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Carlucci, Ashford, and Motley, Civil Rights Pathfinders

Caroline Lester’s story of hidden history in Alaska, presented above, brings to mind another story of hidden history in the then territory and in nearby Canada, that of Cesare “CeCe” Carlucci. Before he died in 2008, Carlucci told me, while he was in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during World War II, he helped build the 1,400-mile Alaska-Canadian Highway (ALCAN) Highway from the United States through Canada to the then territory of Alaska. There, segregated white troops and black troops worked on the highway by day. Carlucci arranged campfires and evening meals with the white and black troops together, unsegregated. Commanding officers looked the other way, perhaps because Carlucci’s risky, but thoughtful acts were enhancing morale among all the troops and improving productivity. The highway was finished in 1942. It was used as a military supply route throughout the remainder of World War II. It was not opened to the public until 1948.¹ It was another decade before Alaska became a state on January 3, 1959.

Carlucci’s story doesn’t end there. After the war, he went on to become the only umpire in the Pacific Coast League (PCL) Hall of Fame. He umpired more than 2,500 games. More importantly, Carlucci, a California resident, mentored two black, fellow PCL umpires, Emmett Ashford and Bob Motley, a former Negro Leagues umpire. The latter two men believed themselves in competition to become the first black umpire in the Major League Baseball

¹ That same year, 1948, three years after World War II ended, President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981, creating the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services. The order mandated the desegregation of the U.S. military, “Executive Order 9981, Desegregating the Military,” Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument, National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/executive-order-9981.htm#:~:text=On%20July%2026%2C%201948%2C%20President,desegregation%20of%20the%20U.S.%20military.>

(MLB). They were right. Ashford, a graduate of Chapman University, prevailed and joined the big leagues in 1966. I saw him umpire many times, in both the PCL and MLB. I believe he remains the most agile and colorful umpire in the game's history.

In 2005, the AAA minor league all-star game between the Pacific Coast League and the International League was held at Raley Field in Sacramento, home of the River Cats (and soon for the next three years, the former Oakland A's). Branch Rickey III, Bob Hemond, executive vice president, Sacramento River Cats, and I, convened a memorial luncheon in Old Sacramento for the late Emmett Ashford. All four game umpires attended, as did Adrienne Ashford, the old umpire's daughter, and many other baseball notables, judges, and lawyers. Terry Flanigan unveiled his large portrait of Ashford as he appeared while umpiring a game, alert to call the action. The portrait hung in Raley Field during the festivities leading up to and during the all-star game. The PCL won the game, 11–5. It was televised nationally.



Terry Flanigan's painting of Emmett Ashford, Major League Baseball's first black umpire. Published with Terry Flanigan's permission.

In 2008, I invited Carlucci, 90, and Motley, 84, to serve on a panel, “Baseball and Freedom: The Roots of Order and Liberty, the story of baseball’s umpires,” to be moderated by Judge William Shubb, U.S. District Court, Eastern District, California. The panel was to be the 3-hour opening night that year for the Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture, conducted annually by the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. Both men accepted. Neither could afford the trip and wanted to take their wives. I personally bought airline tickets and reserved hotel rooms in Cooperstown for both couples. Those four airline tickets and hotel reservations were never used. The night before everyone was set to fly to Cooperstown, Carlucci was hospitalized by a stomach ailment and Motley broke his leg. Neither man made it to Cooperstown. Carlucci had never been in a hospital before. He never came home from this one. Motley recovered. Opening night went on without either man. Judge Shubb asked questions of Motley’s son, Byron, a prominent singer, songwriter, filmmaker, photographer, author, and lecturer, and “of” Carlucci. In the latter instance, with prior knowledge of the judge’s questions, videographers cut Carlucci’s “answers” from three hours of an interview videotaped a few weeks before he was hospitalized. The new program was constructed overnight. It was not our best opening night, but it worked better than expected. I will always regret the two old umpires and their wives never made it to Cooperstown.

Bob Motley wrote a book, with Byron, *The Negro Baseball Leagues: Tales of Umpiring Legendary Players, Breaking Barriers, and Making American History* (2020). Opening and closing statements are included, written by, Bob Kendrick, president, Negro Leagues Baseball Museum; Larry Lester, research director and treasurer, Negro Leagues Baseball Museum; Dave Winfield, a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame; and Dionne Warwick, a prominent hit singer, actress, and television host. Byron Motley and his, “Viva Cuba Beisbal: A photographic journey into the heart and soul of Cuban baseball,” a year later, enjoyed a six-month gallery exhibit at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

Branch Rickey III, then president, Pacific Coast League, and I planned and conducted three opening nights for Cooperstown Symposia, in 2007, 2008, and 2009, along with five other programs. Our sponsors were, Ohio Wesleyan University, Chapman University School of Law, Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, Pacific Coast League and its Hall of Fame, San Francisco State University, Oakland Unified School District, Oakland Athletic League, and California Interscholastic Federation. All of our presentations dealt with

baseball and freedom by retelling stories about separate events in the game, all congealing to comprise and illustrate the key role baseball played in fostering freedom and harmony across all races in our nation. Branch III is the grandson of the elder Rickey, a lawyer and president of the Brooklyn Dodgers. The elder Rickey, over the unanimous opposition of all the other team owners, broke Major League Baseball's 20th century color barrier by bringing Jackie Robinson to the Dodgers in 1947.²

Brad Snyder then Professor, School of Law, University of Wisconsin, and now, St. Thomas More Professor in Law and History; Anne Fleming Research Professor, Georgetown Law, delivered one of the Cooperstown programs Branch III and I produced. He had just written a book, *A Well-Paid Slave: Curt Flood's Fight for Free Agency in Professional Sports*, the year before. A key element in Snyder's book was the supreme court case involved in Flood's fight to break out of absolute control of players by the teams for which they played. Flood lost the case, *Flood v. Kuhn* (1972) 407 U.S. 258, but won the war for players because free agency arrived soon thereafter.³

George Powles, as a McClymonds and Skyline High School teacher and coach in all sports for 30 years in the Oakland Unified School District and the Oakland Athletic League, won 28 league championships in the various sports and made a permanent and positive, though largely invisible mark on thousands of young black men, for the most part, and on their families and, especially, on the game he loved most, and on the nation he fought in combat to defend in World War II. All the while, Coach Powles did so, quietly, humbly, and thoughtfully, by dealing with everyone he coached and everyone he met as a presumptively worthwhile individual. Several of his student athletes made history in Major League Baseball, the National Football League, the National Basketball Association, and the Olympics. Coach Powles began all this in 1947, the same year, Branch Rickey brought Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn

² For some perspective on our first Cooperstown opening night, see, George Nicholson, "Kindred Spirits, Humble Heroes: Branch Rickey and William Wilberforce" (2007), <http://www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=1949>; and see the special Branch Rickey issue, including this article, Ericka Kurtz, "Scales of Justice," *Ohio Wesleyan Magazine*, p. 12 (Winter 2006), <https://ohio5.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/OWUmagazine/id/1028/rec/1>.

³ For more, see, George Nicholson, "Curt Flood and Coach Powles," Negro Leagues Baseball Museum (2014), <https://curtfloodsymposiumkc.wordpress.com/2014/04/04/curt-flood-and-coach-powles>. Flood got his start at Oakland Technical High School, while Frank Robinson and many other black players got their start at McClymonds High School, "The School of Champions." Dwight E. Nathaniel and Chris Nguon, *McClymonds High: The School of Champions* (2015); Paul Brekke-Meisner, *Home Field Advantage: Oakland, CA—The City that Changed the Face of Sports* (2013); and, George Nicholson, "Remembering Coach Powles," *Baseball and Freedom III*, at p. 7 (June 3, 2009), 21st Annual Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture. Powles coached athletes from elsewhere than McClymonds during summer play in American Legion Baseball. His Legion teams were perennial winners, too.

Dodgers. Most of Coach Powles' student athletes were black. During a sad period when other teachers at McClymonds High did not, Coach Powles taught his student athletes to believe in themselves and to reach for the stars. Several of his student athletes did just that and earned their way into their respective major league sports Hall of Fame. Coach Powles was white.

Here are two of Coach Powles most notably successful student athletes:

After leaving McClymonds High, Bill Russell attended the University of San Francisco, where he led the USF Dons to consecutive NCAA championships in 1955 and 1956. He was named NCAA Tournament's Most Outstanding Player in 1956 and captained the gold medal-winning U.S. national basketball team at the 1956 Summer Olympics. Russell then led the Boston Celtics win 11 NBA championships in his 13 years of play. He then became the first black NBA head coach.

After leaving McClymonds High, Frank Robinson played Major League Baseball for 21 years. he only player to be named Most Valuable Player (MVP) in both the National League (NL) and the American League (AL).⁴

Robinson was named the NL MVP after leading the Cincinnati Reds to the pennant in 1961. He was named the AL MVP in 1966 while winning the Triple Crown (leading the league in hitting, homeruns, and runs batted in) playing with the Baltimore Orioles. He helped lead the Orioles to their first two World Series titles in franchise history in 1966 and 1970. He was named the World Series MVP in 1966 after leading the Orioles to a four-game sweep of the Los Angeles Dodgers. A 14-time All-Star, Robinson batted .300 nine times, hit 30 home runs 11 times, and led his league in slugging four times, and in runs scored three times. In 1975, Robinson became the first black manager in Big League history, as the player-manager of the Cleveland Indians, three years after Jackie Robinson attended his final World Series and, while there, lamented the lack of black managers.⁵

Cooperstown Symposia on Baseball and American Culture are unique in professional sports. They have been successfully conducted for more than

⁴ Although Shohei Ohtani of the Los Angeles Dodgers in the National League may repeat that feat in 2024, having previously been MVP in the American League while playing with the Los Angeles Angels.

⁵ Frank Robinson was nicknamed, "Judge." Years later, in 2016, a "real" judge entered the game, a former Fresno State University athlete who was born in 1992 in Sacramento: Aaron Judge, a 6'7," 282-pound, prodigious homerun hitter. Judge who plays for the New York Yankees is the greatest player in the American League at present, while Shohei Ohtani of the Dodgers is the greatest player in the National League at present. Both men are quite likely the Most Valuable Player in their respective league.

30 years. The other major league sports halls of fame, whether NFL, NBA, or NHL, tried similar programs and failed. Only baseball has sustained an annual education program on the history of the game, especially its history of contributing to our nation's on-going quest for freedom for everyone. More than 140 university and law professors and deans, lawyers, judges, and New York baseball writers attend annually. It provides a mechanism for spreading the word throughout the nation on baseball and freedom.

When I was born in 1941, while Carlucci helped build the ALCAN Highway, there were only 16 big league teams, all of them east of the Mississippi. There were no minority players in any of those 16 teams and none until I was six years old. Since the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants came west to Los Angeles and San Francisco, respectively, 30 teams now comprise the Major Leagues. They are in every corner of the nation. Of those 30, California has the most teams, a total of five, the San Francisco Giants, the Los Angeles Angels, the Los Angeles Dodgers, the San Diego Padres, and, at least temporarily, the former Oakland A's. At season's end in 2024, the A's left Oakland after more than a half century playing there and winning three World Series. The team will play in Sacramento for the next three years, before, they hope, heading to Las Vegas, Nevada. Now, there are people of most faiths and virtually all races at all levels of professional baseball. The most powerful hitter in the National League at present is Shohei Ohtani, a Japanese national. No one in the game pays the slightest attention to such matters any longer. The only question is, "Can he play the game?" That is just as Branch Rickey the elder would have it and declared in a 1956 radio broadcast.⁶ I also have a 2-hour DVD copy of a public television interview of the elder Rickey from the early 1950s. By then, Jackie Robinson was the most popular man in America, second only to Bing Crosby. In his early 1950s telecast and his later, 1956 radio broadcast, Rickey presciently and passionately spoke of race in ways that were a quarter century ahead of the Civil Rights Movement. Indeed, Chief Justice Earl Warren and Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., told Rickey and Robinson their early work created the receptive social environment in which they could do

⁶ See, "Branch Rickey, "'One Hundred Percent Wrong Club' Speech," Atlanta, Georgia (January 20, 1956), broadcast on WERD 860 AM radio, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/jackie-robinson-baseball/articles-and-essays/baseball-the-color-line-and-jackie-robinson/one-hundred-percent-wrong-club-speech>.

their important work.⁷ Robinson often worked with Rev. King and wrote to ask the elder Rickey to join him in a particular civil rights march. However, by then, Rickey was physically unable to do so and expressed his deep regret in his reply.

Branch Rickey, a lawyer, and Jackie Robinson, a four-sport letterman at UCLA, are both in the Baseball Hall of Fame. From the time I began to play the game in 1949, they were and remain my heroes, just as they were to millions of black and white boys all over the nation in that era. Rickey and Robinson were serious men of faith, family, and country, with open minds and open hearts. The two men helped all of us to become serious men of faith, family, and country, with open minds and open hearts. Rickey inspired some of us to enter the law. Ever since I first became a judge in 1987, I have been blessed to meet and work with Branch III, the elder Rickey's grandson, Sharon Robinson, Jackie's daughter, Thurgood Marshall, Jr., and several other descendants of great civil rights groundbreakers, in sports and out. I knew Chief Justice Earl Warren and his son, Judge Earl Warren, Jr. Earl, Jr. and I served for a time on the bench of the same trial court and attended Oakland A's games together from time to time.

I return to Ashford's story to conclude. His story is an exciting, groundbreaking story, but it was not all peaches and cream. He was a very energetic and entertaining umpire, one of but a handful that brought fans to the ballpark to see them call ballgames. Once in the Big Leagues, Ashford made it to the pinnacle, he umpired an All-Star Game and a World Series.

Earlier, during the years Ashford umpired in the PCL, then nation's top minor league at the time, he endured a painful blow delivered in front of the Portland fans and players, at a pre-game meeting of managers and umpires at home plate. Ashford had made a tough call the day before. One of those

⁷ Chief Justice Warren occasionally slipped out of Washington, D.C., and made his way by train to Brooklyn to attend Dodgers games and root for Jackie Robinson. He told his secretary to omit the trips from his schedule and to keep them confidential. Earlier, while governor of California, he passed on a potential opportunity to become commissioner of baseball when Commissioner Happy Chandler's contract was not renewed in 1951. Chandler had previously resigned his U.S. Senate seat in 1945 to succeed the late, former Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, as commissioner of baseball. Chandler's most significant action as commissioner was to approve Branch Rickey's proposed Jackie Robinson contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, effectively integrating Major League Baseball. Chandler returned to Kentucky to seek election as governor. Warren's reluctant rejection of ticklers to become commissioner of baseball in 1951 were soon forgotten when President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed him United States Chief Justice on September 30, 1953, under a recess appointment. The Senate confirmed the appointment on March 1, 1954. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) 347 U.S. 483 came the same year. In following years, Chief Justice Warren and his judicial colleagues changed the face of the nation and substantially altered the administration of criminal justice. A fine book to explain it all is journalist Jim Newton's, *Justice for All, Earl Warren and The Nation He Made* (2006). Chief Justice Warren never lost his interest in baseball or his respect for Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson. His son, Judge Earl Warren, Jr., is my personal source for the previously unreported, personal facts in this footnote.

managers, convinced that Ashford’s call had cost him the previous game, handed him the lineup card and said, ‘It’s not you I’m mad at, Emmett, it is the other two guys.’

“The crew chief, Cesar Carlucci, who worked nearly 1,000 games with Ashford, interrupted, ‘What are you talking about?’ he said.

“‘Not you, the other two,’ the manager said.

“‘Who the hell are the other two?’

“‘Abe Lincoln from freeing them and Branch Rickey for bringing them into baseball.’”⁸



Adrienne Ashford and the four umpires who called the 2005 Pacific Coast League and International League All-Star Game at Raley Field in Sacramento, July 12, 2005. Ashford is holding Terry Flanigan’s portrait of her father, Emmett Ashford. The four umpires were Tripp Gibson, Pacific Coast League; Chris Segal, Pacific Coast League; Chad Whitson, International League; and Brad Myers, International League. Published with Brenda Nicholson’s permission.

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⁸ Jacobson, Steve, *Carrying Jackie’s Torch, The Players Who Integrated Baseball—and America* (2007).