

Handout #2: Debate

In 1945, only 4% of American businesses were owned by African Americans. However, the owners of the Negro Leagues teams in the same period were almost entirely African American. Many have argued that the Negro Leagues provided a rare avenue for Black entrepreneurs to achieve financial success.

For decades, the owners of Major League Baseball honored a policy referred to as the “Gentlemen’s Agreement.” The “Gentlemen’s Agreement” was an unwritten pact between all of the owners holding that none of them would sign African American ballplayers to Major League teams. For decades, when the issue of segregation was brought up, the owners would claim that if they were to scout a Black ballplayer who could compete in their league they would happily sign him. This was obviously not true.

“These Negro associations give men like me a puncher’s chance. White baseball be damned.”

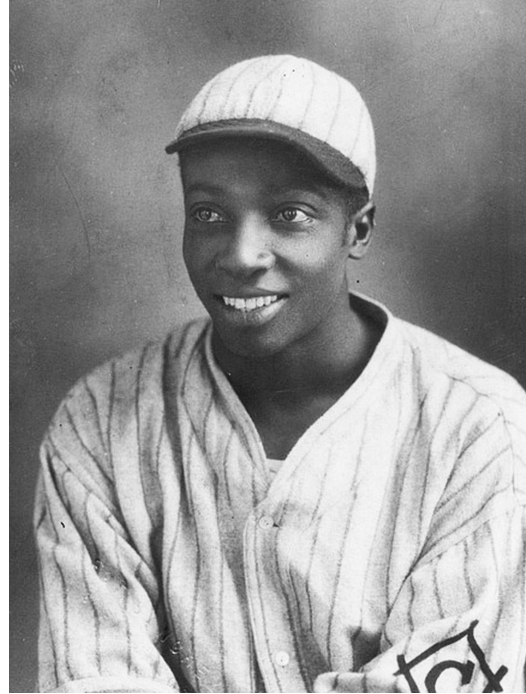
– Andrew “Rube” Foster,
Negro Leagues Executive



Rube Foster

“They [MLB owners], used to say, ‘If we find a good Black player, we’ll sign him.’ They was lying.”

– Cool Papa Bell



Cool Papa Bell

“I can’t own a restaurant that white people will eat in. I can’t sell no clothes that white people will wear, but we know white people gonna show up on Sunday to see these Crawfords play.”

– Gus Greenlee,
Owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords



Gus Greenlee

“The only change [in joining the Negro Leagues] is that baseball has turned me from a second class citizen to a second class immortal.”

– Satchel Paige



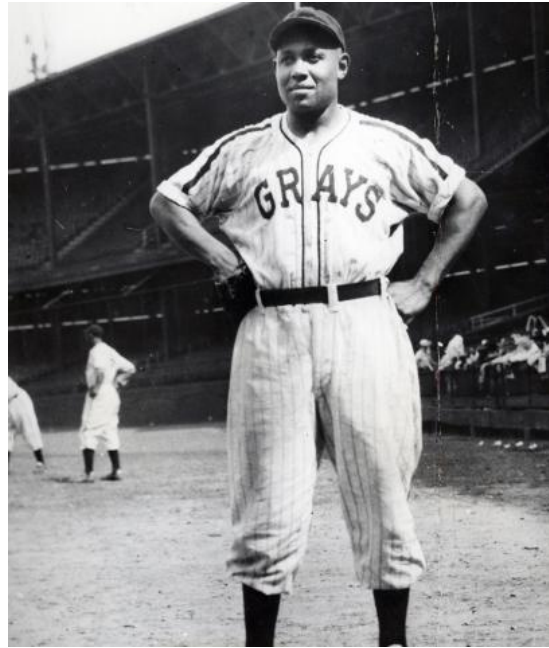
Satchel Paige

“Baseball was in some ways a realm of freedom for Black Americans. Different rules applied. In the factories you didn’t see Black owners. With the ball teams you did. In the factories you didn’t see Black ‘stars.’ On the baseball field you did. The promise of the North was nowhere more evident than in the world of baseball. It was very, very important symbolically — something happened on the field that everyone hoped could happen in all of American life. And of course there was more of it in the North.”

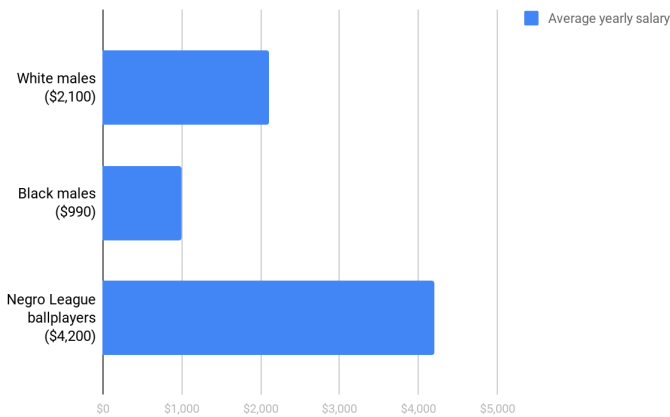
– David Christie, Historian

“We in the Negro Leagues felt like we were contributing something to baseball, too, when we were playing. We played with a round ball, and we played with a round bat. And we wore baseball uniforms, and we thought that we were making a contribution to baseball. We loved the game, and we liked to play it.”

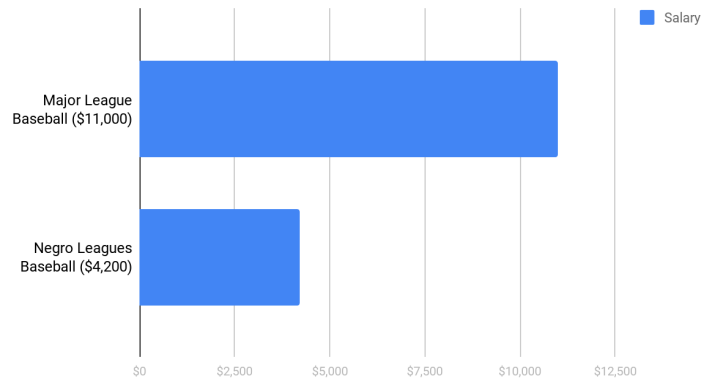
– Buck Leonard



Buck Leonard



1945 Average Yearly Salary in the U.S



1945 Average Yearly Salary for Professional Baseball Players