

Gibson, and James “Cool Papa” Bell, among other Negro league players, whose on-field excellence stood as the strongest argument against organized baseball’s color line. Less told is the story of black baseball’s entrepreneurs (the historian Neil Lanctot’s compelling *Negro League Baseball* [2004] is a notable exception). Rebecca T. Alpert’s *Out of Left Field* is a welcomed addition, given her focus on the little-studied role of Jewish entrepreneurs in black baseball, most notably that of Eddie Gottlieb, Syd Pollock, and Abe Saperstein.

Alpert’s exploration of the reasons Jewish entrepreneurs pursued opportunities in black baseball reveals how organized baseball’s color line curtailed the involvement of Jewish businessmen in the major leagues’ official operations even as it positioned Jews as middle men with the Negro leagues as booking agents scheduling games at major league stadiums. Jewish sporting entrepreneurs, Alpert contends, enjoyed “a great opportunity to wield power beyond what they could have achieved in the wider society in an era when they were subject to discrimination themselves” (p. 3). Yet their participation in black baseball unveiled “the complex process of racialization” in which “their whiteness was less provisional and more an established fact” (p. 11).

Indeed, while Jewish participation in the black baseball circuit meant these executives worked as “equals and competitors with the predominantly black owners of Negro League teams,” the power that they exercised within black baseball was not without controversy (p. 3). Pollock’s team, initially named the Ethiopian Clowns, provoked much consternation within black baseball circles. After all, as Alpert addresses most directly in her fourth chapter “The Conflict over Baseball Comedy,” Jewish entrepreneurs were “unencumbered by concerns about race pride that motivated black owners and journalists” (p. 4). Subsequently, drawing on traditions from vaudeville and minstrelsy, Pollock’s squad often played on the worst of racial stereotypes (wearing “African” garb) and regularly engaging in clowning tactics as part of their in-game entertainment. This unnerved many within black baseball’s inner circle even as it attracted fans at the gate. A similar tension surrounded their role as booking

Out of Left Field: Jews and Black Baseball.
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The literature on black baseball has traditionally focused on the likes of Satchel Paige, Josh

agents. Fellow black baseball team owners and black sportswriters such as Sam Lacy, Fay Young, and Wendell Smith continually wondered whether, as Jewish businessmen, Pollock, Gottlieb, and Saperstein were motivated by pursuing the league's best interest or just their own financial gain.

While Jewish entrepreneurs created opportunities for African American players in the Negro leagues and barnstorming circuit, the strident advocacy of the Jewish sportswriters Nat Low and Lester Rodney for the dismantling of organized baseball's color line sought to open opportunities for blacks in the major leagues. Alpert's discussion of Jewish sportswriters casts fresh light on this set of critical voices in baseball's "great experiment" and rightfully complicates further the oft-told narrative of Branch Rickey's engineering of major league baseball's racial integration in 1947 with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Out of Left Field expands the cast of actors that shaped the Negro leagues and participated in the closing of baseball's Jim Crow era. Although the narrative at times loses its crispness and lapses into repetition, Alpert nonetheless makes a compelling case for the impact of these Jewish figures in the black baseball world and, in so doing, illuminates the imaginings of Jewish identity through baseball and the workings of race in America's game.

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