

Wendell Smith, The *Pittsburgh Courier-Journal* and the Campaign to Include Blacks in Organized Baseball, 1933-1945

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While scholars have given much attention to the part played by Branch Rickey and white sportcasters in ending discrimination in organized baseball, this paper focuses on the heretofore untold role of Wendell Smith and the *Pittsburgh Courier-Journal* in seeing that blacks were allowed in the sport. What is immediately apparent from this analysis is that the black Pittsburgh paper was partly responsible for Rickey's decision to bring Jackie Robinson into organized baseball. Although there were other black newspapers in the United States that participated in the campaign against lily-white baseball during the 1930's and the first half of the 1940's, it was the *Courier-Journal* that proved most effective in seeing that the game's racial barrier was finally lifted. Its greater influence in helping break down the wall of discrimination came partly because it had the largest circulation of any

black newspaper in the country. When the paper initiated its campaign in 1933, its circulation figure approximated 46,000. By the time Robinson had signed his contract with the Dodgers some twelve years later, the *Courier-Journal* circulation had risen to nearly 326,000 -almost 100,000 more than its nearest competitor. In addition, to its large readership, the paper was particularly effective because it refused to relent in its call for complete equality in baseball and continued to remonstrate against discrimination in the game despite the efforts of Friend and Foe alike to restrain its protests. Even during those moments when integration seemed an impossibility, the paper maintained a lively interest in the plight of the black ballplayer and never stopped pressuring the baseball establishment. Lastly, the *Courier-Journal* proved most effective in its campaign largely through the tireless efforts of Smith, the newspaper's sports editor, who became obsessed with seeing that blacks were allowed in the game. Chester Washington, Alvin Moses, Rollo Wilson, and the other sports writers on the staff all took an active role in the campaign, but it was Smith who most doggedly fought for the inclusion of blacks in organized baseball.