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Foreword

Baseball is a noble game, a game of tradition, of allegiance and camaraderie. It is played at an unhurried pace, with no clock. Baseball has generally avoided the physical combativeness, the confrontational style, and the demonstrative behavior often exhibited in professional football, ice hockey, and basketball. For more than a century, from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, it was unchallenged as our "national pastime."

The character of baseball is consistent with traditional American Indian traits and attitudes toward sport. Consequently, young Indians "took" to the game as soon as it was introduced to them in boarding schools during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. They quickly became involved in and contributed importantly to the early development of baseball in this country.

In this book Professor Powers-Beck presents the most extensive compilation of Indian baseball players and related information ever assembled. Using a vast array of resources from official baseball documents, published materials, and commentaries from historians, he tells the story of the successes and the travails of Indians in baseball from the 1890s until 1945, concentrating on the earlier years when regulatory standards were less perfect than they are today. This book is about Indians in organized baseball at all levels, not just the Major Leagues.

Reading this book is a genuine treat not only for the baseball fan but for those persons interested in the personal struggles of Indians in the non-Indian world. It is well crafted and reveals a keen understanding of the subtleties of the baseball world and a sensitivity to the Indian personality. The author not only provides information about well-known successful Indian Major League players but also presents interesting profiles of little-known players.

Perhaps most importantly, the author exposes societal prejudices during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and how those attitudes became a part of Indian/non-Indian interaction on and off the baseball field.

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This book assists the reader in understanding the pressures encountered by Indians in adjusting to the game and to life in the non-Indian world.

The author puts into social context the personal lives of a selected number of Indian baseball players, both well known as well as several "cup-of-coffee" players (those who spent very limited time in the Major Leagues; that is, only long enough to have a cup of coffee). He describes Indian responses to abusive teammates, opponents, fans, and sportswriters – and the pressures and expectations to play the role of stereotypical Indians as conceived by non-Indians.

In the minds of most observers, the entry of Jackie Robinson into Major League Baseball in 1947 marked the beginning of integration and racial issues in baseball. Dozens of volumes and commentaries have been written about this dramatic milestone in baseball and in American social life. The entry of American Indians into baseball during the previous half-century and the persistent racism and abuse directed toward them is not so well known. Powers-Beck brings this pre–Jackie Robinson racism into focus. Anti-Indian behavior was in some instances bolder and more vocal than anti-black behavior.

Though not legally prohibited from playing organized baseball, as were African Americans prior to 1947, American Indians encountered a reception marked by both curiosity and open hostility. This book makes it clear that all Indian players, from the most prominent to the least, faced this treatment. Hostility revealed itself in persistent taunts such as "Go back to the reservation," "Dumb Injun," "Redskin," "Kemosabe," "Heap big Injun," "war hoops," and similar comments. Such expressions were issued both in personal encounters and in the public press. Of course, it is a well-established tradition that all baseball players, especially rookies, are "razzed." With the Indian players this treatment took on a racial tone that was especially painful for sensitive young Indians in a strange climate.

On the other hand, there were seemingly innocent expressions based on curiosity or fascination. For example, practically all Indians were referred to as "Chief" not necessarily as a derogatory term nor out of belief that they were real chiefs of their tribes. Rather, it was a means of identifying or labeling the Indian. Though it was not something they preferred, most Indians did not seriously object to being called "Chief." Some sportswriters had fun with Indian images, creating a near-burlesque climate with comments such as "the Chief is on the warpath," "add another scalp to his belt," "put on war paint," and so on. Of course, early in the twentieth century, political correctness had not asserted itself.

In a move widely acclaimed as "honoring" American Indians, the Cleve-

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land American League team was renamed the "Indians" in 1915, reportedly to pay tribute to Louis Sockalexis, who played with the team several years earlier. In another "positive" depiction Moses Yellow Horse became the source for a rallying cry for the Pittsburgh Pirates. Yellow Horse had only a modest record for two or three years as pitcher, but when the team faced a crisis on the field, the chant "Bring in Yellow Horse" rang out through the stadium whether or not there was any likelihood that he could solve the problem. The exhortation appeared to be based on fun, not reality.

Powers-Beck points out that each Indian player developed his own style in dealing with overt and covert racism. Charles (Chief) Bender, a Hall of Fame pitcher with the Philadelphia Athletics, referred to such critics as "foreigners," while others were openly hostile or resorted to negative, sometimes self-destructive behavior. Perhaps the widely reported "drunken Indian" was to some extent the result of constant racism encountered by these very Indians.

This book presents authoritative and interesting biographical reviews of the most noteworthy Indian baseball players. It also provides an interesting analysis of their personalities, which may have been a factor in their efforts to cope with life in a very competitive non-Indian world. For example, Chief Bender was most fortunate to play for the gentle and supportive Connie Mack of the Philadelphia Athletics. Their good relations were mutual. In contrast, Jim Thorpe played for the fiery John McGraw of the New York Giants. After several years as an all-American football player at Carlisle, followed by two Olympic Gold Medal wins, Thorpe was a confident and strong-willed individual when he began playing for McGraw. He bristled at McGraw's dictatorial style, and the two of them frequently clashed. On the other hand, John "Chief" Meyers, catcher for the Giants, played for McGraw with less tension. Consequently, he had a more successful career, playing in almost every game for the Giants over an eight-year period and earned the title "Iron Man" because of his tendency never to miss a game. Extensive reviews are provided for other players who had varying degrees of success in relating to managers and other players.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American Indians earned a reputation as "natural athletes," achieving extraordinary successes in football (for example, the nationally prominent Carlisle Indian football teams of the early twentieth century), long distance running (Boston Marathon and other world-championship running performances), and in baseball (for example, Bender, Meyers, Jim Thorpe, and Sockalexis, all prior to 1920). John Steckbeck, the Carlisle Indian School historian, pointed out the great success of Indian athletes early in the century and concluded

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that they "then vanished from the sporting scene forever." While Steckbeck perhaps overstated the demise of the Indian athlete, the truth is that there were few noteworthy success stories, especially in baseball, following the first quarter of the twentieth century.

The reasons for the decline of American Indian baseball excellence following 1925 are complex. The author of this book suggests that the hostile treatment of the players may have been a factor. Perhaps the impact of this treatment extended back to the home communities of the players, thus discouraging others. The Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania produced six Major League players then closed in 1918. The downscaling of the Haskell Institute athletic program in Kansas no doubt diminished opportunities for the development of future athletes.

This book chronicles the careers of Bender and Meyers, and mentions "Superchief" Allie Reynolds, each of whom achieved distinction as being among the very best players of their eras. Yet it also presents other Indian players of legendary talent who did not fulfill their promise. For example, reports from credible observers list Louis Sockalexis among the most talented players of all time. Hughie Jennings, a Major League manager at the time stated that "Sockalexis should have been the greatest player of all time." Similarly, Moses Yellow Horse was widely reported as being the strongest, hardest-throwing pitcher of his day, comparable to Walter "Big Train" Johnson. Sadly, neither of these players achieved great success in Major League baseball. One can only speculate as to the reasons for this. Perhaps it was their inability to deal effectively with the hostile treatment that they received in the non-Indian world. It was also widely reported that their skills were diminished by alcohol consumption. Perhaps these factors were interrelated.

In almost all cases the Indian baseball player was a loner on the team, having no other Indian teammates for support. In contrast, following the entry of Jackie Robinson into major league baseball, there quickly developed a critical mass of other African American players who provided mutual support. Years later the same occurred with Latino players in Major League Baseball.

A compelling aspect of this book is the presentation of the careers of several players who achieved great visibility and almost legendary status as Minor Leaguers. Full chapters are presented on Moses Yellow Horse, Louis Leroy, and George Howard Johnson, each of whom had great Minor League careers but spent only a short period in the majors.

Powers-Beck weaves Indian and baseball folklore into personal profiles on the Indian players. The informality of baseball and the lack of rigid

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controls, particularly in the early days, allowed for the creation of many interesting anecdotes.

This is a monumental work with significance for both baseball and American Indians. The concluding chapter on the portrayal of the American Indian in today's sports in the form of mascots, names, paraphernalia, and behaviors provides a fitting conclusion, showing that the issue of racism in sport continues.

Joseph B. Oxendine

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1

"Chief" – The American Indian Integration of Baseball

"No matter where we play I go through the same ordeal, and at the present time I am so used to it that at times I forget to smile at my tormentors, believing it to be a part of the game."

Louis F. Sockalexis, Interview, June 19, 1897

They were called "Chief": the dozens of American Indians who played Major League Baseball from 1897 to 1945, the hundreds who played Minor League ball, and the thousands who played collegiate and semipro ball. While the story of the African American integration of baseball has been told in great detail, the story of the Indian initiation into professional baseball, starting with Louis Francis Sockalexis in the spring of 1897, has not yet been fully told. Although Indians did not face the same obstacles to participation in professional baseball as did blacks at the turn of the century, they too endured an integration experience that began with the derisive nickname of "Chief" and extended to many other forms of racism. In one chapter of *Baseball: The People's Game*, Harold Seymour began to tell that story:

> Of the two races that fared worst in the United States, the blacks and the Indians, the Indians came off better as far as baseball was concerned. Unlike the blacks who, except for a short space, were barred from the House of Baseball until after World War II, the Indians at least had access to its basement, from which they could aspire to its upper story. For Organized Baseball accepted Indians and rejected blacks. Prejudice toward blacks was racial, but toward Indians it was mainly cultural.[1]

And while Seymour and his spouse Dorothy Mills certainly deserve great credit for their seminal work, the analogy of "the House of Baseball," with the basement for Indians and the outbuildings for blacks, is misleading as well as illuminating.

With all respect to Seymour, the prejudice against American Indians athletes was *both* racial and cultural. Indian players were indeed recruited by

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professional clubs for their athletic talents and for their popularity as ticket-sales drawing cards, but even the Indians who reached baseball's "upper story" could not escape racism. The first ballplayers of the twentieth century to hear "Nigger!" from the stands of Major League stadiums were not African Americans but were Indians like John Meyers and Jay Clarke, and they also heard "Back to the Reservation!," "Dog soup!," and other jeers. The legends like Sockalexis, Jim Thorpe, and Charles Albert Bender and the overlooked veterans of many Minor League seasons, like Frank Jude, Louis Leroy, and Elijah Pinnance, were all submerged in the cauldron of racism, far different from the American myth of baseball's supposed "melting pot." These players triumphed in enduring the integration experience of name-calling, race-baiting, mob mockery, and mistreatment by players, managers, and fans, all part of the pervasive racism of America's "Progressive" Era.

Apart from Seymour's pioneering chapter, historians and scholars of American Indian studies have seldom documented the history of American Indians in collegiate or professional baseball. In a classic ethnological study, Stewart Culin briefly noted that Navahos imprisoned at Bosque Redondo in 1863 had incorporated elements of baseball in their own game of *aqejólyedi* (run around ball), and social historian Patty Loew has recently written of the rich baseball traditions among the Lake Superior Chippewa.[2] Many studies of government boarding schools have, however, recognized the prominence of athletic programs at those schools: Michael C. Coleman included sporting activities such as baseball among the "extracurricular activities" that "motivated even students who were critical of the [boarding] school" to continue their education; Genevieve Bell indicated that Carlisle Indian Industrial School's athletic accomplishments "became symbols of the institution and the focus of pride for students and former students alike"; and John Bloom reported that sports in boarding-school athletic programs "created a context for the celebration of intertribal cooperation and identity, sometimes on a scale rarely ever seen before."[3] But it is a rare study like Seymour's chapter or Ellen Staurowsky's 1998 article, "An Act of Honor or Exploitation?," that actually treats the history of American Indian players in professional baseball. Staurowsky's study of Louis Sockalexis examined the renaming of the Cleveland Naps in 1915 as the Cleveland Indians and found that team officials did not, as once claimed, conduct a fan contest to rename the team or single out Sockalexis for honor.[4]

Since Staurowsky's article, several biographies have broken the silence about the pioneering feats of American Indian athletes in professional baseball. Todd Fuller's *Sixty Feet Six Inches and Other Distances from Home*, a life

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of the Pawnee pitcher Moses Yellow Horse, was published in 2002 by Holy Cow Press of Duluth, Minnesota. In this colorful if eccentric biography, Fuller includes his own poems alongside Pawnees' stories about the Pirates relief pitcher. *Sixty Feet Six Inches* perpetuates the common misconception that Yellow Horse was the "first fullblood Indian in [the] Major League," but it still makes a very valuable point: "YellowHorse's story, like that of other Indian ballplayers, touches on [significant] aspects of American culture and history, including assimilation, identity, and survival."[5] Later in 2002 came three notable biographies of Indian baseball players: David L. Fleitz's *Louis Sockalexis: The First Cleveland Indian*, Royse Parr and Bob Burke's *Allie Reynolds: Super Chief*, and Patrick and Terrence McGrath's *Bright Star in a Shadowy Sky: The Story of Indian Bob Johnson*. Fleitz's biography is especially important as it tells the story of the Cleveland outfielder who began the American Indian integration of Major League Baseball. Fleitz examines both Sockalexis's meteoric rise and sudden fall in historical detail, praising him as a "pioneer" of integration, as "the first non-Caucasian in the National League," even while recounting his struggle with alcoholism. Although Fleitz is concerned with Sockalexis primarily as a ball player and only secondarily as an integrator, his biography is well documented and points up the need for a fuller study of the American Indian integration of baseball.[6]

This introductory chapter, which is historical and documentary in nature, will show that professional baseball was a crucible of *both* racial and cultural prejudices for the first generations of Native players, and this crucible was often heated by the educational programs of federal Indian boarding schools. In documenting the American Indian integration of baseball, this book uses newspapers, periodicals, correspondence, interviews, and early Indian school accounts to examine the relationship of baseball and American Indian identity. This first chapter will provide contexts for the study of the American Indian integration of professional baseball, focusing especially on the federal boarding schools, Indian baseball traditions, and Sockalexis's integration experience. The second and third chapters will examine the institutional history of Indians playing baseball in more detail by focusing on the Carlisle Indian Industrial School's baseball program – a school that sent seven players to the big leagues – and on baseball's best Indian barnstorming team, the Nebraska Indians. Later chapters will document the lives of three stars (Bender, Meyers, and Thorpe, chapter 4) and three forgotten heroes of baseball's Indian integration (Louis Leroy, chapter 5; George H. Johnson, chapter 6; and Moses Yellow Horse, chapter 7). An epilogue provides a final

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commentary on the long shadows of anti-Indian caricature, which stretch across baseball history from Sockalexis's debut in 1897 to the Chief Wahoo logo of today's Cleveland Indians.

PLAYERS CALLED "CHIEF"

At the turn of the twentieth century, William A. Phelon, a Chicago baseball writer, glibly hailed the segregated sport's power to transcend all economic, social, and racial differences: "Do you wish to see the one spot where the nations meet and mix on equal terms, where pride of race and birth and ancestry are laid aside? . . . Go to a ball park."[7] For Phelon, the crowded baseball stadium was the epitome of the American melting pot. Yet, when the same writer described American Indians in baseball, he did so in combative terms with the stereotype of the "stone-faced Indian":

> The Indian, sad, morose, receives applause
> Without a smile upon his Sphinx-like face,
> And, inwardly, thinks he gets even when
> He draws big wampum from the pale-skinned race![8]

When Native Americans played ball outside of reservation and Indian school fields in this era, they often faced large raucous crowds and choruses of war-whoops, "ki-yi-yi's," and screams of "Redskin," "Indian," and "Back to the Reservation!" Rudy York, a slugger of Cherokee heritage, who was described disparagingly in newspapers as "part Indian, part first baseman," noted aptly, "Any time an Indian puts on a baseball uniform he becomes about six times as much of a character as any other player." Sadly, the popular fascination with American Indian players was countervailed by a harsh strain of anti-Indian bigotry. So York added, "All an Indian's got to do is be seen drinking a beer and he's drunk."[9]

Starting with Sockalexis in 1897, many Indian players in professional baseball, especially those with clear affiliations with tribes and ties to reservations, were nicknamed "Chief." In addition to "Chief" Charles Albert Bender and "Chief" John Tortes Meyers, there were "Chief" Moses Yellow Horse, "Chief" George H. Johnson, "Chief" Louis Leroy, "Chief" Ike Kahdot, "Chief" Euel Moore, "Chief" Ben Tincup, "Chief" Elon Hogsett, "Chief" Pryor McBee, "Chief" Emmett Bowles, "Chief" Jim Bluejacket, and "Superchief" Allie Reynolds, among others. Historian John P. Rossi called the epithet "a perfect reflection of the naiveté and racism of the age."[10] The adjective *perfect* sounds very much out of place with the noun *racism*, but there is no doubt of the racist effect of the epithet. Joseph Oxendine,

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the author of *American Indian Sports Heritage* and a Lumbee from North Carolina, was himself called "Chief" as a Minor League Baseball player in the early 1950s. He explains:

> It is really used by non-Indians to say, "Hey, you're an Indian. Therefore, that's how I can define you and keep you in your place." . . . They used to call me "Chief" because I was the only Indian in school [college]. . . . Nobody believed that you were chief of a tribe. . . . Billy Mills, the long-distance runner, reacted very testily to people calling him "Chief." Most Indians do not want to be called "Chief" because it demeans the significance of the [tribal] chief, and it's a constant reminder, like saying, "Hey, Indian." You don't mind being known as an Indian, but you don't want it to be your whole identity.[11]

In the early decades of the century, it appeared virtually impossible for a baseball player of admitted Native origin to be known popularly as anything but "Chief."

When, for example, Arthur Lee Daney, the Choctaw pitcher and Haskell Institute star, played for the Philadelphia A's in 1928, his coach Kid Gleason thought even "Chief Daney" didn't sound like enough of "an Indian name": "He said he was going to give me an Indian name. He said he once knew a pitcher named Whitehorn, so I became Chief Whitehorn."[12] Most of Daney's teammates called him "Chief Whitehorn," except for Ty Cobb, who called him "Chief Coolem Off," a mocking reference to Daney's fiery temper as a young man. Certainly, the "Chief" epithet was not meant to honor American Indian identity but to appropriate and cartoonize it as an "Other" in the manner of the cigar-store Indian or the Wild West show Indian.[13]

Another example is the case of Elijah Edward Pinnance (Ojibwe), the first full-blood American Indian to play in a regular season game in the majors, a feat he accomplished on September 14, 1903, pitching for the Philadelphia Athletics at Washington against the Senators.[14] On this occasion, "Chief" Pinnance received a second nickname, which mocked the pronunciation of his last name: "As soon as Pinnance stepped to the rubber he was christened 'Peanuts' by the bleacherites and this name will probably stick to him for all time."[15] When Pinnance was asked by a Washington reporter about the new nickname, he deflected the question with a gracious but dark sense of humor: "Why should that name annoy me? I'll be roasted more or less, and from what I've been able to observe, the roasting process vastly improves the peanut." While many rookie players were subject to hazing in this period, the same newspaper story contained an astonishingly ignorant and racist comment about Pinnance and Bender by a "prominent [white] ball player": "I don't think it looks right for these foreigners to be breaking into the

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game."[16] In effect, the racism of white fans, writers, and players had made foreign America's original peoples.

EARLY HISTORY OF AMERICAN INDIANS IN BASEBALL

At the turn of the twentieth century, many American Indians commonly described as "Western Indians" or "Blanket Indians" still had limited access to Seymour's House of Baseball as a professional enterprise. Missionaries, traders, and neighboring baseball clubs were, however, introducing the sport on reservations, and some American Indians were taking to the game. In an admonition to the Dakota Association in 1887, Eli Abraham, a Santee Sioux, noted the fitness of Indian youths for both baseball and schooling: "Our boys like to take exercise in playing base ball, and I have noticed that when the base ball clubs of white young men from the towns around come in to play ball with them, the white young men get beaten; or when they try their speed with our boys in foot races, they also get beaten. And it seems to me if that our young men can be rightly instructed, they are sure to make progress."[17] Likewise, "Apache Indians captured and jailed at Fort Sill with their famous chief Geronimo, played baseball under the watchful eye of Army guards."[18] Yet not until Apaches like Asa Daklugie were transferred from Ft. Marion (a POW camp in St. Augustine, Florida) to classrooms in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, did baseball hold social and professional promise for them.

Sporadically, American Indians began to try out for Minor League teams in the 1880s in New York, Michigan, Illinois, and Nebraska. Henry Legg, described by newspapers as a Sioux (band unknown) from South Dakota, was one such player. He came to Illinois to play for the Decatur and Danville teams in the short-lived Central State League in 1888. Playing second base, catcher, and occasionally shortstop and right field, Legg was praised for doing "great work as a backstop," but after the Decatur team folded in June, and the Danville team in July, the paper reported, "Bro. Legg is again adrift."[19] According to Decatur player-manager Jerry Harrington, Legg's teammates invented a mock-Sioux name for him – "Rats-in-the-Garret" or "Rats" for short.[20] Still opportunities like Henry Legg's, such as they were, were not available to all Indians even after the turn of the century. When amateur baseball leagues appeared in Alaska in the early 1900s, for example, the Gwichin and Han peoples were actively segregated from Anglo indoor and outdoor baseball clubs. While white clubs played baseball games during Independence Day and Empire Day in the Klondike, Indians were excluded

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