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## **The Decline in African-American Players in Major League Baseball**

Marissa Ibarra Dorr

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Senior Capstone

English Studies

Research Essay

Dr. Lee Ritscher

School of Humanities and Communication

Spring 2023

The Decline in African-American Players in Major League Baseball

Marissa Ibarra Dorr

## DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this project to my dad, Jim Dorr. My dad taught me everything I know about baseball and he is the reason I love the game. My dad also helped me on every big writing assignment I've had throughout my educational career. It would only be fitting that my last big one is dedicated to him. Thanks Dad!

I would also like to acknowledge my mom, Leticia, and my boyfriend Charlie for supporting me through my capstone journey.

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## Essay Option Project Proposal

1. Marissa Dorr, English Studies
2. What is causing the decline in the number of African-American baseball players within Major League Baseball? I chose this focus because baseball is a huge part of my own identity and I want to see the game have a similar impact on other people. I had been aware of, and actively thinking about this issue for some time, however, one particular moment during Winter Break inspired me to use this as my topic. During the break, I was watching All-Star Game footage from 1971, and noticed that 4 out of 9 starters for the National League were African-American. Today, however, many organizations will have 1-2 African-American players on their roster.
3. This project aligns with the theme of this course by uncovering hidden stories of early Black players who broke the color barrier, Black women who contributed to the game and recent Black players. The essay will discuss topics of racism, possibly sexism, and socioeconomic factors.
4. The primary purpose of this project is to determine the cause of the decline in African-American baseball players in Major League Baseball. Through this project, I hope to not only find an answer to this question, but also find a possible solution to the problem. I also hope to acknowledge and showcase the many contributions Black ballplayers have made to the game of baseball, as well as the stories of these players.
5. Working Title: The Decline in African-American Players in Major League Baseball
6. My project will begin by introducing the issue at hand with statistics and research. Before identifying the proposed solutions, I will provide the audience with some historical background of African-American players in baseball. I will begin with the history of the

Negro Leagues and then discuss the players who broke the color barrier. I also hope to highlight the Black women who also played baseball and contributed to the game. Then I will talk about the decline and current programs looking to improve participation again. Finally, I will discuss some solutions that can help encourage more Black players to play baseball. Throughout the project, I hope to integrate testimonials from past and current players as well as baseball historians.

7.

- a. In order to complete this project, I will need to be able to analyze statistics. Other resources I will need to complete this project include statistics and history from Major League Baseball's own sources, historical evidence from the Negro League Museum, facts and testimonials from Major League Baseball's social programs dedicated to supporting African-American youth baseball players, and testimonials from the Players Alliance, which is a group comprised of former and current Black baseball players, and allies who work to support Black players and youth.
- b. I will be researching statistics in regards to the decline in the number of African-American players, testimonials from past and current players, using quotes from MLB documentaries, oral and written histories from the Negro League Museum and consulting scholarly peer-reviewed articles that have also researched this topic.

8. To meet my project's expectations, I will need to begin my research, especially statistical research. Following this, I will begin watching documentaries to find testimonials or

stories from Black players or baseball historians. I will also be doing research about Black players who played during the 70s-90s.

9.

- Week of Feb. 27: Begin statistical research and watching documentaries, and revise proposal.
- Week of March 6: Turn in revised proposal, begin compiling articles that discuss lack of players and reasoning.
- Week of March 13: Work on abstract and continue compiling research
- Week of March 20: Complete and turn in abstract and begin essay draft
- Week of March 27: Work on essay draft (body paragraphs)
- Week of April 3: Continue working on essay draft (introduction and conclusion)
- Week of April 10: Continue working on essay draft, begin revision
- Week of April 17: Final revisions of essay
- Week of April 24: Final revisions of essay and begin poster making
- Week of May 1: Finalize poster and practice for the festival
- Week of May 8: Practice for the festival
- Week of May 15: Practice and attend the festival



Baseball is not just a sport: it plays an impactful role in people's lives. Playing can build life-long relationships and teach life skills. Major League players become role models for young athletes, which is why it's important for children to see themselves represented on the field. After Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947, Major League Baseball saw an increase in the number of African-American players. Despite numerous Black superstars in the game, this number has gradually declined over time. This issue has been prevalent for many years now, with various reasons noted as to why. However, there are three key reasons contributing to the problem. The decline in the number of African-American players in Major League Baseball is due to cost, lack of representation, and the Black talent drain.

In 2022, the Houston Astros and Philadelphia Phillies competed against each other in the World Series. Between the two teams, there were zero African-American players on either roster. According to a *CNN* article:

Ahead of Game 1 at Minute Maid Park in Houston, the Astros and Philadelphia Phillies announced their 26-man World Series rosters last week, and neither team's rosters include any US-born Black players. Astros outfielder Michael Brantley, a Black player, likely would've been on the roster but suffered a season-ending shoulder injury earlier in the season. Meanwhile, the Phillies had no Black players on their Opening Day roster this year for the first time since 1959. (Brown and Gamble)

This moment made it evident to the world that African-American representation in baseball was declining. Many in baseball were appalled at this fact, however, further statistics show that this decline has been an issue for years. The Society for American Baseball Research published statistics that highlighted the lack of representation on the field. Jackie Robinson debuted in 1947, and in that year the percentage of white players was 98.3%, Black players made up 0.9%,

and Latino players were 0.7% (Armour and Levitt). The year with the highest percentage of Black players was 1975; Black players made up 18.5% of the league, white players made up 71.3%, and Latino players were at 10.2% (Armour and Levitt). In the final year of this research, 2016, the number of African-American players had dropped to 6.7%. In 2016, white players made up 63.7%, Latino players made up 27.4% and Asian players made up 2.1%. (Armour and Levitt). Even in 2022, the percentage of African-American players was still low. According to David Waldstein, on Opening Day 2022, the number of Black players amongst the 30 teams was 7.2%, which had decreased by 0.4% from the previous season (Waldstein). It seems that following Jackie Robinson's debut, the number of Black players increased, with the peak of participation being in 1975. However, instead of continuing to grow from there, the number of Black players began to decline. Before analyzing reasons for the decline in participation, it's important to acknowledge several Black players who have made contributions to the game.

When thinking about the history of African-Americans in baseball, the first player that comes to mind is Jackie Robinson. Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947 when he debuted for the Brooklyn Dodgers. His debut was significant for not only baseball, but for America. The animated special *Undeniable: Stories from the Negro Leagues*, touched on the impact of Robinson's debut. It states, "This is what started the ball of social progress rolling in our country, baseball" ("Jackie and Monte"). Jackie Robinson's debut was a significant moment in history, and represented the larger fight for civil rights for Black folks in America. His debut also represents the overall role baseball plays in society. The animated special then highlighted Monte Irvin, another Black player who was a pioneer in the sport. The special considered Irvin to be the "ultimate 5 tool player" ("Jackie and Monte"), which means that Irvin was excellent with his speed, throwing, fielding, hitting for average, and hitting for power. Monte Irvin's skillset was

impeccable and many in the Negro Leagues believed Irvin should have been the first Black player in the Major Leagues. According to Larry Hogan:

While Robinson was first, if Branch Rickey's decision had been based purely on baseball ability, Irvin should have been his choice. [...] 'Most of the black ballplayers thought Monte Irvin should have been the first black in the major leagues. Monte was our best young ballplayer at the time. He could hit that long ball, he had a great arm, he could field, he could run. Yes, he could do everything.' This was a judgment shared by most Negro League owners. (Hogan)

Hogan's writing indicates how important Monte Irvin was to the game of baseball. While he was not the first Black player to move to the Major Leagues, Irvin is still remembered for his abilities on the field. One thing that is certain, however, is how the departure of Robinson, Irvin and other Black players impacted the Negro Leagues.

The Negro Leagues were established to allow Black players to play baseball. The league worked very similarly to Major League Baseball; there were trades, club owners, and championships. Some even argue that Major League Baseball's records are not true, if they are not considering those who played in the Negro Leagues. Regardless, the Negro Leagues were not only important for fostering Black players, but for having an international impact as well.

Another animated special from the *Undeniable* series, highlighted the ways the Negro Leagues grew baseball at a global level. According to the special, the Negro League teams travelled to Spanish speaking countries and later offered opportunities to darker skinned Latino players who were shut out from Major League Baseball. Additionally, Negro League teams travelled to Japan and played games, which effectively popularized baseball in Japan ("International Impact"). The Negro Leagues were beneficial not just to African-American players, but to international players

as well, who were able to watch games in their home countries. The game is still growing globally to this day, but it is clear that the Negro Leagues were the pioneers of baseball's global impact. Furthermore, the Leagues provided women with opportunities to play, which is something Major League Baseball still struggles with today. The *Undeniable* series spotlights a few women who had careers in the Negro Leagues. Toni Stone, who debuted for the Indianapolis Clowns in 1953, filled Hank Aaron's spot on the team after he left for Major League Baseball. Stone played fifty games in an all male league, and her participation caused attendance to soar. Connie Morgan, another player, debuted as a teenager for the Honey Trippers in 1954. Finally, Mamie "Peanut" Johnson was the only female pitcher in the Negro Leagues. She had a winning record from 1953-1955 with the Clowns. The reason Johnson played for the Clowns was due to segregation; Johnson attempted to try out for the All-American-Girls Professional Baseball Leagues but was denied the chance to even do so ("Negro Leagues Women"). Stone, Morgan, and Johnson were all trailblazers in baseball and were able to showcase their talents due to the opportunities provided by the Negro Leagues. Without the Leagues, these women would have been shut out from baseball.

The Negro Leagues were also important for the economy, especially in Black communities. The "Jackie and Monte" episode of the *Undeniable* series, mentions that the Negro Leagues had become center-pieces of vibrant Black communities across the country ("Jackie and Monte). In cities where Negro League teams played, surrounding Black businesses thrived and the teams were very invested in their communities. Additionally, Negro League teams were profitable businesses for the Black owners involved. However, once Jackie Robinson and other stars left for Major League Baseball, the Negro Leagues began to disband. Major League

Baseball was signing the Negro League's star players, so it became harder to maintain these teams, and the economy began to suffer because of that. According to the animated short:

You can directly parallel the rise and fall of the Negro Leagues to the rise and fall of Black economy. And to a large extent, Black economy never recovered from losing the Negro Leagues. What was good morally, what was good socially, was devastating economically. ("Jackie and Monte")

While the integration of baseball was important for the Civil Rights Movement and social justice, it unfortunately had a negative impact on Black economy. Overall, the history regarding baseball's integration and the impact of the Negro Leagues highlights the influential role baseball plays in society.

Dusty Baker is one of the game's most successful managers of all time. Before managing, Baker played in the big leagues for nineteen years. He primarily played for the Atlanta Braves, where he was teammates with Hank Aaron, and the Los Angeles Dodgers. His managing career began in 1993 with the San Francisco Giants, where he won multiple Manager of the Year awards. He would later manage the Chicago Cubs, Cincinnati Reds, and Washington Nationals. Currently, he manages the Houston Astros, where he won the first World Series title in his career. Baker's long journey to World Series Champion was not without struggle. In an interview with Ken Rosenthal, Baker talked about the double standard that he and other managers of color have to face. Rosenthal writes:

Most minorities inherited bad teams. [...] I inherited a good team with D.C. [...] Other than that, all the teams I had, all the teams Don Baylor had, all the teams Hal McRae had, all the teams Lloyd McClendon had, you look at all the minority guys who have been hired, it's always a bad team that you've got to bring back. And then, when you bring 'em

back, if you don't bring 'em back all the way, you're construed as a loser, not a winner.

(Rosenthal)

Baker is saying that when he was hired to manage, he was working with subpar rosters. He was expected to transform these teams into winning caliber, which was unrealistic considering the roster construction. Media and ownership criticized Baker if he was unable to succeed with a poor roster. In the same interview, Baker also talked about racism in the clubhouse. Rosenthal writes:

Baseball is just a microcosm of society. [...] A couple players, I had to talk to 'em. 'I know you've never had a black manager. I know you've never had a black principal.

Your daddy probably never had a black boss, depending upon which part of the country or what line of work you're in.' I even had to ask a couple of players that I played with, 'Why are you so prejudiced?' A couple of 'em are my buddies now – big time.

(Rosenthal)

Baker's comments came during a time in which some baseball players' social media accounts had revealed past racist comments. Baker's remarks show the situations he has had to deal with as a manager and how he educated players on racism. Baker has truly been an influence on players and fans alike, which is why his World Series victory was so important. Baker is just the third Black manager to win a World Series and many hope this achievement will help encourage Black players to pursue careers in baseball. According to Clinton Yates:

Many say that African-Americans don't participate in baseball. It's not that baseball [doesn't recruit], it's just that more African-American students are pushed towards football and basketball. But with Dusty, maybe we can energize the Black community

once again to get involved with baseball, which is something that we need to do here in the United States. (Yates)

Members of baseball are hoping that Baker's recent World Series victory can help influence young Black players to continue pursuing baseball. Baker's overall story is one of hope; after many years in the game, he finally won on the biggest stage. Dusty Baker will eventually enter the Hall of Fame after an incredible managerial career.

Glenn Burke was another pioneer in the sport. Burke played four seasons in Major League Baseball for both the Los Angeles Dodgers and Oakland Athletics. Despite his short career, Burke was a trailblazer, however, the recognition only came after his death in 1995. Burke was one of the first Major League Baseball players to publicly come out as gay, which put a hindrance on his career. Though he was not publicly out during his active career, Burke's sister Lutha, believes that his sexuality had a huge impact on it, "The browbeating got to him,' Lutha Burke said last week. 'I'm more than sure that being gay cost him his baseball career'" (Branch). Teammates of Burke's believed that he was traded from the Dodgers to the A's because of his sexuality and during his time with the A's, his manager Billy Martin allegedly used homophobic slurs to address Burke (Branch). Burke would later pass away after battling AIDS in 1995 and after many years, Major League Baseball finally recognized Burke's contributions to the game. During the 2014 All Star Game, Burke was honored by MLB, "As a way to show their support to the LGBT community and to acknowledge Glenn's monumental role in the movement, [...] MLB invited Burke's family members to the All-Star Game in Minneapolis. 'He was a pioneer, and should be recognized,' Pat Courtney, a Major League Baseball spokesman, said" (Dera). Burke's story is intersectional, as he was both African-American and gay. His story is also not very well known; Burke is most recognizable to fans in Oakland, as the Oakland A's host Glenn Burke

Pride Night during the season to honor his legacy. Burke's story is also important for future players who might struggle with their identity in the realm of baseball.

Curt Flood had a tremendous impact on baseball and his legacy is still affecting players today. Flood played for fifteen seasons and faced racism when he began his minor league career. In 1956, Flood played for Cincinnati's minor league team in North Carolina and he had to endure both personal and institutional racism. In an article for the Society for American Baseball Research, Terry Sloope states:

[Flood] could not stay in the same accommodations as his white teammates; he could not eat in restaurants with his teammates and was forced instead to go to the back door for 'service' or to wait on the team bus until a teammate brought him food. [...] Fans around the league expressed their displeasure at the appearance of a black man on the diamond as well. (Sloope)

Sloope also goes on to say that many of Flood's teammates resented his presence because of his race; those who were accepting of Flood were afraid to confront the other teammates. Flood's stories are common amongst Black players; they often feel alone due to either being one of the only Black players on the team or being unable to share their experiences with their white teammates. Flood's most important contribution to baseball however, was his fight for free agency. Free agency is when a player's contract with their current team expires, which grants them the ability to sign with another team. In 1969, Curt Flood was traded to the Philadelphia Phillies which upset him greatly (Donahue). During this time, MLB did not have a free agency clause, so instead, teams controlled players' contracts and players did not have a say unless they decided to retire or quit. Flood fought MLB's reverse clause to guarantee free agency for himself



and future players to come. Additionally, Flood's argument represented the constant struggle of Black folks fighting to control their labor. According to Robert Green II:

[Flood's] battle against baseball's reverse clause-which prevented players from choosing for themselves which team they could play for-divided fans in 1970. But *Ebony* saw Flood's fight as part of a larger struggle for Black people to control their labor power, whether it was on the playing field or in the streets. Calling him "baseball's long-needed 'Abe Lincoln'" Flood was celebrated in the pages of *Ebony* for standing up against this labor system. "It will be a bit of poetic justice," the editors of *Ebony* noted, "should it turn out that a black man finally brings freedom and democracy to baseball. After all, organized baseball kept black players out of the game for 75 years because they were black." (Green II)

*Ebony* Magazine highlighted the importance of Flood's fight not just for baseball, but for the Black community. Flood also paved the way for baseball's current stars to seek massive contracts for their talents. Curt Flood was eventually blackballed from baseball; owners refused to sign Flood because he fought against them (Donahue). Without Flood, Major League Baseball players would never receive the contracts they do today, proving how impactful Flood was.

Barry Bonds was a superstar throughout his career. Son of Bobby Bonds, godson of Willie Mays, Bonds was destined for baseball greatness. Bonds played for the Pittsburgh Pirates and San Francisco Giants, where he amassed multiple awards and broke many records. However, Barry Bonds was a controversial figure for many reasons, such as attitude towards the press, difficulty getting along with teammates, and most notably, a steroid scandal. These controversies have led to Bonds being excluded from baseball's Hall of Fame. According to Dan Brekke:

[Bonds] became *the* dominant power hitter of baseball's Steroid Era, ending with 762 career home runs, and was welcomed to the team's spring training this year as a hitting coach. But his reputation elsewhere is controversial. Baseball writers have blocked Bonds and other figures from the Steroid Era, notably pitcher Roger Clemens and former Oakland A's and St. Louis Cardinals slugger Mark McGuire, from getting into the Hall of Fame. And here's a reminder of the suspicions Bond must still overcome: When prosecutors questioned him in front of that 2003 grand jury, they detailed a long list of pharmaceuticals they alleged Bonds had taken. (Brekke)

Despite Bonds' historic career, voters kept him out of the Hall of Fame for using steroids during the period Major League Baseball was profiting from and ignoring steroid use. The Steroid Era was a period in baseball where players, like Bonds, were using steroids with MLB's knowledge. Major League Baseball was ignoring steroid use because of the positive publicity and marketing these players were generating for their talents. For this reason, it's shameful that Barry Bonds is not in the Hall of Fame, and his denial could actually be contributing to the lack of Black players in today's game.

Barry Bonds was considered one of the most popular Black baseball players in the early 2000s. But his reported steroid use and the subsequent media critique overshadowed his accomplishments. This resulted in pushing Black athletes away from baseball and more toward basketball and football, Lapchick said. "So, if you're a young Black kid, and you see the best Black baseball player being criticized all the time, and you look at the NBA and see great athletes who are being highlighted on the news and in the community -same thing in the NFL- you're probably not gonna choose baseball" Lapchick explained. (Brown and Gamble)

With Major League Baseball negatively critiquing Bonds despite his caliber of play, Black children might feel less inclined to play baseball. If they are watching a great athlete who looks like them be vilified by those in charge, they would be more likely to choose a sport that celebrates their Black athletes. Regardless of controversy, Bonds is an example of how much African-Americans have contributed to the game of baseball. His treatment in regards to the Hall of Fame is one potential reason for the decline in participation, but there are many other reasons as well.

Major League Baseball has had many impactful Black players throughout its history, so it's crucial to recognize the reasons why their participation has been declining. One of the first reasons for the decline has to do with cost. The cost of youth sports in general has risen steadily over the years, but baseball seems to be the most expensive sport. This is for many reasons; baseball requires more equipment than other sports, and that equipment is incredibly expensive. Players are required to have a glove, bat, and cleats. Depending on what position they play, some are required to have more than one glove or catcher's gear, which all amount to more spending. Competitive travel ball teams, which are youth teams that can play in the spring, summer and fall, are also costly. These teams often travel far and rather frequently, which is more money on top of the initial cost to play. According to a New York Times article, "In an increasingly pay-to-play era, where expensive travel teams and private coaches funnel more privileged players toward elite showcase events, many disadvantaged youth players find it difficult to be noticed by scouts and recruiters" (Waldstein). Players that are more privileged can afford the higher costs of baseball and they are often put in a better position than less privileged players. Private coaching and lessons can be beneficial to players, giving them more chances to sharpen their skills. Additionally, players who practice consistently perform better, which puts athletes

who live in inner cities at a disadvantage. Lou Moore, who wrote an article about how Major League Baseball did not prevent the decline in Black players, talks about how inner city youth were unable to practice due to the lack of baseball resources and inequalities. According to Moore, “Baseball also lost Black talent because America’s structural inequalities had taken their toll on the inner city game. In the late 1970s youth coaches noted that while the sport was doing fine in the mostly White suburbs, inner cities struggled to field teams from the Little League to high school levels” (Moore). Moore then goes on to quote a youth leader in Miami who said that inner city leagues could not afford to give scholarships; players could not afford equipment, and fields were not maintained. Furthermore, the layout of cities created a lack of wide-open space for children to practice (Moore). The lack of open space correlates with the inability to practice; players in the inner cities, who have either unmaintained fields or no fields at all, are unable to practice baseball consistently. Coupled with the other struggles like expensive equipment, Black children are pushed to play other sports that are more rewarding. Ariel Pacheco writes, “When there are cheaper alternatives like basketball, parents are more likely to push their children to play those sports. Combine that with a lack of representation, and baseball ends up being an unappealing choice” (Pacheco). Basketball and football are cheaper alternatives to baseball and both sports are more rewarding. Players who do get a chance to play baseball and attempt to play in college are often met with struggle. Most of the scholarships that the NCAA gives out go to football and basketball, therefore it's very difficult for college baseball players to get full ride scholarships (Apstein). The expensive price of baseball creates less opportunities for Black players, which then leads to less representation in the sport. The lack of representation is another contributing issue, as African-American children are less likely to play if they don’t see players that look like them in baseball.

One big issue with the lack of representation is that there are far too little Black coaches, managers, and front office executives. Currently, there are two African-American managers, Dusty Baker of the Houston Astros and Dave Roberts of the Los Angeles Dodgers (Pacheco). There is one African-American General Manager: Dana Brown of the Houston Astros (Waldstein). There are also zero Black team-owners in Major League Baseball. On most Major League rosters, there are very few African-American players on each team. Former big-leaguer Preston Wilson recalled his experience as the only Black player on a number of teams he played for:

Throughout the minor leagues, Wilson often felt like an exchange student, trying to understand a strange culture. No one around him was familiar with his cultural touchstones. Instead he learned the lyrics to country music he'd never heard before. He practiced one-liners from *Caddyshack* and *Airplane!*. In his decade in the majors, he had teammates who came to his defense when fans yelled racist slurs at him. He also had a teammate who called him the n-word. He once observed a white teammate construct a noose in the clubhouse. It didn't seem to be directed at him, but the teammate paled when he saw Wilson watching. He didn't want a confrontation. He never brought it up.

(Apstein)

Based on Wilson's explanation, it seems that being the only Black player on a team can be an uncomfortable experience. Wilson's story is not the only one, as other players have said that it's difficult being the only Black person on a team. Many Black players find it hard to share their experiences with white teammates. Jon Duplantier, who is currently in the Philadelphia Phillies organization, recalled a time during high school when an opposing team's players yelled racist remarks at him. During MLB's Black Players Roundtable, Duplantier explained that the only

person that he could connect to during the incident was the Black umpire on the field. After the incident occurred, he wasn't able to talk to his teammates about it. He also mentioned that because representation is so low, many Black players -such as himself- feel the need to suppress their feelings and experiences (*MLB Black Players Roundtable: Being Black in Baseball and America*). Oftentimes, there are one to two African-American players on a team at once, so it can be isolating for these players, especially when they feel they can not express their feelings to other teammates.

The lack of representation is a vicious cycle; young Black players don't see themselves represented on the field and current Black players don't feel represented on the field and in the front office. One reason this cycle occurs has to do with roster construction. In his interview, Wilson discussed that there are very few Black pitchers and catchers (Apstein). In the modern-era of baseball, team rosters are 'pitcher-heavy', which eliminates opportunities for Black position players. There are also very few African-American catchers in the game. Former Oakland Athletics pitcher Dave Stewart has been openly critical about the lack of Black pitchers and catchers in the game. His concerns have even influenced the creation of the Dream Series, which is an MLB program that especially focuses on developing Black pitchers and catchers (Waldstein). Another reason this cycle continues is because of the lack of Black scouts in the league. In 1982, there were 566 official MLB scouts, however, only fifteen of those were Black. Fourteen Major League teams -there were twenty-six teams in 1982- did not have any full-time Black scouts (Moore). According to Zippia, a job website, in 2021, the percentage of Black scouts was 8.99%, compared to white scouts which was 66.30% (Zippia.com). Furthermore, in the Global Sport Matters article, Moore states that one Black player believed that white scouts avoided inner cities out of fear (Moore). Scouts are crucial to baseball; teams depend on their

evaluations and opinions on players to determine who should be drafted or traded. They work closely with general managers and the front office to construct a winning roster. If Black players don't have scouts that look like them or are willing to visit their hometowns, it can be much more difficult to get recruited and drafted. The lack of Black scouts is a contributing factor to the lack of representation and decline in participation, but there is another issue that has been detrimental to the decline.

Lou Moore's article for *Global Sport Matters* addresses an issue called the Black talent drain. According to Moore's article, Major League Baseball knew that this decline was coming, but did nothing to prevent the problem. He writes:

In a 1974 article about the lack of MLB managers, the *Sporting News* pointed to an equally pressing concern: the decline of the Black player. Editor C.C. Johnson Spink wrote that over the previous five years, there had been a significant drop in the numbers of African-American players drafted from 40 percent to roughly 15 percent. Spink also wrote that, statistically, Black players had outperformed their White counterparts.

(Moore)

The talent drain stemmed from a multitude of factors, such as the draft, the lack of Black scouts and lack of urgency from Major League Baseball. The nature of the draft, which is one of the first factors, began to change in 1972. According to Moore, "From 1972 to 1982, MLB teams went from drafting 334 collegians to 615, a near reversal of numbers when compared to high school players" (Moore). Former player Bill Madlock believed this change was intentional because there were fewer Black players at the collegiate level. In 2018, *The New York Times* found that only 4% of NCAA baseball players were Black. They even found that Historically Black Colleges had trouble fielding teams (Apstein). Whether this change in drafting was

intentional or not, it clearly had an impact on the number of African-American players breaking into the league.

The talent drain issue was raised in 1974; yet, Major League Baseball did not have a sense of urgency to solve the problem. During this time, baseball had notable Black superstars playing, like Joe Morgan, Reggie Jackson and Willie Stargell; it was likely that Major League Baseball felt the problem was not imminent. However, the decline had already begun, and according to Moore:

For years, Black players had argued that teams had unwritten quotas governing how many Black players they would have on their rosters. Because of these quotas, they believed that Black players had to be great - or else they would never get a real chance to carve out playing careers. Black kids believed this, too. Gates Brown, a former Detroit Tiger who worked in the organization after his retirement, said in 1977 that when he tried to recruit Black kids, “you still get the same line: you got to be twice as good as the White kid.” (Moore)

Moore’s article alleges that there was an unofficial quota system in Major League Baseball. The quota system was damaging to participation because not only did it limit the number of Black players on rosters, it forced unfair expectations onto these players. Front offices believed these Black players needed to have superstar level talent; otherwise, they were not worthy of a roster spot. Another reason the talent drain occurred was because Major League Baseball shifted its focus onto signing Latino players from Latin America. Hall of Famer Frank Robinson stated that after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier, Major League Baseball signed more Black players because of their talents and they were cheaper to sign than white players (Moore). Eventually, Major League Baseball began to actively recruit players from Latin America because they were



even cheaper to sign compared to African-American players (Dreier). This coincides with the data from the Society for American Baseball Research. The data shows a steady increase in the percentage of Latino players in baseball. In 1974, the year that the Black talent drain was proposed, the number of Latino players was at 11.5%. In 2016, however, the number of Latino players was at 27.4% (Armour and Levitt). The data correlates with the idea that Major League Baseball changed its focus to drafting Latino players because they were cheaper to sign. Major League Baseball's priority of maximizing profit had an effect on African-American participation because it potentially took away opportunities from Black players. With many factors contributing to the decline in Black players, it's important to highlight the work already being done to combat this issue and the possible steps to be taken.

Major League Baseball has implemented a few programs to help with the high cost and lack of Black representation in the sport. The RBI (Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities) Program helps provide disadvantaged youth with the opportunity to play baseball. Former player and scout, John Young initially started the program in South Central Los Angeles. According to the RBI website, "This program would not only encourage participation in baseball and expand the pool of talented prospects, but, more importantly, it would provide young people with a positive, team-oriented activity that would keep them off the streets while challenging them mentally and physically (MLB.com/rbi). Major League Baseball supports the program financially and the RBI program provides many benefits to the youth teams who are affiliated with it. For example, the RBI program provides equipment donations, cash grants, training seminars for coaches, scholarships and player hosted events (MLB.com/rbi). The Dream Series that was previously mentioned, is another MLB sponsored program that aims to give Black children the opportunity to play baseball. It also helps get Black players recruited by college and Major League scouts.

With the program focusing on helping Black players, it's also an opportunity for kids -who are often the only Black players on their team- to see other players that look like them (Waldstein). MLB sponsored programs are very beneficial for growing the game. These programs provide opportunities for young Black players that otherwise would not have been available to them due to cost. Additionally, these programs have already made an impact on the game of baseball. Hunter Greene of the Cincinnati Reds was the second overall pick in the 2017 draft (MLB.com). Greene is a young pitcher for the Reds and more than that, he is an alumni of MLB's Dream Series. Greene's journey to the Major Leagues proves the importance of the RBI program, the Dream Series, and other funded programs.

Major League players have taken it upon themselves to help young players of color. The Players Alliance is a group of former and current Black Major League players who are working to help communities of color. Players themselves fund the program. According to the website:

The Players Alliance invested one million dollars to support communities of color in a safe, socially distant, and responsible capacity, while providing them with the resources they need most. Their needs are great, so our efforts must be greater. In order to institute significant changes, we need to be able to pull up to as many Black communities as possible to help give folks the resources they need, whether it be food, aid, comforts, and of course, access to equipment and spaces to play baseball. (The Players Alliance)

The organization is doing more than just providing baseball opportunities, they are working to eliminate economic inequality and provide resources to Black communities across the country. For years, players have traveled to communities of color to provide people with resources. In the 1980s, players such as Daryl Strawberry and Eric Davis visited Harvard Park in Los Angeles to impart wisdom and gear to African-American children interested in playing baseball (Moore).

The Players Alliance and individual players' willingness to help those in need, shows how important this issue is to Black players. Their actions also show their commitment to engaging with their communities. Despite their help, there are other solutions needed to address representation beyond the field.

Increasing representation in front office positions and hiring more African-American scouts are some ways to help improve participation. Another way to increase participation is to promote Black ownership of teams. Former Major League pitcher Dave Stewart is looking to compile an African-American and minority ownership group to finance a new team in Nashville. "Stewart said the Nashville Stars is a large, expensive business, and it's important that Black and Brown children see themselves not just in the players on the field but at the table with other administrators, making the management decisions" (Benkarski). Currently, there is one non-white owner in baseball; Arte Moreno of the Los Angeles Angels (Benkarshi). While on field representation is equally important, having more Black owners and high level front office employees can create more opportunities for Black children. Not every player will play in the majors, but some might want to continue working within baseball, so being represented in administrative positions is crucial. Overall, having more representation in higher level positions can cultivate more enthusiasm in young Black players to continue playing.

As the game continues to grow, Major League Baseball should look to address the decline in African-American players. Funding support programs, like the RBI program, addresses the issue of cost and the structural inequalities that affect players in inner cities. These programs provide support for equipment needs, financial needs, and opportunities for Black players. Hiring more Black scouts, managers, and front office staff will address the overall lack of representation in baseball. More representation in administrative positions will also give Black

players more opportunities on the field, and help resolve the Black talent drain. Finally, learning the stories of Black players and managers who have contributed to baseball will help grow the game for everyone. Learning aspects of baseball history that might not get as much attention can be beneficial for all fans who enjoy the sport. Baseball touches people in many ways and can be an important part of one's culture. Making the game more accessible will give everyone a chance to be positively impacted by baseball.

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