

# Some Medicine for the Amalgamation Syndrome: Latin American Baseball Players, 1871-1946

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Jackie Robinson was responsible for breaking the so-called color line in professional baseball in 1947, yet prior to that historic season a total of forty-seven Latin American-born men played major league baseball in the United States. The history and contributions of this ethnic group to the game of baseball, beginning in 1871 when Esteban Bellan began his career with the Troy Haymakers of the National Association, have been largely ignored. Since 1947 their role in baseball has been so deeply interwoven with that of the American Negro that the two groups have become virtually indistinguishable.

An examination of the “amalgamation syndrome” in the print and broadcast media and in journal articles demonstrates that historians, economists, sociologists, and journalists have consistently ignored the subjects of this study, thus creating a dearth of meaningful secondary source materials. A similar lack of primary material is not in evidence. Native Latin American ballplayers were often the subject of contemporary journalists; however, articles were frequently discriminatory and demeaning.

Case studies of Ramon Herrera, a Red Sox infielder of the 1920’s and Adolfo Luque, a pitcher who spent twenty years playing America’s national pastime amply illustrate the nature of the discrimination that Latin Americans were subjected to prior to the entrance of blacks into the game of baseball. Some of the most powerful evidence found of discriminatory practices by the print media is shown in an analysis of the treatment accorded Latin Americans on the Washington Senators of the late 1930’s and early 1940’s, the club which included the largest contingent of Latin American ballplayers.

Newspaper journalists routinely ridiculed the appearance, speech, folklore, and eating habits of Latin Americans. In addition, their birthplaces often became part of their names; for example, Mel Almada was frequently referred to as “Mexican Mel.” Nicknames like these appeared more frequently when the Mexican League was formed in the mid-1940’s.