
ZANG, DAVID W. *Fleet Walker's Divided Heart: The Life of Baseball's First Black Major Leaguer*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. Pp. xvi, 131. Notes, photographs, appendices, index, bibliographical essay. \$21.50.

Awarded the Seymour Medal for excellence in baseball history, David Zang's biography of Moses Fleetwood Walker is much more than an athletic biography. Devoting more than half the text to Walker's life after baseball, Zang uses the life of this talented ballplayer and complex individual to examine collegiate athletics, professional sport, the entertainment industry, and, of greatest significance, the state of American race relations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The core of Zang's argument is that Walker suffered from a divided heart as he was a mulatto (Zang carefully refrains from using the term Afro-American to describe Walker) during a time when racial boundaries were being defined by segregation

laws and practices. Segregation was supported by scientific notions of racism emphasizing the purity of blood and justifying the exclusion of the mulatto from participation in white society.

On the other hand, the mulatto was often perceived as an outsider by the black community. Zang, thus, concludes, "The reality that most confounded his sense of wholeness, cursed him more deeply with each passing year and eventually wore through to his soul was that Fleet Walker was unavoidably and irrevocably the product of both Negro and Caucasian blood" (p. 8). Moses Fleetwood Walker was born October 7, 1857, of mulatto parents in Mount Pleasant, Ohio, a Quaker community that played an active role in the Underground Railroad. When Fleet was three years old, the family moved to Steubenville, Ohio, where Fleet's father served as a physician and minister. Coming from a relatively affluent family, Fleet Walker enrolled in Oberlin College, although his grades began to suffer when the young man discovered baseball.

In 1881, Walker transferred to the University of Michigan, ostensibly to study law, but, in reality, he was more interested in pursuing baseball opportunities with the Wolverines. Family obligations also loomed for Walker in 1881 with his marriage to Arabella Taylor, with whom he had three children. In 1884, he abandoned his studies to sign a professional baseball contract with the Toledo Blue Stockings of the Northwestern League. Between 1884 and 1889, Walker played for professional teams in Toledo, Cleveland, Waterbury, Newark and Syracuse. His career ended in August 1889 when the Syracuse Stars of the International League (which was considered a major league at the time), giving in to segregationist pressure both outside and within the baseball establishment, released the catcher. Fleet Walker would be the last black to play in the International League until the post-World War II period and Jackie Robinson. Although Walker was hitting only slightly above the .200 level at the time of his release, Zang makes a convincing case for Walker's athletic ability, arguing, "Perhaps it is enough to know that in an age of surging racism where umpires admitted to making calls and teammates admitted to subverting their play on the basis of color, with the alternative of all Negro teams beckoning, and despite the physical demands on an aging catcher, predominantly white teams in competitive leagues had, for seven years, paid Moses Fleetwood Walker to play baseball" (p. 63). So by age 31, Walker was pushed out of baseball.

Zang maintains that Walker's experience with the increasing degree of intolerance in American society produced a considerable amount of bitterness. In fact, the catcher once brandished a gun to quiet hecklers in Toronto. In 1893, an inebriated Walker was indicted for the murder of Patrick Murray. However, a Syracuse jury acquitted Walker. Murray and his friends were also drinking, using racial slurs, and threatening the former ballplayer. Following this brush with the law, Walker and his family returned to Steubenville, where Walker served as a railway mail clerk and, Zang surmised, continued to drink. In 1898, he was arrested for mail robbery, serving a year in jail.

After his release, Walker went into the hotel business with his brother Weldy. But Walker remained an angry man, and in 1908 became a racial theorist, pub-

lishing *Our Home Colony: The Past, Present, and Future of the Negro Race in America*. In this volume, Walker advocated black immigration to Africa as the answer to white racism in America. Yet, as Zang observes, the book was paradoxical with considerable self-hatred directed toward the mulatto. The divided heart of Walker was evident in that, at the same time he was penning a volume advocating racial separatism, he was purchasing an opera house in Cadiz, Ohio, where for the next 15 years he provided film and live entertainment (including minstrel shows) for racially mixed audiences. In 1922, he sold the opera house and moved to Cleveland, dying two years later. At the time of his death, the ambitious Walker was working as a clerk in a billiards parlor. Concluding that Walker remained a divided man until the end of his life, Zang writes, "As a black separatist he was a man who could not abide white society's shunning of merit but could never bring himself to actually separate from white society" (p. 125).

To recreate Fleet Walker's life, Zang examined newspapers, census data, city registers, court records, government files, and the Oberlin College archives. But even with this exhaustive research, many aspects of Walker's remarkable life remain obscure and undocumented. Zang is often forced to speculate. Did Walker really have a twin sibling who died in infancy? How debilitating was his drinking habit? To what degree did Walker attempt to implement his ideology of separatism and a return to Africa? Did he screen *Birth of a Nation* at his theater in Cadiz, and what was the financial source for the purchase of the opera house? Yet Zang's speculations are reasonable conjectures based upon the best available evidence. Zang's prose is straightforward, well organized, and even moving at times. The epilogue in which Zang describes his journey through the environment where Walker played, lived, and suffered is a vivid experience for both the reader and author.

While Zang seeks to develop Walker as an individual attempting to cope with his times and forge a meaningful life, it is in the politics of race that Zang's volume will undoubtedly produce the greatest controversy. Although Zang appears well steeped in the academic and cultural discourse regarding race, reading the works of Malcolm X and Barbara Jean Fields, some readers will not share his sentiments lamenting that Walker's experience led him to advocate racial separation. Yet in reconstructing the life of Moses Fleetwood Walker and adding his voice to the American discourse on race, Zang's biography indicates how the scholarly examination of sport continues to shed light upon the major historical forces and issues influencing our lives.

—RON BRILEY
Sandia Preparatory School