

Effa Manley: A Portrait of Gender and Racial Equality

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As the first woman inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, Effa Manley undoubtedly made significant contributions to organized baseball during her career. These are not, however, the only contributions to society for which Effa is responsible. Throughout her adult life, Effa fought for civil rights while also standing as a symbol of female empowerment and gender equality. As the general manager of the Newark Eagles, Effa is remembered for her actions and words as she fought against color and gender barriers of the 1930s and 1940s. An outspoken woman in a "gentlemen's game," Effa did not go unnoticed.¹ The waves that she made as a woman and as a representative for the black community were revolutionary for the time period. Her belief in equality was demonstrated through her actions with the players she managed as she attempted to uplift black baseball through their success. She further demonstrated this belief through her actions with the Newark community as a prominent activist for the progress of African-Americans in this New Jersey city. Finally, Effa also demonstrated her belief in equality through her relationship with the overall organization of baseball as she struggled against Branch Rickey's unfair practices. These actions that were meant to further racial progress were accompanied by Effa's overarching ability to be a symbol of female empowerment. Throughout her life and career as the general manager of the Newark Eagles, Effa contributed to the progress for gender equality and women's empowerment in a male-dominated society; these contributions were an important addition to the progress Effa made as she aspired for racial equality and civil rights, which she demonstrated through her actions with the Eagles players, the Newark community, and the entirety of organized baseball.

As Effa worked toward full equality for blacks and whites, she also constantly supported the progress toward equality for men and women by fulfilling a role that was typically held by men. As a general manager and partner with her husband,

Effa was alone as a woman in her ground-breaking job as an executive in baseball. Despite the fact that Effa was incredibly outnumbered in her position as a female baseball team official, she still made significant strides towards her goals and did not face many strong challenges from her fellow Negro League executives. Effa attended meetings and helped her husband in the decision-making process for the Eagles. She was responsible for the day-to-day business of the Newark team, which meant that she "was responsible for the schedule, travel, publicity, advertising, purchasing, concessions, negotiating player contracts, ballpark operations, marketing and ticket sales, as well as the... community relations programs."² In every way, she was as effective a leader as her husband, and to some people, even more effective. Her success as a female executive did bring about resentment among the other Negro League owners; they were not accustomed to a female in such a male-dominated business. Manley was the "No. 1 thorn in the vulnerable sides of the other owners, simply because she [was] a woman with ideas and aggressiveness."³ Effa faced complaints from other owners at first, as they claimed that baseball was not the place for a woman to be operating, as made public by Dan Burley in a 1942 *Amsterdam New York Star-News* article.⁴ The owners resented Manley because of her skill as a woman and her lack of fear for speaking up for something that she wanted.

This resentment from the other Negro League owners because of Effa's gender did not bring about much of a challenge for her as she represented the Eagles. The other owners may have been annoyed at her presence, but they did recognize her ability as an executive and knew that she had the capacity to run a baseball team, as indicated by the Eagles' success in Newark. In 1943, Manley was afforded the responsibility of overseeing the charity games played for the Army and the Navy relief funds. The fact that this difficult and important task was placed in Effa's "capable, feminine hands" shows that the other owners felt that she could handle

it.⁵ It was proof that they were ready to trust her with an important job for the entire league. Her ability as a baseball executive prevented any gender discrimination from the other league owners. Effa herself did not feel that she was prejudiced against as a woman and that her biggest problem was the uneasiness at the first meetings.⁶ In an interview with John Holway, Effa commented directly on her relationship with the other owners:

Were the other owners prejudiced against a woman? Oh no. In fact, Abe took me to all the meetings, of course. The first one or two meetings they felt a little bit annoyed. One day the phone rang and it was Cum Posey of the Grays apologizing for using profane words at one of the meetings... Anyway, they finally opened up and were just wonderful to me.⁷

Because of the effectiveness and skill that Effa possessed as a baseball official, she was able to overcome resentment from the other owners. She worked toward her goals despite any feelings of prejudice that she may have faced because of her gender. In this way, she stood as a symbol of female empowerment for women across the nation.

Effa also contributed to equal gender relations because of her partnership with her husband in a completely male-dominated field. In the 1930s and 1940s, the common place for a woman was in the home, to take care of the children and keep the house clean for her husband. According to journalist Connie Woodward, Effa was "a good role model because she was successful at her business and she inspired young women to go into a business of be affiliated with a business that was male-oriented...A woman's place was in the home."⁸ Effa broke the gender stereotype through her career choice and through her success in that career. She was inspiration for women as she defied gender norms and worked as an equal partner with her husband. Effa's relationship with her husband, Abe, served as an example of her belief in equal rights for all; their partnership was a paradigm for equality during a time when relationships were very much dominated by men. They had their respective roles and knew not to overstep any boundaries. Effa realized that she and Abe were equals: "Abe and I had a magnificent partnership. He got the club together and I took care of the business details. It was a

perfect partnership. I never interfered in the way he ran the club, except once."⁹ Their "magnificent" and "perfect" collaboration was one of constant support for one another. Effa often looked to Abe for encouragement, and she was quick to give him credit when he deserved it. His support of his wife gave her the confidence she needed to make her own decisions and be a truly effective leader over the years.¹⁰ The mutual support and reinforcement that Abe and Effa found in each other as business partners and as husband and wife was a rare quality for the 1930s and 1940s. Their relationship is an illustration of Effa's foundation of a belief in equal rights to all citizens.

Effa's belief in equality for all people influenced her actions not just as a woman, but also as a supporter of African Americans and black baseball. Her relationship with the Eagles players that she managed demonstrated her desire to uplift black baseball and bring about racial equality. To her players, Effa was a matriarch who forced the men to present themselves well through their dress and actions outside of the ballpark; she wanted them to successfully represent the entire African-American race while giving Newark a team that would make the Newark community proud. According to player Max Manning, "...in Newark, you always dressed properly. She didn't want to see you sloppy. If your shoes were muddy, she'd remark about it."¹¹ Effa expected the players to dress well and also to behave well off of the field. To her, they were always representatives of the Newark team, during a game or not. She and Abe both advised the players on their behavior, warning against too much drinking, gambling, and carousing.¹² Effa held Newark's fans to the same standards, enforcing rules and regulations to keep the stands orderly and respectable. The stands at Ruppert Stadium were patrolled by policemen who were responsible for keeping order and preventing violence from breaking out. Fans were also kept in line by Effa's own undercover security force: "So I personally hired some men on the side [the fans] didn't know about, who worked in the taverns."¹³ Effa believed that if the black fans and players presented themselves well in public, they would directly affect their status as American citizens: "She wanted them to present their race properly and held them to high standards: they were to dress well, pay their bills, and live respectably..."¹⁴ As a race, the African Americans would be socially uplifted and respected, which was a major goal for Effa as she managed the Eagles.

Effa's relationship with her players also demonstrated her desire to uplift black baseball in other ways. Effa served as a surrogate parent for many of the players, especially those who were younger. In this way, she showed how much she cared for each of them and how much she wanted them to succeed as young African-American baseball players. The Manleys treated their players like family, and more often than not, Effa acted as a mother: "...[her relationships] were a mix of formality and personal concern that reached the category of 'mother hen' behavior with some."¹⁵ Effa felt personally responsible for the success of many of her players as indicated by letters she wrote to parents and money that she lent to several of them. She corresponded with Larry Doby, Don Newcombe, and Jimmie Hill in letters that show her parental nature for these young men. To Jimmie Hill, she wrote, "I have been more than an employer to you, as you well know...I have come to the conclusion that I have pampered and petted you entirely too much...I expect you to get yourself together, and start showing some signs of good sense."¹⁶ Effa was not hesitant to bluntly tell her players what she expected of them in order to make them better players and better public figures. She wanted them to be the best that they could be in all ways so that public opinion of the team would remain high and respectful.

In addition to treating the players like family, Effa constantly worked for better accommodations for them as they traveled and she was always willing to financially help the players. When Monte Irvin was short for a down payment on a house, he borrowed two or three thousand dollars from the Manleys.¹⁷ Effa also provided the Eagles with a \$15,000 Flexible Clipper bus, something that had never before been used by a Negro League team.¹⁸ She wanted her players to be comfortable and satisfied. If they were happy on the team, they were more likely to be successful as baseball players, and more likely to stand as symbols for racial equality. Effa understood the value of her players' satisfaction in the overall outcome of the games: "Without [satisfaction], you've just got a guy in a uniform. Our players actually enjoyed what they were doing."¹⁹ This satisfaction was the foundation of the Eagles' success and was due in large part to the actions of Effa Manley as she strove for equality among blacks and whites.

Effa's strong beliefs in civil rights shone forth in her involvement with her surrounding community

as she constantly worked for the progress of African-Americans toward equality. Even before her official career with the Eagles began, Effa was interested in social justice and civil rights; this is demonstrated in her organization and leadership of store boycotts in Harlem. When Abe and Effa were first married, they lived in Harlem, New York. It was here that Effa began to delve into social and civil rights and where she gained experience as a public leader against injustice. The largest businesses in Harlem were owned by white people, but frequented by blacks. The problem that Effa recognized, however, was that these businesses would not hire any black people as store-front employees. At one department store in particular, Blumstein's, over \$7,000 had been spent by black people, yet they were not hired as sales clerks.²⁰

As secretary of the Citizens' League of Harlem, Effa was an important leader in the black community's response to such discriminatory hiring policies. Along with other league members and people of Harlem's black community, Effa boycotted Blumstein's and picketed outside for several weeks in the summer of 1934. In a meeting with the store owners, it was Effa's personal note that changed their minds about hiring black workers. She said, "You know, we think just as much of our young colored girls as you do your young white girls but there's just not work for them. The only thing they can find to do is work in someone's home as a maid or become prostitutes."²¹ This shocking statement helped the Blumstein's agree to hire black sales clerks; by September, there would be thirty-five of them total.²² This victory over discrimination was a pivotal point in Effa's life as a civil rights activist. She celebrated her success with fifteen hundred other people in a parade and rally in Harlem, a crowd that spoke directly to the widespread effects of Effa's work against discrimination.²³ She carried with her this desire for equality among the races to Newark, where she and Abe moved the Eagles in 1936.²⁴

When Effa moved to Newark, she found a city with rampant discrimination and inequality among the races. Known as "the Georgia of the North,"²⁵ New Jersey was a state filled with lower-paying jobs and inadequate housing for its black population. It was an appropriate time and place for a positive change for African Americans, something to which Effa would gladly contribute. Throughout her career as manager of the Eagles, Effa organized many fundraisers at the ballgames for African American organizations, like the NAACP, in order to promote

the welfare of Newark's black population.

It was because of Effa that the relationship between the Eagles and the Newark community was strong and unyielding: "Even if they had only won now and then, the Eagles might still have had a place in black Newark as fund-raisers and publicizers of the community's charities and helping organizations."²⁶ There are several examples of events that were put on at Ruppert Stadium that functioned as both a public relations event for the Eagles and a charity event for organizations in Newark. Effa was a member of the NAACP, and at one point was treasurer of the New Jersey chapter. Game day fundraisers would reach hundreds of dollars for the NAACP, something that was common among other ball clubs in the Negro National League. What was uncommon, however, was Effa's ability to continuously plan successful events that truly impacted the community. In 1939, Effa organized what author Donn Rogosin called "the most remarkable special day in Negro baseball history."²⁷ That summer, she staged a "Stop Lynching" benefit in Ruppert Stadium in order to raise funds and awareness for what Effa considered a very important African American issue. The NAACP helped by sponsoring buttons that argued against lynching practices that sold for a dollar each; an important publicity photograph was taken of Effa selling one of these buttons to the Newark mayor.²⁸ This important day in black baseball was just one example of how Effa constantly demonstrated her desire to support the black community while managing the Eagles.

Effa's civil activism grew during World War II with more opportunities for uplifting the entire African American race, especially those in the segregated military. In 1941, segregation in the military became a controversial topic in the black press. Effa played a role in this contentious issue when she invited the all-black 372nd Infantry Regiment of twenty-five-hundred men to the Opening Day game. This blatant support for the black members of the military was also supported by the Newark mayor, who declared the day an official "372nd Day." At another game, Effa invited the black members of the Free French forces, with an invitation that added that "white members were also welcome, if there was room."²⁹ Effa's obvious support of African Americans in the military speaks to her desire to bring about equality for everyone, even those in the armed forces. She was proud of those men serving in the military, especially the

fifty-four black baseball players who volunteered to serve.³⁰

Effa held high ideals for black baseball overall, which often led to struggles against white owners with whom she did not always agree. Throughout her career, Effa constantly made known her interest in and support of full black control of Negro League baseball, which she believed would contribute to the overall success of the entire league. She was not afraid to fight the white dominance of the Negro leagues, which involved the monopolization of the best stadiums and control of the schedules. The only concrete progress that Effa made was by ensuring that the Negro Leagues' treasury obtained a quarter of the booking fees, money that may have ended up in the pockets of white agents.³¹ Perhaps the most conflict with white executives, however, came after the integration of the major leagues. Effa had significant struggles with the Brooklyn Dodgers' president, Branch Rickey because of his unfair treatment of other Negro League owners as he began to integrate major league baseball.

Effa Manley did not agree with her so-called "arch enemy," Branch Rickey, immediately upon his integration of Major League baseball.³² Although she was a proponent for integration and a partnership between the Negro National League and the majors, Effa wholeheartedly disagreed with the way that Rickey signed Robinson in 1946. She expressed her feelings to the public in a delicate manner at first, but when Effa and Rickey met at a game in the middle of the 1946 season, Effa was able to verbally let him know how she felt. As described in an article from the New York *Daily Mirror*, Effa said, "You know, Mr. Rickey, we could make trouble for you on the Newcombe transaction if we wanted to."³³ She understood that what he was doing was wrong and unfair. When Rickey signed Robinson, he failed to consult with the Kansas City Monarchs ownership or even offer them compensation for their player. He continued this practice, signing four more players before the 1946 season was over.³⁴ Effa vocally and publicly responded to these practices when she spoke at a luncheon before the Optimist Club at a Newark department store in 1948. During her speech, she said that Rickey used unfair practices, making her feelings known to a larger portion of the public.³⁵ It was imperative that the public knew that although baseball was integrated, the integration was not completed in a fair or reasonable way.

One struggle in particular for Effa concerned her former ownership of Monte Irvin; when Rickey

wanted to sign Irvin without compensation to the Eagles, Effa stood up against Rickey, standing as a symbol for all of the Negro League owners who felt this way. When the Dodgers signed Irvin, "Mrs. Manley stuck her fine feminine hand into the glowing picture and charged that the Dodgers had taken Irvin away from her Newark Eagles without permission."³⁶ Effa felt that her rights and the rights of the other Negro League executives had been violated. She felt that she had to stand up against these injustices as a representative of the entirety of the Negro National League. With a lawyer, Effa managed to get compensation for Irvin and successfully set the standard for compensation for black players: "I was glad to have it resolved that way. But that started the bargain basement. All the teams started grabbing the Negro players for \$5,000."³⁷ Despite the fact that it was minimal sum, it was important to recognize the fact that Effa was successful in gaining compensation for players from the entire Negro league. This was an incredible feat for Effa in the struggle for the respect and justice that was due to the black players and their leaders in the Negro leagues.

To fully comprehend the effect that Effa Manley had on society, it is required that her emphasis on gender and racial equality be taken into account. She spent her life organizing, fundraising, and even arguing for the benefit of African Americans in the 1930s and 1940s. Furthermore, her work for civil rights always had a foundation in her ability to break gender stereotypes and bring men's and women's roles closer together. Her aspirations for equality laid firmly in her relationships with her players, the Newark community, and other executives in organized baseball. She stood as a symbol for women's rights and for social justice across the races. Her legacy remains today in the ideas of full civil rights for all people. As written in a *Pittsburgh Courier* article, "Mrs. Manley contends that the [African American] race does not know its own strength, and when it begins to realize what really fine things the race is capable of doing, it will show rapid progress."³⁸ This inevitable progress in which Effa believed occurred in part because of her relentless leadership toward a true elevation of the African American race.

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Endnotes

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¹² Bob Luke, *The Most Famous Woman in Baseball: Effa Manley and the Negro Leagues*, Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, Inc., 2011, xi.

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³⁰ Berlage, 119.

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³² Overmyer, 216.

³³ Overmyer, 219.

³⁴ Overmyer, 217-218.

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