Beyond Stereotypes

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Racial Attitudes towards Jews in the “Negro Leagues”:
The Case of Effa Manley

by Rebecca Alpert

By the time the United States entered World War II in 1941, Negro League baseball had developed into a profitable, respected, and mostly black-owned business. While many factors contributed to this development, some portion of the financial success was attributable to the contributions of Jewish entrepreneurs during the depression (Alpert; Lanctot). Notably, Ed Gottlieb, Abe Saperstein, and Syd Pollock were welcomed into the business because of the financial experience and expertise they were able to bring to bear. Still, these entrepreneurs were also frequently viewed warily by their black partners and competitors as both white and Jewish outsiders. Which brings us to a consideration of yet another owner, Effa Manley (1897–1981), who was also an obvious outsider—but in a different way—and what a difference this proved to be. This difference, in fact, has led to her being the only woman in history to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, which occurred in 2006, and the acknowledgment of the unique role she played in the business of black baseball. From 1935–48, along with her husband Abe, she owned and operated the Newark Eagles, one of the most successful teams in the Negro National League.¹ Her husband started the team in Brooklyn, but moved it to Newark after an initial lackluster season in New York. By the end of that first season, Effa had taken over all of the front office business operations and was on her way to becoming an outspoken proponent and leader of Negro League baseball. Yet, although she lived her life as a black woman, her biological heritage was white. The intent of this article is to explore...
the complicated relationship between Manley and those Jewish entrepreneurs who were both her allies and competitors in the business of the Negro Leagues and what, in turn, this complex relationship reveals about a dynamic period in the development of American Jewish culture in relation to black culture in the 1930s and 1940s.

Upon first consideration, it would seem that Effa Manley did not like Jews very much, especially those who were her competitors in baseball. In a July 28, 1941 letter to Seward Posey, business manager of the rival Homestead Grays, Manley suggested they make an alliance that could “stop Gottlieb, Wilkerson, Leuschner, Saperstein and all the other Jews who want to join them where Negro Baseball is concerned” (Letter to Posey). She opined that if she or her husband were presiding over league business, “these Jews would be stopped in their tracks,” noting that “the 10% Gottlieb puts in his pocket, and Saperstein puts in his, would set up a nice treasury” (ibid.). Manley was clearly playing off two common stereotypes about “these Jews”—their depiction as being both talented and greedy in the handling financial matters. In this case they are portrayed as having the inclination to make as much money as possible their first priority, rather than pursuing a full commitment to the advancement
of this black business enterprise—and by extension the advancement of blacks in American society. Although in this instance Manley was thus invoking these stereotypes in a way that could be viewed as transparently and even virulently anti-Semitic, her actual relationships with Jews (in both her professional and personal life) reveal a more complex picture. Manley’s attitudes towards Jews typify those prevalent in the black communities of the time—simultaneously negative and positive. While she deployed anti-Semitic rhetoric about Jews and money strategically, her comments also were, on occasion, indicative of her larger resentment of their financial power in the Negro Leagues. As a self-described “race woman,” a common parlance of the time, she thought that the teams should be owned and operated by African-Americans. But she also understood that the Jews had a role to play in Negro baseball, and thus she was willing to welcome them as useful business partners and even as aspirational models for conducting business matters. And although Manley occasionally lumped them pejoratively together with other “ofays,” her relationship with Jewish men in Negro baseball essentially reflected a paradoxical combination of wariness of, and enthusiasm for Jews, their financial acumen and economic status.

Manley’s reaction to the Jewish entrepreneurs in the Negro Leagues should be understood in the context of her prior experiences with Jews—which also had both positive and negative aspects. It is likely that she had Jewish classmates when she was growing up in Philadelphia, attending the predominantly white William Penn High School for Girls (Rushing 21). She likely had additional personal experiences with Jews in Harlem, where she moved after finishing high school in 1916, and where Jews also lived and worked. She herself did not work in Harlem, but downtown in the millinery business, where it is also likely that she met similarly employed Jewish women in this gender-segregated industry. Her first documented encounter with Jews, however, took place in the summer of 1934, when she took a leadership role in the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaign organized by the Citizens League for Fair Play against the Jewish owners of Blumstein’s Department Store on Harlem’s 125th Street. This encounter taught her about working across the economic, social, and racial differences that existed between blacks and Jews. Through her work in this campaign, Manley learned the importance of blending political strategies in order to achieve success. She observed and participated in coalition work, public protest, behind-the-scenes negotiation, strategic use of rhetoric, press relations, and legislation. She would later use all of these political tools in order to make the Newark Eagles a successful business.
Rebecca Alpert

Effa’s background was working-class, and neither during her brief first marriage nor as a single working-woman was she welcomed in the upper echelons of Harlem’s black society. But when she and her husband Abe married in 1933, Manley gained entrée into the black elite of Harlem, associating with the leaders of the community and the leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Abe had made his fortune in the illegal numbers business in Camden, New Jersey; and they had sufficient resources to live on “Sugar Hill” and socialize among wealthier and well-educated African Americans (Overmyer 12–16). In the winter of 1934, Manley organized the Harlem Women’s Association. One of its goals was to compel retail stores, owned primarily by Jewish merchants in Harlem’s main shopping district on 125th Street, to hire African-American women in visible positions as sales clerks. According to Manley’s recollections, William Davis, editor of the *Amsterdam News* gave her the idea to target Blumstein’s. In recounting her experience some years later, she remembered Davis hinting that Mrs. Blumstein would be open to the suggestion that the store provide middle class jobs for better educated African-American women, given that they already employed blacks as elevator operators and in janitorial services (Marshall 86:13). When Mrs. Blumstein did not respond positively to the group’s demands, Manley contacted the rector of St. Martin’s Protestant Episcopal Church, John H. Johnson, to seek support (Letter to Banner). Johnson took over as the official leader of the organization, and gave it a new name: the “Citizens League for Fair Play.” Manley was elected to the office of Secretary and was intimately involved in orchestrating the ensuing protest. The League’s first tactic was to collect receipts from the store, mostly from St. Martin’s parishioners, to demonstrate conclusively to the Blumstein’s owners (both Mrs. L. M. Blumstein and her brother-in-law, William) that the vast majority of their sales came from African-American clientele. Johnson began the campaign on April 8, 1934 with a sermon asking his parishioners to bring their sales receipts to the church over a two-week period. Armed with the evidence that over seventy-five percent of the sales at Blumstein’s came from black customers, Johnson met with William Blumstein. At the time, Johnson asked only that they train and hire one black woman as a sales clerk. Nonetheless, Blumstein refused (Johnson 68).

The League’s response was to adopt a new and more aggressive public strategy. They held a mass meeting at the Church in May, at which they announced a boycott and picketing of the store under the banner “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work.” The League gathered support, and evolved into a coalition of over three hundred civic, religious and business organizations,
attracting a broad range of groups across the political spectrum. It included the integrationist-oriented Urban League as well as the NAACP. Those organizations, funded heavily by Jewish philanthropists, would normally pursue legal strategies rather than direct action; nonetheless, they lent their support to this campaign. Various groups of black nationalists also joined. One of their leaders, Sufi Abdul Hamid, had been involved in a similar effort that had been successful in changing retail-hiring practices in Chicago a year earlier. Hamid had already brought a militant version of those strategies to Harlem. Although these more radical leaders generally supported race-based, direct action strategies, their efforts were only grudgingly focused on employment opportunities for the middle class. Communist and Union groups were also involved, although they generally supported labor-oriented rather than racially-targeted strategies. That this coalition existed at all was remarkable, given the tensions that existed among these disparate groups. But any effort to increase black employment during the economic hardships created by the Depression was a high community priority (McKay 185, 191–92).

Harlem’s two black newspapers were divided in their response. The League received strong backing from Fred Moore, the editor of the New York Age. The Age carried weekly articles about the League and the progress of the boycott, and this publicity was instrumental to their success. But William Davis, editor of the Amsterdam News, disapproved of their strategies and did not support or publicize the group’s efforts. News columnists like George Schuyler worried that the picketing would backfire, alienate white businesses, and cause a loss of advertising revenue for the paper (Moreno 37).

The picketing and boycott lasted six weeks through mid-July, and was ultimately successful in persuading the Blumstein-ownership to meet with the League’s leadership to seek a resolution. Johnson took Manley to the private meeting along with a lawyer, Richard Cary, and Fred Moore of the Age. Manley later recalled making an argument that she believed swayed Blumstein. She told him that he should show respect for black women, who deserved to work in the same jobs available to white women. Under current circumstances, she suggested, black women could only find work as maids or prostitutes. While her reference to prostitution might have been shocking, Blumstein might also have been disturbed by the reminder that most black domestics in Harlem labored in Jewish homes for poor wages. A few days later Blumstein agreed to hire several new clerks immediately, and promised that there would be twenty more at the beginning of the fall season. Although Blumstein’s reneged on employing more black women in the fall, the store hired fifteen new sales clerks
immediately, and the Citizens’ League called off the boycott. Manley viewed the campaign against Blumstein’s as a triumph. In her estimation, it had a critical impact on retail stores and employment for African-Americans on 125th Street, as other merchants, fearing similar actions against their stores, also hired a number of black staff (Marshall 86). Scholars suggest this effort succeeded not only as a short-term victory but also as the beginning of the mobilization of political and economic powers in Harlem (Greenberg 136).

Manley must also have been aware of later events that split the coalition and exposed tensions both intra-racial and between the Jewish merchants and more radical black leaders. When the New York Age published photographs of the new clerks, and they were seen to be all light-skinned, middle-class women, some of the coalition members became outraged. While Effa and her cohort did spend time on the picket lines (New York Amsterdam News July 7, 1934) it was all too clear that the working-class and darker skinned women, who were actually doing most of the picketing, would receive no direct or immediate benefit for their efforts. Some of the leaders, including Sufi Hamid and the Harlem Labor Union, decided to continue and broaden their picketing and boycotting efforts, despite the withdrawal of the other coalition members from doing so.

Although many of the Jewish merchants on 125th Street had heeded the message of the boycott and began to hire African-American workers, others who did not do so became the most visible targets of the continued picketing. Some of the invective against them was tinged with anti-Semitic rhetoric, including positive comparisons to Nazi boycotts of Jewish stores that had begun the previous year in Germany. The anti-Semitic angle was emphasized in the Jewish and New York daily press and Harlem’s Jewish merchants appealed to Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia to stop the “anti-Semitic street corner agitation carried on by the black Hitler.” Sufi Hamid was also condemned by the Age and Amsterdam News as a “Black Nazi” (Hunter 188; McKay 196, 198–204).

The picketing and boycotting efforts exposed black-Jewish tensions in Harlem. In November 1934, after one of the merchants filed a lawsuit, a liberal Jewish judge reluctantly enjoined the picketing, ruling that it was only allowable as a legal tactic in cases of labor conflict but not in matters of race. These tensions continued, however, as black women still were relegated to working for low wages as domestics in Jewish homes, while Jewish merchants remained dominant in the retail business on 125th Street. Still, Jews at this time also took positive steps in support of the advancement of blacks. Many Jewish Harlem merchants, including the Blumsteins, were primary contributors to
integrationist organizations such as the NAACP and the Urban League. The complicated relationships between blacks and Jews in Harlem provided the backdrop for how Manley came to understand the complex connections and differences between Jews and blacks in the Negro Leagues, in particular, and on the streets of Harlem, in general.

When writing to the Research Director of the Urban League about events surrounding the campaign in 1940, Manley provided her analysis of the cause of the problems:

> It is most unfortunate that Negroes must be thought of as Black people and so many other races as white people. If we could be thought of [as] The Negro Race, the same as French, Italian, Jewish and all the others, we might not suffer so. The Race has always proven extremely courageous and helpful in doing its part to maintain this glorious Country of ours, and yet are so unjustly discriminated against, because of the pigmentation of their skin alone[e]. (Letter to Banner)

The tenor of this language suggests an espousal of an integrationist strategy (through which blacks should be treated like other races), while simultaneously upholding a racially oriented pride that makes a point of marking out differences. Blacks, like Jews, Manley argued, should be allowed the opportunity to be both distinct and equal. This combination of separatist strategies, invoking racial pride, and the integrationist desire to be treated like other groups would characterize her relationship to her Jewish counterparts in black baseball. The lessons she learned from the boycott about how to negotiate with Jewish businessmen—and in the tactical use of anti-Semitic rhetoric—would serve as important business strategies for her.

Manley’s use of pronouns in the quotation above adds another subtle dimension to understanding her successes in the world of business. Referring to blacks, she says both that “we might not suffer so” and yet refers to “the pigmentation of their skin.” It is not until much later in her life that Manley revealed publicly that she knew herself to be biologically white. When researchers began to pay attention to the history of the Negro Leagues in the 1970s, Manley was most willing to discuss her experiences. She wrote a book about her life as a team owner and did several oral histories and many interviews with the press. Manley first revealed her racial heritage in several interviews in 1977 (Marshall 91; Kisner 47). She described herself as the illegitimate child of a German/Native-American mother (Bertha Ford) and a white father (John [either Isaac or Marcus] Bishop), attributing her parentage to an affair her
mother had with her boss while married to John Brooks, which resulted in a lawsuit for alienated affections and subsequent divorce. Effa grew up assuming Brooks was her biological father. She was raised by her mother and her stepfather Benjamin Cole in a blended family consisting of Brooks’ and Coles’ six children. Everyone else in the family was black, and Effa identified with them growing up. Bertha did not reveal Effa’s white parentage to her until she was a teenager.⁸

Living in a black family and neighborhoods growing up, identified as “colored” by census takers, and self-identifying as black throughout her life, Effa, it would be fair to say, was socially black and deeply connected to the African-American community, a self-conscious “race woman.” She listed herself as “colored” on her marriage licenses and her (four) marriages—one early marriage that ended in a quick divorce, and two brief ones after Abe’s death in 1952—were all to black men. Her extended family assumed she was of African descent, as did all of her social acquaintances in Harlem and her business associates in the Negro Leagues. She lived her life primarily in the black community, where she was accepted as black. But much after the manner of other light-skinned African-American women, she passed (or, as she put it, “travelled”) as white when it served her interest. As already noted, she attended an inter-racial high school and made white friends at a time when the races rarely mixed. After moving to New York, she obtained jobs usually reserved for white (mostly Jewish immigrant) women in the millinery trade. She proudly related a story about Abe Manley buying her an engagement ring at Tiffany’s where the sales clerk assumed she was white. When she traveled around the country she found it advantageous to pass as white in hotels and restaurants off-limits to her husband, who sometimes posed as her chauffeur. She also used her light-skinned privilege to purchase the home where she and Abe lived in Newark (Marshall 91). Living on both sides of the color-line gave Effa Manley a unique perspective and understanding of racial categories, and probably factored into her view that blacks were a race no different from Jews, while simultaneously increasing her awareness of the cultural differences in each community.⁹

The strategies that Effa Manley learned in the challenge to Blumstein’s, as well as her complex, racial self-identity, helped define her relationships within the National Negro League. In particular, her heightened awareness of race would be a contributing factor in her relationships with the Jewish owners and booking agents she met in 1935, when Abe purchased the Brooklyn Eagles, and developed further, when she subsequently took over the business side of the team. Manley was concerned that the black owners of the teams in the
Negro League did not handle business matters as well as she would have liked. Awareness of the successes of Jewish businesses in Harlem affected the way she interpreted racial differences. As she wrote in confidence to Wendell Smith, the sports writer for the *Pittsburgh Courier*:

[W]e Negroses are not trained in business administration (some races do not seem to need any training). . . . We realize we do not know ourselves, and we let people lead us who have other thoughts in mind. Mainly making money. . . . (Letter to Smith)

Surely she was thinking about the Jewish philanthropists and businessmen in Harlem when referencing “the races [that] do not seem to need any training” and who are mostly interested in “making money.” Manley was both impressed by their talents and lamented that blacks had neither the same “innate” capacity nor access to learning business skills. This dual view was manifest most clearly in her dealings with Ed Gottlieb. In certain respects Ed and Effa were in similar positions. In the business of the Negro National League both were outsiders: Effa was the only woman, Gottlieb was the only Jew, and neither was completely white or black in terms of the social milieu of the time. Both were silent partners: co-owners who handled the business side of their respective teams, the Philadelphia Stars and the Newark Eagles. While black-owner Ed Bolden (for the Stars) and Effa’s husband Abe (for the Eagles) were the public faces of their respective teams, Gottlieb and Effa were both also officers (or, in Effa’s case, her husband’s surrogate) in the Negro National League and did a good deal of business together. Effa and Ed generally got along well. They conducted routine financial transactions cordially, even if, as we will soon see, they sometimes found themselves on opposite sides in arguments over policies and plans.

In the correspondence in the Newark Eagles Collection, everyone addressed Effa deferentially as Mrs. Manley. While she often wrote to other owners on a first-name basis, as they did to one another, letters to Ed (known to his friends as “Gotty”) always began “Dear Gottlieb.” Their conversations in this idiom were primarily business-like and polite, but also provide glimpses of a closer working relationship. Most of the letters dealt with mundane matters: problems with umpires, deliberations over the value of rain-insurance, improving publicity and providing passes for Effa’s parents when the Eagles played in Philadelphia. She also contacted him for advice about other business: asking his opinion about starting her own basketball team, working together on a plan to handle the problems of gas-rationing during the War,
and serving as a committee of two to draft the league’s constitution (Letter to Gottlieb, October 21, 1942; Negro League Minutes). Sometimes she complained to him about the other owners. She was quoted in the *Afro-American* as admiring Gottlieb’s business abilities; a fact she confirmed several times in the course of their correspondence, as when she wrote, “I know you can do more to get things straight than any one else in this Organization” (*Baltimore Afro-American*; Letter to Gottlieb, May 14, 1941). But she also let Gottlieb know that she did not think he really had the best interests of Negro baseball at heart, and wished he would use his business talents to advance the league. As she wrote after the 1942 season:

> Let’s don’t quarrel. I still think what I did a few years ago. You have all the ability necessary to put Negro Baseball on a permanent paying basis. But in order to do this Negro Baseball must come first, and Ed Gottlieb second. Is this too much to hope for? (Letter to Gottlieb, November 7, 1942)

Her words here could be interpreted as reflecting a simplistic stereotype of Jews, as being both good with finances yet really only interested in making money for themselves, thus placing Gottlieb as the outsider and herself as an insider committed to black baseball. Although she worked closely with Gottlieb and sought his advice, she also frequently questioned the strength of his commitment to black baseball, about which she claimed to care deeply, while protesting that he did not. But the major quarrel between Gottlieb and Manley revealed that what she defined as Gottlieb’s self-interest may, in fact, have benefited the league more than she was willing to admit. While Manley accepted Gottlieb in his role as owner and Negro National League officer, their one significant quarrel was over Gottlieb’s position as the League’s booking agent for Yankee Stadium. She objected to his power to decide how to use this important venue that generated a good deal of income for league teams—but especially additional revenue for Gottlieb.

Mostly, Manley objected to Gottlieb’s promotion strategy to showcase the premier Negro League pitcher, Satchel Paige. Gottlieb put together a deal with Yankees general manager Ed Barrow for five Negro League double-headers at Yankee Stadium in 1939. Gottlieb’s arrangement saved the league $12,500 in rental fees. For his work, Gottlieb received a ten percent booking fee. The owners had all agreed to Gottlieb taking the percentage when he took on the Yankee Stadium promotion. Although the Manleys initially opposed giving Gottlieb the commission, they ultimately participated in the lucrative
arrangement. Gottlieb, as promoter, put up all the advance money, and the
clubs involved gained an aggregate total of over $16,000 in profits for them-
selves. For his work, Gottlieb received a total of $1,100 (Chicago Defender July
16, 1938; Pittsburgh Courier February 4, 1939; Rust 54).

In 1940, the New York owners—James Semler of the New York Black
Yankees and Alex Pompez of the New York Cubans—joined the Manleys in
their objection to Gottlieb’s exclusive control of Yankee Stadium promotions.
At the winter meetings of the Negro National League they banded together
to fight the reelection of Tom Wilson (owner of the Baltimore Elite Giants
and Gottlieb’s close associate) as Negro National League President, because in
their opinion, he was too weak to stand up to Gottlieb. Semler, Pompez, and
Abe Manley saw Gottlieb’s booking of Yankee Stadium as an incursion into
their territory, for which they at least should have been compensated and/or
brought in as partners. Semler, Pompez and Manley further argued that they,
not Gottlieb, should get the ten percent booking fee. Supported by Wilson and
Cumberland “Cum” Posey of the Homestead Grays, Gottlieb fought back, ar-
guing that the New York owners “were in the same position as a patient who
applies for medical aid and then curses out the doctor when he charges him a
sum for curing him” (New York Amsterdam News February 24, 1940; Pittsburgh
Courier February 10, 1940).

Effa Manley escalated the debate with remarks she made at a League
meeting that were later reported in the black press. She was quoted as say-
ing that this was “something bigger than a little money! We are fighting for a
Race issue. In other words what we are doing here has become more important
than we [are].” Manley’s comments were dismissed by some due to her gender,
and Posey was reported to have left the room in anger, refusing to return until
Abe Manley promised to leave his wife home “where she belonged” (Chicago
Defender February 10, 1940).

Gottlieb also received support on this matter from the black press. Fay
Young did not approve of Effa Manley bringing up race at a time when whites
were beginning to pay attention to black baseball (Chicago Defender February
10, 1940). Art Carter defended Gottlieb as a businessman who was entitled
to do the best he could for himself and not obligated to be more financially
equitable to serve the common good. Ultimately, the problem was settled
through compromise. Gottlieb was reprimanded and removed as recording
secretary but allowed to keep the Yankee Stadium promotions. With Gottlieb
doing the booking, the Manleys chose not to play in Yankee Stadium in 1940
in protest. Yet Effa Manley thought it wise to retract her statements about the
When asked whether she opposed white ownership, she replied, "Certainly not. Some white owners are the best of men. I even admire Gottlieb’s business ability. He would be all right if the chairman [Tom Wilson] could handle him. He needs to be whipped into line" *(Baltimore Afro-American)*. Manley was sincere about her antipathy to Wilson, whom she frequently tried to remove as the President of the League. She eventually persuaded the League to retain her former colleague in the Citizens League, the Reverend John Johnson, as League president in 1947. He thus became the first independent non-owner to hold that position. Johnson had chaired the committee on integrating baseball established by Mayor LaGuardia in 1945, and as League President worked to make Major League baseball acknowledge responsibility for its part in destroying the Negro Leagues, which was an unintended consequence of integration, as African-American fans changed their allegiance from the Negro Leagues to teams like the Brooklyn Dodgers, Cleveland Indians, and New York Giants who were showcasing black star players (Lanctot 307–08).

When she was interviewed in the 1970s, Effa claimed that it was her husband who was interested in helping the New York owners get the Yankee Stadium rental contract. She stated that she was more willing to work with men like Gottlieb, calling them “fair and decent,” although she was also quite critical of booking-agents in her autobiography (Holway 321; Manley and Hardwick 50). Evidence suggests that Effa was sincere. Despite the strategic rhetoric about his self-interest and the anti-Semitic nuance to her remarks, Effa’s problems with Ed Gottlieb were not primarily about his being Jewish or his lack of commitment to the league, or about the New York teams’ rights to their territory. She used racially-tinged rhetoric strategically to support her husband’s allegiances, knowing that his allies from Harlem would resonate with that kind of coded language. But the true reason for her personal anger toward Gottlieb’s Yankee Stadium promotions was probably more about what she thought to be the disrespectful attitude aimed at her by Satchel Paige, who was by far the most famous Negro baseball star. Showcasing Paige in order to attract crowds was something Manley could not easily stomach. Manley was still angry that, although the Eagles purchased Paige’s contract in 1938 for what in those times was the high price of $5000, Paige refused to report to Newark, preferring instead to jump to Latin American leagues. When he finally returned to the United States, he still did not honor his obligation to report to Newark, but instead began to pitch for his own barnstorming “Satchel Paige All-Stars” and subsequently for J. L. Wilkinson’s Kansas City Monarchs. Paige, due to his...
celebrity, saw no reason why he should be forced to play by the rules—especially the rules as dictated by owners. Moreover, the other owners refused to support Manley, and this too gave her good reason for not taking part in using Paige to promote the League. Indeed, she was also angry because Paige was at the time actually playing in the Negro American League, so his services would consequently have to be “rented” for the New York dates. Manley deemed that an unacceptable and undignified practice that undermined the integrity of the league.

Gottlieb showed no interest in tolerating what he considered to be Manley’s petty, personal grudge. He believed, pragmatically, that showcasing Satchel Paige was the key to promoting black baseball to white audiences. Gottlieb arranged with Black Yankee’s owner Jim Semler to pay Paige $300 to pitch. He explained to Manley that this “was very cheap, as he was largely responsible for the crowd, and helped all of us to make money.” He wrote several letters trying to convince her of how important this was to the League and to the other owners, arguing that Paige’s presence would “help Semler get a crowd, and get out of debt.” He further argued that this promotion could not “possibly hurt you or anyone else.” Gottlieb reasoned that Paige, pitching in an exhibition game, would not disrupt the Eagles’ fan base in Newark, but it would make new fans for the Negro National League (Letter to Manley, May 16, 1941; Letter to Manley, July 21, 1941). She replied “If [the] Yankees use Satchell please arrange for the Eagles . . . to play in Baltimore. I certainly could not be asked to play with Satchell pitching against us after all the devil I went through about him . . . he cost me a lot of cash and embarrassment” (Letter to Gottlieb, May 14, 1941).

When all was said and done, Gottlieb’s position was vindicated. The exhibition went on, Paige was paid $300, each club made $844, and the white press took note of the Negro Leagues (Gottlieb, Letter to Manley, July 21, 1941). Nonetheless, Effa refused to pay her share of the expenses. The idea of paying Paige sent her into a rage against “the powers that are,” who “certainly don’t mind showing how little respect they have for us” (Letter to Posey, July 28, 1941). It was this incident that triggered her angry letter, noted above, to Seward Posey suggesting that they make an alliance that could “stop Gottlieb, Wilkerson, Leuschner, Saperstein and all the other Jews who want to join them where Negro Baseball is concerned” (Letter to Posey, July 28, 1941). Manley’s use of racial rhetoric was a result of her anger at what she considered disrespect to the integrity of a black business. Reacting as a race woman, she used a racial argument to emphasize her strong opposition.
Gottlieb, however, believed he was doing the right thing and continued to insist that Manley behave responsibly: “... as to our personal account, I really hoped that you would agree to pay your share of the Satchell Paige money, as I am sure I doubled each club’s share by making the change, and figured a personal conversation with you would do the trick” (Letter to Manley, October 11, 1941). But Manley held her ground: “How can I pay Satchell when I paid Wilkerson for him and never got it back? ... To ask me to pay for Satchell’s services is just too much. ... I should get paid for letting someone else use him” (Letter to Gottlieb, November 4, 1941). The following year the account still remained unsettled. Gottlieb owed the league money from Satchel Paige’s appearances in Yankee Stadium but would not release the funds until the Manleys paid their share. But Effa did not relent:

... when a person in this baseball [league] paid some hard cash for a ballplayer and just had him taken from him by plain strength, and the offending party makes as much money with him as Wilkie did with Satchell, he should at least give us back the cash we paid for him.
(Letter to Gottlieb, December 15, 1941)

From Gottlieb’s perspective, it was her recalcitrance and not his management style that was holding back the financial benefit for the league. He reminded her that she admitted they made much more money with Paige there, even after paying his fee, than they would have without him. Although she continued to refuse to pay for his appearances, the following year she softened her opposition and even requested that he pitch when the Eagles played against the Monarchs (Gottlieb, Letter to Manley, November 10, 1942; Manley, Letter to Baird, June 8, 1943).

After this encounter, however, Manley’s relationship with Gottlieb took on a more competitive tone. She began to book her own games in New York’s Polo Grounds, even when they were in direct competition with the games Gottlieb had booked for League teams in nearby Yankee Stadium (Manley, Letter to Posey, August 25, 1941). She continued to try to have the Yankee Stadium booking contract taken away from Gottlieb. She worked with others involved in the League, led by *Norfolk Journal and Guide* sports editor Lem Graves, who also expressed a desire to get “the Jews” out of power (Manley, Letter to Graves).

But even though Manley claimed to object to the presence of “Jews” in the league to colleagues to whom she believed that strategy had an appeal, she continued to work behind the scenes with Jewish promoters to advance the
interests of the Newark Eagles. In the winter of 1942 she began a relationship with Abe Saperstein and Syd Pollock, who were owners and booking agents for the Negro American League that was based in the Midwest. During the off-season, annoyed with Gottlieb and the other Negro National League owners, who supported him, Effa contemplated leaving the league and having the Newark Eagles play independent baseball instead. She contacted Saperstein about becoming their agent and promoter. The Manleys even announced to the black press that they were considering withdrawing from the league. They did not reveal that they had consulted with Saperstein but suggested their dissatisfaction with Gottlieb was the main reason that they might decide to become independent. Saperstein responded enthusiastically, asking if she would be willing to fly out to see him in Chicago. By the time Manley replied by mail two days later, they had already spoken by phone. In her letter she acknowledged that the move outside league play would give the other owners the ability to sign Eagle players with impunity, but she was willing to take that risk “to tie up with someone [like Saperstein] who knows the ropes” (Saperstein, Telegram to Manley; Manley, Letter to Saperstein, February 22, 1942).

Sensing the urgency of the deal, Saperstein suggested that Pollock, his associate, make the trip from his home in North Tarrytown, New York to talk to Effa and her husband. Pollock was not only Saperstein’s associate, but the proprietor of the comedy baseball team, the Ethiopian Clowns. Like the other owners, Manley expressed distress over the antics and politics of Pollock’s team. In a 1944 letter to Negro American League owner B. B. Martin she wrote in reference to Pollock, “those people never did want baseball to get too high class, and all these sorts of things help to keep it down.” But later in life she admitted: “I didn’t like the Ethiopian Clowns. I wanted baseball to be dignified. One day when they were playing in New York I decided to go see them, and nobody laughed louder than I did. So after that I stopped complaining” (Holway 321).

Despite her reservations about the Clowns, Effa welcomed Pollock into the Manley’s home in Newark. In his lengthy letter of introduction that confirmed the visit, he told them he planned to supply them with facts and figures that would convince them to work through Saperstein’s office and “eliminate many headaches, squabbles at league meetings, and make yourself just as much money . . . if not more than you ever did playing league ball.” Pollock went on to say that “Saperstein and his staff in the Chicago office outshine all others” at booking and promoting. He emphasized that the Eagles “would fit perfectly into plans Saperstein has in mind and briefly outlined to me several weeks
Saperstein made a strong argument that plans for joining a new league would serve the Newark Eagles well. In Pollock's summary of their conversation he reinforced Effa's desire to “lick Posey and his motives” and divest “Cum Posey of the power he has edged himself into.” Although Effa blamed Gottlieb for her desire to leave the League, when discussing the matter in public, she was also aware that Seward and Posey were most often Gottlieb's allies in the Negro National League, not hers. Pollock added fuel to the fire, suggesting that Manley permit the Clowns to use Ruppert Park when the Eagles were traveling. They would both make a “nice bit of change” and “it would be a blow at Posey and a knockout punch I think you'd like to deliver.” Clearly Manley was willing to work with anyone she believed would help her make the Eagles a successful enterprise, regardless of ethnic identity (Pollock, Letter to Manley, February 28, 1942).

As it turned out, nothing came of Pollock's visit or invitation, and the Newark Eagles stayed in the Negro National League. Two weeks later, Saperstein sent Manley a note wishing her the best of luck. He left the door open for further conversation, saying he “would welcome word from time to time as to how you progress,” and suggested that they get together when he was in New York, touring with his comedy basketball team, the Harlem Globetrotters. A few days later, he received a cordial reply that made it clear her husband wanted to stay with the league (Saperstein, Letter to Manley, March 7, 1942; Manley, Letter to Saperstein, March 11, 1942; Saperstein, Letter to Manley, March 14, 1942).

Manley continued to work with Saperstein to book games for the Eagles in the Midwest, turning down a similar offer from Posey to do the booking. In 1944 Saperstein booked the Eagles to play at Wrigley Field, another major league stadium where Saperstein made the rental agreements. The following year Effa again made arrangements with Saperstein, this time for the Birmingham Black Barons and Kansas City Monarchs to come to Newark. Although she still disliked having to pay extra for having Paige pitch, she did accept the offer when Kansas City played Newark in 1945, calling her previous concerns for compensation “water under the bridge as everyone is trying to do the best he can today.” Ultimately, Manley proved to be a pragmatic business owner who showed she could come to understand the importance of compromise for the sake of financial benefit (Letter to Baird, June 27, 1945).

Manley also avoided dealing with Gottlieb, directly, booking with agents like Brady Johnson in Virginia, and A. J. Hammonds in North Carolina.
Hammonds, in particular, indicated to her that he also preferred “working with my own people in this promotion, rather than working with the Jewish people” (Hammonds). But Manley herself continued to work with “the Jewish people,” booking games against the Clowns to play in Florida before the opening of the season and continuing, despite her reservations, to work with Gottlieb to book games with his own team, the Philadelphia Stars (Manley, Letter to Pollock).

It should thus be clear that Effa Manley was quite willing to work with Jews if this meant the possibility of advancing the interests of her own team. Yet, by the same token, it is also clear that she showed no hesitation to resort to anti-Semitic rhetoric in certain circumstances, if she thought this served her interests. But in the final analysis she also understood the importance of the Jewish promoters and was perfectly content to work with them.

Her willingness to engage with Jews to advance her business interests and her comfort around them is underlined further by her relationship with a law student at Newark University, Jerome Kessler, whom she employed to do publicity. As she later described it, “There was a young Jewish lawyer, Jerome Kessler, who had helped finance his law school training handling publicity for the Eagles.” Kessler continued in the Manley’s employ after passing the bar in 1940. On Kessler’s stationery he listed himself as “Press Relations Director” of the Newark Eagles (Kessler, January 1, 1940). His correspondence with Effa indicated a strong personal connection and a marked enthusiasm for the opportunity to write and place stories about the team in the press. Kessler helped Manley gain what she wanted, attention from the white press in Newark, which she assumed would be more responsive to a white publicity agent. For her part, Manley withstood criticism from the black press for hiring a Jew in this role, given that there were so few white-collar jobs available to blacks at the time. To some of the other owners, it seemed hypocritical on her part to hire Kessler while criticizing other Negro League teams for working with men like Gottlieb (New Jersey Herald News; Carter). But as someone who passed for white on more than one occasion, she knew the advantages of having a white person responsible for getting the word out about her team to the white “dailies.” Jerry Kessler embraced this role with enthusiasm.

Effa and Jerry kept up their close relationship over a considerable period of time. When applying for the Naval Reserve, for example, he requested a detailed letter from her as the “person to whom I am directly responsible in my current employment,” attesting to his good character. She addressed her letters to him, “Dear Jerry,” and in them they discussed their visits both at home and in the office. After passing the bar, and while serving in the armed services,
he began to do legal work for the Eagles, communicating with the head of
the Mexican Baseball League, Jorge Pasqual, gathering information about
Workmen’s Compensation in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and negotiating
other insurance matters. Kessler accompanied Manley to court when she was
sued by former Eagles player Daltrie Cooper after he broke his ankle during
a game and was dropped from the team. She and Kessler discussed player-
contracts. She sought his solace over a letter she got from “that nut Satchell
Paige.” He helped with plans for bringing the mayor of Newark to the park
for opening day, and worked with her on scheduling games (Manley, Letter to
Kessler, May 15, 1940; Pittsburgh Courier August 17, 1940; Manley, Letter to
Kessler, January 23, 1941; March 3, 1941; March 4, 1941; March 15, 1941; April
15, 1941; June 2, 1941).

Most of their correspondence was, of course, about publicity, and Kessler
communicated with all of the black newspapers as well as with the local white
press. There is a hiatus in the correspondence during part of Kessler’s army ser-
vice in the Signal Corps. But when he got back in touch on his return, her reply
described how much she missed his work and how inadequate his replacement
as publicity man had turned out to be. She asked him if he thought the Army
would mind if he sent out some publicity to the [white] “dailies” while still in the
service (Kessler, Letter to Manley; Manley, Letter to Kessler, February 25, 1944).

After the War, when Kessler was a practicing attorney in Newark, Manley
went to him for help solving another problem. Effa was one of the only two
Negro League owners (Ed Gottlieb being the other) to publicly criticize Branch
Rickey’s refusal to pay the Negro League owners for the players he signed up
for the Dodgers, and she enlisted Kessler to help her make her case (Letter to
Gottlieb, June 25, 1946; Holway 325). Rickey made it known that he felt no
need to deal with the Negro League owners and had nothing but contempt
for them and their style of business. He claimed that, since their players were
not under contract to the teams, he had the right to negotiate directly with the
players and to by-pass the Negro League owners. When Rickey began to make
overtures to the Eagles’ Monte Irvin, who was under contract to the Eagles,
Effa turned to Kessler: “I called him and told him Mr. Rickey had no business
taking all these people. I asked him if he would gamble with me on making an
issue of it.” Rickey dropped his pursuit of Irvin because of Kessler’s legal efforts.
Feeling that she had wronged Irvin by taking away his opportunity to play for
the Dodgers, she asked Kessler to contact other teams to see if they would be
interested in purchasing Irvin’s contract. He contacted the Yankees and then
the New York Giants, who subsequently signed Irvin and paid the Eagles $5000
for his contract. Manley willingly paid Kessler fifty percent of the profit that she agreed was due him for his labors (Manley and Hardwick 90–92).

In conclusion, Effa Manley’s attitude about Jewish involvement in the league must be contextualized and should be seen as part of a business strategy she used to protect her interests and to facilitate her alliances. Based on what she learned in the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaign, she recognized the value of using anti-Semitic rhetoric with those she suspected harbored separationist tendencies, whenever she thought this might be strategically useful. Although she lived as a black woman in the Negro Leagues, she also relied on her white identity to overcome the barriers of gender. To no small extent, she probably identified with the ambivalent position of the Jewish men she worked with everyday, seeing herself as their equal, since like her, they were part insiders and part outsiders. Her working relationships with Gottlieb, Saperstein, Pollock, and Kessler illustrate that Effa Manley believed the stereotypes of her day: That Jews had an inherent talent for dealing with money and handling business, while, in contrast, blacks did not naturally possess this talent. She respected the business acumen of Jews, and their ability to cross racial lines to help the league and she was more than willing to work with them. She may have harbored stereotypes about Jews and money but they did not keep her from having respectful working relationships with them, and may have been part of her motivation for doing so.

It was clear to Effa and the other owners that the Negro Leagues could not survive the integration of Major League baseball. The Manleys sold the Newark Eagles in 1948. Abe died in 1952. Effa spent her remaining years living with her family of origin in Philadelphia and later in Los Angeles. When the Negro Leagues became a subject of interest to baseball researchers, Effa devoted time and energy to sharing her legacy, publishing an autobiography, participating in several oral history projects, and lobbying the Baseball Hall of Fame to recognize the contributions of Negro League players—an effort that eventually bore fruit. While she continued to associate with Negro League players, in her later life she had no contact with the Jewish men with whom she worked (Overmyer 247–59).

The ways in which Effa Manley so freely indulged in stereotypical language is something that we can easily criticize today as being both jarring and offensive. But such twenty-first century judgments of Effa Manley are anachronistic and thus to some extent far too simplistic. It is far wiser to examine her life in baseball, as we have endeavored to do above, from a more nuanced perspective. She shared a good deal with her Jewish business colleagues, especially
in terms of the ambiguity of her social position in the 1930s and 1940s. She is revealed to be a woman who was not quite black who competed with men who, from the standpoint of the day, were not quite lily-white. These were men she both disparaged and admired. Above all else, she viewed all the men in her life in baseball—black, white and Jewish—as her equals, and she took every opportunity to make sure that they knew this as well.
Notes

1. Two book-length works tell the story of the Newark Eagles. See the excellent studies by Luke and Overmyer.

2. Unless otherwise indicated, correspondence in this article is taken from the Newark Eagles Papers.

3. A derogatory, slang term for a white person whose etymological origin is unclear. See, e.g., “Ofay.”

4. Greenberg points out an advertisement for an African-American clothing store with headline “American Negroes Competing against Jews in Haberdashery World” (“Or Does It Explode” 117). She further suggests that black women before the Depression were “independent and self-reliant” and often were hired for “gender segregated work [including seamstresses] . . . better educated worked . . . sometimes as shop clerks, or in rare cases, businesswomen” (Greenberg, To Ask for an Equal Chance 9).

5. For a basic outline of the events involved in the Harlem “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaign and their aftermath, see Greenberg; Hunter; Johnson; McKay; and Moreno. The following overall discussion of the campaign is based on these sources.

6. According to Hunter (183), Sufi Abdul Hamdi launched a street offensive and “Effa Manley of the Harlem Housewives Association, shocked at the ferocity of Sufi’s movement, sent a call to Harlem’s ministers to organize a ‘respectable’ job campaign. Reverend John H. Johnson, a former Columbia basketball star and vicar of St. Martin’s Episcopal Church, was the first to reply.”

7. McKay claims charges of anti-Semitism were trumped up to set these two minorities against each other, “Negroes certainly draw no line between the Jews and other whites” (208). Like Manley, he looked at Jewish labor organizing as an aspirational model (217–18).

8. Rushing found Manley’s birth registration to be: “Ethel Ford, March 27, 1897, female, black, 1840 Carlisle St., 26 Ward, Parents: John and Bertha Ford,” Occ Clerk, The Philadelphia City Archives, Philadelphia, PA. He noted that there was no “John Ford”—the name was inserted to cover her illegitimacy. Rushing also argues that Brooks was a criminal, and he could find no documentation that Brooks ever sued Bishop, a central piece of the story Manley told in the 1970s about her birth.

9. As Kaplan points out, while whites saw this kind of passing as a moral dilemma, for blacks it was an ethical triumph (273). See also Alexander 83–94.
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