



Rickey & Robinson: The True, Untold Story of the Integration of Baseball

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In *Rickey & Robinson*, legendary sportswriter Roger Kahn reveals the true, unsanitized account of the integration of baseball—a story that for decades has relied largely on inaccurate, secondhand reports. Focusing on Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson, Kahn's account is based on exclusive reporting and his personal reminiscences, including revelatory material he buried in his notebooks in the '40s and '50s.

Rickey and Robinson were chiefly responsible for making integration happen. Through in-depth examinations of both men, Kahn separates fact from myth to present a truthful portrait of baseball and its participants at a critical juncture in American history.

Rickey & Robinson: The True, Untold Story of the Integration of Baseball Details

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From Reader Review Rickey & Robinson: The True, Untold Story of the Integration of Baseball for online ebook

Reid McCormick says

Dodger history is full of some amazing characters. Sandy Koufax, Tommy Lasorda, and Roy Campanella are amazing examples. Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey are probably my top characters. Vin Scully is without a doubt the most revered man in Dodger history, if not baseball history. Unfortunately there are no definite works by Scully or about Scully, so until then, I continue my pursuit of Robinson and Rickey.

Much has been written about Robinson and Rickey throughout the decades. Together they changed the world. Robinson obviously never had it made and he endured the worst, but without Rickey there would be no 42. I am not too sure how much more I could learn about these two. Robinson is always portrayed as a gentle yet mostly restrained fighter and hero. Rickey is given a more complicated personality. At times Rickey is portrayed as a saint that fights the good fight of integration. Other times he is portrayed as an opportunistic businessman that sees integration as an easy way to get talented ballplayers at a cheaper price while drumming up ticket sales. I like to compare Rickey to President Lincoln, who is often depicted as being either indifferent to slavery or a staunch abolitionist. The truth can be messy.

Roger Kahn, known for the work *Boys of Summer* (which at the time of this review, I have not read), here writes the so-called untold story of baseball integration titled *Rickey & Robinson*. Given the title, I was expecting an in-depth look at the relationship between these two titans in baseball history. I know Rickey and Robinson had a great respect for each other even though they did not see eye to eye on many things. So I was quite surprised when I was over a hundred pages into the book and Rickey and Robinson had yet to be in the same room. Granted there is a stage that needs to be set; the American landscape looked a lot different in the 1930's and 40's, but this means over the half the book does not include our two main characters.

The book is still interesting. There is not a lot of different information here, just a different perspective. It is fun to read a lot of first hand accounts between Kahn and the Dodgers. This book is not a just a history book, but the personal interactions between the author and these legendary figures. I think this book should be called *Sportswriting in Brooklyn: the untold stories of integration in baseball*.

Rick says

Roger Kahn, now 87, has fished these waters before and better. This is not to say that *Rickey and Robinson* isn't an entertaining read even if the use of "untold" in the subtitle is stretching a practice swing into a walk-off home run. There is very little here that Kahn himself hasn't told already and even if you didn't read *The Boys of Summer* or *The Era*, Mr. Kahn's two better books on baseball and the Dodgers when they inhabited the Borough of Brooklyn in the County of Kings in the City of New York, you will recognize much of what is here from the movie "42" or other sources.

You have the league owners meeting to voice its disapproval of integration, largely for financial reasons, and a long-since disappeared "report" written by Larry MacPhail on the topic. You have Rickey's "courage to not fight back" talk with Robinson when he offered him a contract. Durocher's brilliantly profane wake the Dodger team in the middle of the night and read them the riot act over an anti-Robinson petition. You have the Phillies' manager ordering his team to yell all kinds of racist crap at Robinson on the Dodger's first game

against them and the league's action, including a forced let bygones be bygones photo of Robinson and Chapman. And more. It's a great story so no harm in telling it again.

The book, however, is also filled with digressions, some entertaining, some distracting, a few mean and unnecessary. The digressions may also have contributed to several anecdotes being told more than once in this book, sometimes word for word as in the earlier telling, sometimes with a little more detail. I don't know if Mr. Kahn wrote this book or dictated it but however the unwieldiness got in, a good editor might have done him the favor to tidy things up. Occasionally there is a reference of the "as I said earlier" kind but usually there isn't.

Kahn makes the case that Rickey, despite having his own flaws, was highly moral and his religious values were a prime motivator to break baseball's color line. He also argues that it was Baseball Commissioner Judge Landis's death in 1944 and New York State's passing of a fair employment act that opened the door for Rickey's move to action in 1945 (when he signed Robinson to a minor league contract to play for the Dodgers' Montreal farm team in 1946). Kahn includes, as he did in *The Era*, the work of some contemporary sportswriters (including himself and Jackie Robinson), to give credit or shame as befits the piece. He takes *The Times* (boring sports reporting and slow to take up the issue of segregation in baseball) to task—even for a recent piece it published suggesting that the story of Reese's putting his arm around Robinson in Cincinnati may be a myth. Probably should have been a note in the back of the book but old grudges die hard.

Taken altogether, *Rickey and Robinson* is a flawed re-telling of one of the seminal moments in baseball history and one of the rare ones that had a larger national significance as well.

Katherine Wacker says

In his book, *Rickey and Robinson: The True Untold Story of the Integration of Baseball*, renown sports columnist, Roger Kahn, documents the roles of the two men, Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson, who were instrumental in breaking the color barrier in "America's Favorite Pastime." Kahn first gives a biography of each man before delving into the social and cultural environment of the time of Robinson's entrance into the Major Leagues. Rickey and Robinson relies on the personal testimony of both men, and other eyewitness accounts, as well as newspaper columns, to give a reliable narrative to an event that is surrounded by myth and mystery.

There is no question that columnist Roger Kahn was privy to one of the most watershed moments in baseball and American History. At times, his prose is poetic, heroic and heart-breaking. He knows the game of baseball and the personalities around it like few in this generation. He does not sugarcoat the imperfections of either Rickey or Robinson, but gives a realistic profile of both. However, his reporting is colored by his own political leanings, which is distracting. He also repeats the same stories rather than reporting in a chronological narrative, which is confusing.

I enjoyed the personal and honest look at both Rickey and Robinson, but the reader should be aware of the language used. As a Dodger fan and a Robinson fan, I appreciate the sacrifices and contributions of Robinson and Rickey that made the game of baseball better.

However, I do not understand why Roger Kahn chose to make a salacious accusation Robinson's character two pages before the book's end. If the allegation is true, the revelation is out of place, unnecessary, and only leads to speculation. For this reason, I hesitate to fully endorse *Rickey and Robinson: The True Untold Story*

of the Integration of Baseball.

I was given a free copy from the publisher in exchange for my honest review

Bap says

This story is familiar. Branch Ricky is determined to integrate baseball and selects a strong, talented Jackie Robinson to lead the way with the admonition that he would have to endure scorn and abuse with class and forbearance. Equally interesting, this is a memoir of sorts as Kahn looks back over a lifetime of covering baseball. There are delightful insights into Leo DeRoucher, Walter O'Malley, Dixie Walker, and his compatriot reporters Red Barber, Red Smith, Jimmy Cannon, and Jimmy Powers. A most enjoyable read which makes me to put back on my re read list, *The Boys of Summer*. It is fitting to read of Brooklyn in the 40's and 50's which had its heart cut out when the Dodgers left town as they are now back as a center of sport and New York City culture.

Harold Kasselmann says

If this were a stand alone book, I would have rated it much higher. The fact is, however, there is very little new in this book that Mr. Kahn hasn't previously provided in "*The Boys of Summer*" or "*The Era-1947-1957*".(Or for that matter in Charles Einstein's wonderful work "*Willie's Times*.)

It is a very interesting story and Kahn makes himself a primary character in this historical perspective of baseball's most revolutionary era. The problem is it has been told before and frankly it is told several times within this book itself. The writing is very repetitious and Kahn is extremely defensive in his own version of the historic signing of Robinson. He suggests that his account is the only valid portrayal of the events while other journalists merely didn't care to get at the truth.

Still it is very entertaining and if you haven't read the other books on this topic, you will be enlightened and fascinated by the machinations of some of the prominent press members of the day as well as the moral kindness of the man called Mr. Rickey. I found compelling the story of a minister's wife who was going to publish a book about her late husband and an account of how Rickey wrestled with his conscious and with his frugality over Robinson's potential influence on the balance sheet. She describes Rickey pacing back and forth in her husbands' study/office while the latter worked. Then after an hour Rickey suddenly shouts that his prayers have been answered by God and he will sign Robinson to a contract. To me that is compelling evidence that Rickey's sense of morality was his primary goal above any financial rewards in signing Robinson. That was something I had never read before.

Tim Christian says

In the beginning, I was intrigued by Mr. Kahn's straightforward writing style and 'insider' knowledge of the story of Rickey-Robinson. And, while there were some insights shared throughout the book, it suffered from two main weaknesses in my opinion:

1. Confusing chronology. Kahn repeats stories multiple times and tells them using slightly different details each time. He also doesn't follow the arc of the chronological timeline. While that can work in a narrator's favor, it must be handled deftly. He does not pull it off here.

2. Namedropping. Mr. Kahn constantly namedrops and mentions the places where he met different people related to this story. It doesn't add any cache to the narrative; for me, it smacked on namedropping and placedropping (if that's a word) pure and simple.

I have to believe there are better narratives written about this century-changing story of Rickey-Robinson. This one isn't it.

P.e. lolo says

This book about Ricky and Robinson, is mostly about the life of Branch Rickey, but it is also filled with much more than that. The author talks about how the commissioner Landis ban the Cardinals farm teams when Rickey was their General Manager, saying that what he was doing was an unfair advantage. Though every player was being paid. The author goes through with how Rickey built the Cardinals before he left for the Dodgers. The Cardinals of course would go to the World Series in the 40s and win some of them also all the while with the players that Rickey put together. When he to the Dodgers he had already had the idea and put into place the workings of adding Jackie Robinson. His whole goal was to end segregation in baseball. He brought with him to Brooklyn a man named Hy Turken, who was a stat or numbers guy before Bill James made it famous. This would help Rickey in all of his decisions when it came to ball players. The author goes into the difficulties of the first few years of Robinson being with the Dodgers, and he also goes into how there were Jewish players that were being verbally abused by other players and by fans and those players would stand up for Jackie. The author goes into detail also how that though baseball would start being open to all races the big newspapers of New York and some other cities still did not have any African American reports in their sports section or other sections. This would not change until 59 and thoroughly by 62. A Wendell Smith applied for membership in the baseball writers Association of America, in 1939 and was denied. Baseball would be integrated for 15 years before mainstream newspapers began to hire African American sport writers. Still this author who is Jewish stated that abuse by the old time writers went on until they finally left the business or drank too much to be listen to. Who find out how Rickey was forced out to leave the Dodgers before the made their World Series runs in the 50s and their only win while in Brooklyn. Being forced to sell his part of the team to O'Malley. He then moved onto the Pirates and built that team but was gone before the won in 1960. He did acquire a little unknown outfielder that the Dodgers did not protect by the name of Roberto Clemente, for the Pirates along with some other players who would help them win a couple of titles. Robinson of course would be forced by O'Malley, to retire once they got out to L.A. refusing a trade to the Giants. This book is filled with more history from the 30s forward than any other baseball book that I have read before, and what is amazing is that they are still using a lot of what Branch Rickey started back in the 30s and 40s in scouting for talent in a ball player. This is a fantastic book, that you do not need to be a baseball fan to enjoy. I got this book from net galley.

Tracie says

Review forthcoming.

Larry Kunz says

A recounting of the integration of professional baseball by perhaps the only person still living who knew the protagonists (Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson) well.

Kahn promises to deliver all the background details about Rickey's great experiment, and he mostly keeps that promise -- although he wasn't there himself. (Kahn didn't start covering the Dodgers until 1952, five years after Robinson joined the team, so much of his information is based on conversations with Rickey and Robinson years after the fact.) Additionally, and I suppose it's inevitable with a subject that's been so thoroughly dissected, many of the stories Kahn tells are already common knowledge.

The writing style is rambling, with a number of digressions and a great many potshots -- some gratuitous -- at the New York sportswriters of Kahn's day. The book is an easy read and it'll maintain your interest. My main complaint is that Kahn's editor should've taken a more hands-on approach. A couple of details are off (for example, Rickey's meeting with Brooklyn's leading black citizens took place in February 1947, not 1946) and there are way too many digressions and too many "as I've mentioned earlier"s.

Andrew says

Every year, Major League Baseball salutes the memory of its first African-American player, Jackie Robinson. Every year, even as the celebration grows, the number of people who have first-hand memory of those days grows smaller.

Veteran baseball writer Roger Kahn remembers. He also remembers Branch Rickey, the man who was determined that the color line should be broken. He remembers Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the first baseball commissioner who was equally determined that segregation was in "the best interests of baseball", and Walter O'Malley, who purchased the Dodgers (the team that employed both Rickey and Robinson), and many others of the players -- both on-field and behind-the-scenes -- of that era.

"Rickey and Robinson" is not meant to be a formal biography of either man. It tells enough of their backstories to understand what led each of them to the point of history when Robinson trotted out on the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers, but does not attempt to be a complete picture of either man.

One thing I could never decide if I liked or hated was Mr. Kahn's constant self-references. At times, it felt important to realize that this history was being written by a man who actually witnessed it and who wrote about it as it was occurring. On the other hand, it felt like he was trumpeting himself as another member of the cast of this moment in history -- as though it couldn't have happened if the crusading journalist helped to ease the path. (And he could be right about this -- it just felt awfully self-serving.)

I would recommend this book to every baseball fan, especially those who only know about Jackie Robinson because their game program says that every team has retired his #42. I would also recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of the civil rights movement in this country -- seeing how difficult it was for a man of color to simply be permitted to play organized baseball in a traditionally white league provides an important grounding for what finally exploded in the 60s.

RATING: 4 1/2 stars, rounded up to 5 stars where 1/2 stars are not permitted.

DISCLOSURE: This book was provided to me free of charge by the publisher in a random draw. A review request was implied, but not explicitly required.

victor harris says

Kahn is one of baseball's enduring author treasures and he was a friend of both Rickey and Robinson and even co-authored a periodical with Jackie. He provides an interesting perspective on Rickey's decision to sign Robinson and break the baseball color barrier. Although Rickey, known as "El Cheapo" certainly had economic and altruistic motives, Kahn argues that it was not solely a profit driven decision. Other owners could have assumed the role of pioneer and declined. There was nobility in Rickey taking the initiative. Sadly, he did not proceed with equal vigor in protecting Robinson, particularly in respect to salary, forcing Jackie to live in shabby surroundings in New York at the outset.

An intriguing perspective on the Robinson drama and as always with Kahn - extremely well written.

Bryan Jaketic says

This book is a fine piece of the mosaic that is the legend of Jackie Robinson, and we're lucky to still have Roger Kahn with us to provide a voice from a bygone era. But I wouldn't start with this book to learn about Robinson, because it's more of a "fill in the gaps" book. It's also an historical account by a man who was part of the story, so it includes some of his opinions and biases that should be taken with a grain of salt - I particularly found his numerous (albeit brief) rants against advanced statistical analysis to be rather odd and off putting.

Rob1109 says

I am a die-hard baseball fan. Roger Kahn is probably the best-known Baseball writer of the last half century. Yet, for some reason, this is the first book of his I ever read. I honestly don't know why.

I was excited when beginning this book. My dad was a Dodger fan as a child. One of his first memories was of his father and older brother discussing Jackie's arrival in the majors. My dad later became a Mets fan. I did too. I lost my dad several years back but still, his stories about Ebbets Field, the Brooklyn Dodgers, Jackie, Duke, Gil, etc...are fond memories I will always have.

Okay, the book.

Baseball fans—and non-fans know, to varying degrees, some of the pure hell and hatred Jackie endured. I can't even imagine what he went through. What I liked about this book was Mr. Kahn's different take. Rather than looking at it from Jackie's POV, he spent the majority of the book explaining what Branch Rickey went through. I thought that was a brilliant idea, a fresh perspective. A new look at an old story. Jackie really didn't figure prominently until maybe the last 70 pages.

While I knew a lot of what went on, there was also much I learned. I also enjoyed the way the author related

segregation in Baseball to segregation in America.
These parts I enjoyed.

My...issue, I guess, is with the author's style.

I found him frequently going off on tangents that had no place. For example, there were many times he would write about, lets say, a meeting Rickey was having with a reporter regarding bringing a 'negro' to the major leagues. Then, for whatever reason, the author would go into the reporter's background. And not just for a paragraph, but for 3-4-5 pages. I found this strange and read eagerly to come full circle and get back to the original story.

Another issue I had was that Mr. Kahn kept putting himself into the book. For example, he would digress from a conversation to the background of a reporter for the NY Herald. Then, for some strange reason, Mr. Kahn would talk about himself. He would relate stories about his time working at the paper, what his duties were, what he thought of his boss and even what his salary was. Why is it necessary to tell the reader that when he worked for Mr. So-and-so at whichever newspaper it was, his boss would frequently send a young Roger Kahn to the corner store to buy 2 packs of Camels? Who cares?

I want to read about Branch Rickey. I want to read about Jackie Robinson. I don't want to know what errands the author ran for his boss.

I cant EVER recall reading a biography where the author continually put himself into the story. At times this went from a story about Rickey and Robinson to feeling more like a memoir from a guy who covered the Brooklyn Dodgers.

As other reviews stated, there were several instances where the author repeated the same scene, word for word.

Also, numerous times there were full reprints of newspaper articles.

This book was 275 pages. If you take out the fluff—the autobiographical stuff, the reprinted articles word for word, the overwhelming background of reporters—this probably would have been 150 pages.

One of the most defining moments of this period in history is when Pee Wee Reese walked over to 2B and put his arm around Jackie. Powerful stuff. Legendary. Stirring. Yet, it gets only 2 paragraphs. By comparison, the author spent probably 10 pages talking about NY Daily News sportswriter Dick Young.

I also question some of the author's accuracy.

I'm a big fan of US History. I was a history minor in college. I watch the news ever day (probably too much so, especially nowadays.) Yet, in one part of the book, Mr. Kahn states that in the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson wrote 'All men are created free and equal.' Franklin changed it to 'all men are created equal.' I'd NEVER EVER heard that before. Just now I did a quick Google search and could not find it. Perhaps, however, I missed it.

He also drops hints that Casey Stengel and Robinson's teammate Carl Furillo were racist. Just like the above comment, perhaps that is true. But I have NEVER read that anywhere else.

One thing I found ironic came toward the end of the book. Mr. Kahn, once again is digressing from Rickey and Robinson to writing about journalistic integrity. He's stressing how reporters need to be accurate. I agree. He then goes on to state that when the Mets came into existence 'in the early-60s' (not sure why he

didn't say 1962) they hired George M. Weiss and Casey, 2 people best known for their time with the Yankees. That is correct. However, Mr. Kahn states that the Mets, in their inaugural season, "lost 120 of 161 games they played." (40-121)

Wrong!!! They lost 120 games, not 121. Now sure, if you lose 120 games, what the heck is the difference if you lose 121? But this coming as the author is talking about getting facts correct is what I found ironic.

I'm rating this book a 2. A 4 for the approach of looking at this time in history from a different POV but a 1 for everything else.

Matt Moran says

Time for Roger Kahn to shut down the old typewriter.

The problem is not that the book isn't interesting - it is, despite consistent repetition and a good amount of rehashing old material. But the name-calling is excessive and just isn't a good look since most of the people that Kahn attacks are long gone.

George Briggs says

Pioneers vs. The bigots

Roger Kahn writes a 'no holds bared' account of the historic, but often tenuous, entry of Jackie Robinson as the first Black baseball player in the major leagues. It's difficult to imagine that America still held on to racial, ethnic, and religious prejudices after fighting WW2. The courage of Branch Rickey and Robinson are benchmarks for those still fighting ignorance today.
