

**“Richie Allen, Whitey’s Ways, and Me:
A Political Education in the 1960s”**

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“I wouldn’t say that I hate Whitey, but deep down in my heart, I just can’t stand Whitey’s ways, man.”

--Dick Allen, *Ebony*, 1970

“Disrespect” would be a euphemism. Dick Allen was unanimously renamed “Richie” in 1960 by a white press wholly indifferent to the young ballplayer’s protestations that everyone from his mother on down had always called him “Dick.” Later, when Allen finally did insist upon his rightful name after several years of patiently accepting what he thought a vaguely racist diminutive, the press variously ignored his request, spitefully granted it (“Dick ‘Don’t Call Me Richie’ Allen”), or—worse—depicted the “name-change” as an emblem of Allen’s unstable character (as in: “in mid-career he became, adamantly, ‘Dick.’” *Sports Illustrated* referred to this as Allen’s “first name sensitivity.”)¹ Fans in Philadelphia delighted in throwing objects at Allen—pennies, chicken bones, batteries, bolts, half pints—and when he took to wearing a batting helmet in the field, the press intimated that he needed the protection because he was bad with a glove. Allen twice appeared on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*: once in 1970 under the heading “Baseball in Turmoil” (a reference to Curt Flood’s challenge to

baseball's reserve clause, but Allen was the sport's better poster boy for "turmoil"), and once in 1972, smoking what remains the only cigarette in the history of *SI* covers.

Nor has Allen's treatment mellowed over the years. The current entry for Allen on BaseballLibrary.com ("The Stories behind the Stats") begins this way: "Talented, controversial, charming, and abusive, Allen put in 15 major league seasons, hitting prodigious homers and paying prodigious fines. He was praised as a money player and condemned as a loafer." The site does duly note Allen's Rookie of the Year season in 1964 and his MVP season in 1972; but its overall flavor tends fairly decisively toward "loafer" rather than "money player." (The account of his stellar rookie season opens on the odd—but for Allen, familiar—note, "He made 41 errors at third base...")² *Total Baseball*, the baseball encyclopedia, ranks Allen as the 88th best player of all time in an entry that begins, "Dick Allen feuded with writers, fans, managers, and teammates, earned many suspensions and behaved and fielded erratically."³

In American political life, the phrase "Black Power" will always bring to mind Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Party, and other black radicals who came to prominence in the latter half of the 1960s. In the too-clever parlance of '60's- and '70s-era baseball writing, however, its appropriation conjured figures like Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, Frank Robinson, and Richie Allen—the 1.5 generation of baseball's integration after Jackie Robinson had broken the color bar, black sluggers whose speed and playing style and might were transforming the national pastime. (Absent its black stars, Hank Aaron points out, the National League's stand-out player of the 1960s would have been *Ron Santo*.)⁴

But the two meanings of “black power” were not unrelated, as Dick Allen’s career demonstrates perhaps better than most. The social drama of the Civil Rights movement constituted the inescapable context within which black ballplayers of this generation were understood and measured in the white media—most often, if tacitly, located along an imagined political spectrum of “good” and “bad” Negroes (Willie Mays at one end of the spectrum, Richie Allen, Bob Gibson, and Dock Ellis at the other). “If [Allen] had been white,” writes Gibson, “he would have been considered merely a free spirit. As a black man who did as he pleased and guarded his privacy, he was instead regarded as a trouble-maker.”⁵ It is only in the context of the wider political and social world of the 1960s, not of the clubhouse and diamond, that one can comprehend Allen’s becoming “a dartboard for the press,” in Pirate outfielder Willie Stargell’s phrase.⁶

Thus the sports page served as a site of oblique but significant social commentary on the racial questions of the day (indeed it was in relation to the sports page that whites seem to have first acknowledged and accepted that there might even be such a thing as a “white press”). It is not just that the world of Orval Faubus, Martin Luther King, Jr., Strom Thurmond, and Malcolm X supplied the cues for writing about a figure like Richie Allen, but also, contrariwise, that commentary on the likes of Allen—or Muhammad Ali or Cookie Gilchrist or Lew Alcindor—was by its very nature a genre of *political* writing whose significations reached beyond the diamond, the ring, or the gridiron, to the roiling racial world of a nation in unrest.

By the time Allen’s autobiography appeared in 1989, vernacular political discourse was better equipped to deal with the experience of someone “enormously talented and black in a game run by white owners, executives, and managers,” as one

reviewer put it.⁷ Across the arc of his career in Philadelphia, however, from 1964 to 1969, the *political* truths of the sports world were grasped and analyzed chiefly by athletes and writers on the black side of the color line, and only very occasionally by a white commentator like Robert Lipsyte or Jack Olsen. Most often, black analyses of how race mattered—along with black protestations that race did matter—were simply folded into white power’s already-scripted tale of the “bad Negro,” as when Cookie Gilchrist mounted a boycott of the AFL’s 1964 All Star Game in Jim Crow New Orleans, when Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their gloved fists on the dais in Mexico City in 1968, or when Dick Allen or Frank Robinson raised the issue of Major League Baseball’s racist hiring practices. Bad boys all. By suggesting that race had anything to do with his image as “the bad boy of baseball,” in other words, a figure like Allen could only *prove* himself the “bad boy of baseball.”

This essay is not primarily about Dick Allen, but—quite deliberately—about *Richie* Allen, a creation of the white press, a negative icon of the Civil Rights era, “just about the premier bad boy in sports.”⁸ It is also about Richie Allen as a persona who—against the odds, one has to conclude—became a positive icon to me, a white kid growing up in the suburban setting of Boulder, Colorado. The sports pages of this era constituted my political education. I was six years old and just beginning to pay attention to baseball during Allen’s phenomenal rookie year. If “black power” signified anything to me at age nine, around the time when the term entered political parlance, it signified Allen’s towering home run to straightaway center in the All Star Game in Anaheim. But by age ten, always hungry for another story, another AP wirephoto, another stat on Allen, I could not help but notice that most of what I found was some brand of vilification. My

fourth-grade teacher Miss Harms could lecture on Reverend King and the freedom struggle; but what I learned about the injustices and the slanders of racism, I learned mostly by following Richie Allen in the *Denver Post*, waiting in vain for someone to write something good. (“Richie played with fire in his eyes, always,” says Orlando Cepeda. “Never read that in no newspaper.”)⁹

Reflecting on the odd oasis of adulation that his own fame provided him amid a wider, uglier world of racism, harassment, and danger, Bob Gibson once told baseball writer Roger Angell, “It’s nice to get attention and favors... but I can never forget the fact that if I were an ordinary black person I’d be in the shithouse, like millions of others.”¹⁰ Allen never did quite get out, even despite his talent and his fame and the awed respect he earned inside the lines. Here, in what stands as both a historical and a personal reflection, I seek to discover what that might say about politics and sport in the 1960s, and also to recover what it *did* mean to one white fan, thousands of miles and many worlds away from the Philadelphia shithouse called Connie Mack Stadium.

I. Philadelphia

“No baseball season in my fifteen-year career had the highs and lows of ’64,” wrote Allen in his autobiography, *Crash*. “The Temps said it best baby, I was a ball of confusion.”¹¹ Allen was the National League Rookie of the Year, hitting .318 with 201 hits, 29 home runs and 91 RBIs. He also had 38 doubles and 13 triples, a single-season combination which the likes of Mays, Aaron, Clemente, and Rose never matched. Or

Jackie Robinson, for that matter. (Joe DiMaggio bested it back in 1936, with 44 doubles and 15 triples). But Phillies fans found ways to sour on him nonetheless, many blaming him for the team's spectacular September freefall that cost them what had seemed a sure pennant. Fans' merciless booing became so common at Connie Mack Stadium in ensuing years that by the end of his tenure in Philadelphia, Allen had taken to scratching messages during the game—such as the word “boo”—in the infield dirt with his spikes.¹²

Jackie Robinson and the magical date of 1947 seem to have long passed by the time Allen cracked the majors, but the key to his bitter experience in the 1960s lies precisely in how little had happened in the intervening years. When one thinks of baseball's falling racial barriers, the players who come to mind in addition to Robinson are people like Larry Doby, Roy Campanella, and Monte Irvin, a generation born in the 'teens and 'twenties, who came of age in the 'forties and played in the Negro Leagues before entering the newly integrated majors directly on the heels of Branch Rickey's “great experiment” in Brooklyn. The intervening glory years make it hard enough to recall that Willie Mays and Hank Aaron played their first pro ball in the Negro Leagues (Mays with the Birmingham Black Barons, Aaron with the Indianapolis Clowns); but even the players slightly younger than they—players with no Negro League experience at all—spent the early part of their careers in a baseball environment no less white and no less hostile than Jackie Robinson's Ebbets Field.

“You'll never know what you and Jackie and Roy [Campanella] did to make it possible to do my job,” Martin Luther King, Jr. once told pitcher Don Newcomb.¹³ Ironically there was little these pioneers could do to help the McCoveys, Floods, or Stargells who came up behind them do *theirs*, at least in peace. Hank Aaron himself

refers to them as “second generation black players,” though *1.5 generation* would be more accurate—Willie McCovey, Billy Williams, Bill White, Orlando Cepeda, Bob Gibson, Curt Flood, Lou Brock. Though associated with the 1960s and a baseball era far removed from the Jackie Robinson moment, “most of them came through the minor leagues in the 1950s, and almost all of them had their own horror stories.”¹⁴ In *October 1964*, David Halberstam writes of this generation,

If they were not the black players of the pioneer generation, they had come up right behind them: most had grown up in ghettos, and their way into the big leagues had been difficult, often through a still-segregated minor-league system. This obstacle course remained the foundation of big-league baseball, and it was rife with prejudice. Playing on minor-league teams in tiny Southern towns meant the crowds—even the home crowds—were usually hostile. Worse, most of their fellow players were rural country white boys, who, more often than not, seemed to accept the local mores.¹⁵

“I didn’t know anything about racism or bigotry until I went into professional baseball in 1953,” writes Frank Robinson, who grew up in West Oakland and whose initiation in the taunts of “Nigger, go back to Africa” came in Sally League towns like Augusta, Macon, and Savannah.¹⁶ As Dock Ellis—ten years younger still than Robinson—put it, “You learn more than baseball in the minor leagues.” For his own part, Ellis recalls going into the stands in a game against the Geneva Senators, swinging a leaded bat at a fan who had called him Stepin Fetchit, or standing defiantly on the mound,

middle finger extended to a hostile crowd, after striking out the last batter in a game in Wilson, North Carolina.¹⁷

Such incidents—Aaron’s racial “horror stories”—punctuate the biographies of virtually every player of the 1.5 generation. Bill White spent 1953 as the only black player in the Class-B Carolina League, serving, in Halberstam’s words, as “a kind of beacon to local rednecks, who would come out to the ballpark and, for a tiny amount of money, yell at this one young black player, who symbolized to them a world beginning to change.” He sometimes carried a bat with him as he left the clubhouse, according to Bob Gibson, in order “to get through the hostile crowds that stood between him and the team bus.”¹⁸ Aaron and Wes Covington broke the color barrier up north in Eau Claire, Wisconsin (Aaron: “we didn’t exactly blend in”; Covington: “I felt like a sideshow freak”) before Aaron was sent to the Jacksonville Braves to break the color line in the Sally League.¹⁹ The president of the Sally League, Dick Butler, later claimed to have “followed Jacksonville and sat in the stands to keep a lookout. You were never sure what was going to happen. Those people had awfully strong feelings about what was going on.”²⁰ John Roseboro endured taunts of “chocolate drop” in Sheboygan; Felipe Alou was barred from the Evangeline League because of Louisiana segregation statutes (and shipped instead to the more hospitable Cocoa Indians of the Florida State League, “a class D menagerie”).²¹ In Fayette, North Carolina, Curt Flood “heard spluttering gasps, ‘There’s a goddamned nigger son-of-a-bitch playing ball with those white boys! I’m leaving’”; and in Greensboro Leon Wagner faced an armed fan by the outfield fence, issuing a warning, “Nigger, I’m going to fill you with shot if you catch one ball out

there.” “What kind of country is this?” Vic Power wanted to know, upon confronting racial mores so different from those that obtained in his native Puerto Rico.²²

Even after they had safely reached the majors, far from the redneck sneers of the Sally League circuit, most of the 1.5 generation had to negotiate the southern racial climate and the segregated facilities of Florida sites like Bradenton, Vero Beach, Clearwater, or Tampa during the months of spring training. Most also had to deal with some element of segregation in their team’s travel, lodging, rooming, or eating arrangements in cities like St. Louis and Cincinnati during the regular season; many, like Reggie Smith, had epithets and more dangerous objects hurled at them at one time or another, even by the “fans” in their home ballparks. Some joined major league teams that were themselves deeply divided by race. Gibson and White broke into the majors playing for an overtly racist manager named Solly Hemus: “either he disliked us deeply or he genuinely believed that the only way to motivate us was with insults,” remembers Gibson. During one clubhouse meeting, in the presence of the full team, Hemus referred to an opposing pitcher as a “nigger.” Orlando Cepeda, for his part, attributes the perennial also-ran fortunes of the Giants during the early ‘60s to the breakdown of team feeling along ethnoracial lines. (Among other things, though his line-up featured Cepeda, all three Alou brothers, Jose Pagan, and Juan Marichal, manager Alvin Dark tried to ban the Spanish language in the clubhouse. Dark—who, ironically, had grown up in Lake Charles, Louisiana, the very town that barred Felipe Alou—also openly questioned the “mental alertness” of his “Negro and Spanish-speaking players.”)²³

Dick Allen drew a cruel hand, even by the standards of such a deck: after brief stints in Elmira (New York), Magic Valley (Utah), and Williamsport (Pennsylvania), in

1963 and at the age of only 20, Allen landed with the Arkansas Travelers, the Phillies' Triple-A team whose home park was in Little Rock (of Central High fame) and whose line-up had, to that point, been white only. (As Lou Brock, who had been born there, liked to say, Arkansas was indeed "the land of opportunity"—at the very first opportunity he had gotten the hell out.²⁴) "When I arrived at the park," Allen recalls, "... there were people marching around with signs. One said, DON'T NEGRO-IZE BASEBALL. Another, NIGGER GO HOME... Here, in my mind, I thought Jackie Robinson had Negro-ized baseball sixteen years earlier." As if to underscore the militant whiteness of this white world, the season's festivities began with the ceremonial throwing out of the first pitch by *Governor Orval Faubus*. Afterward Allen found a note on the windshield of his car: "DON'T COME BACK AGAIN, NIGGER." "There might be something more terrifying than being black and holding a note that says 'Nigger' in an empty parking lot in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1963," Allen comments, "but if there is, it hasn't crossed my path yet." That Triple-A season was filled with this sort of menace and danger; and it was also exceptionally isolating, as off the field Allen was removed from the rest of the team by the maze of segregationist civic codes and social rituals of pre-Civil Rights Act Little Rock.²⁵

This was perhaps the beginning of bad blood between Allen and both the Phillies' white officialdom and Philadelphia's white press. For one thing, Allen felt that he was ready for the majors already (his nine spring-training home runs in 1963 seemed to argue in his favor), and he saw himself as a sacrificial lamb to the organization's imperative to desegregate its farm system. Which might have been workable if, for another thing, the Phillies had handled Allen's situation with some of the forethought and sensitivity that

the Dodgers had shown Jackie Robinson. But the organization was quite calloused in its general disinterest in Allen's Arkansas experience. As *Ebony* wryly noted in 1970, "During [the] 1963 season with Philadelphia's minor league team in Little Rock, ... he complained about racial injustice (Philly writers say they found no prejudice there)."²⁶ Most telling, perhaps, was Arkansas manager Frank Lucchesi's nonchalance toward the social burden that Allen was made to carry that season: "Richie was upset one night because one person said, 'Come on, Chocolate Drop, hit one out'... That's not in taste but the fan didn't realize it. They say worse things to white ballplayers. Richie is sensitive and he is self-centered."²⁷

And so, one might have thought, the trip north to Philadelphia the following year would be an improvement. But Philadelphia baseball had a fairly spectacular history of racism of its own: though Connie Mack had tried to smuggle talented black players into Shibe Park as Italians or Indians earlier in the century, the Philadelphia stadium—like the Phillies line-up—remained the most stubbornly anti-integrationist in the National League. The black press of the 1940s reported that Mack himself was among the owners "most bitterly" opposed to integration; and according to historian Bruce Kuklick, when Jackie Robinson joined the Dodgers in 1947, "the cruelest taunts he received at Ebbets Field came from the visiting Phillies..." As for Brooklyn's visits to Shibe Park, Phillies GM Herb Pennock pleaded with Branch Rickey not to bring Robinson at all: "Branch, you can't bring the nigger here. Philadelphia's not ready for that yet." When Robinson did turn up in Philadelphia, pitchers threw at him, infielders purposely spiked him, and Phillies players once lined up on the dugout steps, pointing their bats at him and making gunshot sounds. By the mid-1950s, the Phillies were the only remaining all-white team

in the National League; and even after the team finally did integrate, it remained among the last major league teams to end segregated housing during spring training.²⁸

Over and above the racialized traditions of Philadelphia baseball, the city itself was entering a heated and dangerous period in black-white relations—it was a “racial tinderbox,” as the head of the city’s Urban League described it.²⁹ In 1964 Allen arrived in a Philadelphia wracked by racial violence over issues of job discrimination, housing, school segregation, and police brutality, and in which an aggressive (and aggressively white) former beat cop named Frank Rizzo was rising rapidly through the ranks toward the commissioner’s office, which he attained in 1967.³⁰ (Faubus and Rizzo: two-thirds of some weird, depressing hat trick. Later Allen worked for Al Campanis.) There had been violent clashes over the integration of Philadelphia construction in 1963; and in August of 1964, during Allen’s rookie season, three days of rioting engulfed a 125-block area of Lower North Philadelphia, one boundary of which was marked by Connie Mack Stadium. Players had to pass through a “police state” to get to the ballpark during those days. One black resident lamented, “The only thing I regret about the riot... was that we didn’t burn down that goddamn stadium. They had it surrounded by cops, and we couldn’t get to it. I just wish we could’ve burned it down and wiped away its history that tells me I’m nothing but a nigger.” Two died and 339 were injured in the rioting.³¹

Although Philadelphia fans might indeed “boo the losers in an Easter egg hunt,” as Bob Uecker once quipped, and even white outfielder Johnny Callison had objects thrown at him, still these fans found a very special—vitriolic—place in their hearts for the new arrival from the Arkansas Travelers. Even his Rookie of the Year stats (.318, 29 HR, 91 RBI) were not enough to shield Allen from the tense, racial hatreds of mid-‘60s

Philadelphia.³² Fan animosity toward Allen seems a compound of garden variety racism; scapegoating for the Phillies' 1964 tailspin; venting on the larger race questions facing the city; and a misapprehending response, as *Sports Illustrated* noted, to Allen's expressionless playing style, which to many whites made him look "arrogant." (Manager Gene Mauch's more generous observation of Allen's demeanor was that "He doesn't get way up when things are going good, or way down when things are going bad. And that's the best approach to any professional sport.") All of which was further fueled by "some of the harshest press in the city's sports history."³³

Allen was in fact booed for the first time in the fifth inning of the Phils' home opener in 1964, and he was booed plenty as the Phillies squandered their 6½ game lead in the final twelve games of that season. But the mutual bitterness began in earnest the next season, in July, 1965, when a pre-game fight between Allen and Philadelphia favorite Frank Thomas resulted in Thomas' departure from the Phillies.³⁴ The fight, by most accounts, was itself "racial." Thomas was already well-known among his teammates for his derisive comments toward Allen, Johnny Briggs, and other black players. One thing that particularly enraged Allen was when Thomas would approach a black player, pretending "to offer his hand in a soul shake," and then "grab the player's thumb and bend it back hard."³⁵ On the day of the fight, Johnny Callison was razzing Thomas for a failed bunt attempt the night before, but Thomas chose to answer Allen instead of Callison. He taunted Allen as "Muhammad Clay," by some accounts, and "Richie X" by others—taunts that in either case Allen answered with a pop to the jaw before Thomas broke a cardinal baseball rule by swinging his bat at Allen and catching him on the shoulder.³⁶

Teammates pried the two apart, but an ineluctable sequence had already been set in motion: Thomas was immediately sold off to Houston; Allen was forbidden from discussing the incident under penalty of a \$2000 fine; but Thomas, meanwhile, freely fed his (partisan, sanitized) version to the press. Manager Gene Mauch, too, made some rather coy remarks to the press that not only obscured the nature of the incident and Thomas' part in it, but also left an impression that the Phillies had unfairly and quite knowingly scapegoated the white veteran in deference to Allen's talent and youth. It was here, most significantly, that the press began to tag Allen as a "troublemaker"—an appellation that would provide a convenient media peg for the rest of his career. "Baseball should never forget the Allen-Thomas fiasco," says Bill White. "... When Dick Allen came to the big leagues, he was a kid in love with the game. Baseball was all that mattered. After the Thomas incident, the love was taken right out of him. There's historical significance in how that was handled."³⁷

The result was that Allen came out looking unjustly favored and vaguely militant—a ready-made script for many whites, given the city's racial climate—and he was directly blamed for the departure of a popular (white) player. Banners announcing fans' unambiguous preferences—such as "We Want Thomas"—bedecked Connie Mack Stadium; *Daily News* writer Larry Merchant embarked on an anti-Allen crusade in print; one fan "sucker punched" Allen, others at the park jeered him as "darkie" and "monkey" (when he wasn't hitting game-winning home runs), and Allen recalls seeing one father pointing at him and teaching his little boy how to boo. It was soon after, too, that people started to throw things at Allen, to vandalize his home, and to harass his family. Across the balance of the 1960s, Allen was "booed mercilessly," as *Newsweek* reported, and he

received “hate mail . . . so brutal that he now refuses to open anything that looks like fan mail”; “people smeared paint on his car, threw rocks and shot BBs through his windows and booed his children on the street.”³⁸ As the *Daily News* once reported in 1967, after Allen’s heroics had dispatched the Cubs, “He should have been grinning and content in the knowledge that his three-run homer in the twelfth inning won a game for the Phillies. But it is tough to grin when you come to the ballpark and there are letters calling you ‘Dirty, Black Nigger.’” It was after this particular game that Allen started speaking openly about wanting out of Philadelphia.³⁹

The Thomas incident may have marked a turning point for Allen and the city, but it was scarcely the only factor in that souring relationship. As Don Malcolm suggests, the “Angry Negro Problem”—a thematic convention for writing about a certain kind of athlete, from Dick Allen to Gary Sheffield—derives not only from the fact that “white Americans still are manifestly uncomfortable with demonstrative black males,” but also, significantly, that they are “probably most uncomfortable with the ones who are making piles of dough.”⁴⁰ (As for a bit of context on “angry Negroes”: five weeks after the Thomas incident, the Phillies landed in Los Angeles just in time to witness the flames of the Watts riot.⁴¹)

Dick Allen, emphatically, was *not* utterly unappreciated by the baseball world, and this, paradoxically, may have fueled the animosity against him in some quarters. Philadelphia had signed him for a cool \$70,000 bonus, the largest ever offered a black ballplayer. Later, Allen became the highest paid player on the Phillies (and in 1973, upon signing with the White Sox for a quarter of a million dollars, he was to become the highest paid player in Major League history to that point). “His salary has risen faster

than anyone's ever did before," remarked *Newsweek* in 1968. "... And his popularity has plummeted just as fast."⁴² In the calculus of Philadelphia race relations—and of the nation's—these two developments may have been intimately entwined. It is not just a case of a Negro's earnings demolishing the white presumption of what would be fitting; it is also a matter of social demeanor—the white insistence upon “appropriate” black gratitude, which is to say a bit of the old fashioned, hat-in-hand bowing and scraping. But as *Sports Illustrated* commented, on the contrary, Allen was “the first black man ... to assert himself in baseball with something like the unaccommodating force of Muhammad Ali in boxing, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in basketball, and Jim Brown in football.”⁴³

As the economics of the game shifted in the late 1960s, too, there was also the volatile matter of the sheer power attaching to a player's contract: many among the white press and white fandom were troubled that the Phillies organization found even his white *managers* (first Mauch, and then Bob Skinner) more readily expendable than this black star, impetuous though he was. As Jim Bouton had it in *Ball Four*, “There is a pecking order in the major leagues which goes like this: owner, general manager, super star, manager, established player, coaches, traveling secretary, trainer, clubhouse man, marginal player.”⁴⁴ Black super star over white manager—this was a problem for many white fans in the 1960s. And while much discussion of race in baseball has focused on the suspicious paucity of black managers and team executives, the “problem” of the black super star—the tension between the racial hierarchy of the culture and the natural pecking order of the team—has been the cause of much devilment as well.

Within this alchemic mingling of circumstance, ideology, personality, and history, the media developed an iron framework for reporting on Allen's career both on and off the field: Allen was militant, a malcontent, a troublemaker, a black radical. Allen was not entirely blameless for the volume of available copy, it should be noted; but the "badboy of baseball" label did create a media peg for stories that might have attracted no attention at all in the case of other players, black or white. (Indeed, the shock and scandal of a book like Bouton's *Ball Four* in 1970—what Bowie Kuhn called Bouton's "grave disservice" to the game—was precisely its demonstration that the game was made up pretty much exclusively of swearing, hard-drinking, tobacco-addicted, amphetamine-popping, bed-hopping, window-peeping badboys.⁴⁵) But for Allen and seemingly for Allen alone, a steady litany of well-publicized "transgressions" mounted throughout the '60s: the Thomas incident in 1965; a freak, off-field hand injury in 1967, broadly but baselessly presumed to be the result of either a barroom knife-fight or perhaps a run-in with a lover's husband; an actual barroom brawl in 1968 (which, like the Thomas incident, began with a racial slur); and also in '68 a few missed days of spring training, an instance of reporting late to the ballpark, and his benching by Mauch for being "unfit to play" (Allen's trouble, Mauch said, was not with "the high fastball," but rather "the fast highball"); and in 1969, income tax problems, a missed plane to St. Louis, and a missed double-header at Shea.⁴⁶

Where silence on such matters was the journalistic norm in this cookies-and-milk era of sports coverage (Mickey Mantle was not averse to showing up at the park "unfit to play" either, for instance, as we later learned and as the press corps had surely known), Allen's every move seemed to generate acres of copy. "You fellas have created an

atmosphere where people who have never met me, hate me,” he told reporters. Later he commented, “Even if they gave me an opportunity to tell all of my side of the story, I wouldn’t take it because I just don’t trust the white press in general.”⁴⁷ If Allen was a perpetual story, race and racism were never an acknowledged part of that story. But the “race neutral” language of the white press makes for some interesting reading: Allen “marches to a mournful tune that only he hears, moving with an insolent grace,” for example, according to the Philadelphia *Daily News*; though one might fairly ask whether it is even *possible* for a white man, in America’s media cosmos, to “move with insolent grace.” Further, Richie Allen is “a superstar with a built-in distaste for discipline” (*New York Times*); he is “a player of enormous talents and mercurial moods” who is “known less for his awesome batting power than for his drinking, horseplaying and habitual tardiness” (*Newsweek*); “a man who hits a baseball even harder than he hits the bottle,” a “wondrously gifted misanthrope,” the “chain-smoking, hard-drinking, horseplaying, perpetually late bad boy of the 1960s” (*Sports Illustrated*).⁴⁸ So infamous did Allen’s movements become, that at the All Star Game in 1969 President Nixon sent a personal message through Allen’s teammate Grant Jackson: “You tell Richie Allen to get back on the job.” By that same year—his last in Philadelphia, as it turned out—Allen had begun to “wish they’d shut the gates... and let us play ball with no press and no fans.”⁴⁹

The contrast with the *black* press could not have been starker. In 1968, at the height of his most controversial season and amid a thorough raking in the white media, for instance, a photo gallery in the *Afro-American* lovingly depicted Allen as a devoted family man (“\$85,000 dad plays mom at Phils’ ballpark. Richie Allen baby-sits with son between Sunday pitches”).⁵⁰ After the St. Louis trade in 1970, *Ebony* directly took up the

matter of the white press's racism, as "the questions continue[d]" regarding Allen: people ought to "question the questioners," the black journal protested. To question Allen "presupposes that Richie is guilty of all the bad things written about him... Most of the people who hate or love Richie do so on the basis of what they've heard or what they've read in the white press." The whiteness of the press, in this equation, was as inescapably significant as the blackness of the ballplayer: "Richie Allen is black and he's proud and he has the gumption to be a proud, black man in one of America's most conservative sports. He sprouts a lush Afro that's anchored with long and wide sideburns"—"his natural and long wide sideburns were targets of white criticism in Philly for six years." After pointing out that Allen was known to read the Bible with some regularity, and that one of his infamous missed games had to do with his son's illness, *Ebony* argued that "Richie's stands on baseball's controversial issues and the fact he's black" were what marked him as a "radical." "Basically, he's just a 'regular brother,' hipped with all the jive-time routines of coolness, arrogance and a happy-go-lucky attitude."⁵¹

His were, indeed, the Afro and the porkchop sideburns with which *Sports Illustrated* would choose to illustrate its cover story on "Baseball in Turmoil" in the spring of the Allen-Flood-McCarver trade. Although Allen did hold out for more money from St. Louis, it is true, the "turmoil" had mostly to do, not with him—"I'll play anywhere: third, short, anywhere but Philadelphia"—but with Curt Flood, who had refused to report at all. The word "turmoil" itself, in fact, came from an exasperated Gussie Busch, the Cardinals owner: "I can't understand Curt Flood... or the Allen case... we are going through a hell of a turmoil right now." Though Busch was having

his problems with the Steve Carlton contract, too, the turmoil seemed to him largely racial, apparently, and also connected to the broader social currents of 1960s America: “I can’t understand what’s happening here or on our campuses or in our great country.”⁵²

Flood’s protest was, in fact, “racial,” even if it was Allen who more looked the part in *SI*’s estimation. For one thing, Flood was not eager to go to Philadelphia, “the nation’s northernmost southern city,” as he put it, “... to succeed Richie Allen in the affections of that organization, its press and its catcalling missile-hurling audience.”⁵³ And for another, as many have remarked over the years, given the bondage and emancipation motifs of the legalities involved, it was perhaps inevitable that a *black* ballplayer would be the first to challenge Major League Baseball’s reserve clause and seek free agency. Flood himself begins his autobiography, *The Way It Is* (1970), with an epigraph from his brother Carl: “*Pharaoh, you better let them chillun go, honey.*” Later, noting that “the word *slavery* has arisen in connection with my lawsuit” (and conceding sardonically that “the condition of the major-league baseball player is closer to peonage than to slavery”), Flood appeals to the language of a 1949 court decision in the case of the Giants’ Danny Gardella: “Only the totalitarian-minded will believe that high pay excuses virtual slavery.”⁵⁴ The reserve clause/slavery analogy was neither casual nor incidental, in Flood’s view:

Frederick Douglass was a Maryland slave who taught himself to read. “If there is no struggle,” he once said, “there is no progress. Those who profess to love freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground... Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and never will.”

To see the Curt Flood case in that light is to see its entire meaning.⁵⁵

Elsewhere, Bob Gibson quoted Flood as likening a franchise owner's powers "to a plantation owner, allowing his players to play for him in the same way that the plantation owner allowed the sharecropper to work his land while at the same time keeping him deep in debt and constantly beholden." The slavery analogy was also clearly among the things that Gibson had in mind when, during the spring of the Flood-Allen trade, in dark jest he hung a sign above his locker, "Another happy family sold."⁵⁶

Sportswriter Sandy Grady was tacitly acknowledging the racialized dimension of Allen's experience—not with the reserve clause, necessarily, but with the hatreds and disparagements of "The City of Brotherly Love"—when he wrote of St. Louis GM Bing Devine's having "emancipated" Allen. (In typical white press fashion, however, he also suggested that Devine had "emancipated" Philadelphia *from* Allen.)⁵⁷ And Allen, for his part, drew from the same lexicon: "You don't know how good it feels to get out of Philadelphia. They treat you like cattle. It was like a form of slavery. Once you step out of bounds they'll do everything possible to destroy your soul." "Skinner once said he could handle me," Allen later remarked, "... Well you don't handle human beings, you treat them. You handle horses."⁵⁸ Curt Flood might have said that; so might Frederick Douglass.

Allen headed into a slightly new era upon his departure from Philadelphia; fans never again vented the kind of hatred that Allen had seen in Connie Mack Stadium in the 1960s. Lee Vilensky's beautiful "Ode to Dick Allen" vividly captures the death grip that Allen and the white racists of Philadelphia had on one another during those years.

Recalling his first ever visit to Connie Mack Stadium as an eight year old in 1965, Vilensky writes of the “batteries, bottles, paperweights” that were hurled in Allen’s direction, and the “nigger, nigger, nigger” and “fuckin’ nigger, nigger” that swirled around the stands.

I guess it was about the seventh inning when Richie came up for his third at bat. I don’t recall what he had done in his two previous at bats, but the chanting started anew. “Nigger.” “Big mouth nigger.” “Fuckin’ nigger.” “Go back to Africa, Nigger.” Yes, someone actually yelled that... [S]uddenly there was a crack of the bat as Richie Allen crushed a line drive over our heads. I turned around just in time to watch the ball bounce off a little eave above the top of the grandstand, then go completely out of the stadium. A shot of more than five hundred feet in distance. Not a high, arcing, majestic home run, but a cold, vicious, angry drubbing of the ball. A loud slap. The power of it scared me. It made people quiet. Took all their air like a punch to the gut. As Richie touched home plate, the man next to me said to no one in particular: “Fuckin’ nigger can hit.”⁵⁹

II. Boulder

Dick Allen and biographer Tim Whitaker stand on the diamond where decades before the Homestead Grays and the Pittsburgh Crawfords of the Negro Leagues had

played, directly across from the vacant lot where Allen's boyhood home once stood.

"Imaginary baseball," says Allen. "It's the purest version of the game."

Allen tugs at his shirt sleeves and pushes his cowboy hat down on top of his head, mimicking the same routine he went through whenever he stepped to the plate against major league pitching. He takes a few practice swings with his imaginary bat.

Between his feet, Allen has formed a pile of stones with his boots.

He picks up one of the stones, tosses it in the air, and takes a swing with his imaginary bat.

"As a kid, I used to stand right here," he tells me, "with a broomstick in my hands. When I played imaginary ball, I was always the Dodgers. I would bat stones and work my way through the Dodger lineup—Reese, Furillo, Snider, Hodges—waiting, just waiting, for *his* turn to come around."

Allen pauses dramatically, then cups his hands to his mouth.

"Now *battting*," he says, imitating the stadium echo of a public address announcer. "For the Brook-lyn Dod-gers... num-ber four-*tee-two*..."

Dick Allen reaches down and picks up another pebble. "The Jackie Robinson stone," he says, tossing the pebble in the air and catching it, "was always the one that broke a window."⁶⁰

When I was growing up there must have been millions of us who were right with Allen on this: that real players played real games in real stadiums was just a necessary evil so that the much purer game of imaginary baseball could take place, in lots and yards

across North America, especially in the pregnant hours after dinner, as dusk edged into darkness. This scene describes much of my own childhood, though for me the Richie Allen stone was the window-breaker. (Well, our developing suburban neighborhood was still rural enough, the distances still great enough, that no windows were ever really in danger. Besides, I couldn't hit that well. But one time when I was about nine, pretending to be Juan Marichal, pitching off the side of our brick garage and mowing down the hitters 1-2-3 through the innings—a real gem—in the top of the eighth I couldn't resist giving up a home run to Richie Allen. *Num-ber fiff-teen*. In my effort to recreate one of those awesome shots that cause opposing fielders immediately to slack their bodies and look skyward in resignation, I threw the ball too high against the wall, breaking the narrow pane of glass that ran the length of the garage just beneath the awning. Later, when my dad asked me if I knew anything about the broken window, I came *this close* to telling him Richie Allen did it.)

Why Allen would have idolized Jackie Robinson is pretty obvious, but how did *I* come to idolize *Allen*?

I had the 1965 Topps trading card of Allen—the Phillies flag in one corner, the little Rookie of the Year statuette in the other—but my real introduction to him was a hero-worshipping book for kids, *Great Rookies of the Major Leagues* by Jim Brosnan. The chapter on Allen was enough to make a huge impression on an eight year old, but it was not exactly calculated to do so: for example, it included Philadelphia owner Bob Carpenter's judgment, "Allen was the worst-looking infielder I ever saw. I thought he'd be killed by a ground ball." This piece of baseball hagiography also featured a four-panel sequence of photographs depicting Allen letting a grounder pass between his legs. (The

caption reads, “Allen’s uncertain fielding sometimes offsets his great hitting. Here he reaches for a sharp grounder, searches for the ball and then turns to watch it roll into the outfield. A Braves runner... passes Allen to score on the play.”⁶¹

When I was given the book as a gift (in 1966, I believe—the year of its publication), I adopted Allen as my hero at once. It may have been because I was enthralled by his appearance: the chapter itself goes into great detail on his powerful physique, and there is nothing in the photos of Roy Sievers, Herb Score, Frank Robinson, Tom Tresh, or Pete Rose that begins to compare with the pure poetry of form in some of the Allen photos—I see it this way even still. Or, it may have been because I identified with his much-discussed weakness as a fielder, and took special heart in the story of a player who was able to overcome his own limitations. If I were going to become a major leaguer (and who could doubt it?) my own path to glory would surely be strewn with similar obstacles, not to mention the qualms and denunciations of people like Bob Carpenter. Or it may have been that, as the fat kid with thick glasses whom everyone made fun of, I gravitated naturally toward the one figure in the book who was clearly being picked on. (“He... turns to watch it roll into the outfield.” It might have been a few more years before I could articulate this, but even at age eight I felt some version of *hey, what the fuck, man?*) Within two years—1968—when I was three seasons into my Richie Allen worship and Allen himself was getting more and more press for his off-field behavior, I understood exactly what it was that I was seeing. This was my education in US race relations.

In a 1970s routine about visiting Africa, Richard Pryor talks about meeting people who are “so black” that it makes you want to say—and here he drops his voice to an

awed whisper—“*BLACK*.” My neighborhood growing up was a lot like that, except in white. It was not the militant whiteness of South Boston (or Connie Mack Stadium); it was not even the least bit self-conscious. On the contrary, the neighborhood was *so* white as to suggest and naturalize the idea that people of color did not exist at all. Which is just to say, whatever I learned about racialized relations before going away to college in 1977, I certainly did not learn by first-hand encounters. (Nearby Denver, ironically, was the Triple-A locale where the Minnesota Twins banished black players as punishment for dating white women.⁶²)

There is a longer-term history that is relevant here, because I did grow up in a liberal household in which Civil Rights sympathies were never in question. Since my father is a New York Jew, naturally we used to listen to Mahalia Jackson every year when we decorated the Christmas tree. He had grown up in the Bronx in the 1930s, and at age thirteen, the year he was not *bar mitzvahed*, he somehow discovered Harlem and jazz. Though his was probably not the kind of childhood that encouraged much fellow feeling with “the *shvartzes*” (to judge from my grandmother’s social outlook), from those early jam sessions onward, his glimpses of Harlem and his captivation by the black aesthetic of the jazz scene translated into a very particular social sensibility—a whole way of perceiving and understanding the human virtues and various political categories like “decency.” This he tried to pass on to us, along with an appreciation for Louis Armstrong. My mother, on the other hand, is a white Ohio Methodist, and her Tipp City upbringing could not have been much less white—or “*WHITE*”—than my own. But as theirs was what was called a “mixed marriage,” both of my parents had some experience with prejudice—their parents’, for example.

And so, with the Civil Rights movement rumbling in the distance throughout my childhood, and my parents' attention to questions of "difference" and justice remaining fairly salient, racial matters were not as far removed from my immediate experience as the demographics of my town would imply. I remember my father trying to explain the logic of King's "passive resistance" to me at a time when, as a political philosopher, I was probably too young for anything beyond "impulsive vengeance." My sisters and I got the liberal lecture on the stupidities of prejudice on the ride to Denver to see *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. A bit later, it became a point of bedrock principle in our household that of course one would support the Broncos' Marlin Briscoe in his bid to become the NFL's first black quarterback. ("He's not all that good," my best friend's father said, "he's just all that *black*." The opinion was offered up too gruffly not to be suspect, even to a ten-year-old.)

But what strikes me in retrospect is how *indirect* my political education was, for the most part. Straight talk like the *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* lecture was the exception, not the norm, as was my fourth-grade teacher Miss Harms' very interesting prediction of racial retribution in the wake of the King assassination. When I think closely, I recognize that at the time I did not actually see much—or *any*—of the Civil Rights imagery that now occupies my "memory" of the era—Bull Connor's German Shepherds and fire hoses, the flames at Ole Miss, even the "I Have a Dream" speech. The balcony of that Memphis hotel I think I did see for myself on TV in 1968; but most of the rest of it is documentary footage, not actual memory.

My teaching has been animated by Stuart Hall's dictum that social subjects "are unable to speak, to act in one way or another, until they have been positioned by the work

that culture does.” It is *culture* above all that outfits us to behave politically in certain ways and not in others—culture is politics by other means.⁶³ But rarely have I asked the question, if I was just coming to consciousness during the Civil Rights years, what was I learning and how was I taking it in? America’s liberal culture was undoubtedly teaching a lot, though it may not always have been teaching liberality. The most potent message of *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*, for instance, does not involve our common humanity across the color line, but rather a natural submission to the authority of the Great White Father (in this case Spencer Tracy): ultimately nobody can make a move without his approval. Shows like *Love American Style* and *Barefoot in the Park* taught that black is indeed beautiful—as long as it’s almost white. The affable Johnny Carson taught that candor is hip and that racist stereotypes can be funny—as when he joked that there could never be a black quarterback because there were not seven white guys who would turn their backs on him at the line of scrimmage, “especially during a night game.”

On the other hand, anti-authoritarianism was occupying an increasingly significant place in the dominant culture—I think of *Cat Ballou*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Easy Rider*, and a host of other films from my childhood in which bad guys were the good guys and good guys were the bad guys. Perhaps this strain in the culture outfitted me with a useful skepticism toward the media’s own claims regarding the badness of the black radical; perhaps it was this strain that equipped me to sympathize with a bad boy like Richie Allen, doing battle with “the man” in the white front office and the white press. How far is it from the unorthodox authoritarianism of *The Mod Squad* to the unorthodox *anti*-authoritarianism—consciously “raced” or not—of Richie Allen, Cookie Gilchrist, the Smothers Brothers, Jim Bouton?

During these years—confusing enough even for many adults, I am sure—baseball addressed my childhood confusions in a pre-verbal but nonetheless poetic and incandescent language. (By “baseball,” I mean the whole cosmos—the games themselves, the line-ups, the sports page, the fan reactions, the hypnotizing photographs, the piles of adoring books, the Topps cards, the on- and off-field lore in *Sport*, *Sporting News*, *Sports Illustrated*.) “I can’t say it was because of the bombs and the Bull Connors that black players tore up the National League in 1963,” writes Hank Aaron, “but I can’t say it wasn’t either.”⁶⁴ On a particularly fierce streak in the summer of 1968, Bob Gibson, too, writes:

I really can’t say, in retrospect, whether Robert Kennedy’s assassination is what got me going or not. Without a doubt, it was an angry point in American history for black people—Dr. King’s killing had jolted me; Kennedy’s infuriated me—and without a doubt, I pitched better angry. I suspect that the control of my slider had more to do with it than anything, but I can’t completely dismiss the fact that nobody gave me any shit whatsoever for about two months after Bobby Kennedy died.⁶⁵

Aaron and Gibson might rightly have claimed the whole decade for black dominance, not just the isolated moments of 1963 and 1968. (Take the offensive statistic for total bases, the most dramatic instance: from 1960 to 1969 white players made it into the National League’s top three exactly *once*—Pete Rose was third in 1968. Aaron, Banks, Mays, Cepeda, Robinson, Pinson, Allen, Williams, Alou, Clemente, Brock, McCovey, and Perez account for the other twenty-nine top-three finishes.⁶⁶) But in any case, from the suburban picture window of Boulder, Colorado, the ball field and *The Movement* read as

being intimately connected. “Baseball was socially relevant,” wrote Curt Flood, “and so was my rebellion against it.”⁶⁷ This is a lesson I imbibed fundamentally but wordlessly between 1966 and 1969. The hateful, swirling “nigger, nigger, nigger” that Lee Vilensky heard in Connie Mack Stadium, and Richie Allen’s cold, angry drubbing of the ball in response, was a social drama that was integral, if only implicitly so, to the game-within-the-game of 1960s baseball as I watched it on *Game of the Week* every Saturday.

For one thing, while Gibson, Aaron, Allen, and others may have been playing “angry,” they looked to me, above all else, to be simply *serious*; and the regular access that baseball afforded to African American seriousness was no small thing. The seriousness of King and the historic moment came across in the chatter and hum of the adult world around me and in headlines to stories that I knew vaguely about but did not exactly read. People like Sidney Poitier and Diahann Carroll also made an impression. But baseball occupied my mind a hundred sixty-two days of the year; and unique among the major sports, baseball games unfolded at a contemplative pace that was well-suited to conveying the force of an athlete’s character—neither concealing it behind the armor of the NFL nor blurring it in the flying speed of the NBA.

“Quiet dignity” is almost certainly a racist construction—or at least a racialized one—as the phrase never appears in connection with white people, I notice; and it probably dates from a period when “quiet,” from Negroes, was especially prized in US culture. But nonetheless, something like “quiet dignity” *is* a part of what the 1.5 generation of black stars communicated to me, at once a contrast and an antidote to the vapid dronings-on of play-by-play announcers like Curt Gowdy and Joe Garagiola; and the “dignity” in the equation tended to keep their “quiet” from coming across as anything

like accommodation. The intensity of concentration—the intensity of *mind*—evident in the expressions and small rituals of Gibson on the mound, Flood or Robinson at the plate, silently but decisively dismantled any facile cracker assertions about the brutish capacities of “the Negro.” That Solly Hemus or the white fans in various Sally League locations had either failed to acknowledge this, or, perhaps, had not allowed themselves to see it in the first place, just goes to show how desperate they were.

But if baseball held the power to dislodge the slanders of racism, so did it have a tendency to generate some slanders of its own—the denigrating trope of black athletes’ “natural gift” is only one among many. “Hanging around baseball, as I have been doing,” wrote Donald Hall in the 1970s, “I don’t see racism in management, in coaching, or in the front office. Reading the newspapers of Detroit and Chicago and Boston and New York, I see it every day.” The list of the “Most Unpopular Sports Figures, in the last decade or two,” he points out, “is largely black”—a younger Muhammad Ali, Duane Thomas, Dick Allen, Alex Johnson.⁶⁸

This is where Allen was so significant to me, not just as a personal idol but as a social emblem: the dissonance between what I felt about Allen and what the press reported about him became so taut as to snap my youthful ingenuousness, because to me Allen was clearly a figure of dignity, too, no less than Gibson or Aaron or Brock or Clemente. I was too young by about one season to catch and appreciate the Frank Thomas incident and Allen’s initial falling-out with the press; but it was a stunning and deflating lesson to me when, in 1967, the media so openly questioned Allen’s “claim” to have injured his hand while pushing his car, and when in 1968 and ‘69, they so openly denounced him—not just as an outlier (on the order, say, of Jay Johnstone)—but as

someone uncontrolled and uncontrollable, a kind of *pre-criminal*, when he missed a plane to St. Louis or showed up late to Shea. In his paean to Allen, “Letters in the Dirt,” folksinger Chuck Brodsky—another white kid of almost exactly my vintage—reflects upon the racial dimension, as he saw it, in Allen’s treatment by the fans and by the press: “He stood a bit outside the lines which / made him fair game for those times / Richie Allen never kissed / a white man’s ass.”⁶⁹ This is precisely the conclusion I came to myself, sometime around the age of ten.

Hindsight, of course, clarifies some things but hopelessly clouds others. Knowing what I now do about the 1960s, about racism, about the Movement, and about Allen himself, can I recover with any certainty the Richie Allen who occupied my imagination in 1970, when the Cardinals’ road schedule and my family’s summer vacation intersected for a moment at a day game in San Diego? Can I see my young self any more clearly than I see Allen? Allen would not answer, or even look up, when I called out to him from behind the Cardinal dugout after infield practice, but I had not expected it to go any differently. I bore him no grudge for ignoring me, nor did the magic of seeing him in person diminish in the least. Did I see the situation as “racial”? Did I see myself *white* standing there—another white fan, perhaps, from Allen’s point of view, who might meet his glance with an insult or a double-A battery—another white boy who had been taught by some jeering peckerwood how to boo? I believe I did, because for one thing, this was one of the very first times I had ever addressed an African American directly; it is doubtful that I was unaware of my whiteness and his blackness, notwithstanding the era’s liberal bromides on the virtue of being colorblind. And for another thing, even if I did not know his precise thinking on “whitey’s ways,” I had figured out some things by

watching Allen and his career from afar. I understood at least dimly the burden in our exchange; and, rightly or not, in an inarticulate way I felt his rebuff to concern not me, exactly, but the larger web of relationships ensnaring us both. I had entered history, in other words, and this was perhaps the first time in my eleven years that I was aware of it. At least it seems so to me now.

*

After the '60s crested and began to recede, the culture was hungry for emblems of reconciliation; the Richie Allen narrative was conveniently pressed into service. Following his bitter years in Philadelphia, and two years of marked under-appreciation in St. Louis and Los Angeles, Allen landed in a brief dream sequence with the Chicago White Sox. Not only did he put up the kind of numbers in 1972 that the best of his early years had promised (.308, 37 HR, 113 RBI), but in Comiskey Park he found a welcoming and comfortable home. The difference, according to Allen, was White Sox manager Chuck Tanner: "He's from home and he's like a brother." (The two knew each other from the old days in Pennsylvania—Tanner's New Castle is about seven miles from Allen's Wampum—and they often called each other "Homey," which perhaps hints at Allen's intended meaning in the phrase "like a brother.") Tanner thought Allen "not only the best player in the American League, but the best in the majors... When he's through with the White Sox, he's going to walk right into the Hall of Fame."⁷⁰ Tanner thought that Chicagoans ought to build a monument to Dick Allen.

The manager's appreciation for Allen transcended baseball by a long way. "He has a magnetism," said Tanner, "—like Clark Gable, say, or Marilyn Monroe."⁷¹ This is an astonishing thing to say: daring to compare the appeal of a black man to the enchantment of these white icons—and one of them a Beauty Queen at that—strikes me as more radical in its way than anything Allen ever thought up in defiance of Whitey. This is a world, after all, where black and white *ballplayers* are rarely compared: even in the cosmos of sports talk today, Griffey might remind people of Mays, for instance, but certainly not of Mantle; and McGwire is said to have hit "with Frank Howard-type power." Orval Faubus could do no better in segregating our common conceptions of who is "like" whom; and yet Tanner spotted Dick Allen's similarities to Marilyn Monroe. We probably ought to build a monument to *him*.

From Allen's White Sox years onward, the baseball establishment fell in love with the story of its own acceptance of Allen, even if it did not quite learn to love the ballplayer himself as Chuck Tanner did. (He never did come near the Hall of Fame, for instance.) But Allen "is a man who marches to his own wry drummer," reported *Sports Illustrated* in 1972. "On the day his teammates were going out on strike, Allen signed his 1972 contract."⁷² "His own wry drummer" is a far cry from the portrait of the trouble-making militant that had characterized the coverage of Allen as a Philly. After Chicago, the press began to find something lovably quirky in Allen's history of unorthodoxies; but more importantly, the press seemed to find something laudable in its own warming up to Allen: it was as if, in embracing Allen, the white sports establishment could at once prove and celebrate just how far it had come. "He wrote dismissive notes to his general manager in the base-path dirt with his foot!" commented *Sports Illustrated* in tones of

mock scandal in 1973. “What kind of man would do a thing like that? And why didn’t anybody think of it before?”⁷³ Now Allen was “a team player who has bounced around... a mentor to the young, a seasoned veteran whom managements have seen as a discipline problem. The more you learn about Allen from outside sources,” remarked *Sports Illustrated*, “the more he swims before you.” Even the press’s conventional disregard for Allen’s point of view began to shift: as *SI* now described it, when Allen entered pro ball, “First thing, his name got changed... he did not care to be issued a new name by an organization.”⁷⁴ Dick “Don’t Call Me Richie” Allen suddenly seemed fairly reasonable.

America’s favorite Dick Allen story is the one about how he got a standing ovation when he returned to the Phillies in 1975. Although he found himself “wondering where all the brothers had gone” as he looked around the Phillies’ new, suburban ball park, evidently Allen is fond of this one, too. “Things had changed,” he wrote. “... blacks were beginning to run the city. In the old days, I represented a threat to white people in Philadelphia. I wore my hair in an Afro. I said what was on my mind. I didn’t take shit. But now, like the rest of the country, Philadelphia had come around to accepting that things had changed and were going to keep changing, like it or not.”⁷⁵ The movement, had, after all, accomplished some things; the logic and the accepted idioms of American race consciousness had shifted significantly; the terms of sports celebrity, too, had changed, unorthodoxy taking its place among the new orthodoxies—Jim Bouton, Joe Namath, Rosie Grier, Steve Carlton, Bill Lee. Perhaps Dick Allen had merely been a few years out ahead of the curve, and there was no depth to the tragedy of his Philadelphia story after all. Many found it comforting to think so.

And yet the reconciliation narrative—the Allen/Philadelphia story, and the national healing for which it is an implied allegory—cannot plow under all the chicken bones, the bolts, and the batteries that rained onto the field in those earlier years in Philadelphia, nor can it wipe from memory Allen’s whimsical sorrow songs, the letters in the dirt. Perhaps this is why the player who had integrated professional baseball in Orval Faubus’ Arkansas and who had later distinguished himself as one of the most powerful hitters in the Major Leagues, expressed elation in 1987—as if finally receiving affirmation—when aging Negro star Cool Papa Bell pronounced that he indeed would have had what it takes to make it in the Negro Leagues. Inverting the conventional storyline of baseball aspiration and fulfillment, a buoyant Allen exclaimed, “He said I could have been one of them... He said I had power and I could run, the two most important requirements in Negro League baseball.” Even he recognized the irony in his being “a big leaguer who felt like he lost out because he never got a chance to play in the Negro Leagues.”⁷⁶ This is not to paint Allen as a victim of desegregation. But his implied daydream about being “one of them,” a Negro League star, does say a bit about the operations of race in the game, even two decades after Jackie Robinson had broken down the color barrier. “People said there was one set of rules for me and another for the rest of the team,” Allen once said, reflecting on his image as the Phillies’ troublemaker. “When I was coming up, black players couldn’t stay in the same hotel or eat in the same places as whites. Two sets of rules? Baseball set the tone.”⁷⁷ This is the political lesson that Allen’s career had been teaching all along: desegregation did not come off as advertised.

NOTES

- ¹ Dick Allen and Tim Whitaker, *Crash: The Life and Times of Dick Allen* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989), p.xvii; “Dick Allen,” in BaseballLibrary.Com/baseballlibrary/ballplayers/A/Allen_Dick.stm; *Sports Illustrated*, Sept. 10, 1973, p.105; William Kashatus, *September Swoon: Richie Allen, the '64 Phillies, and Racial Integration* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), p.191.
- ² “Dick Allen,” in BasballLibrary.Com. *Sports Illustrated*, March 23, 1970; June 12, 1972.
- ³ John Thorn, Pete Palmer, Michael Gershman, *Total Baseball: the Official Encyclopedia of Major League Baseball* [Seventh Edition] (Kingston, NY: Total Sports, 2001), p.158.
- ⁴ Hank Aaron with Lonnie Wheeler, *I Had a Hammer: The Hank Aaron Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), pp.334-335.
- ⁵ Bob Gibson with Lonnie Wheeler, *Stranger to the Game: The Autobiography of Bob Gibson* (New York: Viking, 1994), p.224.
- ⁶ Willie Stargell and Tom Bird, *Willie Stargell, an Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p.168.
- ⁷ *New York Times Book Review*, April 23, 1989, Sec. 7, pp.36-37.
- ⁸ *Ebony*, Oct. 1972, p.192.
- ⁹ Allen and Whitaker, *Crash*, p.186.
- ¹⁰ Roger Angell, “Distance” [1980], in *Game Time* (New York: Harcourt, 2003), p.208.
- ¹¹ Allen and Whitaker, *Crash*, p.53.

¹² David Wolf, “Let’s Everybody Boo Rich Allen,” *Life*, Aug. 22, 1969, p.50.

Folksinger Chuck Brodsky’s “Letters in the Dirt” is a paean to Allen and his infield writing. *Baseball Ballads*, chuckbrodsky.com Records, 2002.

¹³ Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America’s Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Plume, 1991), p.223.

¹⁴ Aaron and Wheeler, *I Had a Hammer*, p.209. See also Jules Tygiel, “Black Ball: The Integrated Game,” in *Extra Bases: Reflections on Jackie Robinson, Race, and Baseball History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska/Bison, 2002), pp.104-117. Tygiel’s *Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* [1983] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) remains the standard in the field on the early period of integrated ball.

¹⁵ David Halberstam, *October ’64* (New York: Fawcett, 1994), p.113.

¹⁶ Frank Robinson and Barry Stanback, *Extra Innings* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), pp.23, 26.

¹⁷ Donald Hall with Dock Ellis, *Dock Ellis in the Country of Baseball* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), pp.123, 128.

¹⁸ Halberstam, *October ’64*, p.203; Gibson and Wheeler, *Stranger to the Game*, p.58.

¹⁹ Aaron and Wheeler, *I Had a Hammer*, pp.55, 56.

²⁰ Aaron and Wheeler, *I Had a Hammer*, p.79.

²¹ John Roseboro with Bill Libby, *Glory Days with the Dodgers and Other Days with Others* (New York: Atheneum, 1978), pp.54-55; Felipe Alou with Herm Weiskopf, *My Life and Baseball* (Waco: Word, 1967), p.29. (Even so, writing in 1967 the highly

conservative Alou averred that the urban uprisings were inspired by communist agitators. p.103.)

²² Curt Flood with Richard Carter, *The Way It Is* (New York: Trident, 1971), p.38; Samuel Regalado, *Viva Baseball! Latin Major Leaguers and Their Special Hunger* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), pp.66, 67.

²³ Gibson and Wheeler, *Stranger to the Game*, pp.52-53; Howard Bryant, *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.92; Hall and Ellis, *Dock Ellis in the Country of Baseball*, p.134; Orlando Cepeda with Herb Fagen, *Baby Bull: From Hardball to Hard Time and Back* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 1998), pp.74-75; Kashatus, *September Swoon*, p.113; Regalado, *Viva Baseball!*, pp.84-87.

²⁴ Halberstam, *October '64*, p.151.

²⁵ Allen and Whitaker, *Crash*, pp.11-14; Kashatus, *September Swoon*, p.45.

²⁶ *Ebony*, July, 1970, p.90.

²⁷ Quoted in *Sports Illustrated*, Sept. 10, 1973, p.111.

²⁸ Bruce Kuklick, *To Everything a Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp.145-148; Kashatus, *September Swoon*, pp.9-37; Bryant, *Shut Out*, p.5; David Faulkner, *Great Time Coming: The Life of Jackie Robinson from Baseball to Birmingham* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), pp.163-164; Tom McGrath, "Color Me Badd," *The Fan*, September, 1996, p.39.

²⁹ Gerald Early, *This Is Where I Came In: Black America in the 1960s* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska/Bison, 2003), p.67.

³⁰ Kuklick, *To Everything a Season*, pp.155-156, 158; Early, *This Is Where I Came In*, pp.70-71.

³¹ Kuklick, *To Everything a Season*, pp.155-156; Early, *This Is Where I Came In*, pp.75-89; Kashatus, *September Swoon*, pp.76-80, 111-113.

³² *Sports Illustrated*, June 1, 1970, p.40; Kashatus, *September Swoon*, p.54.

³³ *Sports Illustrated*, Sept. 10, 1973, p.111; Kashatus, *September Swoon*, p.82. See also William Kashatus, "Dick Allen, the Phillies, and Racism," *Nine*, Fall 2000, p.151. On Allen's general mistreatment by the press, see Craig Wright, "Dick Allen: Another View," (originally published in SABR magazine), posted at www.expressfan.com/dickallenhof/docs/defense.pdf.

³⁴ Kashatus, *September Swoon*, p. 80.

³⁵ Allen and Whitaker, *Crash*, p.4.

³⁶ See "The Thomas Incident, July 1965" in Kashatus, "Dick Allen, the Phillies, and Racism," and Kashatus, *September Swoon*, pp. 149-157; *Sports Illustrated*, Sept 10, 1973, p.111; Allen and Whitaker, *Crash*, pp.1-10.

³⁷ Allen and Whitaker, *Crash*, pp.58-59, 10; Leonard Schechter, "Richie Allen and the Use of Power," *Sport*, July, 1967, p.66.

³⁸ *Newsweek*, July 8, 1968, p.52; *Sports Illustrated*, Sept. 10, 1973, p.111; Kashatus, *September Swoon*, pp.155-156.

³⁹ Kashatus, *September Swoon*, p.172.

⁴⁰ Don Malcolm, "The Angry Negro Problem," *Baseball Primer: Baseball for the Thinking Fan*, www.baseballprimer.com/articles/malcolm_2001-03-05_0.shtml.

⁴¹ Kashatus, *September Swoon*, p.160.

⁴² *Newsweek*, July 8, 1968, p.52.

⁴³ *Sports Illustrated*, Sept. 10, 1973, p.107.

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- ⁴⁴ Jim Bouton, *Ball Four* [1970] (New York: Wiley, 1990), p.393; Kashatus, *September Swoon*, p.189.
- ⁴⁵ Bouton, *Ball Four*, p.ix.
- ⁴⁶ This is the Richie Allen canon. See Allen and Whitaker, *Crash*, and Kashatus, *September Swoon* (Mauch quoted p.166). *New York Times*, Aug. 23, 1968, p.79; July 3, 1969, p.35.
- ⁴⁷ “Richie Allen is Not All Bad Boy,” *New York Times*, May 18, 1969; *Ebony*, July 1970, p.92.
- ⁴⁸ Kashatus, *September Swoon*, p.171; *New York Times*, “Sports of the Times,” June 25, 1968; *Newsweek*, May 19, 1975, p.58; *Newsweek*, Aug 21, 1972, p.83; *Sports Illustrated*, March 23, 1970, p.18; April 29, 1974, p.19; July 19, 1999, p.19.
- ⁴⁹ Bill Conlin, “Richie Is Beautiful. He Don’t Give a Damn for Nobody,” *Jock*, January 1970, p.88; *Sports Illustrated*, May 19, 1975, p.59.
- ⁵⁰ *Afro-American*, July 13, 1968, p.13.
- ⁵¹ *Ebony*, July, 1970, pp.89, 90, 92, 93.
- ⁵² *Sports Illustrated*, March 23, 1970, p.21.
- ⁵³ Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, p.188.
- ⁵⁴ Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, p.139.
- ⁵⁵ Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, p.206; Halberstam, *October '64*, p.364.
- ⁵⁶ Gibson and Wheeler, *Stranger to the Game*, p.219; *Sports Illustrated*, March 23, 1970, p.22.
- ⁵⁷ Kuklick, *To Everything a Season*, p.163.

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- ⁵⁸ See “Oppositional Identity” in Kashatus, “Dick Allen, the Phillies, and Racism”; *Newsweek*, Aug. 21, 1972, p.84.
- ⁵⁹ Lee Vilensky, “Ode to Dick Allen,” *Elysian Fields Quarterly: The Baseball Review*, Vol. 20, number 3, www.efqreview.com/NewFiles/v20n3/dustofthefields-two.html.
- ⁶⁰ Allen and Whitaker, *Crash*, p.40.
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- ⁶² Roseboro and Libby, *Glory Days with the Dodgers and Other Days with Others*, p.232.
- ⁶³ Stuart Hall, “Subjects in History: Making Diasporic Identities,” in Wahneema Lubiano, ed., *The House that Race Built* (New York: Vintage, 1998), p.291.
- ⁶⁴ Aaron and Wheeler, *I Had a Hammer*, p.231.
- ⁶⁵ Gibson and Wheeler, *Stranger to the Game*, p.188.
- ⁶⁶ Thorn, Palmer, and Gershman, *Total Baseball*, pp.2204-2222.
- ⁶⁷ Flood and Carter, *The Way It Is*, p.16.
- ⁶⁸ Hall and Ellis, *Dock Ellis in the Country of Baseball*, p.177.
- ⁶⁹ Brodsky “Letters in the Dirt,” *The Baseball Ballads* (Weaverville, NC: chuckbrodskyrecords.com, 2002), track 5.
- ⁷⁰ *Sports Illustrated*, June 5, 1972, p.64.
- ⁷¹ *Sports Illustrated*, April 29, 1974, p.20.
- ⁷² *Sports Illustrated*, June 5, 1972, p.64.
- ⁷³ *Sports Illustrated*, Sept. 10, 1973, p.107.
- ⁷⁴ *Sports Illustrated*, Sept. 10, 1973, pp.108, 110.

⁷⁵ Allen and Whitaker, *Crash*, pp.159-160.

⁷⁶ Allen and Whitaker, *Crash*, p.85.

⁷⁷ *Sports Illustrated*, July 19, 1993, p.84.