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*Two Pioneers: How Hank Greenberg and Jackie Robinson
Transformed Baseball—and America* by Robert C. Cottrell
(review)

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Rosengren's biography is likely to remain the definitive biography of Hank Greenberg, especially since the eyewitnesses to Greenberg's life are fading. Greenberg is fortunate to have Rosengren for a biographer.

Robert C. Cottrell. *Two Pioneers: How Hank Greenberg and Jackie Robinson Transformed Baseball—and America*. Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2012. 270 pp. Cloth, \$27.50.

Rob Edelman

Every contemporary grade-schooler should know that Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play in the major leagues in the twentieth century. That's a fact of history, and it transcends balls, strikes, and on-field exploits. Hank Greenberg, on the other hand, may not have been the first of his faith to make the majors, but he was the initial bona fide Jewish baseball superstar and surefire Hall of Famer. When Robinson came to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, Greenberg's career was on the wane; that year was the last of his thirteen big-league seasons. Yet both are linked in that, during their time in the limelight, they frequently (and often painfully) confronted the pervasive racism and anti-Semitism that were embedded in the American fabric. Their life stories—with an emphasis on how, in their time, both men were set apart from the mainstream of professional baseball—are simply and effectively recounted in Robert C. Cottrell's *Two Pioneers: How Hank Greenberg and Jackie Robinson Transformed Baseball—and America*.

Because the struggles of Greenberg and Robinson are well-documented elsewhere, the baseball fan with a grasp of the sport's history will already have insight into their lives as presented by Cottrell. The author also need not remind such fans of the rudimentary facts of baseball's past; even casual followers of the sport will know that the 1941 season was highlighted by Ted Williams's .406 batting average and Joe DiMaggio's fifty-six-game hitting streak. But the reportage contained in *Two Pioneers*, which consists primarily of profiles of both ballplayers, offers a first-rate introduction to younger readers. Additionally, Cottrell puts forth some facts and insights that are well worth pondering, and that just may expand the awareness of those already in the know. For instance, he observes that, under different circumstances, Robinson easily might have played professional football or basketball—and thus, baseball history would have been inexorably altered. Greenberg, who was

reared in the Bronx, was scouted by the hometown New York Yankees but chose not to sign because he “simply did not believe he could displace Gehrig at first base” (27). The presence of Jewish gamblers who were connected to the 1919 Black Sox scandal ignited anti-Semitic feelings in certain quarters, playing into the stereotype of the Jew as a brainy, manipulative cheater. Some of Cottrell’s reportage transcends sports. He notes that, during the Civil War, General Ulysses S. Grant “issued a directive, General Order #11, expelling Jews from his military district, blaming them for pervasive smuggling and speculation that caused a spike in cotton prices” (20). Over and over, Cottrell stresses that, during the 1930s and 1940s, anti-Semitism did not just contaminate Nazi Germany; in his time, Greenberg encountered narrow-minded fans and bigoted fellow ballplayers without leaving the shores of his native country. He was viewed not just as a great slugger but as a great *Jewish* slugger—just as Robinson was labeled a multitalented *Negro* ballplayer.

While generally well researched, *Two Pioneers* is not flawless. Cottrell reports that the celebrated incident in which Kentuckian Pee Wee Reese placed his arm around Robinson in a show of public support took place in a game pitting the Dodgers against the Boston Braves. However, its exact time and location, not to mention the Dodgers’ opponents, has never been determined; various individuals have offered different recollections of the incident. In a chapter covering the events of 1947, Cottrell describes Lena Horne as “the young singer and Brooklyn resident” (192), yet by that time Horne had long left the borough of her birth and was established in Hollywood as an MGM contract player. He notes that the 1947 film *Crossfire* spotlights the murder of a Jewish “war hero” (195); however, the victim is no Audie Murphy but rather a World War II veteran who was discharged because of wounds sustained at Okinawa. Cottrell cites the title of another 1947 release that deals with anti-Semitism as *Gentlemen’s Agreement*, rather than *Gentleman’s Agreement* (195). Too often, it has been my experience that historians who thoroughly explore the area of their expertise misstate the simplest facts when dealing with other topics.

Despite these imperfections, *Two Pioneers* serves as an all-purpose history lesson for both the seasoned and the novice baseball buff—not to mention those with no interest whatsoever in the sport. Cottrell offers a thoughtful portrayal of Greenberg and Robinson as proud men who loathed the racial and religious prejudice directed their way. He also emphasizes that the link between them was a public one. From firsthand experience, each understood the abuse that the other was subjected to as well as its impact on the human psyche. During the 1947 season, Robinson and Greenberg collided at first base on a play in Pittsburgh. Cottrell notes that the encounter “resulted in a mutual display of respect rather than the abuse and slurs that each frequently suffered

from other players and fans” (xiii). Robinson eventually admitted that Greenberg offered “the first real words of encouragement I received from a player on an opposing team,” while Greenberg observed that he “identified with Jackie Robinson . . . because they had threatened me the same way” (xiii).

When one reads these quotes, one is reminded of the antagonism that has often characterized African American–Jewish relations across the decades. In this regard, *Two Pioneers* is a sobering testament to the fact that African Americans and Jews have more in common than individual members of both groups are often willing to admit.

Lyle Spatz, ed. *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America: The 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012. 380 pp. Paper, \$26.95.

Robert A. Moss

This lovely volume is an entry in SABR’s series *Memorable Teams in Baseball History*. Here are 380 double-column pages devoted to the 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers of Jackie Robinson’s rookie year, a multifaceted, multiauthor effort edited by Lyle Spatz.

Of course, other books deal with Robinson and the 1947 Dodgers: Red Barber’s 1947 *When All Hell Broke Loose in Baseball* (1982) provides a passionate and personal perspective from the Dodgers’ longtime play-by-play announcer; Jonathan Eig’s *Opening Day: The Story of Jackie Robinson’s First Season* (2007) affords an updated introduction to one of baseball’s most exciting seasons and a pivotal chapter in the evolution of civil rights in postwar America; and Jules Tygiel’s classic, *Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (1983), provides an even deeper and broader treatment of this topic.

However, *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America: The 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers* is unique: three intertwined threads combine “time-line” capsule summaries of the Dodgers’ 1947 games; multipage, fully sourced biographies of the players, coaches, managers, and owners; and freestanding essays devoted to various aspects of the season. This nonlinear, interspersed structure allows the book to be opened anywhere and browsed for pleasure and instruction, and a detailed table of contents is available for those who desire a more deliberate or selective approach.