision, but opened the floodgates for free agency and today's economic structure that more-equitably splits the lucre between players and owners. Flood himself never benefited from his selfless struggle, and died in 1997."[56] The story is nearly always the same, even as the metaphors mix. Once Catfish Hunter, Dave McNally, and Andy Messersmith acquired the right to shop their baseball services, Flood was characterized variously as having "pioneered an effort to gain some freedom," "emboldened other players," "opened doors for free agency," "threw himself over barbed wire," or (with the cleverest pun of all), "opened the floodgates for free agency."

To assert that Flood is the most remembered forgotten athlete in American professional sport, though, is to utter an incoherence that becomes apparent when stories

like these are told; everyone seems to say that everyone forgets. What purports to remove this mode of remembrance from incoherence is its displacement of amnesia onto contemporary athletes. Those who write the stories, of course, never forget — the athletes of today are the culprits. Similarly lamenting the shortness of memory over Andy Messersmith in 1979, Murray Chass compared him with Flood once again: "Messersmith was the one who put his career on the line […], but players have shown as much appreciation for him as they have for Curt Flood, who prematurely killed his baseball career with an earlier freedom fight."[57] The gaps in player memories, it would then seem, are not limited to Curt Flood, as Chass reiterated in 1997: "Professional athletes, for the most part, live their time. They generally don't care what happened before them and, worse, they often don't know. Sadly, many baseball players wouldn't even be able to identify Flood, wouldn't even know he was the forerunner of Andy Messersmith, another name they wouldn't recognize for the impact he had on their lives."[58] Chass' reprimand to current players over their failure to remember or acknowledge Flood and Messersmith, their forerunners, evokes Harry Edwards' accusation of "militant ignorance" and Perry's similarly admonishing tone over the loss of the activist athlete from the contemporary sports scene. Except, the militant ignorance practiced by contemporary players, on the account of Chass and others, has little to do with race, social justice or political significance. Instead, it revolves around the failure to appreciate what has made massive athlete wealth possible. In its elegy to Flood in 1997, the *Houston Chronicle* contrasted him with a dubious list of the craven and selfish who probably didn't know that he had died, let alone who Curt Flood was:

> Of all the millionaires Curt Flood helped make, when Flood succumbed to cancer last January, not a single contemporary player attended his funeral. Not Shaquille O'Neal, he of the $110 million free-agent contract with the Los Angeles Lakers. Not Chad Brown, of the $24 million free-agent contract with the Seattle Seahawks. Not Albert Belle of the more than $50 million free-agent contract with the Chicago White Sox. Not anyone. Sadly, Flood experienced in death the kind of neglect and solitude he once knew in life.[59]

And, it seems that by the Summer of 2009, little had changed. As Bryan Burwell put it the day after the St. Louis All-Star game, "Mention Flood's name around All-Star clubhouses, and the reactions are mixed with touches of vague recognition."[60] "Neglect and solitude," says just about everyone, provided that the targets of disdain are overpaid professional athletes.

In a recent essay on the rehabilitated reputation enjoyed by former Boston Celtic basketball star Bill Russell, Murry Nelson argues that the shift in the Russell narrative is motivated less by racial atonement or revaluation than by a desire to discipline athletes in the present. Russell, at one time, was detested by a media establishment that coded his surliness as "black anger," a lens that resulted in racially tinctured characterizations of his athletic ability. Since then, Bill Russell has come to be regarded as one of the National Basketball Association's ideal ambassadors. Says Nelson, "a man so reviled in youth has become in his senior years a spokesperson for comportment in a sporting milieu perceived by many to be overrun with antisocial misfits and hedonists motivated solely by self-promotion."[61] This line of reasoning echoes Leonard's concern that Flood has become a convenient figure against whom contemporary black athletes can be measured as selfish. But, the reversal of the Russell narrative centers fundamentally on the shifting meaning of his blackness. With respect to Curt Flood, one wonders exactly what his

contemporaries are enjoined to remember; his courage?, his sacrifice?, the bare facts of his history? Maybe it is all of those, but it is almost never his racialized experiences. Burwell's 2009 All-Star Game lamentation offered the memories of two important baseball figures in the present as proxies for public memory. Dave Campbell was once an MLB pitcher who has gained greater fame as a baseball analyst for ESPN. Said Campbell, "as a guy who gets a pension check every month, if [Flood] hadn't done what he did, I don't think I'd be getting that pension check. Or it certainly wouldn't be as large as it is now."[62] Burwell also turned to Ozzie Smith, the Hall of Fame shortstop who played the bulk of his exemplary career with the Cardinals, who said, "before there can be change, there's always someone who has to sacrifice. [Flood] was the guy who sacrificed it all so that we can experience what we're doing today."[63] Presenting the memories of Campbell and Smith as superior to those of the current generation of players and, it would seem, to our own, Burwell concluded, "It's time for baseball to honor and remember just how significant that sacrifice was."[64] As public memory gets its upgrade in relation to Flood, the meaning, influence, and significance of his racial identity is no more visible than it was in the *Times*, *The Sporting News*, and most black newspapers in 1970.

This fact may account for the recent scholarly efforts of Michael Lomax, Gerald Early, and David Leonard[65] to recover a distinctly racialized context to the commonly told stories of Curt Flood. And Brad Snyder, whose biography stands as the most complete and satisfying account of Flood's life, said in a 2007 interview that "civil rights was driving his lawsuit."[66] Throughout this project I have offered a variety of criticisms of these efforts, especially as they anachronistically assert phrases like "black power,"

"black rage," and the "spirit of the sixties," so I do not wish to rehash them all here. However, as race makes it back into Flood's story in the popular imagination, it is rarely, if ever, understood in relation to the complex terrain on which Flood attempted to fashion a strategic public position. To be fair, I am not claiming that previous treatments fail simply because they are not my reading. In fact, apart from Stuart Weiss' *Curt Flood: Man Behind the Myth*, which asserts an objectivity that simply does not hold, I do not think they fail much at all. Snyder's book is in fact a lucid and insightful history of Flood's legal context. Accented by the relationship between the civil rights movement and the US court system, Snyder offers informed biographies of federal judges, careful readings of legal opinion, and a complete historical explication of labor law in sport. But as he, Lomax, Early, and Leonard burn energy toiling to find the argument that gives race meaning in Flood's case, they labor to find an agency that emerges from Flood's racialized reckoning; and these observers rarely escape the dilemma that vexed Flood himself and that continues to trouble those in public life who remember how forgotten he is.

The best that most can do is to put Flood next to Jackie Robinson, assert the complementarity of their struggles, and recite the argument from extension. Bill Fletcher's piece from *The Berkeley Daily Planet*, which is perhaps the most pointedly racialized plea for Flood's entry into baseball's Hall of Fame (since he has been *forgotten*), makes an argument not much different from Snyder's:

> "Flood's actions took place in the context of the great battle to expand democracy that was represented by the social movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. Flood became a champion for the goals of those

> movements on the field of baseball. While Jackie Robinson, by his presence, broke the color line in baseball, Flood, by his actions, challenged the feudal-like system that restricted the ability of players to get out from under the thumb of team owners. In that sense, Flood was more than a symbol, but was as much an agent of change."[67]

Fletcher underestimates, at the very least, the importance of Jackie Robinson "symbolism," but offers a distinction that makes the case for Flood's significance by comparing his "agency" to the *mere* symbolism of Robinson. On this score, especially since Fletcher regards Flood as a representative of no less than two and a half decades of social movements, one might be inclined to see Flood as even more important to baseball's progress narrative than Jackie. Though Fletcher's argument is not precisely the commonly repeated "Curt finished what Jackie started" position, it surely demonstrates the requirement that any attempt to recover race from Flood's case must cope with Jackie Robinson.

Perhaps anticipating the strength that Flood can gather when his relationship to Robinson is examined in such a way, Snyder clarifies the argument from extension:

> I don't want to equate Jackie Robinson's suffering or struggle with Curt Flood's impact or struggle, because Robinson's impact was much larger, and his struggle much harder. There's his symbolic importance, and the timing of it all: in 1947, eight years before the Montgomery Bus Boycott even began. Martin Luther King told Jackie Robinson there would have been no bus boycott without him. I think Robinson's impact was enormous and almost incalculable. Curt was taking the baton from Jackie Robinson in a lot of ways, and taking the next step. The reserve clause was the next step—it had to go.[68]

As confidently as Fletcher's position vaults Flood into importance at the expense of Jackie Robinson, Snyder's argument insulates Robinson's symbolic hegemony from the

effect of *over*-remembering Flood. Whether Flood was an "agent" in contrast to Robinson's symbolic effect or Jackie Robinson's "incalculable" symbolic effect dwarfed the influence of Curt Flood, the racialized dimensions of Flood's case are recovered through the Jackie Robinson connection, which explicitly and implicitly requires positioning Flood within the liberal progress narrative of "the civil rights movement," or "the social movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s," a relay race in which Flood was passed the baton.

Herein lies the problem: In the early 1970s, Jackie Robinson was not a reference that racialized Flood, he was instead one of the many means through which Flood came to represent the same colorblind political imaginary now desperately in search of the black activist athlete's lost civic ethos. Robinson may help to make Flood's blackness visible, but only to the extent that wherever race manifests in public memory it can be abstracted into the same universal principles Robinson ostensibly represents, thus coming to trump, as it did for Curt Flood in the early 1970s, the crass facts of a professional athlete's salary. A well-paid slave, as Flood famously announced, is a slave nevertheless. I do not mean to deny this line of reasoning, because, for my own part, I certainly believe that Flood was victimized by an unjust system. Having said that, as Flood is continually remembered as the man that baseball forgot, the effort to fit race into public memory belies the systematic expulsion of race that characterized both Flood's public address and the address of those who supported him categorically. Remembering Flood's courageous challenge in the context of racism, or in the context of a white backlash, or in the context of "black power," however real those problems may have saturated the contemporaneous social or political atmosphere, produces instead an image of black athletic activism that

works to index the failures of the present — the memory of Flood as forgotten imposes exactly the kind of amnesia that enables the compulsion to nostalgia. Racializing Curt Flood delivers a symbolic reward to the injunction to remember him.

The Activist Athlete and the Problem of Black Experience

In the same 1998 interview with David Leonard in which Harry Edwards recognized the problem of sexism in *Revolt* and the OPHR, Edwards also addressed the question of what else OPHR leadership might have done to broaden the scope of the revolt. Cutting across racial lines in ways that may have been unthinkable in 1968, Edwards lamented:

> Some of our greatest supporters — the Harvard University crew team, Hal and Olga Connolly, Bill Toomey — were white. Even with the tremendous Black Power thrust of the movement, and its emphasis on black culture, I should have made a greater effort to publicly enunciate and embrace that interracial relationship. Even though the media didn't want to hear it, and they didn't because they wanted to paint it as a wild, militant Black Power thing, I should have put greater emphasis on the interracial dimensions of what we were trying to accomplish. We probably would have lost some people on the black side, but I think the long term validity, clarity and honesty about what actually happened, and who was actually with us in this effort, would have been enhanced. It would have simply been more valid.[69]

Regardless of how this statement is assessed, it should be clear that Edwards' line of self-criticism is possible only after thirty years of reflection — it represents a political orientation *Revolt* was both disinclined to harbor in 1968 and against which it militated openly. One might suggest here that Edwards basically misreads himself in failing to see how his poetic expressions of blackness challenged the logic of inclusionism that produced, in fact, the loss of the activist athlete. But, as an historical examination of the

political culture of *Revolt*, there's no doubt that he is right. A public expression of interracial cooperation likely would have made *Revolt* "more valid." What Edwards seems to overlook in his self-analysis, however, is that his disclosures in 1968 and 1969 relied fundamentally both on a challenge to existing paths to political legitimacy and on a version of double-consciousness that saw the benefits of interracial cooperation as an integrationist delusion. White sports reporters could be voices of blackness, but this was much different than integrationist colorblindness. Speaking blackness into politics, which Edwards did with precision and strategic complexity, was precisely what made him, as Warner might say, "less than public." The counterpublic idiom of *Revolt*, quite simply, was not built for "long term validity."

These days, Shaun Powell and Bill Rhoden offer the two most elaborate and compelling public arguments on the disappearance of the black activist athlete. Each published in 2007, Powell's *Souled Out* and Rhoden's *Forty Million Dollar Slaves* express common nostalgic cravings for an earlier age in which black athletes acted on the courage of their convictions. Moreover, the arguments in each book turn on a problem with which Harry Edwards thought he did not have to cope in 1968: the social experiences of black athletes. In fact, Edwards used the brutal facts of black experience in integration in 1968 to mount his critique. In essence, Powell and Rhoden argue that wealth and celebrity culture have deprived contemporary black athletes of both the experiences with race that produce an activist's consciousness and the willingness to risk lucrative financial opportunities by speaking politically. Are they right? Without careful sociological investigation, it is probably difficult to know. Are they onto something? Certainly they are, but my central criticism is that their line of reasoning, which gestures

incisively toward the limits of sport's progress narrative, instead attacks individual black athletes for, essentially, doing what was asked of them in liberalism's political imaginary. Powell and Rhoden, in short, accuse black athletes of abusing the progress that liberalism's narrative told them they were constituting through their colorblind performance of excellence.

To be clear, their arguments do not lack nuance, nor do they lack an acumen for diagnosing the problems of lost black experience and consciousness. Across his case studies, Rhoden, for example, assesses the influence of what he calls, "the belt": a process involving summer camps, campus athletic cloisters, and quasi-professional non-playing performances (such as meeting with potential sponsors) into which those who will become professional athletes are inserted as if on conveyor belts.[70] By the time athletes reach the pros, Rhoden says, any impulse they may have had to speak conscientiously through their blackness often becomes consumed by a deeply socialized sense of political neutrality. All while noting the experiential shifts many black athletes incur between "the world of the streets and the world of wealth," and registering, like E. Franklin Frazier and W.E.B. Du Bois an inherent gift for "second sight" as occupants of "two worlds," Rhoden still describes contemporary black athletes as no less than traitors:

> Occupants of two worlds — the world of the streets and the world of wealth — these athletes can speak from a perch of power and influence, while holding to the kind of "keep it real" pedigree that makes them relevant to the core black community. But now that they occupy a position where they can be more than mere symbols of black achievement, where they can actually serve their communities in vital and tangible ways, while also addressing the power imbalance within their own industry from a position of greater strength, they seem most at a loss, lacking purpose and drive. Given the journey that has led to this point,

> contemporary black athletes have abdicated their responsibility to the community with treasonous vigor. They stand as living, active proof that it does not necessarily follow that if you make a man rich, you make him free.[71]

On the point about "keeping it real," Rhoden finds agreement with Powell, who asserts that "street cred" is "the most destructive force known to poor black kids."[72] In a comprehensive and craven swap of wealth for freedom, Rhoden insists that the racial imbalance of power in professional sport ought to be traced to a fundamental abdication of black athletes' personal responsibility to their communities.

What do their communities need? And, who are "their communities" in a post-integration political environment? Curt Flood had shown that even the most seemingly just expression of athletic activism can turn on such questions. And there is no doubt that Bill Rhoden remembers Curt Flood, whose fight supposedly "transcended race." Throughout Rhoden's text, the answers to the complexities of coalitional politics are unclear, but the distortions that "the belt" builds into black (double-)consciousness, on his account, are so widespread and possess such delusive force that the potential energy of collective black power goes tragically untapped:

> The community of black athletes, like the black community at large, is wealthier and in some ways more powerful than ever before, but in many other ways it resembles that wandering lost tribe, a fragmented remnant unable to organize itself to project the collective power it embodies but is afraid to use.
>
> Isolated in summer camps and prestigious universities and pampered as the budding millionaires that many of them will become, today's big-time college and professional players are far less prepared to deal with the racial realities that exist in America than any previous generation of athletes.[73]

As a "wandering lost tribe," a "fragmented remnant," Rhoden seems to say, black athletes have access to a common cause they refuse to claim, lest they sacrifice the pampering in a way that puts them in touch with America's racial realities. To be fair to Rhoden, his solutions demand an insightful rendering of sport's ownership structure, which amounts, essentially, to an urgent insistence that black athletes seek paths to ownership, not just for the sake of disrupting the plantation dynamic of sport, but also for the sake of exercising control over images of their blackness.

Powell's argument is similar, but far more attentive to the ways in which professional experience causes black athletic amnesia. Consequently, his direct admonition to black athletes is even more pointed than Rhoden's. "A sizable group of young athletes today, because they were born later, have no concept of history or the athletes who paved the way for them to make millions and enjoy a better lifestyle," Powell asserts, which for him, "suggests modern-day black society has lost some soul in the process of switching from one generation to the next."[74] Powell's position is the one that often claims to remember Curt Flood, who presumably made everyone rich (even though he never won anything except a few Gold Gloves). But, would a "concept of history" or the memory of the black athletes of the past be enough for today's athletes to get their soul back? As Powell searches the sporting landscape for individuals in whom we might believe, he sees some figures whose coherence with his conservative solutions is highly tenuous: "Any concerns about the plight of the black community and racism are being voiced almost exclusively by [Tommie] Smith, [John] Carlos, [Harry] Edwards, a few sports sociologists, a smattering of media people, and every once in a while, a lonely cry in the wilderness from the rare black athlete who chooses to speak out on issues.

Otherwise, muffled by wealth and softened by a fawning society, black athletes today share a common role model and mentor. They'd rather not be like Tommie Smith or John Carlos. They'd rather be like Mike."[75] By "like Mike," Powell refers to the sell-out that both he and Rhoden find easiest to target: Michael Jordan.

On Jordan, Rhoden and Powell seem to be in complete agreement. Rhoden's criticism of Jordan reveals what he takes to be the consequence of the shifting experiential conditions of black athletes, namely that in public discourse, blackness is made to disappear. Rhoden's analysis of some well-known commentary from David Falk (Jordan's agent) attempts to evidence the expulsion of blackness entailed by the Michael Jordan model of success:

> Jordan became larger than black and white. You could look at him and really not see his color. Like O.J. Simpson, Jordan was racially and politically neutral.
>
> Here's the problem with transcendence, however: The crossover black athlete often transcends his own race.
>
> Falk [Jordan's agent] said, "When players of color become stars they are no longer perceived as being of color. The color sort of vanishes.
>
> "I don't think people look at Michael Jordan anymore and say he's a black superstar. They say he's a superstar. They totally accepted him into the mainstream. […]
>
> Depending on whom you speak with, Jordan's life mirrors the vision Dr. King laid out in the 1963 speech, his success determined by the content of his character, rather than the color of his skin. But Jordan was also a dream come true for the NBA. The challenge for the NBA as it went from a majority of white players to mostly black players was how to make a majority black league palatable. How to take black style and showmanship, but somehow leave behind the more "inconvenient" features of blackness in America. How to make race visible and invisible simultaneously.
>
> The answer was to have blacks act neutral, but perform spectacularly.
>
> Like Mike.[76]

Rhoden speaks insightfully to the thoroughly racialized political dynamic that undergirds dangerously shallow appropriations of King's oft-cited colorblind wish, but leaves one to wonder where a better reading of King leads. For instance, he arrives at a provocative point in analyzing Jordan's refusal to join students at the University of North Carolina who pressured administration to build a African American Studies building on campus in the mid-1990s. "Jordan, the world's megastar, could have helped ignite a sea-change in the role of the black athlete in America," Rhoden laments, noting that "he favored the building of a library for family life that had his name on it. He wanted something for all students, of all races. This was his signature: the universal man."[77] What becomes clear, however — as Rhoden continues to bury contemporary black athletes in naked scorn — is that the insights delivered through his critical instinct about colorblindness sputter on the depth of his liberal commitments.

Michael Jordan was not the first "universal man" for whom vast swaths of public space have been carved in sport. Neither was Jackie Robinson, who unlike Jordan often appears on those proliferate lists of activist athletes. But the history of Jackie Robinson's symbolic significance certainly shows that sport's "universal man" has a long and complex history. Beyond having "made everyone rich," this is precisely what Curt Flood illustrates with compelling difficulty. The history of sport's "universal man" admits of tangled junctures and perilous traps for those speaking "truth to power." Rhoden, of course, blames athletes for cowardice in the face of such peril (and I surely do not mean to defend apathy as a political solution). Rather, in exhorting athletes to address the public in transformative ways, Rhoden becomes hostile in his nostalgia over a mode of black political speech that spoke with the courage of conviction, but he misplaces the

very careful and deliberate ways in which black public life turned "universal men" into its most useful symbolic resources in sport. It was, after all, Bill Rhoden who wondered when Hall of Fame voters would "embrace" Curt Flood, *just as Jackie Robinson once did*.[78]

Reading Rhoden charitably, one might say that he simply wishes that black athletes would make their blackness matter, a kind of nostalgia for the counterpublic that was lost in the dilution of Edwards' *Revolt*, a hope for the return of the "particular man" to do battle with Michael Jordan. If the arguments from Rhoden and Powell are understood as comprehensively evaluating the state-of-the-black-athlete, then this is where their arguments take oddly divergent turns. Rhoden's argument, especially with its attention to the institutional realities of "the belt," and their consequences for black athletes' understanding of their own blackness, seems to be one well-suited to recirculating the kinds of injunctions to rebellion that presume the racialized character of sport's "plantation" and puts the realities of black experience back into political speech. But, of course, Rhoden says, those realities don't produce activists — they produce traitors. Nostalgia, in this sense, operates as a way to deliver an experience that cannot be had today, so he pleads: *remember*. And in *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, a text that both covers roughly one hundred years of black athletic participation and claims authoritative recognition of the activist's "role" in that history, Rhoden fails to mention Harry Edwards, the "egocrat"[79] of athletic protest, even once. As usual, inferences are difficult to draw from omissions, but Powell, whose berating of contemporary athletes exceeds even the vitriol of Rhoden, delivers the goods on Edwards, who he places in direct contradistinction to Michael Jordan.

This, then, is what's strange: Powell has trouble telling athletes to speak without first telling them to sit down and shut up. Essentially, Powell uses the spirit of protest embodied in Harry Edwards (and Carlos and Smith and those *few* others) to defend a model of racial comportment that can be described only as Cosbyism. Citing Edwards's assertion that sport is filled with athletes "focused on themselves, who draw tremendous attention not necessarily to a greater cause, but to themselves," Powell takes nearly prudish exception to contemporary forms of resistance to authority: "[Athletes] are more likely to lash out at coaches or teammates or fans or the media or anyone else who rubs them the wrong way. And others have confused acting foolishly with activism."[80] In many ways echoing the acidic mockery of Lin Hilburn, who in 1970 gave readers of the Los Angeles *Sentinel* a reading of the "rhetoric of the ghetto," Powell delivers insight only at the expense of problematic black speaking styles: "A touch of danger, a healthy dose of defiance, and anything else that frightens authority is exactly what strikes a nerve among those young black kids who reject any thoughts of joining the mainstream, along with those wanna-be-def white kids from the suburbs. And who better to deliver those goods than a rebellious black athlete with nothing constructive to say or do except, you know, keep it real?"[81]

Who shall lead, when clearly the "nonthreatening, noncontroversial, and non-political"[82] Michael Jordan is just as insufficient as a "touch of danger?" Powell's best answer: Bill Cosby, and not just the actor, but more precisely, "Cliff Huxtable."[83] According to Powell, Cosby's well-known criticisms of black culture represented the views of a "silent majority in the black community that took notice and lent support. Cosby became a refreshing voice, especially when compared to the dreadful collection of

self-appointed black leaders who a fearful of criticizing the people they claim to represent."[84] Moreover, Cosby (or Huxtable, rather) represents a model of black fatherhood that Powell takes to be in need of obvious rehabilitation: "Any examination of the state of blacks in sports, or blacks in general, starts with the father. Many of the problems currently faced by black athletes, along with solutions to those problems, can be attached to him. When he is involved in the lives of his children, the result is mostly negative. We can list all the evils of black society until our vocal chords snap. But the most critical issue by far is the health of the black family, which depends heavily on the father and whether he handles his business."[85] *Would that they were Cliff Huxtable!*, Powell cries. I do not claim to know whether he is right about the silent majority or if his broad understanding of black families is accurate, but it seems that Cosbyism offers a solution to the dilemma produced by the choice between spoiled, foolish sporting children and the malignant political deferrals of Michael Jordan, whose only notable off-court achievement was to make "a movie with Bugs Bunny."[86] Everyone, it seems, who comments on the condition of black athletic activism finds an irony somewhere, and perhaps this one is my original find: if the history of black public address is any guide, a Cosbyist commitment to mainstream racial comportment seems to be an awfully unconvincing formula for producing radicals like Harry Edwards.

Several tensions like these appear in *Souled Out*. "Given a choice," says Powell, "I'd rather have the eye of America trained on the legions of blacks from all walks who nourish children, elevate their communities, and show a willingness to mesh comfortably into the mainstream while staying true to their heritage."[87] Maybe this is what Harry Edwards was after, or maybe not, but Powell seems committed to a notion of the

"mainstream" that Edwards might not have welcomed in his "kind of scene." My point here is not to measure Powell's verdicts on contemporary activism against the truth of the *Revolt* model of black activism, but to reveal where the story of the activist athlete's demise finds its own limits. If those troublingly incoherent canons of black athletes ought to be modeled in civic spirit, then surely they took us somewhere we are supposed to measure as progress — but if progress' cash value is mere cash, all that the liberal politics of representation has left is, literally, to blame the victims of progress so-gotten for treachery and abandonment. The black athlete that appeared in vivid synecdoche on campus and in pro locker rooms in 1969 has transformed in public memory into a hesitant hoarder of cash, especially once images of Mexico City arise: "Smith and Carlos were black athletes of a different era, cut from a different mold, because money is most certainly on the mind of a typical professional black athlete today. He has a comfortable standard of living, a fair degree of fame, a healthy amount of respect from the public, and because he doesn't want to jeopardize any of that, he also has a severe case of laryngitis."[88] Once liberal mediation breaks the activist mold, all there is left to do is wag fingers. There simply seems to be no way to authentically represent the kinds of experiences that give substance to nostalgia's sickening vacuities regarding the black activist athlete. The past that never was, in which Harry Edwards and John Carlos and Tommie Smith racially transformed the political vocabulary of sport, really never was. In the meantime, accusations of etherization, selfishness, triviality, and malign neglect abound, and the radicals are no more upon us than before.

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Curt Flood discloses the absurdity in the relationship between public memory and commentary about race in sport's public sphere. As the dominant story seems to go, he acted on the courage of his convictions at great personal risk in order to free slaves. Remember Curt Flood, contemporary athletes are ordered, for he represents what it means to be a principled black athlete. At the same time that today's black athletes face the criticism that they do not behave politically in ways that would have satisfied their activist predecessors, they are asked to represent an experience that they cannot, on the full admission of the critics, advance with any sincerity. Curt Flood made you rich, these critics say, so now that you're rich you should stand up for something, however risky, just like Curt Flood would have. But the complexities of a black athlete's public subjectivity proved perhaps nothing more painfully to Curt Flood than this: the mere fact of speaking truth to power, even when those who will circulate your argument are many, guarantees one very little; what you say and how you say it matters a great deal. I do not mean to dismiss the powerful social insights that emerge from these contemporary concerns over the disappearance of the activist athlete, because, frankly, I see the productive outcomes incipient in holding athletes to the models of protest embodied in figures like Carlos and Smith. This is why it is hard to argue with Stephen A. Smith, who wonders if any "modern day star will use his or her platform to speak up about terrorism, sweatshops in third world countries or other unspeakable human rights violations."[89] The insistence that black athletes speak for *something* may be the only place left to turn in sport, but the impulse to allow nostalgia to drive critical memory, which requires that we ignore the politics of racial representation in its publicly mediated forms — or at least take those publicly mediated forms for granted — can urge nothing

but to speak for the very racialized experiences liberalism attempted to mute under the sign of progress. After all, in the face of a supportive black public sphere at odds with itself over how blackness would be represented, Flood and his advocates centered on the universal choice, the race-neutral choice, the disincorporated choice, the colorblind one, *and it was the more promising choice for Curt Flood*.

Manning Marable's critique of liberal integrationism includes his own insightful list of symbolic representatives. Wary of a century of black politics organized around "a commitment to the eradication of racial barriers within government, business, and society," Marable defines symbolic representation as "the conviction that the individual accomplishments of a Bill Cosby, Michael Jordan, Douglas Wilder, or Oprah Winfrey trickles down to empower millions of less fortunate African-Americans."[90] In remembrances like Powell's, Bill Cosby and Michael Jordan surely do not belong next to each other in the directory of civic piety; they belong on different lists, the former on the list of ideal fathers and the latter on the list of those who have "souled" out. Marable, however, sees something that Powell, Rhoden, and others not only overlook, but conceal actively as they reproach athletes for being militantly ignorant: there is not, nor has there ever been a convenient or self-evident mode of representing blackness in public life. Marable says, "The fundamental contradiction inherent in the notion of integrationist 'symbolic representation' is that it presumes that a degree of structural accountability and racial solidarity binds the black public figure with the larger masses of African-Americans."[91] Curt Flood knew this well. The political pretense involved in the reported demise of the activist athlete consists in the assumption that entry into public mediation is transparent, that a well-intentioned speaker can move opinion in ways that matter simply

through the force of speech, as if blackness will simply speak for itself once a black athlete says something with a measure of social value. This, of course, was something that Curt Flood knew was false once he listened to the question from Tom Haller. *Are you doing this because you're black?* The problem for Flood was that he would not be the only one measuring the significance of his blackness.

In a 1976 interview with the *New York Times*' Murray Chass, Flood spoke openly and graciously about the emerging opinion that his failed Supreme Court challenge may have created new opportunities from which he never did and would never benefit. As self-effacing as he ever was in the early seventies, but still a very cool cat, Flood opined:

> But what I did then is relative today only because it happens that other people have benefited by it and that's cool. These guys are making more money and deservedly so. They're the show. They're it. They're making money because they work hard. Don't you tell me one minute that Catfish Hunter doesn't work his butt off. I know he does and he's the show. People come out and see the Bird, Mark Fidrych of Detroit. Every time this guy goes on he draws 50,000 people. Well, why not get paid for it? You could put World War II in that damn stadium right there and you couldn't draw 30,000 people.
>
> So what happened five years ago is significant in only one respect, that it gave the ballplayer a chance to think what am I worth, what is my talent worth? Do I have to spend the rest of my life in servitude to this one person? Can he juggle my life any way he wants to? Now these guys are getting what they're worth and that's cool.[92]

In the end, Flood claimed that what he did, he did for himself. Perhaps if the purveyors of public memory who pine feverishly for the lost ethos of the black activist athlete would take him at his word, they would find ways out of the cycle of blame and accusation that results in labels of malicious cowardice, and instead come to grips with

the racialized political culture that leaves us grasping for heroes to begin with. That probably would have been cool with Curt Flood.

Notes

[1] Flood quoted in Murray Chass, "Curt Flood, Forgotten Man in Baseball Freedom Fight, Lives in Self Imposed Exile," *New York Times*, September 9, 1976.

[2] Shaun Powell, *Souled Out?: How Blacks are Winning and Losing in Sports* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2008), 28.

[3] Ibid., xix.

[4] Dayn Perry, "The Demise of the Activist Athlete," in *AlexBelth.com* (2006), http://www.alexbelth.com/article_perry.php.

[5] Hartmann, *Race, Culture*, 244.

[6] Ibid., 240.

[7] Stephen A. raises racial issues seemingly without hesitation, especially through historical references. He often, even, has to "check himself" as a "journalist" before dropping his catchphrase, "That's right, I said it…"

[8] Stephen A. Smith, "Remember When Athletes Had the Guts to Stand Up for Their Beliefs?," *ESPN.com*, July 15, 2008, http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/print?id=3487980&type=story.

[9] Leonard, "Curt Flood," 44.

[10] Smith, "Remember When."

[11] Ibid.

[12] Loren Steffy, "Free Agency Has Become a Way of Life," *Houston Chronicle*, October 25, 2005; George Will, "Dred Scott in Spikes," in *Bunts: Curt Flood, Camden Yards, Pete Rose, and Other Reflections on Baseball* (New York: Touchstone, 1998), 276-279.

[13] Leonard, "Curt Flood," 31-2.

[14] There's a reason why I've resisted the temptation to name these the "white press." Especially given the way that Harry Edwards would describe things in *Revolt*, the title would seem to fit. But, my argument, fundamentally, depends on the idea that the national sports press (herein identified as the *New York Times*, *The Sporting News*, and a few others), took the universality of their address for granted. Calling them the "white press" asserts an anachronistic racial form, though perhaps very real, that existed by force of implication, not by force of active reflection or self-nomination.

[15] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 114-124.

[16] Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, 84; Marable says, "even before the triumph of reaction under Reagan in the early 1980s, […] political conservatives deliberately usurped the 'color-blind' discourse of many liberals from the desegregation movement. Conservatives retreated from the Nixonian strategy of utilizing affirmative-action tools to achieve conservative political goals, and began to appeal to the latent racist sentiments within the white population. [...] And the liberals were at a loss in fighting back effectively precisely because they lacked a consensus internally about the means and goals of achieving genuine equality. Traditional 'liberals,' like Morris Dees of the Southern Poverty Law Center, who favored an inclusionist 'color-blind' ideology of reform often ended up inside the camp of racial reactionaries, who cynically learned to manipulate the discourse of fairness."

[17] A point made by Fraser.

[18] Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out Of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[19] Edwards, "Crisis of Black Athletes."

[20] Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 1. "Exclusion" turns out to be what Goldberg means by "racism." He says, "As modernity's definitive doctrine of self and society, of morality and politics, liberalism serves to legitimate ideologically and to rationalize politico-economically prevailing sets of racialized conditions and racist exclusions."

[21] One very silly way to describe what I'm really getting at here is to compare what black newspapers did to Curt Flood's racial identity with the classic arcade game, "Whack-A-Mole." Every time blackness popped up in Flood's case, black newspapers hit it with a rhetorical mallet, which sometimes took the form of explicit assertions of objective reason, sometimes the stretching of the slave metaphor to white ballplayers, and other times took the form of making Flood's blackness simply about Curt Flood "the man."

[22] Malcolm X, "An Open Letter to Jackie Robinson," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 29, 1964.

[23] Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, 218.

[24] Curt Flood, "Deaf Ears," chap. 4 in *Baseball*, DVD Disc 9, directed by Ken Burns (1994; PBS Home Video, 2000).

[25] Harry Edwards quoted in Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave*, 115.

[26] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* (Winter 1991-1992), 12.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 175.

[29] Alcoff, 12.

[30] Berlant quoted in Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 164.

[31] Flynn, *Baseball's Reserve System*.

[32] Miller, *A Whole New Ballgame*.

[33] Though I'm trying to neutralize gender with these pronouns to reflect one of the ways in which the "current age" is expanding its repertoire of activist identities, much of the nostalgia is still caught up in hegemonic masculinity, especially as I will illustrate below in my analysis of Shaun Powell, whose *Souled Out?* relies on black fatherhood to define the future of blackness in sport.

[34] Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, 7.

[35] I think specifically of Lin Hilburn again here, who gave readers of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* a taste of "the rhetoric of the ghetto"; Hilburn, "In Lieu" (chap. 3, n. 91).

[36] Edwards quoted in Perry, "The Demise" (foreword, n. 23).

[37] Edwards, "The Decline," (foreword, n. 8).

[38] Perry, "The Demise."

[39] Leonard, "Curt Flood," 45.

[40] Baker, "Critical Memory," (chap. 3, n. 8).

[41] Leonard, "Curt Flood," 43.

[42] Ibid., 44.

[43] Ibid., 44.

[44] There are more ironies here than Bill Madden could have imagined fourteen years ago. In the week prior to this writing, Judge Sotomayor had been confirmed as the first "Latino" US Supreme Court justice, having been nominated by President Barack Obama, the nation's first black president. Progress made, problem solved? Maybe not, but let's call that the working title of an essay presently under construction.

[45] Bryan Burwell, "Curt Flood Should Have Been Recognized in All-Star Festivities," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 15, 2009.

[46] Murray Chass, "Flood Was a Man for Every Season," *New York Times*, January 21, 1997.

[47] Murray Chass, "Baseball's Abraham Lincoln," *New York Times*, September 25, 1979.

[48] Ed Edmonds, "The Enduring Legacy of Curtis Charles Flood: His Courageous Legal Struggle for Personal Dignity," Paper presented at the Eighteenth Annual Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture, Cooperstown, New York, June 8, 2006, 1.

[49] Edmonds, "The Enduring Legacy," 12.

[50] See Chap. 5, n. 89.

[51] Chass, "Curt Flood, Forgotten Man," 1976.

[52] Chass, "Flood Was A Man," 1997.

[53] John Lopez, "Flood's Willingness to Battle System Helped Players Strike It Rich," *Houston Chronicle*, April 13, 1997.

[54] Jonathan Lehanski, "What Every Baseball Fan Should Know: The Curt Flood Case," *At Home Plate*, May 28, 2005, http://www.athomeplate.com/regular-articles/what-every-baseball-fan-should-know-the-curt-flood-case.html.

[55] Bill Fletcher, "Curt Flood: 10 Year Later and No Closer to the Hall of Fame," *Berkeley Daily Planet*, December 19, 2006.

[56] Carl Bialik, "Curt Flood's Tragic Fight," *Gelf Magazine*, December 4, 2006, http://www.gelfmagazine.com/archives/curt_floods_tragic_fight.php

[57] Chass, "Baseball's Abraham Lincoln."

[58] Chass, "Flood Was A Man."

[59] Lopez, "Flood's Willingness."

[60] Burwell, "Curt Flood."

[61] Murry Nelson, "Bill Russell: From Revulsion to Resurrection," in *Reconstructing Fame: Sport, Race, and Evolving Reputations*, eds. David C. Ogden and Joel Nathan Rosen (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 100.

[62] Quoted in Burwell, "Curt Flood."

[63] Ibid.

[64] Burwell, "Curt Flood."

[65] I would include Belth's *Stepping Up* in this list, but there are severe limits to his text. For the details of Flood's life, it relies almost exclusively on *The Way It Is*,

which isn't necessarily a limit in itself. But as a project that is very thin on historical analysis and relatively uncritical in its transformation of Flood into what Leonard calls a "superhero," *Stepping Up* lacks the insight, qualitatively speaking, of these other accounts of Flood's life.

[66] Snyder quoted in Bialik, "Curt Flood's Tragic Fight."

[67] Fletcher, "Curt Flood: 10 Years Later."

[68] Snyder quoted in Bialik, "Curt Flood's Tragic Fight."

[69] Edwards, "The Decline."

[70] Rhoden gets the conveyor belt metaphor from a conversation with former University of Michigan and National Basketball Association star Chris Webber, whose attempts to discuss the political economy of American athletics are often drowned out publicly by the fact that Webber once took money from an agent as an amateur.

[71] Rhoden, *Forty Million*, 8.

[72] Powell, *Souled Out?*, 6.

[73] Rhoden, *Forty Million*, xiii.

[74] Powell, *Souled Out?*, xviii.

[75] Ibid., 48.

[76] Rhoden, *Forty Million*, 204.

[77] Ibid., 213.

[78] See chap. 1, n. 9.

[79] Warner cites Claude Lefort on this point (Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 172), but later offers an even better description of what I'm getting at: "[T]here is a logic of appeal to which Reagan and Jesse Jackson equally submit. Publicity puts us in a relation to these figures that is also a relation to an unrealizable public subject, whose omnipotence and subjectivity can then be figured both on and against the images of such men." (Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 175).

[80] Powell, *Souled Out?*, 38.

[81] Ibid., xvii.

[82] Ibid., 35.

[83] This is not much of an overstatement. Throughout Powell's text, Earl Woods (father of Tiger Woods) and Richard Williams (father to Venus and Serena Williams) operate as representative exemplars of the importance of attentive fathers to prevent young black athletes from selling out. Despite the oxymoronic logic of his argument, he clarifies what Earl Woods and Richard Williams have in common: a resemblance to "Heathcliff Huxtable" (Powell, *Souled Out?*, 271).

[84] Powell, *Souled Out?*, 10.

[85] Ibid., 272.

[86] Ibid., 35.

[87] Ibid., 11.

[88] Powell, 26-7.

[89] Smith, "Remember When."

[90] Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, 101.

[91] Ibid., 101.

[92] Chass, "Curt Flood."

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