

Hank Aaron

Civil Rights Crusader Through the Game of Baseball

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Abstract

In this paper, this author will make important connections between civil rights and baseball in United States history. If one were to connect civil rights and baseball it would take much more time and effort than what this author had to give. This paper is about Henry Aaron and Civil Rights in the United States, specifically Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Through the access of two great online newspaper databases and many great secondary sources this paper will give new dynamic insight about Henry Aaron and the city of Milwaukee.

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Introduction: Baseball More Than a Game

Baseball is the American pastime. It represents much more than a bat, glove and ball; it represents our country. What makes this game so beautiful is the fact that it can take our minds off of the most disastrous real life situations. My thoughts go back to September 11th 2001 when our country was attacked through terrorism. There was no way to completely heal from an event like that but what was there just five days after the attack? The American pastime, Baseball. I will never forget the scene at Shea Stadium when Mike Piazza sent a two-run homer out of the park for a game winning Home Run on September 21st, which was the first game in New York since the attack. This not only began the healing process for the New York Mets, but also for the entire country. I was 13 years old at the time and thought I understood the situation, looking back on it now it is much more emotional. To see professional athletes handle the situation with such grace, it allowed the rest of us to take a deep breath and remember that through unity and togetherness we would prevail.

Many types of sports can have an emotional effect on its fan base but baseball is different. Baseball has been played in the United States for over 150 years. It is a sport that requires nine individuals to play together and at times sacrifice for each other. It is a sport that does not require a certain weight or height to play, something that can't be said about other dominant American sports like Basketball and Football. A sport that began to flourish just before the Civil War, it was coined the nickname of "National Pastime" in the *New York Mercury*

on December 5th 1856. ¹ This is intriguing because by no means was the United States a unified “nation” in 1856, the game proved to be bigger than a certain political issue, figure, or party.

This sport has been critical to the history of the United States. In the 1930s it was baseball that allowed immigrants to feel more “American” by accepting ethnically diverse players in Major League Baseball. Players such as Joe DiMaggio and Hank Greenberg gave hope to Italian and Jewish born children and even adults that they could succeed in the United States. ²

However, most specifically for this paper, is civil rights history. The common, stereotypical belief of African-Americans for the majority of the first two centuries of United States history was that they were not as capable as whites. Not as capable to learn, not as capable to teach, and consequently not as capable to succeed. These beliefs remained constant throughout the majority of the history of United States because of the way that African American’s were portrayed in the media. It wasn’t until Jackie Robinson was given the opportunity to prove himself, and the rest of the African American community that the stereotypes began to lose their significance. Robinson opened the door for black athletes of all sports. He opened the door for a 25 time all-star, the all time leader in runs batted in (RBIs), the number two leader in home runs, and the number three leader in career hits. These are the statistics of one man, Henry Aaron. Like Robinson, Aaron used his role as professional baseball star to help people other than himself. He paved paths for more African American athletes, and essentially took the torch from Robinson as far as lead baseball civil rights advocate goes.

¹ Jules Tygiel , Past Time: Baseball as History. New York, Oxford University Press 2000 6

² Paul Finkelman., “Baseball and the Rule of Law Revisited”, *Thomas Jefferson Law Review*, 25 (Fall 2002) 5

In this paper, I will be covering Hank Aaron's impact on the city of Milwaukee. He played in Milwaukee from 1954-1964 and then he returned again in 1975 to end his career in Milwaukee. In 1954, Aaron was a mere 20 years old and he was in a city with a very small African American population, with a history of segregation. The purpose of this paper is to connect his success in baseball to the civil rights movement and see if his success allowed him to make an impact in the civil rights movement.

African American History of Milwaukee

The unique history of African Americans living in Milwaukee made Aaron's story more compelling. We know about Milwaukee's current segregation issues, as it is one of the most segregated cities in the United States. The fact that a 20 year-old African American took the city by storm in 1954 is quite impressive. Joe William Trotter's book Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945 lays the foundation for history of African American's living in Milwaukee in the first half of the 20th century.³

Before 1915, African Americans were very hard to be found in Milwaukee. It was in Milwaukee that the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 was deemed unconstitutional by the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1854. Sherman Booth, editor of an abolitionist newspaper, led a mob into the Milwaukee jail to free Joshua Glover, an ex-slave who had been living in Racine.⁴ Wisconsin's decision against the Fugitive Slave law represented the feelings and attitudes of many of the North at the time. Although this decision favored blacks living in Wisconsin, it doesn't accurately repeat racial conditions of in Milwaukee during this early part of the 20th century.

It was immigration that fueled industry in Milwaukee up until 1915. Milwaukee was known as the City of Nations, as its foreign stock was as high as any city in the United States. During the 1840s and 1850s more than 1,000 Germans arrived weekly. Milwaukee grew very quickly; in 1850 Milwaukee's population was sitting at a modest 20,000, but by 1900 its population had grown to an unbelievable 285,000 because of the immigration craze. In fact it

³ Joe W. Trotter. Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat 1915-1945, Chicago and Urbana, Ill. University of Illinois Press 1985

⁴ Patrick D. Jones. The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee, Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press 2009, p 12

was tied with New York City for the highest percentage of population being of foreign stock, a staggering 78% in 1910⁵. Foreign stock refers to those who are immigrants from a different country, or those who are born in the United State with parents who are originally from a different country. In comparison, from 1870-1910 the **black** population in Milwaukee rose from 176 to 980, a very slow growth of a population especially for a northern industrial city.⁶

This immigrant population proved to be a reason for African Americans to keep away from Milwaukee for the first half of the 20th century. The original jobs for blacks in Milwaukee were based on the myth that blacks could handle heat better than whites. So wherever the work was sweaty, dirty, low-paying, and heavy, this is where the black men were found.⁷ These difficult and hazardous jobs were in four major industrial groups: iron and steel, slaughtering and meatpacking, tanneries, and building and construction.⁸ This work was not very attractive compared to that in other Northern industrial cities at this time, where black men were being hired in their factories. The main difference between Milwaukee and Chicago, Detroit, or Cleveland was the foreign stock that took up most of the low-skill jobs. Also, racist attitudes of industrialists and labor unions often blocked black entrance into industrial jobs. The lack of jobs and racist practices of the factories and labor unions made Milwaukee a very unattractive place for blacks to move to before World War II.

The early twentieth century in Milwaukee was the setting for the original segregation of the city that is now known for its segregation. For numerous reasons, including economic

⁵ IBID., 15

⁶ Trotter, 5

⁷ IBID., 13

⁸ Paul Geib "From Mississippi to Milwaukee: A Case Study of Southern Black Migration to Milwaukee, 1940-1970" *The Journal of Negro History*, 83(1998): 235

disparity, discriminative real estate practices, and white flight, the small percentage of African Americans were forced to live in the same neighborhood together. This 35-block neighborhood was known as “little Africa”.⁹

The Great Depression lowered wages for all people, but especially hit the blacks in Milwaukee who were already working for lower wages than white workers. Trotter gave statistics that better the understanding of the racial segregation in the city. For instance, the home values for whites were double the price of that of blacks in 1940, \$4,485 compared to \$2,762.¹⁰The Black population in Milwaukee was forced to move into a low-rent, decaying part of town because it was the only place they could afford to live. In fact, during this time 97% of Milwaukee’s black population lived in the same neighborhood that expanded roughly 8x12 blocks in North Milwaukee.¹¹

It was not until World War II that Milwaukee became a more attractive place for blacks to find work and to live. In 1941, President Roosevelt announced through the F.E.P.C (Fair Employment Practices Committee) that the defense industries were to not discriminate against blacks in hiring.¹² Regardless of this announcement, the demand for factory labor was very high and blacks were being hired. It is ironic that it took a World War to finally give blacks an opportunity to live and work in Milwaukee. Chart 1A shows that the population growth of blacks in Milwaukee was very staggering from 1940-1970. From 1940 to 1950, the black population grew from 8,821 to 21,772. In just ten years the population increased by nearly

⁹ Jones, 19

¹⁰ Trotter, 179

¹¹ Trotter, 176

¹² Geib , 234

12,000 people! Can you imagine the social implications of a population growth like this? A town that has been dominated by white people with European heritage is now being flooded by black people with a completely different culture background.

This actually was the phenomena that all northern industrial cities endured at some point. Milwaukee's black population phenomenon occurred later than most. However, even though there was a significant growth of blacks in Milwaukee from 1940 to 1950, they still were a miniscule part of the population. Only 34 out of 1000 people in Milwaukee at this time were black, which still allowed discrimination and segregation to occur. Regardless, by 1950 the impact of blacks was definitely being felt in America and Baseball.

African American History in Baseball: Prelude to Hammerin' Hank

In 1945, Branch Rickey of the Brooklyn Dodgers made a decision that would forever change the baseball culture in America. Rickey knew, like a lot of other baseball people during this time that there was an abundance of untapped talent that was playing in the Negro Leagues. The Negro League had great competition among an all black pools of players. They were essentially paid peanuts by their white owners, just enough to live off of. In fact, few of the teams in the Negro Leagues used contracts. The owners of these teams knew that these black ball players had no better option as far as making a living goes. They paid each player day to day. After all, the black players did not have a union to back them up; they had their back against the wall. ¹³The Negro leagues were a great example of the Jim Crow laws that were enforced in the south, which created and gave authority to segregation.

Rickey knew that it wouldn't be an easy task to bring a black player into professional baseball. "I know you're a good ball player," Rickey said to Robinson during their first meeting on August 28th, 1945. "What I don't know is whether you have the guts." Robinson was quick to defend himself, "I'm not afraid of anybody or anything on a playing field." Rickey stopped him, "I'm looking for a ballplayer with guts enough to not fight back."¹⁴

Rickey believed that bringing Jackie Robinson would not only help his team's success because he was a standout baseball player but in effect generate greater revenue for his ball club. By bringing up Jackie Robinson to the major leagues in 1947 he opened up an entire new fan base of black people who were ecstatic to finally see one of their own playing on an equal

¹³ Lee Lowenfish. *Branch Rickey: Baseball's Ferocious Gentleman*, University of Nebraska Press. 2007. 374

¹⁴ IBID., 375

playing field. This decision by Rickey was vital for start of the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

It actually took much arm-twisting and convincing on the part of Rickey to get Robinson to sign on to play for the Dodgers. Robinson had been contacted by other “scams” which would exploit his talents by having him be the “joke” of their league. When Rickey made first contact with Robinson, Robinson thought he was being asked to play for a Brooklyn Negro league team. But Rickey was a very honest and religious man, who used these qualities to effectively reel in Robinson. He would tell Jackie stories of inspiration, for instance about an Ohio couple taking their first railroad trip. They feared that their train would never make it through the mountains, yet they reached their destination in one piece. Rickey would tell Robinson, “That’s the way it is with most trouble ahead in this world, Jackie- if we use the common sense and courage God gave us. But you’ve got to study the hazards and build wisely.”¹⁵

Rickey was joined by Bill Veeck, who was known for his crazy baseball business antics. They each reaped great rewards for their decision to bring in black baseball players. Rickey says he brought in Robinson only to win a World Series, but most people knew Rickey was strongly against segregation and he wanted to make a move that would help end segregation in the United States. Rickey also brought in other standout Negro Leagues players, such as Roy Campanella. After winning numerous National League pennants between 1947 and 1954, the Brooklyn Dodgers finally won the World Series in 1955.¹⁶ From the business side, there was also great success brought by bringing in Robinson. During the 1947 season the Dodgers set an

¹⁵ IBID., 376

¹⁶ Finkelman, 7

all-time attendance record and the majority of the credit for this is given to Robinson who brought in a brand new Dodger fan base. In fact, in every National League city (except Cincinnati) the home team recorded a new single game attendance records when the Dodgers came to town.

Veeck, who owned the Cleveland Indians, also began winning after signing black ball players Larry Doby and the oldest rookie in Major League History, Satchel Paige. The Brooklyn Dodgers were about to sign Doby but it has been said that Rickey suggested that he go play in Cleveland, which would help integrate the American League.¹⁷ Doby was the first black player to play in the American League, which came eleven weeks after Robinson's debut. Paige, who is referred to as one of the greatest pitchers of all-time in any baseball league, sadly didn't make his Major League debut until he was 42 years-old. He was far out of his prime before he was given his opportunity to play with in the Major Leagues. Paige was the first black baseball player inducted into the American Baseball Hall of Fame in 1971.

During this time there were people who were strongly supportive of Rickey and Veeck. In the summer of 1945, Communist New York councilman Benjamin Davis was a big piece of the "End Jim Crow in Baseball Committee". Davis and others would picket outside of major league ball parks with photographs of dead and wounded black soldiers from the most recent World War, with the caption underneath reading, "Good enough to die for their country but not good enough to play for organized baseball".¹⁸ Unfortunately, much of the South was still very

¹⁷ Finkelman, 5

¹⁸ Lowenfish,377

conservative and strongly against blacks being treated equal, even it was just a game they were playing.

Robinson was truly changing the social landscape of cities across the United States. However, in the south there were no Major League baseball teams. The National League in 1947 consisted of franchises in Brooklyn, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, New York, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. The thing these cities have in common is that they are all above the Mason-Dixon Line. While Robinson did break the color barrier in baseball, there was much work to do about segregation across the entire United States. Henry Aaron essentially picked up the torch from Robinson and continued the integration of baseball in the South.

Rickey's dream was to see the day where merit, not skin color, would determine a person's chance for success. His historic move to bring in Jackie Robinson laid down the foundation for this to occur in baseball and also in the rest of the United States. He opened the door for players such as Ernie Banks, Willie Mays, and most importantly Hammerin' Hank Aaron to play their entire careers in Major League Baseball.

Aaron's Path to Milwaukee

Henry Aaron was born on February 5th 1934 in Mobile, Alabama. His parents were Estella and Herbert Aaron. Not surprisingly he wasn't the talk of the town the day he was born. Rather, five Alabama black men were being sent to Montgomery for execution for unrelated crimes.¹⁹ This was 1930s life in Alabama, a life of inequality for blacks, there was not only inequalities, there was hatred towards blacks from the majority of white southerners. This is the life that Hank Aaron grew up knowing. When Aaron was eight his family moved to Toulminville, a village just outside of Mobile, when the family expanded to eight members. They used a kerosene lantern that gave light to the entire home. They used an outhouse, which the family built itself. Not only did the Aarons build their own outhouse when they moved to Toulminville, they built the house itself. Aaron's father used money he had been saving up for years to buy two lots, and he paid carpenters \$100 to build a frame and a roof. Then that was it, they moved in! Aaron recalls, "We were a proud family, because the way we saw it, the only people who owned their own homes were rich folks and Aarons."²⁰

Aaron was a realistic young boy. Although he loved playing baseball, he saw himself as a carpenter growing up. It wasn't until other blacks began getting into organized baseball that he changed his profession of choice to baseball player. Mobile had a knack for producing big time baseball players. Satchel Paige, the first black Major League Hall of Famer, began the lineage of black ball players to come from Mobile. Aaron was next in line, then after Aaron came Giants great Willie McCovey and Cubs great Billy Williams. In most other cities in the Deep South,

¹⁹ Henry Aaron and Lonnie Wheeler, I Had A Hammer. New York, Harper Collins. 1991, 1

²⁰ Aaron and Wheeler, 8

football overshadowed baseball but not in Mobile. These black ball players put Mobile on the map. Aaron was clearly influenced a lot by Paige the hometown hero, as well as Jackie Robinson, the national hero.

Aaron recalls the time he saw Robinson speak in Mobile, “The day Jackie Robinson came to town in 1948, and I skipped shop class to hear him speak in the auditorium on Davis Avenue. That same day, I told my father that I would be in the big leagues before Jackie retired. Jackie had that effect on all of us- he gave us our dreams. He breathed baseball into the black community, kids and grown-ups alike.”²¹

Mobile was home to the Mobile Bears of the Southern League. The Southern League was an all white baseball league, which today, would be comparable to the minor leagues. Satchel Paige would work out with the Bears but he would never see the day to pitch in an actual game. There was also the Mobile Black Bears, an alternative semi-pro team for only black men. The manager of the Black Bears was a man by the name of Ed Scott. Scott saw Aaron play in a local softball recreational league and Aaron caught his eye. The Black Bears roster consisted of grown men and they only played on Sundays. Each of these details did not go over well with Estella, Henry’s mother. She eventually allowed him to play, but only home games.

Scott recalls his first impressions of Aaron “He was only seventeen and the rest of us had wives and children. He was green as he could be. He stood up there at the plate upright, no crouch at all, and the other team figured he wasn’t ready. The pitcher tried to get a fastball by

²¹ Aaron and Wheeler, 14

him, and he hit a line drive that banged against the old tin fence they had around the outfield out there- nearly put the ball through the fence. They walked him the rest of the time.”²²

That was the beginning of the professional career of Hank Aaron. For most black players of this time, their first opportunity to play was in some sort of Negro League. This was true for Aaron as well. After an exhibition game between Aaron’s Black Bears and the Indianapolis Clowns, the Clown’s management was so impressed with Aaron they offered him a contract of \$200/month for the following season.²³ This would be equivalent to roughly \$1600.00/month using today dollar values.²⁴ This was not a bad deal for the Clowns who, without knowing, just signed one of the greatest players in Major League baseball history.

Aaron was an instant success in the Negro American League; he hit an astonishing .467 as an 18 year-old. He was spotted by the New York Giants and the Boston Braves. This was a common theme of Aaron’s career as he let his play do his talking and scouting. He did not have much help along the way at all and each break he got is a break he earned through his performance. The Braves eventually outbid the Giants for Aaron, and they signed him to a contract of \$350/month.²⁵ Another common theme of this time was the exploitation of the black players by the white owners. The Clowns owner received \$10,000.00 from the Braves after sending Aaron to their organization. The Boston Braves relocated to Milwaukee in 1953 because of lack of attendance in Boston and because of the new Milwaukee County Stadium that was being built.

²² Aaron and Wheeler, 23

²³ Stan Baldwin, Jerry Jenkins, and Henry Aaron. Bad Henry. Chilton Book Company. Radford, PA. 1974 163

²⁴ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson "Purchasing Power of Money in the United States from 1774 to 2010," Measuring Worth, 2009.

²⁵ IBID., 163

On June 11, 1952 Aaron reported to Eau Claire, WI for his first organized baseball assignment. This was truly a monumental moment in his baseball career. Aaron at this time played shortstop, a position that is usually given to the most athletic and smoothest glove on the team. The Eau Claire Leader Telegram called Aaron and second-basemen Mickey MacConnell the “\$25,000 Keystone Combination”.²⁶ Aaron was acquired for \$10,000 and MacConnell was acquired for \$15,000. The irony in these numbers is that MacConnell graduated from Brown University and kept the entire \$15,000, and nobody remembered that guy. On the other hand, Aaron’s \$10,000 went to Clowns owner, Syd Pollack and Aaron will forever be a household name in baseball history. I guess this treatment of Aaron was a component of the fuel that he poured on his personal fire.

Although Aaron only played in Eau Claire for one summer, he took a lot away from the experience. It was his first experience living in a place with only white folks. He and another black player, Wes Covington were unofficially adopted by a white family in Eau Claire. The town was a huge baseball town, a town that looked past the color of the skin and looked at the skills the players were blessed with. Aaron recalls, “Playing in Eau Claire gave me a chance to look at things with a much broader, wider scope. I learned you have to judge people individually rather than collectively.”²⁷

Aaron only played one season in Eau Claire because his talent was far superior to the others in the league. He was named “Rookie of the Year” of the Northern League in the summer of 1952. As Aaron had more success, there was more focus put on the quickness of his hands.

²⁶ Jerry Poling. A Summer Up North: Henry Aaron and the Legend of Eau Claire Baseball, University of Wisconsin Press. Madison, WI 2002 p 56

²⁷ IBID., 53

Ham Olive, an umpire in the Northern League, remembers this quality well, “I called many a strike on Hank that he hit. He was THAT quick. It was embarrassing when everyone would hear me call a strike, and see him hit it!”²⁸ Eau Claire’s Carson Park dedicated a statue to Aaron in 1994; each time you walk through the gates of Carson Park you are reminded of the legend of Hank Aaron.

The two best players visually and statistically on the Eau Claire Bears in the summer of 1952 were Aaron and Covington, each black. Eau Claire was definitely an upgrade for these players compared to Mobile, and other Southern cities but there was still racism that occurred. In the Leader Telegram, top Braves scout Billy Southworth was interviewed by a reporter discussing the top players on the Bears. He did not mention Aaron or Covington at all; rather he talked solely about white first baseman Dick Engquist.²⁹ Even though there was no hatred towards Aaron or Covington, it was clear they were not treated 100% equally, even in Eau Claire.

It is hard to believe that this 18 year old kid had already experienced so much in baseball but also, more importantly, in life. He had grown up in the Deep South, and had been relocated twice through baseball decisions and he was still 18 years-old. But, there was no experience that would prepare Aaron for his next move. Aaron and four other non-white players were to be assigned to the Sally League in Jacksonville, Florida. The South Atlantic League (Sally League) was known for its racist fans and owners, who actually rejected Jackie Robinson back in 1947 before he went north to Brooklyn. This is the season where Aaron

²⁸ IBID., 47

²⁹ Aaron and Wheeler, 44

figuratively picked up the torch from Robinson as far as integrating baseball goes. Robinson was able to crack the integration of organized baseball in the North, but was unable to do so in the South. Aaron joined; Felix Mantilla, Horace Garner, Fleming Reedy, and Al Israel as the five non-white players who were sent to Jacksonville to play in the Sally League.

To put this into better perspective, in 1952, the year before Aaron was sent to Jacksonville another baseball team in Jacksonville was denied by the chamber of commerce to add black players to their roster. A spokesman explained, "No race prejudice is involved, it's just that the patrons of the team felt they would rather have an all-white team"³⁰ I am not sure who this spokesperson was or who he was trying to fool, but I found this to be rather comical. This was the South, which was much more difficult to integrate than the north. Robinson was playing in cities such as Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, Aaron was playing in cities such as Atlanta, Savannah, and Montgomery.

It is extremely appropriate that the first game of the Jacksonville Braves in 1953 took place on April 1st, also known as April fool's Day. The game did not go well for the Braves, as they were dismantled by the Boston Red Sox, 14-1. The one run the Braves scored however, turned out to be one of the most important runs of Jacksonville's season. It came in the bottom of the eighth inning, with the score already 14-0, when the Braves scrawny second baseman came up to the dish. It was Aaron, and he cracked an Ike DeLock fastball 400 feet over the right-centerfield fence. Bill Foley of the Florida Times-Union put the game into his words, "Nobody remembers Boston battered the Braves 14-1 that April fool's day in 1953. But nobody there

³⁰ Wheeler and Aaron, 51

ever forgot the shot that launched Henry Aaron on his way to becoming the greatest home run hitter in baseball history.”³¹

So it began, the season that would forever change organized baseball in the South, the first full season with black players in the Sally League. The team was managed by Ben Geraghty and before the season actually began he sat down with Aaron, Mantilla, and Garner and told them what they were to expect if they stayed with the team. It was nothing that the young men didn't already know. Despite being only 19 years old at the beginning of the season, Aaron had already played in two professional leagues, one being the Negro American League and the other being the Northern League in Eau Claire. He was young, but rather experienced for being so young. Aaron has fond memories of Geraghty, “ I guess he was one reason I didn't realize I was crusading,” claims Aaron, “because he crowded out a lot of stuff and never let it get close to me.”³²

Aaron and the two others were also spoken to by the mayor of Jacksonville W. Haydon Burns before the teams' first road trip to Savannah, Ga. He told them that they had to be quiet and take the harassment from the opposing fans. If they were to act out, it would put their lives in danger. ³³ Aaron remembered the attendance records that would his team would attract, at home and on the road, which was very reminiscent to Jackie Robinson's first tour with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

³¹ Bill Foley. “Millennium Moment: April 1st, 1953”, Jacksonville, FL. *Florida Times Union* April 1st, 1999

³² Tygiel Baseballs Greatest Experiment 283

³³ Wheeler and Aaron, 57

“There were more than 5,500 people at the ballpark in Savannah- the biggest Opening Day crowd they’d ever had and the biggest in the Sally League that year. It would be that way all summer. Wherever we went, the fans poured out to the park. We set all kinds of attendance records that year, and opened up the Sally League to a whole new group of customers. There were so many black fans that they had to add room to the colored section in a lot of ballparks. It was like a party every night in the colored section. All we had to do was catch a fly ball and everybody on the black side of the ball park would whoop and holler like we’d won the World Series. There was probably nowhere else in the South where so many white and black people could be found in the same place.”³⁴

If that doesn’t sound like a beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, I am not sure what else could do justice. It is crucial to remember that at this time in these cities in the Deep South, there were informal social “Black Codes” that denied blacks offering a handshake to white people because it assumed equality. All whites were to be addressed as “sir” or “ma’am” but whites were free to address blacks by their first names or “boy”. Black men couldn’t look or speak to white women. Yet baseball, of all things, brought these people to a common place. An equal playing field led to equal rights. If Aaron, Mantilla, and Garner wouldn’t have played that season for Jacksonville southern white baseball fans wouldn’t have been able to notice their talents. They wouldn’t have seen that they do deserve an equal opportunity; to at the very least play baseball.

Although there was excitement in the black community about the integration of Sally League baseball, there was also discrimination that the players endured all season. Aaron’s teammate Felix Mantilla was deliberately hit by a pitch while playing in Macon, Ga. He lost his cool, and charged the mound. Players and fans poured the field and the police were brought in

³⁴ Wheeler and Aaron, 57

to separate the sides.³⁵ There were also situations where the racism wasn't violent but still affected the players. For instance, whenever the team arrived in the town to which they were heading the white players would get off the bus and head into their hotels, while the black players sat in silence. If the team had it their way, they would have had the entire team stay together because after playing with the black players for a few weeks they were able to look past their skin color. Unfortunately, Jim Crow ruled the south. Once the white players were off the bus, the bus driver would drive Aaron, Mantilla, and Garner to the other side of town where they would stay with black host families. Despite the inequality, the black host families were very welcoming for the black ball players as they were the closest they would get to meeting Jackie Robinson.³⁶

By the end of the summer of 1953, the Jacksonville Braves were about to win the pennant, Aaron was leading the league in batting and RBI's. In fact, Aaron's .367 averages were 30 points higher than the next man and his 125 RBI's stood 30 RBI more than the next man. He not only was a part of the desegregation of the Sally League, he tore the league apart statistically. He was even gaining respect from the most racist of players. Corky Valentine, the nastiest, most ruthless pitcher in the Sally League, who was known for pelting batters just because he wanted to, even gave praise in his own words to Aaron and Mantilla after the Braves won the pennant, "I just wanted to let you niggers know you played one helluva game."³⁷

³⁵ Jules Tygiel, Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy. New York, Oxford University Press. 1983 282

³⁶ Wheeler and Aaron, 63

³⁷ Wheeler and Aaron ,73

Characteristically like Aaron, he only played one season in Jacksonville before being called up to Milwaukee. The success he had in Jacksonville against all of the racist attitudes is truly amazing. His skin was as tough as one could get after a season in the Sally League. Having moved up to Milwaukee as a 20 year-old rookie, in a city with a suddenly growing African American population, set the stage for Aaron to make an impact on the city like no athlete had before.

Media Coverage of the Milwaukee Braves and Hank Aaron

The media are a consistent fuel that creates stereotypes, the media are what people see and listen to on a daily basis. The problem is that the information supplied by the media is from their point of view and not always the truth. Many racial stereotypes that African Americans have been given in the history of the United States have come from media sources. Until 1964 before discrimination actually became illegal, the Deep South did everything in its power to keep black separate from whites and this usually meant unequal as well. As technology evolved, media sources evolved as well. However, one source of media that was consistently used for information by the general public for the majority of United States history was the newspaper.

When Aaron made his splash in Milwaukee, he was one of a small number of black baseball players making their debuts in organized baseball in the 1950s. Other players such as Willie Mays, Frank Robinson, and Ernie Banks were also making an immediate impact on their teams in the 1950s. The Chicago Defender, a black newspaper, gave the African- American point of view of baseball coverage during the 1950s. The Associated Press was and still is a news company that is cooperatively owned by many newspaper, radio, and television stations across the United States. In the 1955, The Associated Press was a predominately all-white company, thus displaying the mainstream point of view. A comparison of the two is a way to depict how different these media sources were. For the most part, white people read the Associated Press and black people read media sources such as the Chicago Defender.ⁱ

The Chicago Defender began publishing news in 1905 after it was created by Robert Sengstacke Abbott who worked out of his kitchen. It took five years for the newspaper to take

off but by the beginning of World War I, the Defender was the most influential black news source in the United States.³⁸ In 1956 the Defender began printing daily issues, which is conveniently the same year as Aaron's first MVP candidate season.

By the beginning of the 1955 season, African American baseball players accounted for 28 of the players in the Major Leagues.³⁹ There was a trend during this year for baseball coverage for the Defender; they began focusing solely on Major League baseball rather than the Negro Leagues. This is mainly because the cream of the crop had left the Negro Leagues for the Major Leagues. An interesting difference between these two media sources is how they refer to the black athletes. The Defender uses the two terms "Tan" and "Sepia" to describe the black players compared to Associated Press terms "colored", "black", and "Negro". This is significant because it shows that the media sources are sending different terminologies to the two different audiences. This may also mean that even though the same event is covered, two different stories are being sent out.

The 1955 All Star game represented changes in the game. This season, Roy Campanella, a black catcher for the Dodgers led the league in all-star votes, and he was joined by 14 other black ball players in the all-star game. As Defender writer Charles Livingston puts it, "One thing seems certain, Tan players will be well represented in the All-Star game."⁴⁰ At 21 years of age, Aaron made his first all-star game. This is quite remarkable, given that Jackie Robinson had broken the Major League baseball color barrier only eight years prior.

³⁸ <http://chicagodefender.com/article-1369-about-us.html> ; April 12, 2011

³⁹ *Chicago Defender*, "28 Negro Players Start with Big League Clubs" 23 April , 1955

⁴⁰ Charles Livingston *Chicago Defender*, "Campy Grabs Lead in All-Star Picking" 25 June, 1955

The Braves finished at 85-69 in 1955 which was good enough for second place in the National League behind the Brooklyn Dodgers. Despite not winning the pennant, there was much upside for this club. Hank Aaron led the league with 37 doubles and black teammate Billy Bruton lead the league with 25 steals.⁴¹

Aaron was not only well-known among Milwaukee baseball fans at this time, he was known hitting threat throughout the entire league by the end of 1955. As the 1956 season rolled around, one of the biggest questions around the league was how this 22 year-old kid was going to keep up these statistics. As if he didn't have any pressure already, he was picked to win the batting title in early May. A May 1956 Chicago Defender article titled "Aaron Picked to Win Batting Title" says it all in just a few words.

"Some of the keenest baseball observers are convinced that the leading hitter in the National League this year will be a 22-yearold modest outfielder for the Milwaukee Braves. This unobtrusive athlete is Hank Aaron; now in his third season with the Braves....Aaron does not have the dramatic flair of Willie Mays nor the over-sized press build-up of Mickey Mantle. But he does have intrinsic baseball qualities that make him a potentially terrific hitter."⁴²

The Chicago Defender didn't leave its coverage of Aaron at one article; they covered him very closely, along with the Milwaukee Braves, for the entire summer of 1956.

The Associated Press had always covered the Milwaukee Braves since 1953, but like any news source they began covering the Braves and specifically Aaron much more extensively in 1956 when the team began playing better. There was not an article that covered the story about Aaron being "predicted" to win the batting title that year, like there had been in the

⁴¹ *Chicago Defender*, "Mays, Banks Win 2 Firsts; Bruton Base Thief Champ" 17 December, 1955

⁴² *Chicago Defender*, "Aaron Picked to Win Batting Title" 6 May, 1956

Defender. Would there have been if it was Joe Adcock, Braves first basemen, who was predicted to win the batting title? Maybe so, but we will never know.

On April 18, 1956, the Braves defeated the Cubs on opening day 6-0. Opening day always receives more coverage than an ordinary game and Aaron received a column to his credit. It was titled "'Didn't Hit it Too Good', Says Aaron of Season's 1st Home Run", talk about an oxymoron! When a reader see's this title, there is little to be excited about. It makes Aaron look either stupid or arrogant, and neither are good qualities to be labeled. Once the reader gets into the article, the information becomes much more realistic and positive. It is important to remember that in 1956, unless you are a baseball fan, you probably have not heard too much about the young right fielder from Mobile, Al. These articles in the media are what fans and the everyday newspaper readers base their judgments from.

The April 18th, 1956 article describes Aaron's strike zoneⁱⁱ as one that expands from the top of his head to his toes. Aaron says that the home run that he hit was actually in the generic strike zone, and he seems to mock the reporter with this quote, "Maybe my eyesight is improving!"⁴³

By late July of 1956, Aaron was taking the league by storm and he was also receiving positive coverage from the media. This was very important for Aaron himself and the Milwaukee Braves because they were winning ball games because of his hitting. But more importantly, a black athlete was gaining respect in Milwaukee because of this media coverage. Aaron was not only helping his team out, he was indirectly helping out his community by being

⁴³ *Associated Press*, "'Didn't Hit it Too Good', Says Aaron of Season's 1st Home Run" 18 April, 1956

such a crucial component to his team's success. After the Braves defeated the Phillies 10-0 on July 27th, Aaron took the league lead in batting average. He was sitting at an average of .338 and had recorded 22 hits in his last 42 trips to the plate. For non-baseball readers, this is called *completely on fire*. Aaron was gaining a reputation around town and the league as being very humble during this season as well. After the game he was asked about his performance, "I can hit better playing night ball here because I can pick up the ball better. The background is pretty brutal during the day and I have trouble following it. Mostly though, I'm just getting the breaks again."⁴⁴ As baseball people know, there is a fair amount of luck that combines with skill in the game. Sure you have to be able to hit the ball hard and far, but if you hit it near a player in the field, chances are you are not going to get on base. His humble nature allowed his success and popularity to grow in Milwaukee quick.

His manager Fred Haney gave praise to his hitter after a game, in an article titled "Aaron has Three Ambitions: Bat Title, World Series, MVP". When asked about these ambitions that Aaron has Haney were quick to respond, "He's one of the greatest natural hitters I ever have seen. He knows he can do it and he doesn't press. He's relaxed confident and successful."⁴⁵ And when asked to compare Aaron to other hitters, he put him with the best: Mickey Mantle, Ted Williams, Willie Mays, Stan Musial, Shoeless Joe Jackson, Babe Ruth.

The Milwaukee Braves and the Brooklyn Dodgers once again battled for the entire summer, with the same result, the Dodgers taking the pennant and the Braves were left to wait until next season. However, individually Aaron did improve on his previous year's statistics. He

⁴⁴ *Associated Press*, "Aaron has League Lead" 25 July, 1956

⁴⁵ *Associated Press*, "Aaron Has Three Ambitions: Bat Title, World Series, MVP" 31 July, 1956

lived up to the expectations and then some. Aaron hit .328 which led the league, accumulated 200 hits which led the league, and he also hit 34 doubles (actually a step down from the year before) that led the league as well. The 22 year old also was one of the four “Tan” players that made the Look Magazine “Baseball Nine” in 1956; he joined Mickey Mantle and Ted Williams in the outfield.⁴⁶ Aaron was named the Wisconsin State Athlete of the year in 1956 by the United Press. Despite giving Aaron the title of Athlete of the Year, the United Press’ article came off with a racist tone. They refer to him as a Negro outfielder, a term that comes off as rather harsh, compared to black or African American. The United Press then makes Aaron look unintelligent, “Aaron in his third season in the league, can’t explain his ability....Aaron says, “ I just go out and get my hits. I’m in there swinging, that’s all.”⁴⁷

Success is something that usually results in an increase of income, especially in professional sports. An Associated Press article from January 1957, reporting about the new contract that Aaron was after, was interesting in a few ways. First off, the article refers to Aaron as a 24 year old outfielder. At the time of this article, he was only 22 years old. Secondly, the article reports that Aaron was after a 100% raise, which would bring his salary to about \$35,000. Today, this salary would be valued at \$267,000.⁴⁸ Without a doubt that is a pretty penny even today but not nearly the type lucrative salaries that we see today. Black players such as Aaron, Banks, and Robinson have helped expand the market of Major League baseball to what it is today.

⁴⁶ *Chicago Defender*, “Name 4 Tan Stars on Look Baseball Nine” 23 September 1956

⁴⁷ *Associated Press*, “ Braves’ Henry Aaron State Athlete of Year”, 27 December 1956

⁴⁸ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson "Purchasing Power of Money in the United States from 1774 to 2010," *Measuring Worth*, 2009.

1957: The Year of the Braves

The Braves had been close. But there still wasn't a championship in Milwaukee. There certainly was a buzz around the city come April. The fan's felt it, the players felt it, and the community felt it. Milwaukee set new attendance records, which was remarkable given the small population of Milwaukee (compared to other baseball towns). Remember the television show "Happy Days"? That was Milwaukee in 1957. There was the care-free, be-bopping, Chevrolet, American happiness that was spreading across the entire United States during the 1950s but Milwaukee may be the best example of a 1950s American city, especially in the summer, with the Braves.⁴⁹

Milwaukee took in Aaron as its son. Sure, he wasn't white and didn't look like the other baseball stars in the city such as Joe Adcock and Eddie Matthews. But, man, he could play baseball. All thought of race, color, and ethnicity was tossed out like a piece of gum driving down the interstate.

Aaron, coming off a batting title championship, now aimed to attain the Triple Crown.⁵⁰The Triple Crown in baseball is leading the league in Home Runs, batting average, and RBI's. Today, only 13 men have completed the feat since 1900, the last coming in 1967 by Carl Yastrzemski of the Boston Red Sox. Aaron fell one category short; ironically he came up short in batting average. In 1957, he led the League in home runs with 44 and RBI's with 132. Despite coming up short against his personal goal, his team was in position to defeat the Cardinals in the 1957 National League pennant.

⁴⁹ Wheeler and Aaron, 118

⁵⁰ *Chicago Defender*, "Aaron Has Eyes On National League Triple Championship", 27 March 1957

It was quite the scene in Milwaukee on September 23rd 1957. It was a 2-2 ball game in the bottom of the 11th and there was a runner on first as Aaron approached the plate. Cardinal relief pitcher Billy Muffett was on the hill and Aaron was guessing breaking ball. Aaron guessed right and drilled a deep homerun to centerfield. It sent Milwaukee County Stadium into frenzy as well as the entire city of Milwaukee.⁵¹ The Braves were finally heading to the World Series, and they would face the New York Yankees. Aaron said that moment was one he had been dreaming of, "I told the writers that for the first time in my life, I was excited. What I meant was that for the first time I felt like I could let down my guard and really act excited. I've never had another feeling like that."⁵²

The next day in the newspaper the photo of Aaron being on the shoulders of his white teammates was sent around the United States. That's right, a black man, was being carried off the baseball field by four white teammates. And they actually looked very happy doing so, heck; they had just won the National League Pennant! The Little Rock high school integration crisis had been going on since September 9th, 1957. Aaron shared the front page of national media sources with the Little Rock nine. The timeline of events was very ironic. Talk about two opposite events. The Wisconsin CIO News puts the irony into their own words,

" Milwaukee's dusky Hank Aaron blasted the Braves into the World Series only a few hours after an insane mob of white supremacists took the Stars and Stripes in Little Rock and tramped it on the ground in front of Central High School....The cheers that are lifted to Negro ballplayers only dramatize the stupidity of the jeers that are directed at those few Negro kids trying to get a good education for themselves in Little Rock."⁵³

⁵¹ Wheeler and Aaron, 126

⁵² IBID., 127

⁵³ Wheeler and Aaron, 126

The Braves went on to defeat the New York Yankees in seven games to bring home the 1957 World Series to Milwaukee. Aaron was the statistical batting leader for the Braves during the World Series as he hit .393 and had three home runs; star pitcher Lew Burdette was named World Series MVP. Soon after, Aaron was named National League MVP over Stan Musial. It was official that Aaron was a son of Milwaukee. He was also beginning to realize that his role in the city and the country was going to be more than just baseball player.

1950s Milwaukee: Ground Battle of Civil Rights

The 1950s were a time of much excitement in the United States. Consumerism was truly setting in as the new “fad” in the United States. Families were moving to suburbs, buying homes, automobiles, and appliances. It really was a time of happiness for most white American families. It was a decade of advancement through pain and struggle for African American families.

In 1954 the United States Supreme Court ruled against “separate but equal” with the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision. Chief Justice Earl Warren decided that it was impossible to keep things separate and equal for white and black children. Segregation always led to inequalities in the United States. Despite this court decision, there was not a change in southern policy because there was nothing that would enforce the ruling. The Southern officials for the most part were supportive of segregation.

Milwaukee attorney James W. Dorsey, a man with a German mother and a black father was a civil rights advocate in Milwaukee in the 1950 and 1960s. He believed that human rights were not a priority of the United States until the 1950s. “It had taken the Emancipation Proclamation, a Civil War, and the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments of the Constitution to reach this point (the point of separate but equal of *Plessy V. Ferguson* in 1896)”⁵⁴ He went on to mention that there was 400 pages of legal reasoning in the 1856 *Dred Scott* case compared to just nine pages in the *Brown* decision. What this shows is that, the general knowledge and

⁵⁴ *Janesville Daily Gazette*, “Lawyer Traces Progress of Human Rights in USA” 29 April, 1958

understanding of black people from 1856 to 1954 had grown immensely.⁵⁵ The truth that they are as capable as white people had been creeping out in many different ways during that 100 year span.

One of the many ways that this truth had been leaked out is through sports and the athletes that play them. Being on an equal playing field allows a person to prove himself; if you are capable you will hold your own. Robinson, Aaron, Banks, and the many other black ball players did more than hold their own. They were dominant. Dorsey refers to Aaron's home run to win the pennant as a prime example of sports proving equality.

Even with the success and popularity that Aaron had earned in Milwaukee in the 1956 and 1957 seasons, at times he was reminded of his skin color. He lived in a suburb of Milwaukee with his wife Barbara and his oldest son Hankie. Aaron recalls stints of racism in his neighborhood.

“Mequon was semi-rural, and nearly all white. Most of the neighbors were hospitable, but there were occasional instances that reminded us that we were different. I remember walking into a neighbor's yard and the dog growling at me; the neighbor told me he wasn't used to colored people.”⁵⁶

Milwaukee despite the “happy go lucky” feels during baseball season, the city was in the middle of its own civil rights crisis. Kevin D. Smith's article thoroughly examines the Religious Civil Rights battle that was occurring Milwaukee during the 1950s. Smith describes Postwar Milwaukee as a heavily industrialized city that was home to an extremely diverse mix of

⁵⁵ IBID

⁵⁶ Wheeler and Aaron, 130

religious institutions whose members had an extensive history of social activism.⁵⁷ While these churches were clashing, there was also a rapid population increase of southern African Americans into Milwaukee during these beginning two decades of the cold war.

Milwaukee's former Socialist Mayor, Ezra Zeidler, placed race alongside socialism as the two principle issues of his 1956 run for mayor. Zeidler would go on to win his third term as Mayor of Milwaukee. Zeidler's opponents attempted to sabotage his campaign through rumors that he had put up billboards in the South to recruit black families to move to Milwaukee. Others used the attack of Socialism against him. In fact, one manufacturing firm declared they would fire any employee who voted for him in 1956.⁵⁸ The Daniel Bell murder of 1958 caused much controversy in Milwaukee. Bell, a 22 year old black male, was killed by a Milwaukee police officer on February 2nd 1958 after Bell had fled a traffic stop. The Milwaukee police said the shooting was justified. The medical examiner declared that the shooting distance was only two feet. This was to say that Bell was attacking the officer and the officer claimed that Bell had a knife. Witnesses say that the shot came from over 15 feet away.⁵⁹ Regardless of the court's decision, it caused an immediate flair of race relations within the city.

The Congressionalist's (Anti-Zeidler) was against the inflow of African Americans because they saw the migration as a threat of the ownership of the neighborhood in which their church was located but also saw it as a threat to the value of their homes. They believed when blacks would move in, their most valuable asset, the family home would lose value. This

⁵⁷ Kevin D. Smith "Breaking Faith: Religion, Americanism, and Civil Rights in Postwar Milwaukee", *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* Winter 2010 Vol. 20 p. 74

⁵⁸ *Next City Magazine* "Frank Zeidler's Milwaukee", John McCarthy Winter 2007

⁵⁹ *Associated Press* "Officer Justifiably Killed Holdup Man, Jury Decides" 15 February, 1958

was certainly an unfortunate effect of white flight in Milwaukee during the 1950s and it continued through the 1990s.⁶⁰ The confessional Lutherans (pro- Zeidler) were the ones who were in favor of social housing projects. They supported human rights, they were on the side of Daniel Bell, and they were the voice of the black civilian in Milwaukee during the late 1950s.

To say the least, Hank Aaron's first few seasons in Milwaukee were not in a utopia by any means. Many people just hear about the Milwaukee Braves and the way they rejuvenated the city, which they did. But there was also a battle on the ground over civil rights. This goes back to the diversity within the city; each ethnicity had their own religion that they brought to Milwaukee during the late 19th century and early 20th centuries. When the black migration became noticeable in the late 1940s it forced the churches to officially draw their lines. The churches who were already knowingly different from one another and the issue of African American migration and displacement was an additional issue that they could not agree on.

Aaron experienced bits and pieces of racism while living in Milwaukee but he didn't receive anything like the treatment he received during the final year of his career. His first few years in Milwaukee, he was a hitter who hit for average and not so much power. Throughout his career he developed a knack for hitting home runs. After playing for 20 years in the Major Leagues, all but his final year with the Braves organization he found himself knocking on the door of the greatest record in baseball and possibly all of sports. The record in front of him was home run and the man in front of him was Babe Ruth. The beloved Babe Ruth.

⁶⁰ Smith 80

Conclusion of a Career and Beginning of a New One

There were many fans by 1973 who were cheering for Aaron to take the lead, especially the black communities around the United States. The Braves had moved to Atlanta after the 1965 season, which brought Aaron down south once again. The hate mail that Aaron received is very well documented, the year leading up to the day Aaron broke Babe Ruth's Home Run record was a living hell for Aaron. Aaron received 100s of hate letters daily from angry southern racists who believed that the most prestigious record in Baseball needed to stay with a white man. This is almost comical when comparing the recent Home Run race that featured Barry Bonds, who was going after Aaron's record. After much suspicion, Bonds was officially charged with perjury when he lied about the use of Performance Enhancing Drugs. The record that Aaron went through hell for was given to a cheater. For a baseball purist, it makes you grit your teeth.

Hank Aaron blazed a trail for African American ball players, he gave hope to the freshly migrated African Americans in Milwaukee in the 1950s; he made people around him better. As Sandy Toland states it, what didn't he do for the game?

"He didn't flaunt it, didn't shout it out from the window of a twelve-cylinder Packard didn't spend his nights whoring around, didn't stand at home plate and watch his home runs land. Hank didn't ignore his young fans who offered only encouragement. And he didn't stop playing, coolly, intensely, in his understated way, like 'grace in a gray flannel suit' as the sportswriter Jim Murray wrote, 'like a poem with a bat in his hands.' Not when they called him "Nigger" at his home park, not when armed guards took his children to school, not when threatened again and again , to kill him, certainly not when some sportswriter suggested he stop at 713, to honor Babe Ruth."⁶¹

⁶¹ IBID 195

After his playing days, after the harassment he had been the focus of over the past 25 years. Aaron became an advocate for civil rights. He scrapped his timid youthful personality of the young National League MVP in 1957; he recycled it for a person with a strong voice that people would listen to.

In 1982, Aaron returned to the city where his professional career began, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Aaron spoke at UW- Eau Claire on January 25th 1982. He had recently been inducted into the Major League Hall of Fame, the audience was expecting a speech about baseball but that is not what they received. The speech is now titled, "Courage to Succeed". Aaron declares that there are too many selfish people in the world. From athletes to teachers, there was a selfish trend that was spreading across the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s. There was the oil crisis that was causing inflation, making everyday goods more expensive, and the result of this was selfish attitudes from all people. Aaron challenges the students at UW-Eau Claire to find an alternative for the "in it for me attitude".

"Today our Nation faces a more severe test of its will and its future; and it comes at a time when we have been seen less united than ever before; children against parents, student against teacher, friend against friend, and government against the people. It is an awesome task we face, pulling our society back together, but it is a task we must face; we have no choice. And the burden of our nation falls to you, and the generation after you. You are here at this center of learning in order to prepare yourself to face and meet that challenge. You will discover in time that the challenge come not nearly as from without as it does within."⁶²

Aaron states that, "...If you are not a part of the solution, you a part of the problem.."
and these words actually take meaning when they come from Aaron's mouth; he desegregated

⁶² *Courage to Succeed*, Hank Aaron Video Recording, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, 25 January, 1982

baseball in the Deep South, he played baseball in Milwaukee during a battle between churches over civil rights and he was still the best. Aaron relates the issues of selfishness and not standing up for the right thing to the slave trade.

“When the good people of the world refused to disallow the Slave Trade, millions of Africans were either killed or captured and African civilization was set back hundreds of years. The racial segregation and discrimination that follows persists from the 1880s to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, until hundreds of thousands of Americans had the courage to stand up to the force of evil and tell them that segregation was not only wrong but it was illegal. We need only to look at other times, other places to see the needless oppression of people by other people, Nazi Germany, Italy, South Africa, Uganda....Oppression knows no time, no place, color or limitation to the extent that any human being is rejected or denied opportunity because of their religion; hell in contempt, because of their sex, to that extent we are all victim.”⁶³

These are the words of a ball player, not a politician, not an educator, but a **black** ballplayer at that. Not only are his words knowledgeable, they are inspirational. For a kid who was known for his humbleness and timid nature, there was some point in his career where he realized he was no longer just a ballplayer. Was it when he broke the color barrier of baseball in the Deep South? Was it when he hit a walk-off home run that sent Milwaukee to the 1957 World Series? Was it the day he bypassed Babe in the home run record books? The point is that there are many instances in Hank’s life that he didn’t settle for average; he was a part of the solution, not a part of the problem. I do not think it can be said that Milwaukee’s black community depended on Hank Aaron, but I do think it can be said that Aaron gave them hope and gave them reason to stay in Milwaukee. Hank Aaron was a pioneer in the United States Civil Rights movement, a pioneer in baseball, and a pioneer in the Milwaukee civil rights movement.

⁶³ IBID

Chart 1A

Black Population Grown In Milwaukee 1930-1970

	Black Population	% of total Milwaukee Pop.	% increase
1930	7,501	1.3	236% (From 1920)
1940	8,821	1.5	18%
1950	21,772	3.4	147%
1960	62,458	8.4	187%
1970	105,088	14.65	68% ⁶⁴

ⁱ I was able to access the online archives of the Chicago Defender and the Associated Press. UWEC Professor Robert Gough allowed me to use his user name for the Defender, which otherwise has limited access and I was very much appreciative of that. I accessed the Associated Press archive via UWEC's McIntyre Library's database "Access Newspaper Archive". I decided to focus my media research on the 1955-1957 seasons. Aaron's first seasons in Milwaukee and the season's that preceded his stardom and familiarity.

ⁱⁱ For non-baseball readers, a Strike Zone is the zone in which an umpire calls balls and strikes. It is generally from a player knees to the players' chest, or the letters on the jersey.

⁶⁴ Geib, 231

Primary Sources

Bisher, Furman. "Born to Play Ball." *Saturday Evening Post* vol. 229, no. issue 8 (1956): p30-76.

This article from the Saturday Evening Post was an extremely racist article. Despite Furman Bisher being from Aaron's home town, he remained on the southern, conservative, racist point of view in his article that describes Aaron's baseball talents.

Chicago Defender, June 25, 1955- March 27, 1957

The Chicago Defender was an invaluable resource for me while writing this paper. The Defender is one of the longest running African-American ran newspaper in United States history. I was able to compare and contrast African-American vs. White, mainstream newspapers. I was able to access these excellent articles through the online archive on the Defender website. I took a lot away from the Chicago Defender articles, mostly the fact that mainstream newspapers did not cover African American athletics unless they were icons such as Hank Aaron and other 1950s black baseball stars.

Florida Times-Union, April 1, 1999.

This article does an excellent job of putting into words what occurred during Aaron's first game with the Jacksonville Braves. I quoted Foley in my paper because his wording was very relevant and I couldn't put it into better words myself.

Janesville Gazette, April 29, 1958.

The Lawyer that the title speaks of is Milwaukee Attorney James Dorsey. In his article that calls that Aaron's game-winning home run in 1957 over the Dodgers played a role in speeding up the Civil Rights movement throughout the United States.

Oshkosh Northwestern, April 18, 1956.

This article that was posted in the Oshkosh Northwestern covers the game in which Aaron hit his first home run in 1956. This is another article I used to describe the way the media covered Aaron early in his career. The title says it all in this article, which comes off as arrogant, a characteristic that does not describe Aaron.

Racine Journal Times, December 27, 1956 - January 27, 1957.

This article that I took from the Racine Journal Times is a great example of media impacting the perception of a player. Aaron came off of a great 1956 season, and the increase in salary was most definitely warranted. The way the Racine Journal Times words the title is the point that I commented on

in my paper.ⁱⁱ

Sheboygan Press, July 31, 1956- February 15, 1958.

This article comes after Aaron originally called for a 100% raise. He received a large increase in salary but, not the amount he had originally called for. I used this article to get better understanding of the relationship between Aaron and the Braves organization. I also took an article from this press which covered the Daniel Bell murder.

McCarthy, John. "Frank Zeidler's Milwaukee." *Next City Magazine*, winter 2007

This magazine article gives further insight to Mayor Zeidler's time in Milwaukee during the 1950s. I was able to take interesting details away from this article about Zeidler's policy on civil rights, which was one of the debated topics of the 1956 election.

Media Development Center, University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire. "Courage to Succeed."
University of Eau Claire, 1982.

This video is a speech by Hank Aaron given in 1982 on the UW-Eau Claire Campus. This was a great resource for me because it ties my paper together. Aaron speaks much about human rights, the things that are wrong in the world and very little about baseball. This shows that he has evolved from a baseball great, to something greater.

Secondary Sources

Aaron, Henry, Wheeler, Lonnie. *I Had a Hammer*. New York: Harper Collins, 1991.

This book is an autobiography of Aaron's career. Wheeler co-authored the book and he set up introductions before every chapter. This book was my go-to resource throughout my paper. Aaron was very specific about his emotions and point of view about different situations in his career. I used this book for nearly every part of my paper but most specifically, Aaron's time in Jacksonville and Milwaukee.

Baldwin, Stan, Jenkins, Jerry, Aaron, Henry. *Bad Henry*. Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1974.

This book was another book that Aaron helped write. However, this book was printed in 1974, at the very tail end of his career. This book focuses on the treatment Aaron by southern baseball fans from early in his career to the home run chase of 1973. I used *I Had a Hammer* more in this paper because it is a newer publication.

Geib, Paul. "From Mississippi to Milwaukee: A Case Study of Southern Black Migration to Milwaukee, 1940-1970." *The Journal of Negro History* 83, no. 4 (1998): 229-248.

This publication from the Journal of Negro History was extremely valuable for my research. I relate this same black migration to the play of Hank Aaron. I make connections between the two phenomena's.

Jones, Patrick D. *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.

This very recent publication written by Dr. Patrick Jones was very helpful for me. Jones makes comparisons between Milwaukee and Selma, AL. The book is very well researched and I was able to take a lot away from it.

Lowenfish, Lee. *Branch Rickey: Baseball's Ferocious Gentleman*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007.

When working with a "baseball, civil rights" topic, it should be a requirement to mention Branch Rickey. Rickey was a true abolitionist. I tell the story of Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey in my early chapter, African American Baseball History: Prelude to Hammerin' Hank.

Poling, Jerry. *A Summer up North: Henry Aaron and the Legend of Eau Claire Baseball*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.

This local publication was a great asset for my research. Aaron played his first professional baseball in Eau Claire, WI. This work by Jerry Poling does an excellent job of telling stories of Aaron's time in Eau Claire, I used this work in my chapter: Aaron's Path to Milwaukee.

Smith, Kevin D. "Breaking Faith: Religion, Americanism, and Civil Rights in Postwar Milwaukee." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 20 (2010).

This very recent article published in *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* was extremely beneficial for me. I gained greater knowledge of the civil rights battle that was going on in the city of Milwaukee in the 1950s. I used this information most specifically in my chapter, *1950s Milwaukee: Ground Battle of Civil Rights*.

Toland, Sandy. *Me and Hank*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

This book published by Simon and Schuster gave an interesting perspective on Aaron. Toland was a childhood fan of Aaron. Twenty Five years later he wrote a book on Aaron's accomplishments and his struggles. I quoted Toland in my final chapter, he puts Aaron's accomplishments for the game of baseball into his own words and I found it to be excellent.

Trotter, Joe William. *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945*. Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985.

This 1985 book by Dr. Joe Trotter was a go-to research tool for me while writing this paper. Trotter does a great job of chronologically writing of the history of Black's in Milwaukee. This book was crucial for my background research of Milwaukee.

Tygiel, Jules. *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Jules Tygiel is a well-known baseball historian. This book helps me describe the path Jackie Robinson took to breaking the baseball color barrier and how this act led to Aaron's act of doing the same in the south.

_____. *Past Time: Baseball as History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

This is another great work of Tygiel. This is a work that has a broad focus. I took away a better overall understanding of the history of baseball in the United States. I used this book in my introduction, describing what baseball means to the America.