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*“If You Were Only White”: The Life of Leroy
“Satchel” Paige* by Donald Spivey (review)

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John's second essay is much shorter. It presents simple narrative accounts of the first and last Dodgers games at the ballpark.

Paul Zinn's solo effort, "Ebbets Field: Sporting Venue and Community Center," covers the many uses besides baseball to which the ballpark was put. These include a remarkable amount of boxing and football, both college and professional; soccer; and a handful of opera performances in the 1920s. Fans tend to think of Ebbets Field as a pure baseball park, but it, like so many others, was also multipurpose.

The Zinns' joint effort is a rather large accumulation of the most notable games played at Ebbets Field, starting with the Dodgers' first win in 1913 and concluding with the last game of the 1956 regular season. For each, they include a pithy narrative and, for most, the box score.

Following the essays, the editors present three sets of remembrances: one by Dodgers, a second by opposing players, and a third by fans. These reminiscences are culled mostly from interviews conducted by Paul Zinn with some coming from oral histories conducted by the Brooklyn Historical Society. Much of what the players have to say is repetitive: Ebbets Field was small; it was cozy; the fans sat close to the action; the fans were loud and exuberant; one could hit well there; the Dodgers were tough to play against. More than one opposing player remembers that the playing surface was always in first-rate condition, a recollection that is a bit of a shock to those who have pored over photos of old ballparks and seen lots of bare earth where grass should have been. The fans' memories, perhaps surprisingly, prove to be well worth reading. Each tells an individual story adorned with family tradition, memories of first games attended, and nostalgia for a team that truly was part of the neighborhood. One is struck by the intensity of these experiences, like that of Mary Walsh Heagney, now seventy-five years old, who, once wanting Pee Wee Reese's autograph, simply walked a few blocks to his apartment, rang the bell, and saw Reese, who answered the door, oblige with a smile.



Donald Spivey. *"If You Were Only White": The Life of Leroy "Satchel" Paige.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012. 347 pp. Cloth, \$29.95.

Jim Overmyer

Another book on Satchel Paige? There has been so much written about the legendary African American pitcher since he was finally allowed into the

white major leagues thirty-six seasons ago that another biography might seem redundant. A search of the New York Public Library's online catalog by Paige's name, for example, turns up twenty-five titles. Donald Spivey's bibliography for this book references seven devoted to the hurler.

But few of these dealt with Paige the individual, as opposed to Paige the legend. And fewer still put Paige in the context of the historical eras in which he lived, fitting him into a much broader narrative than that of his lengthy baseball career. People interested in Paige have waited a long time for this book. Spivey spent twelve years researching and writing it, and the result is biography the way it should be written and a top-flight entry in the extensive Paige canon.

Spivey, a history professor at the University of Miami, has done deep research on several of the eras and places in which Paige lived and pitched. First, there's the early section on what it was like to grow up African American in Mobile, Alabama, in the early 1900s—his family was “dirt-poor and, commensurate with their lowly status, lacked every conceivable amenity associated with a good life” (2). Something of a lawbreaking youngster, Paige was shipped off at age twelve to the Alabama Reform School for Juvenile Law Breakers at Mount Meigs, which despite its imposing name was a progressive place where youngsters were well-cared for and learned a trade. Paige's, of course, turned out to be baseball, and Spivey has dug so far into Mount Meigs's history that he claims to have correctly identified Paige's first coach, Moses Davis, whose credit has been given to others in past biographies.

To add depth to the well-covered defection of Paige and other Negro League stars to Dominican Republic dictator Rafael Trujillo's team in 1937, Spivey has delved into State Department files in the National Archives to bolster his claim that African American baseball owners' complaints to the government created a sort of international incident in which Paige, of course, was at the center. And he has gained access to the FBI's file on Paige as agents dutifully tracked his statements encouraging baseball integration in the 1940s, which became “suspicious” because, on that subject alone, he was on the same wavelength as the Communist Party.

The best of Spivey's sources, though, are a multitude of interviews with former Negro League players, particularly Ted “Double Duty” Radcliffe, a childhood friend and teammate of Paige's, and two of Paige's children, Robert and Pamela. Those remembrances allow the Satchel Paige story to leave the baseball field and become a personal profile in which Spivey doesn't soft-pedal the less than heroic parts. More than once he connects the dots of circumstantial evidence to come to the conclusion that Paige was an enthusiastic womanizer, marriage vows notwithstanding. He keeps track of Paige's many material

acquisitions—fancy autos, antique furniture, photography equipment. But he also makes it clear that the great pitcher was a very poor saver, telling how Paige and his second wife, Lahoma, worried a great deal over how to make ends meet when the baseball career was over and how Paige suffered maladies that were the result of sheer medical neglect of his body.

Likewise, there is no glossing over Paige's constant movement among Negro League teams, leagues, and entire baseball playing areas of North and South America, contractual or handshake agreements notwithstanding. The pitcher's constant "jumping" from teams earned him something of a reputation as unreliable. But in Spivey's analysis this was a conscious decision of a man who grew up dirt-poor but with tremendous talent to maximize his earning potential over the years: "He may well have been not only the first free agent in baseball but the most successful one" (140).

Spivey does a particularly good job describing the summer of 1933 when Paige, Radcliffe, and other African American players paired up with white teammates to represent Bismarck, North Dakota, in the city's attempt to become the undisputed champions of the relatively obscure baseball empire of the upper Great Plains. The team conquered its opposition, maintained good racial relations among themselves with just a few setbacks, and foreshadowed the integrated professional baseball that was still years down the line everywhere else. The Bismarck team, faced with limited hotel choices in far-flung Plains towns, "were in all likelihood the first integrated sport team on which blacks and whites also roomed together" (115).

Paige often was paid separately from the rest of his teammates to make special appearances on the mound. This star-for-hire persona, in which he often employed stagecraft aspects of his trade such as his hesitation pitch, double and triple windups, and calling in his outfielders before striking out the side, made him appear a comic figure at the same time that he was seen as a dominant ballplayer. Spivey confidently asserts, though, based in large part on the interviews, that under Paige's constant performer façade burned an interest in and commitment to racial civil rights: "The affable and easy going manner that Paige displayed to the media and the public did not mean that there was not fire in his bosom, a constant burning and smoldering because of racism in America" (241).

