*Queen of the Negro Leagues: Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles*, by James Overmyer, McFarland, 2020

As we celebrate the Negro League Centennial with retrospectives on some of the greatest players of all time, James Overmyer’s revised edition of *Queen of the Negro Leagues: Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles* (2020)showcases one of Black baseball’s most pivotal administrators: Effa Manley (1897-1981). Detailing Manley’s imprint on Black baseball in general and the Newark Eagles in particular, Overmyer adds to a recently invigorated interest in Black women in baseball—the eponymous play *Toni Stone* (2019) about the first of three women to play in the Negro Leagues is a salient example. Moreover, as we applaud Kim Ng becoming the General Manager of the Miami Marlins and thus the first woman to hold such a position in the Major Leagues, it is an apt time to reckon with women’s marginalization and understudied roles throughout the history of the national pastime. Effa Manley paved the way for Ng and the others who will no doubt follow in her footsteps, and Overmyer’s *Queen of the Negro Leagues* is a helpful starting place for exploring this history.

As Overmyer outlines in Chapter 1, Effa’s parents seem to have both been white, but she more or less lived her entire life as a Black woman, passing on occasion to avail herself of the privileges of whiteness but otherwise remaining fully immersed in Black communities. “If there had been questions [about her racial identity],” Overmyer avers, “her status and commitment to improving black society would have been enough to squelch them” (11). Many of Effa’s fundraising and activist efforts were bound up in the Newark Eagles in particular and Black baseball more generally. While her husband, Abe, owned the team, Effa was the business manager. More accurately, she was the visionary and also, as Overmyer notes, the disciplinarian (84). As shrewd and stubborn as she was insouciant, Effa held her own in male-dominated spaces—whether among the Eagles players or the other Negro League owners.

In chapters 2-9, Overmyer details the origins and management of the Eagles and finally the Manleys’ sale of the Eagles and exit from the Negro Leagues after Major League teams began signing Black players. Abe initially purchased the Brooklyn Eagles, but it was in the Manleys’ new home in Newark, where they merged the Eagles and Newark Dodgers and began utilizing Ruppert Stadium, that garnered the team a loyal fanbase. In Chapter 2-4, Overmyer emphasizes Effa’s role in forging strong bonds between the Eagles and Newark’s Black community, as well as her attempts to fortify the Negro Leagues as an empowered Black institution. As Overmyer notes, “the more she [Effa] became its advocate and, if need be, its defender” (36), the more Black baseball’s male-dominated power structure made a space for her. Further, Effa combined her racial justice activism with her stewardship of the team, using Eagles home games at Ruppert Stadium to fundraise and promote racial uplift efforts, ensuring that the team was a vehicle for Black empowerment. As Overmyer details in Chapter 5, Effa was a pioneer in baseball marketing with a keen sense of how to ensure that Eagles games were respectable social events that Black celebrities and Newark residents alike were proud to attend.

Reading *Queen of the Negro Leagues* is also a reminder of the all-star Eagles players who eventually integrated the Major Leagues (Larry Doby, Monte Irvin, and Don Newcombe) as well as those whose careers were spent behind the color line but should be better known (Ray Dandridge, Willie Wells, George “Mule” Suttles, Leon Day, among others). As much as Abe and Effa were invested in ensuring the success of the Eagles, Overmyer’s archival research reveals that the team often struggled financially. However, as World War II pressed on and more Black migrants from the South took manufacturing jobs in Newark and other northern cities, the fanbase for the Eagles and other Negro League teams significantly increased. Overmyer notes that the Manleys’ transition from being in the red to the black also benefitted the players, who salaries steadily increased during the WWII years, even as the Major Leagues “actually lost money” (155) and “white big leaguers were caught in the general salary freeze imposed by Washington to curb wartime inflation” (156). Rather bittersweetly, the Eagles had their best year in 1946, when the team “won all the honors black baseball had to give” (172), but this was just two years before Abe and Effa were forced to sell the team as the Negro League enterprise began to crumble.

As Overmyer outlines in Chapter 9, Effa was a vocal proponent of ending segregation in the Major Leagues before she and Abe realized that they would lose both their best players and the majority of their fans as a result. As Overmyer makes clear, Effa did not passively accept the inequitable terms of integration proffered by Major League owners. She and other Negro League owners advocated for a partnership with the Major Leagues that would maintain an essential role for their teams but to no avail. Moreover, she famously rebuked both Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson, the latter of whom she called “ungrateful and more likely stupid” for turning his back on the institution that gave Robinson his start (Overmyer 203). Additionally, when Bill Veeck sought to sign the Eagles star slugger, Larry Doby, Effa made sure to negotiate for compensation, resisting the practice begun by Rickey to treat Robinson and other Black players as free agents and ignore their contractual agreements with Negro League teams. By 1948, however, Effa and Abe were hemorrhaging money and were forced to sell the Eagles to Memphis businessmen for the rather paltry sum of $15,000.

Abe’s health declined in the subsequent years, and he died in 1952 under the care of Effa’s family in Philadelphia. Yet, as Overmyer reports in Chapter 10, Effa remained active well after his death. She left Newark, briefly resettling in Philadelphia before permanently relocating to Los Angeles, where she passed away in 1981. She remarried twice, though neither union lasted more than a year. In collaboration with Leon H. Hardwick, she wrote and self-published *Negro Baseball. . .Before Integration* (1976). In her final years, Effa also continued to advocate for Negro League players’ induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame after the initial nine players were inducted during the 1970s. Effa herself finally received the honor in 2006, and we are indebted to Overmyer’s *Queen of the Negro Leagues* for continuing to keep her legacy front and center.

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