

# Boston: the Red Sox, the Celtics, and Race, 1945-1969

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**Senior Honors Thesis (HP 299)  
2011-12 Academic Year**

**Boston:  
The Red Sox, the Celtics, and Race,  
1945-1969**

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*Dedication:*

*To my Family – who have helped to inspire my love of sports and social justice*

**Acknowledgements:**

I would first like to thank Dean Joe Burns for working with me as my advisor on this project. He gave me the freedom to make the project my own and helped me move toward writing a more coherent paper. Secondly, I would like to thank Professor Susan Michalzczyk, my honors program professor sophomore year. She helped to encourage me to take on the challenge of writing a thesis and works tirelessly to make the thesis program a reality within the honors program.

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On a more general note, I would like to thank the Red Sox, the Celtics, and tangentially the city of Boston as well for helping to shape my life, as both a sports fan and an individual. I would like to thank Boston College as an institution for providing me with the opportunities that it has. I would also like to note the influence that the 4Boston and Appalachia Volunteers programs have had on me during my time at Boston College in shaping my ideas surrounding social justice that had begun during my time with the Duxbury Appalachia Service Project and youth retreats through Holy Family Church.

Most importantly, as noted in the dedication, I would like to thank my family, in particular my parents, Mark and Joanna Dow, my siblings, Wesley, Christian, and Alexis, and my grandparents, Ron and Roberta Dow as well as my late grandmother Marie Ratto, for always being there for me and for helping to raise me in a way that I would desire to write a paper that touches on ideas of both sports and race within the context of the city of Boston.

Thank you.

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **Overview of Chapters**

The aim of this paper is to look at the impact that the racial integration of the Boston Red Sox and the Boston Celtics in the 1950s had on the city of Boston amidst the larger civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s. Although at times sports franchises and their players can have a degree of isolation from the communities in which they play, professional sports in Boston undoubtedly mix much more fluidly with the larger populous of the city and the Greater Boston area. As Richard A. Johnson writes, “Sporting traditions dictate both the landscape and social calendar of Bostonians.”<sup>1</sup> In recognizing the importance of sports to the city of Boston and in recognizing the high-profile nature of both the Red Sox and the Celtics, the aim here is to look at the intersection of sports and race on a variety of levels from the front office, to the media, to the fans, and most importantly with the players themselves.

After this introduction, chapters two, three, and four essentially look to lay the foundation for the Bill Russell Era of 1956-1969. Chapter 2, “Setting the Stage: 1770-1940,” gives historical context to Boston’s circumstance with regards to race. From Quock Walker and the American Revolutionary period to William Lloyd Garrison and the Civil War to the Great Migration and the coming of World War II, understanding Boston’s past is essential to gaining a better grasp for the issues that unfold in the aftermath of World War II. Chapter 3, “Beginnings: 1940-1947,” looks to analyze the ways in which sports and race initially intersect in Boston with Jackie Robinson’s tryout with the Red Sox in 1945 and Walter Brown’s founding of the Celtics in 1946, functioning as two critical events. Chapter 4, “Starting to Change: 1948-1956,” continues the narrative of Chapter 2 as events regarding race begin to come to the forefront in both Boston and

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Whalen, *Dynasty’s End: Bill Russell and the 1968-69 World Champion Boston Celtics*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), vii.

America at large. The desegregation of the armed forces, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott all occurred during this time period. In Boston, John Hynes was elected mayor in November 1949 and brought with him the vision of a “New Boston” that would come with both positive and negative consequences. During this time period, the Red Sox failed to properly scout Willie Mays in 1949, and on the opposite side of the ledger the Celtics became the first team to draft an African-American player with the selection of Chuck Cooper in 1950.

Bill Russell’s arrival in Boston in December 1956 dramatically altered the discussion of race and sports in Boston as detailed in Chapter 5, “Bill Russell Arrives: 1956-1957.” His arrival marked both the beginning of one of the greatest dynasties in sports history and the opening up of a discussion on race that in many ways Bostonians did not want to have. Bill Russell was not the only person to make himself known in Boston in the late 1950s as Pumpsie Green became the first African American to play for the Red Sox, in 1959, followed shortly thereafter by pitcher Earl Wilson. Chapter 6, “More Arrivals: 1958-1962” looks at the additions of these two players to the Red Sox as well as the arrivals of Sam Jones and K.C. Jones to the Celtics and the election of John Collins as mayor of Boston in November 1959. Chapter 7, “Coming to a Head: 1963-1965,” details the volatility of the mid-1960s with regards to race in America from the assassinations of John F. Kennedy in 1963 and of Malcolm X in 1965 to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Issues of race reverberated in Boston as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Boston in April 1965 and Bill Russell conducted basketball clinics during the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964.

As the decade of the 1960s neared its end, significant events continued to occur that would influence subsequent discussions of race and sports in Boston. Chapter 8, “The Struggle Continues: 1966-1967,” furthers the narrative with events such as the refusal of service to Earl

Wilson at Red Sox spring training in 1966, the Red Sox's Impossible Dream Team of 1967, the appointment of Bill Russell as the first African-American head coach for a major North American sports team in 1966, and the election of Kevin White as mayor of Boston in November 1967 all entering the conversation. Chapter 9, "The Ending of an Era: 1968-1969," details the events that took place during Bill Russell's final season with the Celtics. The assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968 and of Robert Kennedy in June 1968 rocked the nation, and Russell's retirement from the Celtics after winning his 11<sup>th</sup> title marked the end of the '60s for Boston and its sports teams. The Epilogue (Chapter 10), "After 1969," takes a brief look at how events from 1945-1969 impacted future decades for the city of Boston and its professional sports franchises, particularly with regards to the busing crisis of the 1970s and the "whitening" of both the Red Sox and Celtics in the 1980s. Yet, it is important to note the success of these two franchises in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which harkened back to the success of Russell's Celtics and the Red Sox's Impossible Dream team. The Conclusion attempts to weave the three strands of the city of Boston, the Red Sox, and the Celtics as to their experiences with race and to look at the legacies of these shared pasts and the events of 1945-1969.

### **Notes on Sources**

The primary source utilized most often in this paper is the *Boston Globe*. Archives of the paper were accessed online through ProQuest Historical Newspapers available through Boston College Libraries. These archived articles give a real sense for the issues of the times and provide at least some perspective on how those who observed or were involved in these events felt about them. Articles from the *New York Times* were accessed in a similar way and provide another view on many issues.



Information on the city of Boston comes well researched from historian Thomas O'Connor of Boston College with his *The Hub: Boston Past and Present* as well as *Building a New Boston* and *Bibles, Brahmins, and Bosses* proving to be valuable resources. J. Anthony Lukas' *Common Ground* provides great insight into the racial climate of Boston particularly in the 1960s and 1970s and provides historical context that brings the situation into a much clearer light. Malcolm X's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as told to Alex Haley gives some insight into Boston prior to the primary time frame considered in this paper. In looking at sociological issues surrounding race and sports, Richard Davies' *America's Obsession* and David Wiggins' *Glory Bound* are worth reading.

In discussing the Red Sox, the most pertinent source in dealing with the Red Sox and issues of race comes in Howard Bryant's *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston*. Bryant's work brings in-depth analysis to the Red Sox's tumultuous history with the issues at hand in a keenly accessible way. Bill Reynolds' '78 looks primarily at the Red Sox's loss to the New York Yankees in a one-game playoff in 1978, but Reynolds also details the history that led up to that game and the significance of race and sports in Boston. Glenn Stout and Richard Johnson's *Red Sox Century* touches on every topic imaginable with regard to the Red Sox and their first one hundred years of baseball and gives due respect to the issue of race within the Red Sox organization.

In looking at the Celtics, two books help to frame the time period discussed here with Bill Reynolds' *Rise of a Dynasty: the '57 Celtics, the First Banner, and the Dawning of a New America* on one end and Thomas Whalen's *Dynasty's End: Bill Russell and the 1968-69 World Champion Boston Celtics* on the other. This paper's most significant individual, Bill Russell, is looked at through one of his autobiographies, done in conjunction with Taylor Branch, *Second*

*Wind: The Memoirs of an Opinionated Man*. Harvey Araton and Filip Bondy's *The Selling of the Green* looks at the side of the Celtics that was less progressive on racial issues though much of their work identifies with the time period after the period discussed here.

A plethora of other sources, both primary and secondary, exist on all of these topics, but only so many can take center stage in any type of project.

## **Major Themes**

The historian Thomas O'Connor writes, "For more than three hundred years, Boston has demonstrated an unusual ability not only to survive, but to assimilate the old with the new, the traditional with the progressive, blending the past with the present in a style all its own."<sup>2</sup> Boston's experience with race and sports provides one such example of how Boston has changed and adapted, but in this case, as in many other cases, it comes with a caveat. O'Connor continues, "Not that change comes easily to Boston—it never did. Indeed, it was when confronted with change that Boston all too often displayed a mean and selfish spirit that belied its reputation as the Cradle of Liberty and the Athens of America... Boston seldom welcomed change that would threaten what it had so carefully built."<sup>3</sup> Boston's experience with sports and race is again emblematic of this conundrum. Boston's resistance to change came through as the Red Sox were the last team to racially integrate in Major League Baseball and as Bill Russell struggled to carve out a comfortable lifestyle as a black man during his time in the city.

As a team, the Celtics shone as a beacon for what could be accomplished when blacks and whites worked together toward a common goal with the evidence coming in the form of 11 championships over 13 seasons from 1957 to 1969. They were the first team to draft an African-American player, the first NBA team to have an all-black starting five, and they were the first

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas O'Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), xii.

<sup>3</sup> O'Connor, *The Hub*, xii-xiii.

team to hire an African-American head coach in any of the four major North American sports. As far as race and sports went in Boston during this time period, the Celtics were the closest embodiment to Puritan leader John Winthrop's "city upon a hill" as existed at the time.

The Red Sox on the other hand struggled mightily with the process of integration and its subsequent legacy, particularly given the franchise's stature and deep connections in the city. As Howard Bryant writes, "For the Red Sox more than any other franchises have always found themselves linked with the larger story of abolition, opportunity, politics, and clannish insularity."<sup>4</sup> The Red Sox under owner Tom Yawkey and his two primary cronies, Joe Cronin and Eddie Collins, provided staunch resistance to integration though in an often understated way which Bryant calls "a cold war of sorts."<sup>5</sup> Yet, the club's resistance to integration was detrimental not just in a public relations sense as Bryant writes, "The price the Red Sox would pay, of course, was winning, and history. Surely a club with [Willie] Mays, [Jackie] Robinson, [Bobby] Doerr, and the Splinter [Ted Williams] would have beaten those Yankees at least once, and Williams would have been more than just a hitter, but a champion as well."<sup>6</sup> The Red Sox missed some golden opportunities to dramatically alter their own history and legacy.

Indeed as Bryant writes, "The past would never seem to fade, and the Red Sox and the city continued to struggle with racial unease."<sup>7</sup> The fact that the Celtics represented the opposite end of the spectrum during the time period discussed here really did not seem to matter. Despite all their success, the Celtics were also-rans to the Red Sox and Bruins to many Bostonians during this time period, and images and assumptions surrounding the Celtics changed particularly with the "whitening" of the team's roster in the 1980s.

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<sup>4</sup> Howard Bryant, *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), vii.

<sup>5</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, ix.

<sup>6</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, viii.

Shortly after Bryant's writing in 2002, however, the tables began to turn as the Red Sox won the World Series in 2004 and 2007 largely behind the bats of Latino players David Ortiz and Manny Ramirez, and the Celtics won the NBA title in 2008 for the first time since 1986 with black players playing every minute in the finals. In this vein, O'Connor writes, "By eventually adapting to change and accommodating itself to modern ways—although at times grudgingly, often angrily, and almost always slowly—Boston has continued to be a live, functioning urban community that has not given into the nostalgic impulses that can so often turn a once-famous city into a lifeless historical shrine."<sup>8</sup> These two franchises and the city that they call home, in time, found a way to make necessary changes, and in looking at the past the formula they needed to follow is laid out. As Bryant writes, "Within the rubble of hard years exists the key to a newer, brighter chapter for the future."<sup>9</sup> Although the city of Boston, the Red Sox, and the Celtics all struggled with issues of race during the period of 1945-1969, the success of Bill Russell's Celtics and the 1967 Impossible Dream team of the Red Sox gave an example to the city of what could be accomplished when blacks and whites worked together, and although the city did not necessarily pick up on those possibilities in the next two decades, the success of those Celtic and Red Sox teams made the success and embrace of the Red Sox and Celtics teams of the early 2000s a much more plausible scenario, with its roots in history.

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<sup>8</sup> O'Connor, *The Hub*, xiii.

<sup>9</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, x.

## **Chapter 2: Setting the Stage, 1770-1940**

### **The Eighteenth Century**

The city of Boston is well-known for its role in the American Revolution. From the Boston Tea Party to the Battle of Bunker Hill to such famous Patriots as Samuel Adams and Paul Revere—it is from these events and figures that Boston earned the nickname of “The Cradle of Liberty.” Crispus Attucks, a former slave, was the first person shot during the Boston Massacre of March 5, 1770, and Sam Adams used Attucks’s death as a rallying cry for other Americans to stand up for freedom. However, events that gain legendary status can often be removed from facts and context. As J. Anthony Lukas writes in *Common Ground*, “Boston was never quite so distinctive as it liked to pretend. Throughout the eighteenth century, Boston’s sailing men provided Negroes to the West Indies and the Southern colonies. Slaves, bought in Africa for five pounds sterling, brought from thirty to ninety pounds in the West Indies, a differential which laid the foundation for many New England fortunes.”<sup>10</sup> On the eve of the American Revolution Massachusetts was home to 5,249 African Americans, most of whom were slaves.<sup>11</sup>

Slavery was still in place in Massachusetts in 1781 even though the state constitution stated that all men were born free and equal. On these grounds, Quock Walker, a slave in Massachusetts, sued for his freedom and eventually won his freedom in 1783. The case effectively made slavery unconstitutional in the state, but slavery was not formally abolished in the state until after the Civil War. However, in gaining their freedom, African Americans in Massachusetts lost a degree of occupational status as Lukas writes, “[Slaves] in Massachusetts had been employed in a wide variety of crafts; as printers, blacksmiths, tailors, ship’s carpenters, coopers, masons, rope makers, or sailors. But with the end of slavery in the state, white artisans

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<sup>10</sup> J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1985), 54.

<sup>11</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 54.

largely reclaimed those jobs, and by the early nineteenth century Negroes were heavily concentrated in service positions.”<sup>12</sup> In the late eighteenth century, the North End served as the primary residence of most African Americans in Boston, but with time, the community ended up on Beacon Hill.

### **The Nineteenth Century**

Boston also had seemingly strong moral grounds as a racially tolerant community as the birthplace of the abolitionist movement in America. In 1831 William Lloyd Garrison founded the anti-slavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, in the city, and in 1832 at Boston’s first black church, the African Meeting House, on Beacon Hill, he established the New England Anti-Slavery Society along with eleven other white men. Yet, the racial makeup of this original group of twelve white men brought into question the differences between challenging the institution of slavery and bringing equal rights to individual slaves. As Howard Bryant writes, “The more difficult concept was Garrison’s and abolitionists’ perception of the slave himself. Here, Boston found itself to be as conflicted as the rest of the nation, for until the arrival of Frederick Douglass, the movement contained no blacks in its leadership.”<sup>13</sup> In many ways, the mythological image of Boston as an oasis of racial harmony hindered its ability to address issues of race.

On the limits of the abolition movement in Boston, Bryant continues, “Its abolitionist pedigree was more the result of a relatively small but influential group of anti-slavery leaders than any form of citywide enlightenment.”<sup>14</sup> In separating the small group of abolitionists from the larger populous of the city Bryant notes, “The notion of Boston as the moral voice of a nation, as a social beacon and the home of abolition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

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<sup>12</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 55.

<sup>13</sup> Howard Bryant, *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 7.

was a myth, really.”<sup>15</sup> Underneath the veneer of Boston as the Cradle of Liberty in the late eighteenth century and as the birthplace of the American abolition movement in the nineteenth century was a reality that painted a different picture and influenced race relations moving forward.

One such indication that Boston was not as racially tolerant a place as it seemed came with the Sarah Roberts case regarding Boston’s public schools, which had been segregated since 1798. In 1849 Benjamin Roberts brought a suit against the city in an attempt to allow his daughter, Sarah, to enter a white public school. The case went before the Massachusetts Supreme Court and Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw. In the case, *Roberts v. Boston*, Shaw ruled that Boston’s segregation of schools was not unconstitutional and through his ruling gave birth to the doctrine of “separate but equal” which was cited in the 1896 case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* which entrenched segregation in the Jim Crow South. A coalition of black parents and abolitionists of both races did take the court to the political arena, and in 1855 the Massachusetts state legislature passed a bill prohibiting segregated schools. Continuing in this vein Lukas writes, “It was the first of several notable victories achieved by the same coalition in the decades before the Civil War—among them, lifting the ban on interracial marriages, adding Negroes to the jury rolls, and abandoning segregated seating on the state’s railroad cars.”<sup>16</sup> Yet as Thomas O’Connor notes even in the aftermath of the Sarah Roberts case, Boston’s public schools continued to reflect the city’s segregated housing patterns.<sup>17</sup>

Prior to the Civil War, African Americans had gained a certain level of comfort in Boston and what Lukas notes as a “special relationship” with white Bostonians.<sup>18</sup> One reason for this

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<sup>15</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 55.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas O’Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 231.

<sup>18</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 57.

was the relatively small size of the city's black population which posed little threat to the community's white establishment. Another reason the city seemed attractive as a beacon of racial harmony came from African-American writers who described Boston as “‘a city of refuge, a place of light, life, and liberty,’ the one place in America ‘where the black man is given equal justice,’ and even euphorically, ‘the Paradise of the Negro.’”<sup>19</sup> Yet during this same time period Frederick Douglass encountered discrimination in Massachusetts and in 1829 David Walker wrote his *Appeal* while living in the city. The notoriety surrounding the Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment, the first all-black Northern regiment in the Civil War, also gave Boston a reputation as a beacon of racial tolerance though the soldiers were denied full pay despite promises to the contrary.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, African Americans in Boston expected, and in some cases, made gains. After the Civil War, Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner sponsored John Rock as the first African American to practice law before the US Supreme Court, and legislators in Massachusetts fought to bring federal jobs to African-American veterans. In 1866 two African Americans were voted into the Massachusetts state legislature, and the legislature contained at least one black representative through the end of the century. From 1876 to 1895 Boston's City Council had at least one African-American representative from the West End. Yet during this time period Boston's black population began to experience tensions with both the city's Irish-American population and with the influx of former slaves from the South which would have strong repercussions in the twentieth century. As Bryant writes, “Over the years, it would be the blacks in Boston who trusted the vision of Massachusetts as much as any white; this trust would lead to animosity not just between races when Boston inevitably retreated from these ideals, but also between blacks, who would forever be perplexed by why Boston's blacks appeared so

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<sup>19</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 52-53.



submissive to the white power structure.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, this white power structure continued to have a negative impact on Boston’s black population in the late nineteenth century.

Despite some political successes in the aftermath of the Civil War, equality was not necessarily forthcoming. As O’Connor writes, “Beneath the surface, however, things were by no means as encouraging as they appeared. For one thing, even though the number of black residents increased substantially after the war, there were few changes either in their traditional housing patterns or living conditions. Between 1866 and 1868, over a thousand former slaves moved up from the South to live in the Boston-Cambridge area.”<sup>21</sup> This influx helped increase the black population in the Boston-Cambridge area from 2,261 in 1860 to 3,496 in 1870, “despite complaints from Governor John Andrew that the lack of opportunities and social services for these newcomers would create a race of ‘homeless wanderers.’”<sup>22</sup> Boston’s continued practice of segregated housing worked as a further detriment to the city’s African Americans as they were cut off from emerging industries in the city such as commercial business and banking. The employment opportunities for the majority of African Americans in Boston continued to be confined to the industries of service and labor. As O’Connor writes, “Most black Bostonians essentially served the needs of the white community and brought in enough income to sustain their families in modest fashion. But they were seldom able to acquire the training, instruction, or experience that would enable them to move up the economic ladder.”<sup>23</sup> Blacks in Boston were systematically denied opportunities to create wealth for future generations, and with redistricting in the city in 1895, Boston’s black population was splintered—a black politician was not elected to Boston’s city council until Tom Atkins in 1967.

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<sup>20</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> O’Connor, *The Hub*, 231.

<sup>22</sup> O’Connor, *The Hub*, 231.

<sup>23</sup> O’Connor, *The Hub*, 231.

## The Early Twentieth Century: 1900-1940

With a weakening political base, Boston's black community turned to the likes of leaders such as William Monroe Trotter. Trotter had graduated from Harvard, founded the newspaper the *Boston Guardian* in 1901, and saw his father go off to fight in the Civil War for Massachusetts. Yet the work of Trotter and the establishment of the first recognized branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Boston in 1911 only had so much impact. By the early decades of the twentieth century Boston had begun to move away from its abolitionist past as Bryant writes, "For the better part of the nineteenth century the city had built a powerful reputation on its noble accomplishments, but like most of the nation in the early part of the twentieth century Boston had exhibited a massive retreat from the concept of racial equality and owned little new history on racial issues about which to be proud."<sup>24</sup> In what would be a symbolic blow, Boston's African-American community was unable to prevent the city from showing D.W. Griffith's highly-racist film, *The Birth of a Nation*, in 1915 despite repeated protests. As Boston drifted farther away from its abolitionist past, an elite group of black families, known as the "Black Brahmins," increasingly came to represent Boston's black community.<sup>25</sup>

This developing hierarchy existed alongside a larger stratification of race and ethnicity in Boston as the city's demographics continued to change. Boston's African-American community had largely lost the sympathy of Boston's elite Yankee class and increasingly came into competition with Boston's growing Irish population as well as newer immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe for housing, jobs, and social services. Potentially the most significant change

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<sup>24</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 57.

for Boston's established African-American population was the influx of blacks from the South and later from the Caribbean.

Many African Americans made their way from South to North as part of the Great Migration of the twentieth century—many got off their trains in Baltimore, Philadelphia, or New York, but some continued onto Boston, drawn by its abolitionist legacy. Thomas Quinnie Walker whose daughter's life is detailed in part in *Common Ground* felt “as if my life is starting all over again” upon arriving at Boston's South Station in 1925.<sup>26</sup> However, the influx of blacks from the South only added tensions for many blacks already in Boston. Bryant writes, “The arrival of blacks to Boston did not create a powerful voting bloc; rather, it led to difficult culture clashes between southern blacks, Caribbean blacks, and the old black gentry who were descendants of the freedmen that lived in Boston from before the Civil War.”<sup>27</sup> The old black gentry felt themselves getting squeezed out of the picture in Boston as Bryant continues, “Theirs was an angry community. They felt sold out by the weakened Brahmins and left out of the political order by the Irish. That left southern blacks, the only group lower on the social totem pole, to absorb the brunt of black anger. They expected these southern blacks to model themselves in the old and traditional Boston way.”<sup>28</sup> The influx of blacks from the South did not create a stronger political unit for black Bostonians nor did it bring any sort of sense of racial brotherhood.

Blacks from the South had an opposing view of Boston's established black community. As Bryant writes, “This position of pride and ownership that Boston blacks held toward their city would anger emigrating blacks from the South, who viewed Boston's blacks as bourgeois, unable to recognize the racism that had always existed and had deluded them into thinking they

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<sup>26</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 53.

<sup>27</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 85.

<sup>28</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 85.

stood on equal footing with whites.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Boston’s black population had increased significantly from the days of the Civil War—from 2,280 in 1860 to 14,000 in 1910.<sup>30</sup> This population continued to grow and diversify particularly with an increased influx of blacks from the Caribbean, primarily from Barbados and Jamaica after World War I. By the 1930s, Boston’s black population had passed the twenty-thousand mark (with Boston’s total population over 750,000) and resided largely in the South End and Roxbury neighborhoods.

Alongside these changing demographics, came an emerging sports scene in Boston. James Naismith invented the sport of basketball in nearby Springfield, Massachusetts in 1891, and the Boston Red Sox began play in 1901, first calling Fenway Park home in 1912. The Boston Bruins first hit the ice in 1924 and became the primary tenants of the Boston Garden upon its completion in 1929. In the winter Boston became a hockey town with the Bruins winning the Stanley Cup in 1929 and 1939, as the sport of basketball, despite being invented in Massachusetts, was not played in the Boston public schools from 1925 to 1945.<sup>31</sup> The Red Sox won World Series titles in 1903, 1912, 1915, 1916, and 1918, quickly and easily becoming the number one sports franchise in the city.

However, by the 1930s some were questioning the segregation of organized baseball, and as Glenn Stout and Richard Johnson write, “In Boston, the local black press led the cause, particularly a young African-American journalist named Mabrey ‘Doc’ Kountze. Kountze who served as sports editor for both the *Boston Chronicle* and the *Boston Guardian*, made the integration of Major League Baseball, in particular the [Boston] Braves and Red Sox, his special

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<sup>29</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 58.

<sup>31</sup> Bill Reynolds, *Rise of a Dynasty: the '57 Celtics, the First Banner, and the Dawning of a New America*, (New York: New American Library, 2010), 94.

cause.”<sup>32</sup> Kountze, who would become the first person of color to enter the Fenway Park press box in 1957, had reached out to the front offices of both the Braves and the Red Sox with regards to why their teams were not integrated in 1935. Both teams told Kountze that they believed there were African Americans who had major league ability and personally disagreed with the color line. Yet obviously racial barriers existed that seemingly stopped the front offices of these teams from making changes to the status quo. Kountze’s efforts did allow for traveling teams from the Negro Leagues to play in the ballparks of the Braves and Red Sox, and his efforts and the responses he received foreshadowed a much larger struggle to come in the 1940s and 1950s.

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<sup>32</sup> Glenn Stout and Richard A. Johnson, *Red Sox Century: One Hundred Years of Red Sox Baseball*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 239.

## **Chapter 3: Beginnings, 1940-1947**

### **Boston in the 1940s**

Like many other cities in the years leading up to World War II, Boston was struggling through the Great Depression, and just as in many other cities across America, Boston capitalized on the economic opportunities presented during the war. As the historian Thomas O'Connor writes, "Wartime prosperity gave a much-needed jolt to the city's sagging economy. A global conflict of this magnitude brought an end to more than a decade of depression and provided welcome jobs for men and women in war plants, factories, armories, and shipyards."<sup>33</sup> By the conclusion of the war, America's economy was booming and was looking toward a brighter future.

However, despite the benefits of the G.I. Bill and the protection of services such as social security and workmen's compensation, Boston did experience economic hardships in the aftermath of World War II. On the deteriorating situation in Boston, O'Connor writes, "War contracts were being canceled; the machine and tooling industries were conducting substantial layoffs; inflation kept rising higher and higher."<sup>34</sup> The city of Boston had a growing deficit, high tax rates, and a continuing state of warfare between the city's Irish and Yankee constituencies.<sup>35</sup> Yet with new social services through the federal government, many Bostonians were able to move out from under the control of political machine bosses, and the Red Sox teams of 1946-1949 gave baseball fans in Boston something to cheer about after watching teams that fielded sub-par talent earlier in the decade due to the number of ballplayers fighting in the war effort.

### **Race Relations in Boston in the 1940s**

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas O'Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present*, (Boston: Northeastern Press, 2001), 202.

<sup>34</sup> O'Connor, *The Hub*, 208.

<sup>35</sup> O'Connor, *The Hub*, 203.

Socioeconomic hardships did not constitute the only issues in Boston during World War II and in its aftermath as Boston's African-American population continued to grow and change. Boston's African-American community continued to grow as the second wave of the Great Migration began in 1940. Some in Boston's black community were even able to enter into Boston's Irish-dominated political sphere as Dr. Silas "Shag" Taylor and his brother Balcom worked Boston's black community for the political machine of James Michael Curley in the 1930s and '40s. Boston developed its own version of Harlem at the intersection of Massachusetts and Columbus Avenues during the '30s and '40s as well, as jazz clubs began to spring up.

With a continued influx of African Americans to the city came continued tensions, and one view of the tensions that existed within Boston's black community comes from Malcolm X, who moved to the city as a fifteen year old in 1941 to live with his half-sister Ella Mae Little Collins. Malcolm's take on the black community in Boston provides a snapshot into the animosities that existed between Boston's old black gentry and newer immigrants from the South and Caribbean. Upon reaching Humboldt Avenue Hill in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood, Malcolm X reminisced in his autobiography, "This was the snooty black neighborhood; they called themselves the 'Four Hundred,' and looked down their noses at the Negroes of the black ghetto, or so-called 'town' section where Mary, my other half-sister lived."<sup>36</sup> Along similar lines Malcolm continues, "Then the native-born New Englanders among them looked down upon recently migrated Southern home-owners who lived next door, like Ella. And a big percentage of the Hill dwellers were in Ella's category—Southern strivers and scramblers, and West Indian Negroes, whom both the New England and Southerners called 'Black Jews.'"<sup>37</sup> The attitude of

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<sup>36</sup> Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 42.

<sup>37</sup> Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 42.

Boston's old black gentry had impacted Boston's race relations for decades, and in later years the rejection of this attitude led to more vocal protest against discriminatory practices.

On the way in which members of the old black gentry presented themselves, Malcolm writes, "These Negroes walked along the sidewalks looking haughty and dignified, on their way to work, to shop, to visit, to church. I know now, of course, that what I was really seeing was only a big-city version of those 'successful' Negro bootblacks and janitors back in Lansing [Michigan]. The only difference was that the ones in Boston had been brainwashed even more thoroughly."<sup>38</sup> Malcolm X points to the degree of mythology that existed with respect to the "special relationship" that Boston's old black gentry felt they had with whites as Malcolm continues,

In those days on the hill, any who would claim 'professional' status—teachers, preachers, practical nurses—also considered themselves superior. Foreign diplomats could have modeled their conduct on the way Negro postmen, Pullman porters, and dining car waiters in Roxbury acted, striding around as if they were wearing top hats and cutaways ... I don't know how many forty- and fifty-year-old errand boys went down the Hill dressed like ambassadors in black suits and white collars, to downtown jobs 'in government,' 'in finance,' or 'in law.' It has never ceased to amaze me how so many Negroes, then and now, could stand the indignity of that kind of self-delusion.<sup>39</sup>

However, the discrimination that led to these circumstances would be more harshly criticized in the forthcoming decades, and this level of underhanded discrimination would play out in the Boston sports sphere as well.

### **The Jackie Robinson Tryout**

Jackie Robinson's tryout with the Boston Red Sox on April 16, 1945 and its aftermath came to epitomize how the organization had handled race and continued to handle race, particularly over the next 14 years as the team became the last club in the majors to integrate, in 1959. In the waning days of World War II, the tryout represented Boston's chance to continue

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<sup>38</sup> Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 43.



the myths surrounding the city that stemmed from the days of the Revolution and the abolitionist movement. Reality, however, would get in the way.

In the first place, the Red Sox had not gone out of their way by any means to coordinate the tryout. The fact the tryout was held at all came because of the actions of Boston City Councilor Isadore Muchnick. At the time, the Boston City Council had to approve a permit to allow for baseball to be played on Sundays, and Muchnick stated that he would not vote for the permit unless the Red Sox agreed to hold a tryout for black players. In the 1940s gate receipts provided almost all of a club's revenue, and the Red Sox needed Sunday games to remain financially solvent, and thus the team agreed to sponsor a tryout.<sup>40</sup> Muchnick had tried a similar move the year prior in 1944, but he recalled in 1959 that Eddie Collins the general manager of the Red Sox told him that "The Red Sox would be very happy to have colored ball players. But none wanted to play in the big leagues. They were doing better financially in their own leagues."<sup>41</sup> This time, however, there would be a tryout.

Muchnick worked in conjunction with Wendell Smith, a writer for the African-American newspaper the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and the two brought Robinson, Sam Jethroe, and Marvin Williams to Boston in April 1945. Robinson though was unsure about the tryout as he doubted the Red Sox were serious about integration. On the tryout Howard Bryant writes, "Robinson himself was satisfied with his performance, although by the time he left Fenway he was smoldering about what he felt to be a humiliating charade."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, as Robinson recalled to the *Globe* in 1949, "Do I remember the left field fence. But that day I was hitting the ball good to all fields. I still remember how I hit that day."<sup>43</sup> Coach Hugh Duffy ran the tryout as the three men

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<sup>40</sup> Howard Bryant, *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 29.

<sup>41</sup> Cliff Keane, "Robinson's Day with Sox Told," *Boston Globe*, April 29, 1959.

<sup>42</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 31.

<sup>43</sup> Harold Kaese, "Red Sox Let Robinson Slip Away in '45," *Boston Globe*, July 7, 1949.

worked out alongside a handful of white players—the Red Sox were always looking for players during the lean war years as long as they were white.<sup>44</sup> Yet despite this need for new talent, manager Joe Cronin barely watched the tryout, and Collins, the man ultimately responsible for signing players, did not watch the tryout at all.<sup>45</sup> The Red Sox had no interest in signing Robinson, Jethroe, or Williams.

This fact alone was damning enough, but the issue took even deeper roots as Bryant writes, “Clif Keane would give the day its historical significance. A reporter for the *Globe*, Keane said he heard a person yell from the stands during the tryout. The words—‘Get those niggers off the field’—were never attributed to one person, but they have haunted the Red Sox.”<sup>46</sup> In the years after the tryout the players would take different paths as Jethroe signed with the Boston Braves in 1950, Williams would never make it to the majors, and Robinson of course would break the color barrier in baseball with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. The tryout received little media coverage, and four years later Harold Kaese of the *Globe* wrote, “The tryout was played down. We—the writers—were dopes.”<sup>47</sup> The way in which the tryout played out began to solidify the Red Sox organization as a racist one. On the impact of an unwillingness to integrate and the faux tryout, Glenn Stout and Richard Johnson write, “It is the single greatest error in the history of the franchise, far more significant than the sale of [Babe] Ruth to the [New York] Yankees. For, Boston’s failure to sign Robinson left no imaginary curse upon the franchise, but a real one, with genuine and lasting consequences.”<sup>48</sup>

### **The Red Sox in the 1940s**

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<sup>44</sup> Glenn Stout and Richard A. Johnson, *Red Sox Century: One Hundred Years of Red Sox Baseball* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 241.

<sup>45</sup> Stout and Johnson, *Red Sox Century*, 241.

<sup>46</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 32.

<sup>47</sup> Kaese, “Red Sox Let Robinson Slip Away in ’45.”

<sup>48</sup> Stout and Johnson, *Red Sox Century*, 244.

Tom Yawkey had bought the Red Sox in 1933, and it was under his ownership that the Red Sox earned its reputation as a racist organization. As Bryant writes, “Yawkey’s racial belief system would be a question throughout his lifetime, and after, but to Robinson and the black press, there was no real quandary. Yawkey did not want blacks on his team.”<sup>49</sup> In a similar vein, Bryant continues, “Within the organization, there was no guiding force, no catalyst with the vision to make integration a reality, and in years to come this would become the critical characteristic of the Boston Red Sox regarding race.”<sup>50</sup> By the mid-1940s Yawkey had largely withdrawn himself from the daily operations of the team, handing the reins to cronies such as Collins and Cronin and taking most of his enjoyment in ownership from his relationships with the players.

In the aftermath of World War II the issue of segregation in Major League Baseball would take on additional meaning. America had just fought a war against discrimination, a war in which African Americans fought despite not having full equality in their own right. Tom Yawkey, however, was not particularly moved as he was a part of the 1946 committee that suggested to Major League Baseball that allowing blacks to attend games would scare away white customers and lead to the downfall of the sport.<sup>51</sup> That the Red Sox would back such a measure showed just how far removed the organization was from any substantive past of liberty and abolition. Major League Baseball had no explicit policy against blacks playing in the league, and yet, all fifteen other owners opposed Dodgers owner Branch Rickey’s proposal to promote Jackie Robinson to the big leagues in 1947. Baseball, however, moved ahead of society at large as Robinson’s entrance into the majors signified one of the first steps toward bringing down segregation and discrimination in any sector of American society.

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<sup>49</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 40.

<sup>51</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 24.

The Red Sox did reach the World Series for the first time since 1918 in 1946, but the club lost to the St. Louis Cardinals in seven games. Yet the Red Sox fell into a deep slump after successful seasons in '48 and '49, and their resistance to integration played a major role in that downfall as Bryant writes, "The Red Sox, however, got old quickly, and because of the heavy strain of racism that ran throughout the organization, they would not sign the cheaply priced, highly talented, and readily available black players that surely would have kept them competitive."<sup>52</sup> In 1949, Harold Kaese of the *Globe* wrote, "Could the Red Sox use Robinson now? Could the farmers use rain?"<sup>53</sup> Aligning with the attitudes of its owner and other front office staff members, the Red Sox had missed a golden opportunity to change their history, but a new sports team, opening up shop just a few miles from Fenway Park would have the chance to learn from the mistakes of the Red Sox.

### **The Birth of the Celtics**

The National Basketball Association began play in 1946 with the Boston Celtics as one of its original members. The historian Thomas Whalen notes that the sport of basketball was gaining in popularity throughout the '40s particularly at the college level with the National Invitational Tournament and that the post-war economic boom in America provided the perfect opportunity to start a new sports league.<sup>54</sup> The Celtics did struggle in their inaugural season of 1946-47 going 22-38 before an average crowd of around four thousand people in an arena that could hold 13,909 for basketball.<sup>55</sup> Yet owner Walter Brown gave his whole-hearted support to the team, and when opportunity came in later years, he and the franchise would be ready.

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<sup>52</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 42.

<sup>53</sup> Kaese, "Red Sox Let Robinson Slip Away in '45."

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Whalen, *Dynasty's End: Bill Russell and the 1968-69 World Champion Boston Celtics*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>55</sup> Bill Reynolds, *Rise of a Dynasty: the '57 Celtics, the First Banner, and the Dawning of a New America*, (New York: New American Library, 2010), 96.

## **Chapter 4: Starting to Change, 1948-1956**

### **Chuck Cooper and the Celtics in the Early 1950s**

The Boston Celtics received two additions to the franchise in 1950 that would prove critical to their future success as Arnold “Red” Auerbach became coach of the Celtics and a young point guard from Holy Cross, Bob Cousy, joined the team. The C’s also made one other significant addition in 1950, becoming the first team to draft an African-American player into the NBA with the selection of Charles “Chuck” Cooper out of Duquesne in the second round. With his selection, the team broke the color barrier that had operated as an unofficial rule in the NBA since it started in 1946. As Walter Brown made the pick, one of his fellow owners asked, “Walter, don’t you know that he’s a colored boy?” To which Brown responded, “I don’t give a damn if he’s striped, polka dot, or plaid. The Boston Celtics take Charles Cooper of Duquesne.”<sup>56</sup> The Celtics had scouted Cooper for two years prior to taking him in the draft, showing a stark contrast to the amount of time the Red Sox allocated to scouting players of color.<sup>57</sup>

Other teams began to follow the lead of the Celtics as the New York Knicks selected Nat “Sweetwater” Clifton in the same year, and the Washington Capitols took Earl Lloyd, also in 1950. However, on the significance of his own selection Cooper would later say, “I am convinced that no team [w]ould have made the move on blacks then if the Celtics had not drafted me early.”<sup>58</sup> Yet the integration of the NBA did not come with nearly the same amount of attention as Jackie Robinson’s breaking of the color line with the Brooklyn Dodgers, three years

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<sup>56</sup> Bill Reynolds, *Rise of a Dynasty: the '57 Celtics, the First Banner, and the Dawning of a New America*, (New York: New American Library, 2010), 129.

<sup>57</sup> [Globe Staff], “Celtics Sign Cooper, 1<sup>st</sup> Negro in Majors,” *Boston Globe*, July 1, 1950.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Whalen, *Dynasty’s End: Bill Russell and the 1968-69 World Champion Boston Celtics*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 11.

earlier, had. No doubt, one reason for this was the newcomer status of the NBA—it had only been around for four years while Major League Baseball had been founded in 1869. Baseball was America’s pastime while basketball was still primarily a novelty. Bill Reynolds posits a couple of other theories on why the NBA’s integration was quieter than MLB’s as he writes, “One theory was that basketball players had been to college and didn’t seem to harbor the same vitriol against blacks as did many baseball players, most of whom had not gone to college. Many baseball players had also grown up in the South. Another theory was that college basketball had long been integrated in much of the country, so most players had played against blacks before.”<sup>59</sup> Yet integration came with pains just the same with the context of the time, as President Harry Truman had integrated the armed forces only two years prior in 1948, and the country was still another four years away from the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

One person in particular who was not thrilled with the integration of the NBA was Abe Saperstein, owner of the Harlem Globetrotters. On Saperstein’s position, Bill Russell writes, “Saperstein, liked to portray himself as the benefactor of all Negroes in sports. He also believed that he had earned a monopoly on the services of every black athlete in the country. In this spirit he had opposed the admission of Jackie Robinson to major-league baseball on the grounds that it threatened his all-Negro baseball teams.”<sup>60</sup> In the case of Cooper, Saperstein told Walter Brown that if Cooper played for the Celtics, the Globetrotters would no longer play in the Boston Garden. Saperstein’s threat carried particular force as the Globetrotters were more popular than the NBA itself at the time, and Brown and many other owners relied on the Globetrotters to help raise gate receipts. Yet, Brown would not bend to Saperstein and in response to the threat told Saperstein that none of Saperstein’s teams would ever play in his building again. Brown’s

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<sup>59</sup> Reynolds, *Rise of a Dynasty*, 130.

<sup>60</sup> Bill Russell and Taylor Branch, *Second Wind: Memoirs of an Opinionated Man*, (New York: Random House, 1979), 116.

standing on principle struck a particular chord with Russell, for the Globetrotters represented “more of a minstrel show than a sporting event” for him.<sup>61</sup> However, Brown’s principles only had so much reach as difficulties with integration would arise.

One such difficulty that came with integration occurred in Cooper’s first season with the Celtics after the team had played an exhibition game in Raleigh, North Carolina. During the trip, Cooper could not stay at the same hotel, eat in the same restaurants, or go to the same movie theater as his white teammates. The team planned to spend the night after the game in Raleigh and fly to New York the next morning, but since Cooper could not stay at the team hotel, he was going to take a train to New York after the game. Upon hearing this, Bob Cousy offered to give Cooper some company on the train that was scheduled to leave at three in the morning. If having to go through these elaborate separate travel arrangements was not embarrassing enough, Cousy’s greatest moment of embarrassment came as the two had to use separate restrooms at the train station.<sup>62</sup> On his situation with the Celtics, Cooper said, “I wouldn’t necessarily call it hell, but yes, the worst part was traveling. It was those separate hotels and restaurants, and cabs.”<sup>63</sup> Yet Cooper and the team’s difficulties did not only come with traveling.

In a 1952 game against the Tri-Cities Blackhawks in Moline, Illinois, one of Cooper’s opponents called him a “black bastard.” Cooper pushed his adversary in the face in response, and much of the rest of the team joined in on the fight with Red Auerbach squaring off against Tri-Cities coach, Doxie Moore.<sup>64</sup> Prior to the game Cooper had told Auerbach that he was not going to submit to any more racial abuse, and Auerbach gave him the support to feel free to respond. In another event in 1952, the Celtics and Auerbach refused to play a game in Raleigh, North

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<sup>61</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 117.

<sup>62</sup> Reynolds, *Rise of a Dynasty*, 132-133.

<sup>63</sup> Whalen, *Dynasty’s End*, 19.

<sup>64</sup> Whalen, *Dynasty’s End*, 18-19.

Carolina because the local administrators would not allow Cooper to play in the game. In trying to cope with these difficulties, historian Thomas Whalen writes, “Indeed, his fellow Celtics always offered a welcomed buffer to the hostile forces of society that lurked beyond the sheltered reaches of the basketball court.”<sup>65</sup> This was not the case everywhere—when Cooper was playing for the St. Louis Hawks in a subsequent season, the Hawks went ahead and played a game in Baton Rouge, Louisiana even though Cooper was not allowed to participate. Whalen writes, “Race wasn’t a problem on the Celtics because Auerbach refused to make it so. He made a special point of building a harmonious team atmosphere where blacks and whites could work and thrive together.”<sup>66</sup> Even, if Auerbach was not a crusader on racial issues, his position stood as a welcome break from the stubbornness of many others.

Harvey Araton and Filip Bondy in *The Selling of the Green* take this more conservative approach to Auerbach and his attitudes toward race. They and many others posit that Auerbach’s sole desire was to win, and in this way race became a non-factor. Regarding Auerbach and the league’s other coaches, Araton and Bondy write, “He and his coaching brethren would have been blind not to notice the untapped market of talented black players.”<sup>67</sup> Yet, during a similar time period the Boston Red Sox were more than willing to turn a blind eye to African-American players. More in this line of thinking the two write, “Pragmatism shouldn’t detract entirely from Auerbach’s good deeds. He did not use Cooper and [Bill] Russell’s color as alibis. He did not avoid selecting them for positions that could have been filled by whites. That in itself was progressive. But at the same time, as Cousy suggested, Auerbach was not so much a visionary as

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<sup>65</sup> Whalen, *Dynasty’s End*, 19.

<sup>66</sup> Whalen, *Dynasty’s End*, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Harvey Araton and Filip Bondy, *The Selling of the Green: The Financial Rise and Moral Decline of the Boston Celtics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 50.



he was a street-smart survivor.”<sup>68</sup> Regardless, by the early 1950s the Celtics were at least a little ahead of the curve when it came to issues of race.

And by 1953 the Celtics were starting to make some gains in popularity. After one game in January at the Boston Garden that had a particularly large crowd, Cooper told the *Boston Globe*, “When we went out on the floor for our warm-up shots, I honestly thought for a minute that we were playing the Harlem Globetrotters. Then, when I looked down the court and saw the Knicks shootin’ around, I felt that we were in Madison Square Garden, New York...I was like in a dream.”<sup>69</sup> Red Auerbach and Walter Brown also appreciated the sizeable crowd. Later in that same year, in October, the Celtics signed their second black player, Don Barksdale, formerly of the Baltimore Bullets with both Bob Cousy and Ed Macauley of the Boston Celtics urging Barksdale to join the club.<sup>70</sup> Cooper and Barksdale would play one season together in 1953-54, and Barksdale would play one more season with the team in 1954-55 sharing an apartment with Celtics radio announcer Johnny Most. The Celtics had no African American players during the 1955-56 season but that would change in a big way with the arrival of Bill Russell in December 1956 which is discussed in the next chapter.

### **The City of Boston in the Early 1950s**

In 1950 Boston recorded its highest population in a federal census coming in at just over 800,000, but within ten years the population would dip back below 700,000. Clearly Boston was undergoing some changes during this time period. One of the greatest reasons for this population flux was the emergence of the suburbs and the highways that connected these outlying towns to the city. This phenomenon helped create class tensions as J. Anthony Lukas wrote, “Boston’s

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<sup>68</sup> Araton and Bondy, *The Selling of the Green*, 52.

<sup>69</sup> Jack Barry, “Celtics’ Cooper ‘Like in a Dream’ When He Saw Crowd at Garden,” *Boston Globe*, January 20, 1953.

<sup>70</sup> Jack Barry, “Barksdale Says He Will Join Celts Dec. 1,” *Boston Globe*, October 28, 1953.

Irish were notoriously resentful of the ‘two toilet’ Irish who had betrayed their heritage by moving to the suburbs and sending their sons to Harvard.”<sup>71</sup> Not only did Boston have tensions between races and ethnicities, it also had tensions within races and ethnicities to deal with.

The biggest story in Boston in the final months leading into 1950 was the mayoral election between John B. Hynes and longtime machine boss James Michael Curley. Hynes ran essentially as the reform candidate, as a break from the system that had neglected many. As historian Thomas O’Connor writes, “Hynes drew together a broad-based coalition of reform-minded, middle-class Irish, Jewish, and Italian voters, as well as a number of representatives of the African-American community in the South End-Roxbury district who also felt ignored by the Curley regime.”<sup>72</sup> On Election Day in November 1949 Hynes received 138,700 votes, the most by a mayoral candidate in the city’s history to this day, and Curley took home 126,042 votes, the most in his political career.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, in January 1950 Hynes was inaugurated as mayor with hopes for a revitalized “New Boston.” As O’Connor writes, “He promised to restore Boston’s ‘good name and reputation,’ and he assured voters that he would eliminate the ‘arrogance, waste, and inefficiency’ that for so had long characterized operations at City Hall.”<sup>74</sup> A new sense of cooperation permeated the city, at least in part. Archbishop and later Cardinal Richard J. Cushing’s social teachings helped bring Catholics and non-Catholics together. For one of the first times, Boston’s Yankee financial establishment showed a willingness to work with the mayor, and the city’s Irish political establishment showed a new desire to have an open dialogue. Early on in the ‘50s Hynes began to erect housing projects that at the time were welcomed as

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<sup>71</sup> J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 23.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas O’Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 210.

<sup>73</sup> O’Connor, *The Hub*, 211.

<sup>74</sup> O’Connor, *The Hub*, 211.

much-needed low-income housing though they would be later viewed as socially isolated and segregated disasters. On the other side of the financial spectrum, Hynes's efforts had enticed the Prudential Insurance Company to look to Boston as the site for its northeast regional office in the spring of 1952.

Amidst Boston's evolving political machine, the city's African-American population continued to grow. As the Great Migration picked up again in the years after World War II, Boston's black population had gone from around 23,000 in 1940 to over 40,000 by 1950.<sup>75</sup> Within this context a young Martin Luther King, Jr. arrived at Boston University's School of Theology and Ministry in September 1951, and shortly thereafter King began preaching at a local Baptist church. Yet even with these growing numbers, Boston's African-American community lacked the size of other Northern cities such as Detroit or New York to harness much political power. As Lukas wrote, "Boston's blacks lacked the critical mass necessary for effective political or social action."<sup>76</sup> Boston's districting still crippled the city's African-American community, and Lukas argues that the community had no real historic center as a place to represent unity.<sup>77</sup> Boston's black community did not have the political means at this time to voice their concerns, but by no means did this signify that African Americans in the city were not encountering problems with housing, education, and widespread discrimination, and these issues would come to light in later years.

### **Willie Mays, Piper Davis, and the Red Sox in the Early 1950s**

In looking at the state of the Red Sox in this time period, Howard Bryant writes, "Understanding the Red Sox of the 1940s and '50s under Tom Yawkey is to accept one overriding principle: [Eddie] Collins and [Joe] Cronin were his most powerful deputies...From

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<sup>75</sup> O'Connor, *The Hub*, 236.

<sup>76</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 60.

<sup>77</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 60.

1933 to 1958, these two men would control virtually all the player movements of the Red Sox organization.”<sup>78</sup> And on these two men and many of their colleagues in the front office, Bryant writes, “Even in a whites-only environment, the Red Sox would hire some of the game’s worst racists.”<sup>79</sup> These men—Yawkey, Collins, and Cronin—created a culture surrounding the Red Sox and race that would become ingrained within the franchise, making dealing with issues of race even more difficult in the future.

One of the primary reasons the team used in their defense of not having any players of color, was that many of their minor league teams operated in the segregated South. The Red Sox front office claimed that it did not want to have to subject players to the discriminatory treatment of Jim Crow. This argument proves shallow however as Bryant writes, “Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth. Had the Red Sox wanted to sign a black player, the organization surely could have, for in those days it was commonplace for teams to loan players to different organizations.”<sup>80</sup> Yawkey, Collins, and Cronin also received favorable treatment in the Boston press, as the team’s party line stated that the Red Sox were open to signing any talented black players, though much of the evidence supported the contrary.

In 1949 the Red Sox had an exclusive opportunity to sign a talented eighteen year old playing in Birmingham, Alabama named Willie Mays. The opportunity came because of an agreement the Red Sox had with one of their minor league clubs, the Birmingham Barons, and the local Negro league team, the Birmingham Black Barons. The manager of the Black Barons, Lorenzo “Piper” Davis, alerted the Red Sox to the possibility of scouting a high-level prospect. The Red Sox sent Larry Woodall, a native Texan, to scout Mays. Woodall was not particularly pleased about the prospects of scouting a black player, and after sitting through three days of

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<sup>78</sup> Howard Bryant, *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 43.

<sup>79</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 43.

<sup>80</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 44.

rain, he allegedly said, “I’m not going to waste my time waiting for a bunch of niggers.”<sup>81</sup>

Woodall essentially mailed-in a scouting report back to the Red Sox though it is unclear if Woodall ever even saw Mays play.

Later in 1949 the Red Sox did sign their first black player to a contract—it was Mays’s manager with the Black Barons, Piper Davis, who was in his mid-thirties at the time. Davis was assigned to the Red Sox’s AA team in Scranton, Pennsylvania for the 1950 season where, by early May, he was leading the club in home runs, batting average, runs-batted-in, and stolen bases. Davis had great success on the field despite trying circumstances. Davis could not stay with the Red Sox in their segregated downtown hotel in Cocoa, Florida during spring training—an issue that would become critical again during Pumpsie Green’s time with the Red Sox later in the decade. Even coming to the ballpark posed issues as Davis later said of his first day of spring training, “That first day was the worst. It was then I learned I had to dress in the visitors’ clubhouse. I couldn’t even dress with my team at first. Then I went on the field and nobody would even play catch with me. I just stood there until finally a guy named Dale tapped me on the shoulder and said, ‘Let’s throw.’”<sup>82</sup> Davis also was not allowed to go on road trips that took the team to the segregated South.

Despite his on-the-field success with Scranton, Davis was released on May 15, 1950 for what manager Jack Burns told him was “economical reasons.” Davis told the *Globe* in 1979, “I’ll never forget that day. The manager (Jack Burns) came over to tell me I’d been cut because of ‘economical reasons.’ ... I was bitter at the time, because Walt Dropo had just been called up from Louisville, their Triple A club, and I thought for sure I’d get a shot there next. I was leading

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<sup>81</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 45.

<sup>82</sup> Larry Whiteside, “The First to Sign,” *Boston Globe*, July 22, 1979.

the club in hitting, runs batted in, and stolen bases at the time.”<sup>83</sup> The reasoning was particularly odd given that money was never a problem for the Red Sox under the Yawkey ownership, particularly not a minor league contract. Ironically, Boston professional baseball did see its color line broken in 1950 as Sam Jethroe—the same Sam Jethroe the Red Sox had chosen not to sign five years earlier—played for the Boston Braves hitting .273 and becoming the National League’s Rookie of the Year.<sup>84</sup>

The Red Sox did sign an African-American catcher in 1953 named Earl Wilson but quickly converted him to a pitcher, setting back the timetable for his chance to make it to the big leagues. The prospect report on Wilson is particularly revealing as it describes Wilson as “a well-mannered ‘colored’ boy, not too black, pleasant to talk to.”<sup>85</sup> The wording in the report no doubt reveals something about the language of the times generally, but it also reveals something of the Red Sox organization. If the Red Sox were going to sign a black player, it was apparently useful for the front office to know that he was “well-mannered” and “not too black.”

Ultimately, the Red Sox’s refusal to sign black players hurt them on the field. As Glenn Stout and Richard Johnson write, “As America snoozed through the 1950s, so did the Red Sox. In the end they became both bad and boring. Fans didn’t go to see the Red Sox win anymore. They went to see Ted Williams, on display in the Fenway museum like a relic of a distant, bygone age.”<sup>86</sup> Stout and Johnson go on to criticize the Red Sox for not seizing upon “the largest pool of talent ever unleashed upon the game at a single time – African Americans.”<sup>87</sup> Not only were the African-American players now available talented, they were also hungry to prove they

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<sup>83</sup> Whiteside, “The First to Sign.”

<sup>84</sup> Larry Whiteside, “The First to Play,” *Boston Globe*, July 22, 1979.

<sup>85</sup> Larry Whiteside, “Sox and Minorities: Figures Say it All,” *Boston Globe*, July 22, 1979.

<sup>86</sup> Glenn Stout and Richard A. Johnson, *Red Sox Century: One Hundred Years of Red Sox Baseball*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 275.

<sup>87</sup> Stout and Johnson, *Red Sox Century*, 276.

belonged in Major League Baseball just as much as their white counterparts. The Red Sox, as much as any team in the majors, could have used this new infusion of energy and drive. In 1952 Yawkey signed seventeen prospects in an attempt at a youth movement, but all seventeen of these players were white, and thus the Sox missed out on some of the most talented players available, as many were black or Latino.<sup>88</sup> In the 1950s the Red Sox had no African-American or Latino scouts, and few of Boston's white scouts were willing to look for talent in the inner cities, the rural South, or the Caribbean.

Thus by the mid-1950s the Red Sox had not put a single African-American player in uniform, and the Celtics had only dressed two black players, but in December 1956 that changed in a big way, both literally and figuratively, with the arrival of Bill Russell to Boston.

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<sup>88</sup> Stout and Johnson, *Red Sox Century*, 279.

## **Chapter 5: Bill Russell Arrives, 1956-1957**

### **America in the Mid-1950s**

America in the middle of the 1950s was a nation stuck in between the valor and patriotism that had grown to fruition in the 1940s and the Civil Rights Movement and other protests that followed in the 1960s. The Korean War, America's "Forgotten War," had taken place from 1950-1953 as America's first military conflict after World War II. The Cold War was taking center stage during the administrations of Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower. McCarthyism had taken the country by storm but was effectively over by 1954.

The nation was booming in post-war prosperity as many Americans moved out of the inner-city and into suburbs. Television was becoming increasingly popular, and the birth of Rock 'N' Roll was bringing a new emphasis on youth culture to the country. Increasingly, a divide grew between the staid, old generations and the young generation of Elvis followers. Television brought an idyllic image of America to its viewers with no racism and little to no unhappiness. TV proved critical as a new form of mass communication for advertisements, ideas, and a growing popular culture. The proliferation of popular music followed a somewhat similar trend to professional athletics in the post-war period. Many white Americans began to watch African Americans compete in sports for the first time, and many of these same Americans started to listen to black musicians for the first time. African-American musicians such as Louis Jordan, Fats Domino, Ray Charles, B.B. King and Clyde McPhatter were all becoming household names by the mid-'50s. On the baseball diamond, Jackie Robinson played his last season in 1956, and the likes of Willie Mays, Ernie Banks, and Hank Aaron were following in his footsteps. On the increasing presence of blacks in music and sports Bill Reynolds writes, "To a generation of kids coming of age in the fifties, it was possible now to look at blacks differently than their parents



had, and sports were a huge part of that. If nothing else, it individualized blacks, made white America look at them as people, and not just a faceless group. It personalized them in ways that rarely had been done before in the larger culture.”<sup>89</sup> Indeed, issues of race became one of the defining topics of post-war America.

The Civil Rights Movement began to pick up steam in the mid-‘50s. The decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in May 1954 overturned the “separate but equal” clause of the 1896 case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In August 1955, 14-year-old Emmett Till was murdered in Mississippi for whistling at a white woman, making national news. Just four months later, in December, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. The Montgomery Bus Boycott took place over the next twelve months largely under the leadership of a young Martin Luther King, Jr. who had recently received his doctorate degree from Boston University’s School of Theology and Ministry in June 1955. In January 1957, one month after Bill Russell’s arrival in Boston, King founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and shortly after Russell’s first season with the Celtics, in September 1957, the “Little Rock Nine” integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. America was changing on a macro level but also on a micro level as the city of Boston demonstrates.

### **Boston in 1957: Through the Eyes of Bill Russell**

In 1957, Boston’s skyline lacked the presence of either the Prudential Building or the John Hancock Tower. Government Center and City Hall Plaza would not be built until the next decade. Boston was struggling with the loss of jobs in two major industries, textiles and shipping, as the national economy began to change. The city was losing a significant and often more affluent segment of its population as many Bostonians moved to suburbs, and Boston

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<sup>89</sup> Bill Reynolds, *Rise of a Dynasty: the '57 Celtics, the First Banner, and the Dawning of a New America*, (New York: New American Library, 2010), 199.

continued to come face-to-face with a tribal atmosphere in which the Yankee financial establishment and the Irish political machine took center stage. Boston contained a number of working-class ethnic neighborhoods with Irish Americans residing in South Boston, Charlestown, and Dorchester, Italian Americans in East Boston and the North End, and African Americans largely in Roxbury. By the time Bill Russell arrived in Boston, the nightlife that Malcolm X had enjoyed in Boston prior to World War II had mostly disappeared, with Slades and Hi-Hat two of the few remaining places of entertainment catering toward African Americans in the city.

Thus, Russell arrived in Boston, during a time of transition for the city. Russell would become one of the first high-profile figures to criticize Boston as a racist city and to advocate for the city's African-American population. On Russell's relationship with the city Howard Bryant writes,

It was the city's treatment of Russell—and how he perceived Boston—that would begin to separate the city from the rest of the sports world. The Red Sox were considered a racist franchise, but Russell would provide the lightning rod for scrutiny upon the city. That the average black person had a rough go of it in Boston was one thing; that Bill Russell, the greatest basketball player on the planet, felt so ostracized and so bitter about a place that should have idolized him was quite another.<sup>90</sup>

The relationship between Russell and Boston took time to evolve to this point of frustration and disillusionment, but the foundation behind some of these feelings had early roots.

Russell's sometimes contentious relationship with the city's media comes through as he writes in his autobiography, "I made some independent and relatively intelligent comments shortly after moving to Boston, and the sportswriters immediately assumed I was spouting Muslim doctrine. Where else could I have gotten any ideas? I certainly couldn't have come up with such thoughts on my own. They were trying to make me smaller, taking slices off my

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<sup>90</sup> Howard Bryant, *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 57.

ego.”<sup>91</sup> Racism had deep roots throughout almost all segments of society as Russell also writes, “There were few things white people could do without revealing a prejudice that was offensive to me, and I spent a lot of my time trying to combat bias in all its forms.”<sup>92</sup> Russell’s experience also gives a perspective on the larger experience of African Americans in the city. On what it meant to be an African American with a high income in Boston during this time, Russell writes, “In introducing me to black society in Boston, Iodine [a friend of Russell’s] helped me understand the first fact of life for a young black man earning thirty or forty thousand dollars in Boston back in the 1950s: that my economic peer group consisted mostly of pimps and gangsters...In Boston, in the late 1950s the idea that a black man could be successful without either hiding or kissing ass was an obscure one, at best.”<sup>93</sup> Bill Russell was not fitting any of the molds that the city of Boston would like to have put him in as he embarked on his career with the Celtics.

### **The Sport of Basketball in 1957**

By 1957 the sport of basketball still had a rather limited influence within the sphere of sports in America. In the spring of 1957 the National Basketball Association was only in its eleventh season, and the league featured only eight teams. Basketball did not have a lot of credibility within American sports circles as Bill Reynolds writes, “Often called a goon’s game, it was frequently ignored by both the big-name newspaper columnists, who didn’t consider it worth their attention, and by the majority of the American sporting public.”<sup>94</sup> Basketball as a sport garnered little respect, and the NBA did whatever it could in an attempt to turn a profit. Baseball was America’s pastime, and the Red Sox were Boston’s number one team with an aging

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<sup>91</sup> Bill Russell and Taylor Branch, *Second Wind: Memoirs of an Opinionated Man*, (New York: Random House, 1979), 188.

<sup>92</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 181-182.

<sup>93</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 219, 220.

<sup>94</sup> Reynolds, *Rise of a Dynasty*, 5.

Ted Williams as the team's main attraction. NBA owners had a far different situation than their more genteel counterparts in Major League Baseball—owners in the NBA were trying to do anything to fill their arenas.

The 1956-57 season marked an important stepping stone for the NBA, particularly according to Bill Reynolds. The NBA Finals were televised for the first time as basketball began to gain a foothold in the emerging media of television. The Celtics, led by Bill Russell and Bob Cousy, represented what the sport was becoming while the St. Louis Hawks, the Celtics' opponent in the 1957 NBA Finals, looked like many of the NBA's previous champions. Cousy brought a new flair to the game, and Russell was the league's first, bona fide African-American star. In later years the likes of Wilt Chamberlain, Elgin Baylor, and Oscar Robertson were instrumental in changing the game, but at this stage Russell was essentially an island.

### **The Boston Celtics in 1957**

In Boston, the Celtics not only played in the shadow of the Red Sox but also operated as a second fiddle in the Boston Garden behind the Boston Bruins. This was the case despite the fact that the Celtics had a far more talented team than the Bruins—a trend that became increasingly obvious during the Celtics' 11 championships in 13 years from 1957-1969. During the '50s the Celtics routinely barnstormed throughout New England as a way to attempt to popularize the game in the area. During the 1956-57 season the Celtics averaged 10,517 fans in the thirteen-thousand-seat Garden—this was the highest attendance rate the team would enjoy during their championship run, as the figure was closer to eight thousand for the majority of the other twelve seasons.<sup>95</sup> Although correlation does not mean causation, the Celtics as a team, increasingly featured African-American players during this time period. And as Harvey Araton

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<sup>95</sup> Harvey Araton and Filip Bondy, *The Selling of the Green: The Financial Rise and Moral Decline of the Boston Celtics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 76.

and Filip Bondy point out, “When Bob Cousy retired after the 1962-63 season, Celtic home attendance dropped by about thirteen hundred per game—at a time when they were still an exciting attraction on the road.”<sup>96</sup> Indeed, on another attendance related note, in 1957, Red Auerbach said, “He [Russell] is the first one ever to sell out the arenas in which we play. He sold out New York, Rochester, Fort Wayne, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. No one else ever has done it.”<sup>97</sup> Both the lack of popularity of basketball and views on race in Boston shaped attendance at the Garden.

Bob Cousy had defined the Celtics since his arrival in 1950, earning the nickname “Mr. Basketball.” He, like Russell, was one of the forces changing the game of basketball with his elaborate dribble moves and flashy passing. In a similar vein to Elvis, Cousy represented the need to demonstrate a more individual sense of freedom of expression at a time in which the style of play was much more rigid. Russell and Cousy did not necessarily enjoy the closest of relationships, but this was more a function of personality—both men were driven and often private—than race as Cousy had been close friends with Chuck Cooper and Don Barksdale, the only other black players to play on the Celtics prior to Russell. Russell sheds some light on this relationship as he writes, “Still, I can’t say I was ever close to Cousy; we never sat down and had a talk the way real friends would. The same was true with most of the other Celtics while we were playing. There is simply too much competitive pressure in professional sports to share your hopes and fears with somebody in the same business.”<sup>98</sup> Yet, Cousy and Russell became cornerstones for the Celtics beginning with the NBA Finals in 1957.

Celtics owner Walter Brown saw the 1957 Finals as a pivotal moment for his franchise—an opportunity to finally gain the hearts of the city and the region’s fans. Many in Boston thought

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<sup>96</sup> Araton and Bondy, *The Selling of the Green*, 75.

<sup>97</sup> John Ahern, “Brown Says Russell Best Drawing Card,” *Boston Globe*, January 22, 1957.

<sup>98</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 141.

the Celtics would cruise past the Hawks in the Finals, and the Garden was only half full for game one, but interest in the series changed after the Celtics dropped a double-overtime thriller to St. Louis. The Celtics easily won game two before a sold-out crowd in the Garden and took a 3-2 series lead in game five at the Garden—a game five in which five thousand fans had to be turned away at the box office. For the decisive game seven, a group of about twenty fans camped outside the Garden waiting for tickets to go on sale, and the team finally began to see increased media coverage. With this series, the Celtics had finally made its mark on the Boston sports scene, but the team’s relationship with the city would continue to evolve over subsequent years.

The arrival of Russell, combined with the direction of Auerbach, led the Celtics to take on an unmatched championship attitude. As Russell writes on Auerbach, “Red never let things get very far out of focus. He thought about winning more than I thought about eating when I was little.”<sup>99</sup> On what gave the team its edge, Russell writes, “On the Celtics, we believed that the principal difference between good teams and great ones was mental toughness: how well a team could keep its collective wits under pressure.”<sup>100</sup> Russell further describes what it took to win,

None of us had to strain to understand that we had to complement each other’s specialties; it was simply a fact, and we all tried to figure out ways to make our combination more effective. That kind of togetherness was purely pragmatic, predicated on winning in a team sport, and it didn’t have anything to do with the popular image of the Celtics as a team full of ‘Celtic Pride,’ whose players stuck together on and off the court. Some people may think that a bunch of guys with a cooperative approach to life got together, applied their philosophy to basketball, and suddenly there was Celtic basketball—living proof that it pays to be nice. Others may think that our fierce desire to win etched our strategy of togetherness, as if we’d all decided that since it worked on the court, this approach would work in life, too, and we’d become living proof that success breeds happiness. Both notions are exaggerated. The Celtics played together because we all knew it was the best way to win.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 125.

<sup>100</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 126.

<sup>101</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 127.

This attitude extended throughout the team's championship years but found its roots in that first championship in 1957. Although Russell and the Celtics' view may be harshly pragmatic, their results speak for themselves and provide an example of what it takes to achieve such a high level of success. For Russell, the seeds of his championship stock began well before his arrival with the Celtics.

### **Bill Russell's Early Life**

In discussing the figure that most fully bridges the gaps between sports, race, and the city of Boston, it is worthwhile to take a look at Bill Russell's life before he became a Celtic. Russell was born in 1934 in Monroe, Louisiana at a time when America was struggling through the Great Depression, and the South was still in the grips of Jim Crow. Yet, as a young child, Russell had some peace of mind as he writes, "But even whippings didn't bother me much. I had what they called a happy disposition, which meant sometimes I was entertaining and other times a nuisance."<sup>102</sup> During his years in Boston, the media would not often characterize Russell using the phrase "happy disposition" and to see the degree to which society can change an individual is writ large over Russell's life. As a young boy Russell saw a white policeman grab and swear at his mother "for dressing like a white woman."<sup>103</sup> But for the most part Russell had little contact with whites during the early years of his childhood as he writes, "But then nothing about the white world made much sense to me. I'd scarcely had contact with any; there were none in my school, of course, and the white kids I did see usually threw rocks at my friends and me when we walked into town."<sup>104</sup> Racism was a prominent part of the world Russell grew up in.

Russell and his family moved to Oakland, California when he was eight looking for more opportunities, particularly for education, outside the segregated South. Russell's life took another

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<sup>102</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 12.

<sup>103</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 24.

<sup>104</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 26-27.

devastating turn as a twelve year old, when his mother died suddenly. His mother's passing was a pivotal event for Russell as he writes, "It was no secret that I wasn't quite the same person, and people said so. I wasn't reckless anymore; in fact, I became a loner and introvert about the time all my peers started through such manhood rites as smoking, serious fights and sex."<sup>105</sup> Russell became an avid reader after his mother's death and identified the following moment as the first time he became enraged,

I was breezing along through a chapter on the American Revolution when I did a double take on one sentence. It was if somebody had stuck a foot out there on the page and tripped my mind as it went by. I looked again, and this sentence jumped out at me: *Despite the hardships they suffered, most slaves enjoyed a higher standard of living and a better life in America than they had in their primitive African homeland.*<sup>106</sup>

That Russell responded so strongly to this, demonstrates the principles that Russell would come to stand for and the type attitudes that Russell would embody when encountering issues of race. Russell, instead, adopted Henri Christophe, a leader in the Haitian Revolution and later President of independent Haiti, as a personal hero for his refusal to be a slave.

Not until late in his high school career at McClymonds High School in Oakland did Russell begin to excel at basketball. As a sophomore he was the "sixteenth man" on the JV team and shared the last uniform with a teammate, Roland Campbell.<sup>107</sup> Yet Russell had another pivotal, if somewhat understated, moment in his life as a junior as he writes, "During my junior year in high school, in 1950, I had a mystical revelation. One day while I was walking down the hall from one class to another, by myself as usual, it suddenly dawned on me that it was all right to be who I was."<sup>108</sup> In later years, Russell would continue to be himself regardless of what others thought, said, or wrote. Russell began to have more success at the varsity level as a junior

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<sup>105</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 35.

<sup>106</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 37.

<sup>107</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 61.

<sup>108</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 51.



and senior as he continued to learn the game. McClymonds had great success using jump shots on offense and blocking shots on defense—two tactics that were frowned upon at the time and were considered undisciplined. The style of play also had a racial dimension as many considered it “Negro basketball” and were infuriated that a playground style of hoops could have success.<sup>109</sup>

As a raw talent, college scouts paid little attention to Russell, but he did receive one scholarship offer from the University of San Francisco. This was Russell’s chance to get the education his father and late mother had wanted for him. However, Russell did have an adjustment period, as he writes, “Suddenly my life veered off course because somebody thought I was potentially a basketball player, and instantly I found myself in a sea of white people... I never knew what to expect. If they’d taken me out of class one day and fired me into space as the first astronaut, I’d have taken it in stride.”<sup>110</sup> Indeed, when Russell got to USF there were only nine black students on campus, five of whom were on the basketball team.<sup>111</sup> The Dons underperformed somewhat during Russell’s first year on the varsity as a sophomore due in large part to the bigotry of some of the team’s seniors. But in the next two years, teaming with teammate, roommate, and future Celtic, K.C. Jones, Russell led the Dons to back-to-back NCAA championships in 1955 and 1956. In juxtaposition to Russell’s championship was the fact that Russell still encountered racism on the road and on campus. Even after visiting the White House with a select group of superstar athletes, he was treated just as poorly as ever when visiting family in Louisiana.

### **The Signing of Bill Russell**

Thus, coming into the 1956 NBA Draft, Bill Russell was one of the most highly considered players. Yet, very few people had seen him play—very little college scouting existed

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<sup>109</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 64.

<sup>110</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 80.

<sup>111</sup> Reynolds, *Rise of a Dynasty*, 139.

at that time and the NCAA Tournament was not televised. Additionally, many still had serious questions as to Russell's offensive abilities with most of his points coming off layups and dunks. Auerbach, however, talked to his old college coach, Bill Reinhart, and former Celtic, Don Barksdale, both of whom had seen Russell play, and was convinced to go after him based on those conversations.

The Celtics did have to make a move in order to be in position to pick Russell—they were too far down in the draft order to have any hope of him lasting until their pick. The Rochester Royals, owners of the first pick, were not as interested in signing Russell due to the quality of the big men they had under contract and the hefty salary that was expected to come with selecting Russell. The St. Louis Hawks owned the second pick, and it was here that the Celtics made their move. St. Louis, in a segregated city, had less interest in selecting a black player, and the Hawks willingly traded the second pick to the Celtics primarily in exchange for hometown hero “Easy” Ed Macauley. The Celtics were now in position to make Russell a Celtic. Some concern existed that Russell might sign a more lucrative contract with the Harlem Globetrotters, but as Jack Barry of the *Globe* wrote, “It’s hard to understand Abe Saperstein going extra high financially for Russell. Abe wants comedy for his Trotters. That’s what pays off for him. And Russell is known as a basketball player, not a funny man.”<sup>112</sup> Russell however had no intentions of ever joining the Globetrotters, and after winning a gold medal with USA Basketball at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne, Australia, he joined the Celtics in December.

### **Bill Russell and the 1956-1957 Season**

Russell's first season with the Celtics was a difficult one as he writes, “As a rookie, in 1957, I was the only black player on the Boston Celtics, and I was excluded from almost

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<sup>112</sup> Jack Barry, “Russell Plays for Celtics or Not in NBA,” *Boston Globe*, December 5, 1956.

everything except practices and the games.”<sup>113</sup> Especially on the road in his hotel room, Russell had more than enough time to contemplate his situation. Russell’s personality was of a guarded nature, largely due to his life’s experiences. During the 1957 NBA Finals, Russell was the target of racial epithets in St. Louis’ Kiel Auditorium, and the Celtics had limited choices in finding a hotel that would accept black guests in downtown St. Louis, eventually settling on the Hotel Melbourne. The city of Boston and Celtic fans had trouble accepting him—they felt intimidated by his personality, his refusal to sign autographs, his size, his goatee, and his race.

Russell’s arrival with the Celtics changed the game on the court as well. He was the first true African-American superstar in the sport, and his success was a harbinger for an increasing black presence and dominance in the NBA. His combination of size and athleticism were unprecedented. The league featured a number of players just as tall as Russell, but none provided the shot-blocking ability or defensive presence of Russell. Blocks were so new to the game that they were not even considered as a statistical category. His combination of skill, size, hard work, determination, athletic ability, and instinct were unequaled. Red Auerbach provided the atmosphere for Russell to succeed telling the big man to focus on rebounding and defense. As the years rolled on, Russell would continue to have an impact both on the court and within the larger community of Boston and the nation, in particular with regard to Civil Rights.

### **The Boston Red Sox and Race in 1956-57**

Bill Russell’s arrival with the Celtics put the lack of African-American players on the Boston Red Sox under closer scrutiny. The Celtics had drafted Russell in May 1956, and the Red Sox were on the defensive in the *Boston Globe* in July. Many accused the Red Sox of running the team as a racist organization. Joe Cronin denied any charges of bigotry as he told the *Globe*, “Pigment of the skin means nothing to us. We want major leaguers on our team. We’d be

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<sup>113</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 188.

delighted to have a Negro major league ball player—when we can sign one to a Red Sox contract. We will not be pressured into signing a player merely because he is a Negro.”<sup>114</sup> Yet, most of the evidence seemed to prove the contrary.

Mabe Kountze, who had always worked to try to integrate the Red Sox, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Globe* in July 1956, harkening back to the days of the Jackie Robinson tryout. He wrote, “Nor can we of historically liberal New England excuse ourselves for not having had the courage of Branch Rickey. There is historically no reason why New England and Boston could not have cracked the color line first, especially since we had the first chance to do so on April 16, 1945. Boston once had that courage. Where is it now?”<sup>115</sup> Kountze sought the valor of the days of the Revolution and Abolitionism, but those ideals were in short supply by the 1950s. Jackie Robinson himself attended a breakfast in Boston under the invitation of Mayor John Hynes in February 1957, and he too, took the occasion to criticize the Red Sox for still having failed to integrate a decade after he broke the color barrier with the Dodgers. The Sox, however, could not hold out much longer, and in the coming years would begin to face, more directly, issues of integration.

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<sup>114</sup> Bob Holbrook, “Cronin Scoffs at Rumors, Tells of Scouting, Schools,” *Boston Globe*, July 15, 1956.

<sup>115</sup> Mabe Kountze, [Letter to the Editor], “Colored Athletes and the Red Sox,” *Boston Globe*, July 20, 1956.

## **Chapter 6: More Arrivals, 1958-1962**

### **Pumpsie Green and the Red Sox**

In the aftermath of Bill Russell's arrival in Boston, undoubtedly the most significant figure in the landscape of sports and race in Boston was Pumpsie Green. Green made his debut with the Boston Red Sox on July 21, 1959, becoming the first African-American player to take the field for the team. As the Red Sox were the last team in major league baseball to field a player of color, Green's promotion came with far greater attention than the promotion of a AAA ballplayer normally would.

Green's arrival with the Sox had been on the horizon for some time. The lookout for Green's landing in the major leagues had begun as early as June 1958. In that month, Green's manager at AAA Minneapolis, Gene Mauch, told the *Globe*, "He fields better than anyone up there...He still has some things to learn about hitting."<sup>116</sup> In that same article, author Roger Birtwell wrote, "Throughout the American Association, Pumpsie Green is being watched with great interest. This is not entirely because of his rather dazzling fielding. It is also because he is a Negro, and he has advanced farther in the farm system of the Red Sox than any other man of his race."<sup>117</sup> Under this environment of scrutiny, Green came to spring training for the Red Sox in the spring of 1959.

Green found himself in a difficult position on a number of levels in Arizona that spring. The color of his skin alone made his situation distinctive as Howard Bryant writes, "He was just a guy trying to win a job. Being black made it all different. Add color into the mix and Pumpsie Green was no longer a limited shortstop trying to win a spot on a mediocre ball club. He was a

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<sup>116</sup> Roger Birtwell, "Pumpsie Green Almost Ready," *Boston Globe*, June 16, 1958.

<sup>117</sup> Birtwell, "Pumpsie Green Almost Ready."

pioneer, storming the castle sword in hand.”<sup>118</sup> On paper, manager Pinky Higgins seemed to give Green a chance that spring as he started the Oklahoma native at shortstop for the first game of spring training in March. Yet, on the chances of Green’s making the team out of spring training, Higgins told reporter Al Hirshberg, “There will never be any niggers on this team as long as I have anything to say about it.”<sup>119</sup> Green certainly could not have found comfort in this lack of support from management.

Green was the only African American with the Red Sox that spring, and the *Globe*’s Harold Kaese shed light on the situation as he wrote, “No one laughed harder than Pumpsie when a fan looking over the Red Sox last week was overheard asking a companion, ‘Which one is Green?’ But the question may be pertinent later this season, for Earl Wilson, big Negro pitcher now training with Minneapolis in Florida, after two years in the Army, could be brought up at any moment.”<sup>120</sup> On one level, Kaese’s words demonstrate that Green was easily identifiable from his teammates based on his skin color and that the addition of Wilson would make Green more difficult to identify based solely on skin color, but on another level Kaese’s words also hint that, with the addition of Wilson, Red Sox fans might have some difficulty distinguishing between two African Americans.

Arguably Green’s biggest difficulty in navigating spring training in 1959 resided in the fact that he was not allowed to stay with the rest of his teammates in the team’s hotel, the Safari Hotel, in downtown Scottsdale, Arizona. On Green’s predicament Kaese continues,

Green—who put on the big league uniform that was denied Jackie Robinson and Willie Mays is a quiet but likeable young man with one of the happiest laughs you have ever heard. In the clubhouse, about the only place he sees them, he fits in easily with the other Red Sox players, swapping stories and information and laughing at their jokes. He isn’t belligerent or aggressive, for if he were he could make something out of the lonely life he

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<sup>118</sup> Howard Bryant, *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

<sup>119</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 3.

<sup>120</sup> Harold Kaese, “Isolated Pumpsie Wonders If He Will See Boston,” *Boston Globe*, March 16, 1959.

has led here. The town of Scottsdale barred him as a resident, so the Red Sox put him up at a nice enough motel on the outskirts of Phoenix.<sup>121</sup>

Green's personality and demeanor also played a critical role in dealing with his situation with the Red Sox. His demeanor came into sharp contrast with that of Bill Russell. Howard Bryant points to the significance of Green's personality as he writes, "Perhaps more than anything else, Pumpsie Green owned an ability—very important for black people in the 1940s and 1950s—to accommodate his aspirations to conform to the social limitations of his day."<sup>122</sup> Thus, Green did not take any real outward stance against his lodging situation.

Green began his stay in Arizona at the Frontier Motel in Phoenix, but by March 22 the Red Sox gave Green the go-ahead to move to the Adams Hotel—the team hotel of the San Francisco Giants. This move gave Green a chance to interact with other ballplayers at night, even if they were not the ones on his team. Indeed, the Giants proved an interesting foil to the Red Sox. The Giants had integrated more than a decade earlier, in 1949, and the team chose the Adams Hotel in Phoenix because it allowed for both black and white guests. Each morning a car would come to pick up Green, first at the Frontier, then at the Adams, to bring him the 17 miles to Scottsdale, and each evening a car would bring Green back to his hotel for the night. Not having a car also put a number of restrictions on Green—including forcing him to eat dinner at the same restaurant every night.

Green, however, showed great fortitude despite his situation. On his living alone, Green told Milton Gross of the *Globe*, "I've already learned that. A long time ago I learned how to live with myself and by myself. I don't say I like it. I just know how I do it. I've been through things

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<sup>121</sup> Kaese, "Isolated Pumpsie Wonders If He Will See Boston."

<sup>122</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 9.

a lot worse than here.”<sup>123</sup> Green also took the high road on his chances of making the club, particularly considering he would be the first black player to suit up for the Red Sox,

I’m here to make a ball club. A lot of people are going to be looking at me. As long as people meet me halfway and are good to me I don’t want any trouble with anybody... Can a rookie feel at home? A guy can have a good Spring and still be sent out for some guys who’ve been around a little longer. Of course I don’t feel at home. I’m shaky. I can’t relax, but if I was in Spring training with the Dodgers where I wasn’t alone I’d be the same. I’m just a guy in Spring training trying to make a team.<sup>124</sup>

By the time April rolled around, many felt that Green would indeed open the season with the Red Sox. A ballot of eleven Boston baseball writers named Green, who led the team in hitting in spring training, the team’s “Rookie of the Spring,” and the Red Sox had trimmed their roster down to the player limit.<sup>125</sup> Yet, the Red Sox front office chose to option Green to AAA Minneapolis to open the 1959 season.

Green’s demotion caused an appropriate amount of furor in reaction. Harold Kaese of the *Globe* wrote,

The Red Sox have won no prizes this Spring for the way they treated Pumpsie Green. From a strict baseball point of view they may have been doing the wise thing when they optioned their first Negro player to the Minneapolis farm club yesterday. From every other point of view, they undoubtedly have pulled a colossal boner. They are guilty of incredibly poor public relations. They have borne out the suspicions of those who said: ‘We’ll believe the Red Sox have their first Negro player when he shows up in a Red Sox uniform in Fenway Park and plays a game.’<sup>126</sup>

The Red Sox, indeed, had brought this situation upon themselves with their consistent actions and attitudes involving racial matters. Some of what was written on Green’s demotion was also more widely revealing. Kaese continued, “He made no trouble. He did not pop off. He did not try to take advantage of his unique position.”<sup>127</sup> Kaese’s words reveal a larger expectation among many Bostonians—that African Americans should not speak out or “cause trouble.”

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<sup>123</sup> Milton Gross, “Green Now Used to Loneliness,” *Boston Globe*, March 28, 1959.

<sup>124</sup> Gross, “Green Now Used to Loneliness.”

<sup>125</sup> Bob Holbrook, “Red Sox Send Pumpsie Green to Minors,” *Boston Globe*, April 8, 1959.

<sup>126</sup> Harold Kaese, “Did Sox Give Pumpsie Green a Shabby Deal?” *Boston Globe*, April 8, 1959.

<sup>127</sup> Kaese, “Did Sox Give Pumpsie Green a Shabby Deal?”



Additionally, to consider Green's situation as advantageous is counterintuitive. That an African American would hold a position of "advantage" in a nation that had discriminated against individuals of African descent for over three hundred years and on a team that had socially segregated him, throughout a time in the season crucial to the building of team camaraderie, nears on the edge of lunacy. Yet, Kaese's opinion represented widely held beliefs in the city and nation and were echoed in the words of the *Globe's* Bob Holbrook, as he writes, "But one thing about Green, he did not take the opportunity to pop off about ill treatment. He refused pointedly to answer any and all questions shot at him. A smart boy. There is nothing to be gained by creating a furor over taking another turn in the minors."<sup>128</sup> Bostonians may have expected Green to take his demotion in stride like "a smart boy," but Green had every right to fight for his rights. Along these lines, the sit-ins in Greensboro, NC and Nashville, TN in 1960 and the Freedom Rides in 1961 evidenced an increasing attitude of overt opposition to oppression.

At least two state organizations made moves in the aftermath of Green's demotion as both the Boston branch of the NAACP and the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) had reactions. The NAACP voiced opposition to the Red Sox's use of a newly proposed parking lot after their treatment of Green. Herbert E. Tucker, the president of Boston's NAACP branch, told the *Globe*, "We feel very strongly that any business that would sacrifice the principles of fair play and the American way of life—as was evidenced in the treatment accorded Pumpsie Green during the Spring training season and the subsequent results thereof—should not be allowed to benefit financially by utilizing public lands for their private use."<sup>129</sup> The NAACP had a hard road to hoe against a veritable Boston institution such as the Red Sox. That the NAACP was one of the groups to advocate on Green's behalf also spoke to

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<sup>128</sup> Holbrook, "Red Sox Send Pumpsie Green to Minors."

<sup>129</sup> [Globe Staff], "NAACP Says No Pumpsie, No Parking Lot for Sox," *Boston Globe*, April 9, 1959.

Boston's racial situation as the NAACP increasingly represented an older, more accommodating way of action in comparison to the up-and-coming SCLC and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee which was formed in April 1960. The MCAD sought to begin an investigation into the Red Sox's hiring practices of both the players and Fenway Park staff in the aftermath of Green's demotion.

The *Globe* also published a number of letters to the editor under the title "Whole Town's Talking About the Green Boy" that help capture the breadth of reaction to the event. On the more conservative end, John T. Blaisdell of Boston wrote, "In my opinion as a fair-minded (I hope) baseball fan the whole Pumpsie Green thing has been blown out of proportion. I've played some ball myself, in an organized way, and saw Pumpsie play in and around Phoenix last month. He is what I'd call a 'prospect,' but he is certainly a season away from being of major league quality."<sup>130</sup> Others criticized the Red Sox for not sleeping in a hotel that Green was allowed to stay at during spring training, and still others more directly confronted the team as G.H.G. of Mattapan wrote, "I'm certain that the return of Pumpsie Green to the minor leagues is no surprise to Sox fans. It seems evident that Boston's group of big-league prima donnas will never condone the breaking of the color line here. The result is that we fans will be cheated every time we pay an admission, because we will not be viewing the best brand of our national pastime when we watch 'Boots' Buddin playing shortstop."<sup>131</sup> Indeed, on Opening Day, Don Buddin, the starting shortstop for the Red Sox, was booed as he was introduced.

As the Red Sox opened the 1959 season with poor infield play, Larry Clafin, a reporter for the *Boston Record-American*, asked manager Pinky Higgins if he would consider recalling

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<sup>130</sup> [Letters to the Editor], "Whole Town's Talking About the Green Boy," *Boston Globe*, April 12, 1959.

<sup>131</sup> [Letters to the Editor], "Whole Town's Talking About the Green Boy."

Green—in response Higgins called Claflin a “nigger lover.”<sup>132</sup> However, with the team struggling Higgins was fired on July 3 with Billy Jurgens replacing him as manager. Less than three weeks later, on July 21, 1959, with Higgins in no position to stop it, Pumpsie Green entered the game as a pinch runner in the eighth inning, and the Red Sox became the last team in the major leagues to break the color barrier. Herbert Tucker and Mabe Kountze were glad to hear the news with Kountze telling the *Globe*, “It’s good news. We’ve been fighting for it for a long time. Everyone in New England should be overjoyed. This is a good reflection on the Sox change of management to Harris and Jurgens.”<sup>133</sup> Green, however, was placed into a difficult situation.

Green had a heavy weight on his shoulders as Bryant writes, “When he played well, Green uplifted the city’s integration forces...When he struggled, Green believed he let down not only his teammates but also people in Boston—the NAACP, for example—who had so tirelessly petitioned the Red Sox on his behalf.”<sup>134</sup> Additionally, Green felt a level of resentment toward Boston’s media members, many of whom expected Green to act as a sort of spokesman on racial issues. Green was not in the position of Jackie Robinson to take a strong stance due to the fact that he did not have the same support from management, and Green did not have the type of superstar status that Robinson held. One positive did come out of the racial attitudes that plagued professional sports teams at this time. Since it was considered taboo for white and black players to room together, one week after Green’s promotion, the Red Sox brought their second African-American player up to the big leagues in pitcher Earl Wilson. By 1959, the issue of race had taken center stage for the Red Sox organization.

### **The Red Sox: 1958-62**

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<sup>132</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 52.

<sup>133</sup> Robert McLean, “Everyone Pleased Pumpsie Returning,” *Boston Globe*, July 22, 1959.

<sup>134</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 12.

By 1959 the Red Sox lagged behind every other major league team in the area of integration—even the Detroit Tigers (in 1958) and the Philadelphia Phillies (in 1957) had integrated—and neither of these cities was considered particularly progressive. The issue of race existed on an institutional level with respect to the Red Sox as Bryant writes, “As of 1958, Yawkey did not employ a single black person—not with the grounds crew, custodians, concessionaires, or office staff—at any level of the organization.”<sup>135</sup> Yet, Tom Yawkey was able to avoid wide criticism due to his relative reticence on race in juxtaposition to other more vocal owners and due to the fact that the Boston media was not particularly critical of him.

When looking at the Pumpsie Green situation, the *Globe*'s Jerry Nason worried that Yawkey might move the Red Sox out of Boston. Nason wrote, “Yawkey is an owner who has always bridled at outside interference, as he should. He has explicit faith in the sound judgment of his field manager, in Mike Higgins, the evaluation of his players.”<sup>136</sup> To consider Higgins an objective evaluator of talent certainly was a stretch, and Nason's reference to “outside interference” is an eerie harbinger for the notion of “outside agitators” that was so widely used in the South during the 1960s civil rights campaigns. Nason continued, “This is a guy [Yawkey] I would not push too hard. He's taken a lot of knocks without a whimper and he's been a tremendous asset to this town. I'd find the rights and wrongs of the Pumpsie Green situation, but I'd tread very carefully while doing so.”<sup>137</sup> In recognizing Yawkey as a “tremendous asset” to Boston, Nason demonstrated just how the city felt about the owner of the Red Sox and how it approached issues of race.

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<sup>135</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 7.

<sup>136</sup> Jerry Nason, “Will Yawkey Quit Boston?” *Boston Globe*, April 12, 1959.

<sup>137</sup> Nason, “Will Yawkey Quit Boston?”

Glenn Stout and Richard Johnson characterize the Red Sox of the late '50s and early '60s as “a ‘country club,’ a cushy organization where average players earned All-Star wages.”<sup>138</sup> Yet in 1958, Joe Cronin, then General Manager of the Sox, was named the President of the American League in what Bryant calls “a tacit condoning of the Red Sox way and a clear example of the deep levels of entrenchment that existed in Major League Baseball with regard to racial questions.”<sup>139</sup> Yawkey had struggled with letting his old drinking buddy, Higgins, go during the 1959 season, and so by the end of the '59 campaign, Yawkey fired Jurgens and rehired Higgins. The Red Sox mirrored their home city both in terms of racial attitudes and in terms of social standings as Stout and Johnson write, “The team’s lack of appeal and charisma mirrored that of the city in which they played. Both the ball club and the city looked back on a glorious past but faced an uncertain future. People were leaving Boston in droves, and property values plummeted.”<sup>140</sup> The Red Sox and the city of Boston lacked stability, but the Sox continued to play games with the dawn of every new season.

Ted Williams homered in his last at bat in Fenway Park on September 28, 1960. Also, in 1960, the Red Sox for the first time acquired a black player by trade in Willie Tasby who played in 105 games for the Sox during that season. Earl Wilson also began to find his stride with the Sox despite the fact that many still felt that African Americans lacked the discipline and intelligence to pitch. Wilson’s shining moment came in a game against the California Angels on June 23, 1962, when he became the first African American to throw a no-hitter in the American League. Yet the Red Sox would continue to struggle with matters of race with Yawkey at the top, and with Higgins’s promotion to general manager in 1962 until, in a critical move for the

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<sup>138</sup> Glenn Stout and Richard A. Johnson, *Red Sox Century: One Hundred Years of Red Sox Baseball*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 297.

<sup>139</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 51.

<sup>140</sup> Stout and Johnson, *Red Sox Century*, 297.

franchise, he was replaced in 1965 by Dick O'Connell—one of the few front-office members of the Red Sox to achieve his rank by merit.

### **Bill Russell: 1958-62**

As Bill Russell continued his career with the Celtics, he did not in any way, shy away from matters of politics or race. During the 1957 Finals, Russell had been denied service at two different late-night diners in St. Louis due to the color of his skin, and this discrimination foreshadowed events to come. In November 1958 when the team was playing an exhibition game in Charlotte, NC, Russell again faced discriminatory treatment and spoke out against it. Unlike the lack of support that players of color were subjected to on the Red Sox, Celtics owner Walter Brown defended his black players, which now included Sam Jones and K.C. Jones, both at the time and in subsequent months. In January 1959, Brown told the *Globe*, “I said before and I say now, I’ll never do anything to embarrass my ball players. We don’t have to play in the South or anywhere. When the league schedule is made up a rival club has to obtain permission from other teams if it wants to schedule a game any place outside of its own arena.”<sup>141</sup> However, a similar incident of discrimination garnered even greater attention in October 1961.

The Celtics and St. Louis Hawks were scheduled to play an exhibition game in Lexington, Kentucky as a homecoming for the Celtics’ Frank Ramsey and the Hawks’ Clif Hagan. Attention, however, turned away from the game and toward an issue of race, after some members of the Celtics and Hawks were denied service at a hotel coffee shop. This incident led the five black members of the Celtics—Russell, the two Joneses, Tom “Satch” Sanders, and rookie Al Butler, to boycott the game and fly home to Boston. On the irony of the incident, head coach Red Auerbach said, “The State Department has asked Bill to make a special foreign tour as an official good will ambassador. He received all these honors, represented his country in the

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<sup>141</sup> Jack Barry, “Brown Reiterates Stand on Playing South Games,” *Boston Globe*, November 26, 1958.

Olympics and has trouble getting a place to stay and eat in this country.”<sup>142</sup> Ramsey was apologetic and stood in solidarity with his teammates as he said, “I can’t say how sorry I am as a human being, as a friend of the players involved, and as a resident of Kentucky for the embarrassment of this incident. I’ll stand behind my teammates any time in a situation of this type.”<sup>143</sup> Auerbach further elaborated on his take of the situation as he said, “I think of athletes as entertainers. That is one of the ways the American Negro has attempted to show he is a human being. I am coming to the realization that we are accepted as entertainers, but that we are not accepted as people in some places. Negroes are in a fight for their rights—a fight for survival—in a changing world. I am with them.” Thus in a time period where the Red Sox continued to try to dodge questions of race, the Celtics were forced to do some soul searching on these issues, and in many ways came out of difficult situations stronger.

Yet just as the institution of baseball dragged its feet at certain points during this time period, so too did basketball. In his autobiography Russell recalls one such situation as he writes, “I laugh now when I look back on one incident that offended me in 1958, my second year in the NBA. I was chosen the Most Valuable Player in professional basketball, and yet when the sportswriters voted, I was not even on the first All-NBA team. They had to trip all over themselves to leave me out, putting three white forwards on the team and no center at all. What ingenuity and what a trivial place for prejudice.”<sup>144</sup> Indeed these types of American attitudes helped lead Russell to purchase a 50,000-acre plantation in Liberia in 1960 and led him to feel so much excitement as he visited Africa in 1959 as the winds of change began to sweep across that

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<sup>142</sup> [Globe Staff], “Segregation Hits C’s Negro Star,” *Boston Globe*, October 18, 1961.

<sup>143</sup> [Globe Staff], “Kentucky Neighbors Apologize to Ramsey for Insult to Celts,” *Boston Globe*, October 19, 1961.

<sup>144</sup> Bill Russell and Taylor Branch, *Second Wind: The Memoirs of an Opinionated Man*, (New York: Random House, 1979), 187.

continent in the midst of the struggle for independence. Despite these international dealings, Russell's basketball career marched on in the city of Boston.

### **The Celtics: 1958-62**

After winning the NBA Finals in 1957, the Celtics continued to look to strengthen their roster with the signing of black players. The C's selected Sam Jones out of North Carolina Central University in the 1957 draft and received the services of K.C. Jones beginning in the fall of 1958 after Russell's former teammate at USF completed a two-year commitment with the military. The Celts then added Tom "Satch" Sanders out of New York University with their first selection in the draft of 1960. These additions helped to make Russell feel a bit less alienated and gave the team a strong nucleus of talented black players. Also during this time period, in 1959, Wilt Chamberlain began his career in the NBA, and Chamberlain's rivalry with Russell over the next decade became one of the major story lines of the NBA, with Russell's reserved demeanor and Chamberlain's outgoing personality helping to shape the rivalry as well.

Despite this progress, however, there were persistent underlying issues. Don Nelson, who began his career in 1962, said in 1974, "When I came in the league you had black stars of course, but blacks were the first to go if there was a question of cutting a black or white. You didn't see blacks at the bottom of a team."<sup>145</sup> Indeed, the Celtics were not immune to part of this as Harvey Araton and Filip Bondy claim, "From 1958 to 1965, the Celtics had only one black player who might be classified as a little-used reserve: John Thompson."<sup>146</sup> Additionally, despite the success the Celtics were having as a franchise winning titles in '59, '60, and '61, the team, a major attraction on the road, only averaged 6,852 fans per game during the 1961-62 season—another

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<sup>145</sup> Thomas Whalen, *Dynasty's End: Bill Russell and the 1968-69 World Champion Boston Celtics*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 135-136.

<sup>146</sup> Harvey Araton and Filip Bondy, *The Selling of the Green: The Financial Rise and the Moral Decline of the Boston Celtics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 125.



season in which the team won a championship.<sup>147</sup> Thus, even as the team worked to make strides in confronting race, the city of Boston was not necessarily moving in tandem with its most successful sports franchise in coming out to watch a team that featured black athletes.

### **The City of Boston: 1958-62**

In 1957 Mayor John Hynes had created the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA). The organization took part in urban renewal projects in '57 and '58 clearing out tenement housing in first Boston's South End and then in the city's West End neighborhood. Yet, Hynes's redevelopment plans left thousands without housing as the BRA knocked down entire city blocks without creating adequate alternative housing. With this backdrop, the city's mayoral election took place in the fall of 1959 with underdog John Collins taking on the well-established John Powers. Collins, behind the slogan of "Stop Power Politics" and the prospect of creating a "New Boston," took the election in November '59.

During the late '50s the city had slipped further financially and was in danger of falling into bankruptcy and receivership. In September 1960, BRA Director Edward Logue unveiled his "Ninety Million Dollar Development Program for Boston" in an attempt to revitalize the city.<sup>148</sup> Collins, as well, hoped to extend his vision of a "New Boston" past the downtown area to the many older, working-class neighborhoods that existed throughout the city. Boston's African American community looked to benefit from revitalization of these neighborhoods. From 1940 to 1960, the city's black population had grown from 23,675 to 63,165 but still constituted just over 10 percent of the city's population and had little political clout.

Regardless of the growth in population, racism existed throughout the city. Bill Russell recalls one such incident in his autobiography as he writes, "Once in Boston, in about 1960, I

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<sup>147</sup> Araton and Bondy, *The Selling of the Green*, 23.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas O'Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 221.

was sitting in my car in a parking lot while a friend was inside getting a few sandwiches to go. When a cop pulled into a parking lot next to me, I knew he didn't like the look of that big car—or at least the look of me in it. He walked up to me and said, 'Let me see your driver's license and registration.'"<sup>149</sup> Russell told the police officer that he had no ground to ask for his paperwork. After a moment, the officer returned to his cruiser to call in the license plate, and once he realized that it was Russell in the car he quickly pulled away. Russell himself noted that if an average black man had acted in such a way, the situation may not have had such a benign ending.

Russell expressed many of his feelings about Boston and its racial situation to Pumpsie Green. Indeed, Green learned about Boston from Russell. Green got along fine around Boston's whites with his easygoing demeanor, but Green learned about Boston's less friendly side from Russell. Russell found Boston more difficult to navigate than Green, for Russell did not feel comfortable with the exclusive nature of so many of Boston's institutions and the way in which the city was segregated. Furthermore, Russell grew increasingly frustrated with the blissful ignorance with which both blacks and whites treated issues of race in the city and the way in which Boston failed to live up to its legendary past as a place of freedom and equality. Personality went a long way in contextualizing these two men's relationship with the city as Bryant writes, "If Pumpsie Green did not accept racism, he also knew it was an intractable and unavoidable part of his life. He would not allow it to bore at his soul. Russell, meanwhile, was proud and defiant, demanding to be recognized on his own terms."<sup>150</sup> Green would leave the Sox after the 1962 season, but Russell would continue to deal with these issues in Boston, as the city and the nation continued to confront race in the turbulent decade of the '60s.

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<sup>149</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 194.

<sup>150</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 59.

## **Chapter 7: Coming to a Head, 1963-1965**

### **America and the Civil Rights Movement: 1963-65**

The period 1963-1965 emerged as a critical one for the Civil Rights Movement in America. The nation had witnessed the Sit-ins of 1960, the Freedom Rides of 1961, and James Meredith's enrollment as the first African American to attend the University of Mississippi in the fall of 1962. Against this backdrop, the Birmingham Campaign under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. commenced in the spring of 1963. The campaign consisted primarily of nonviolent demonstrations, yet the demonstrators met a shocking degree of force from Birmingham's police department. Birmingham's Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, directed those under his command to use high-pressure hoses and attack dogs against demonstrators, and images showing the use of these tactics shocked and dismayed people throughout the country. One of the campaign's primary goals was for demonstrators to intentionally get arrested in order to fill up the city's jails, and the SCLC recruited a number of children to help in this effort.

King was among the many whom ended up in jail, and it was from jail that King composed his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" on April 16, 1963. King's letter was a response to a letter, "A Call for Unity," written by eight, white Alabama clergymen who had taken umbrage to the demonstrations of the Birmingham campaign. The letter called the demonstrations "unwise and untimely" and hinted at the idea of "outsiders" affecting the city, revealing a similar mentality as to the way Bostonians preferred to deal with their problems.<sup>151</sup> King's response represented one of the most eloquent annunciations of the Civil Rights Movement touching on a number of themes. King touched on the universality of the struggle as he wrote, "Injustice

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<sup>151</sup> Bishop C.C.I. Carpenter, et al, "A Call for Unity," April 12, 1963, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/King//frequentdocs/clergy.pdf>, Accessed: January 31, 2011.

anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” and commented on the need for progress in the present as he continued, “The time is always ripe to do right.”<sup>152</sup> King’s work made reference to a number of Biblical and classical works, and his writing directly analyzes the timelessness of justice.

King’s letter brought forth a number of other key points that were worth considering for Americans throughout the nation. He noted the need for an appeal to the conscience and the need for tension as he wrote, “Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up must be exposed with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.”<sup>153</sup> King also expressed disappointment, particularly with white moderates and white church leaders as he wrote, “I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride for freedom is not the White Citizen’s Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice.”<sup>154</sup> Although King’s inspiration came largely in part from the events in Birmingham, his words had far reaching implications that extended beyond Alabama. The city of Boston reflected both of these themes as it had largely ignored its racial problems (not exposing its boils to the light), and although the city had not experienced anywhere near the amount of racial violence that the South had, it too saw a tendency to elevate order above justice. King’s campaign brought a great deal of attention to the injustice occurring in Birmingham and helped continue to keep the national spotlight on racial inequality, and other events furthered this focus as well.

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<sup>152</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” April 16, 1963, [http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/resources/article/annotated\\_letter\\_from\\_birmingham/](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/resources/article/annotated_letter_from_birmingham/), Accessed: March 1, 2011.

<sup>153</sup> King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”

<sup>154</sup> King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”

On June 11, 1963, Vivian Malone and James Hood successfully integrated the University of Alabama, becoming the first African Americans to enroll at the school since Autherine Lucy's three-day enrollment in 1956. The day was marked with great symbolism as Alabama Governor George Wallace blocked the two from enrolling at the school on their first attempt in what came to be known as the "Stand in the Schoolhouse Door." Wallace's actions caused President John F. Kennedy to send troops from the National Guard to the school, and with the presence of General Henry Graham, Wallace stepped aside and Hood and Malone were able to enroll as students. Kennedy then took the occasion to address the nation on civil rights, a matter that he had largely ignored as president, turning his focus instead toward foreign relations and the Cold War.

Kennedy addressed his fellow Americans that evening with his usual eloquence but with urgency on the matter of racial injustice that he had seldom shown before. The president advocated for a sort of soul-searching throughout the country as he stated, "I hope that every American, regardless of where he lives, will stop and examine his conscience about this and other related incidents. This nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds. It was founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened."<sup>155</sup> Continuing on the idea of the issue as a national one Kennedy noted, "This is not a sectional issue. Difficulties over segregation and discrimination exist in every city, in every state of the union, producing in many cities a rising tide of discontent that threatens public safety."<sup>156</sup> Thus, Kennedy, beloved throughout his native Massachusetts, made the issue one that applied to his home state just as much as it did in Alabama.

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<sup>155</sup> [AP], "'A Moral Issue from Scriptural Times,'" *Boston Globe*, June 12, 1963.

<sup>156</sup> [AP], "'A Moral Issue from Scriptural Times.'"

Kennedy took an even wider look at the issue both within the context of American history and within the context of written human history as he said,

We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution. The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated... One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons are not fully free. They are not yet freed from the bonds of injustice. They are not yet freed from social and economic oppression, and this nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free.<sup>157</sup>

For Kennedy to express these words brought a particular significance as now the President showed legitimate concerns over the direction of the country on matters of race. With the President fully behind civil rights, the chances for the passage of federal legislation, supporting racial equality, greatly improved.

Momentum behind the Civil Rights Movement continued with the March on Washington on August 28, 1963. In front of the Lincoln Memorial, King gave his famous “I Have a Dream” Speech where he told the nation, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” King and Kennedy continued to work together in an attempt to fashion federal legislation that could bring racial equality to America.

Then, on November 22, 1963, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Kennedy’s death reverberated throughout the nation and did so particularly in the city of Boston. The *Globe* wrote, “In Boston, they wept. Elsewhere, they mourned. At 2 p.m. Friday, the President of the United States died from the bullets fired by a mad assassin in Texas. And people choked up in the streets of his native city. Probably no where in the world was the shock so great.”<sup>158</sup> Oscar Hanlin of the *Globe* brought further light to the event as he wrote, “He came to the presidency

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<sup>157</sup> [AP], ““A Moral Issue from Scriptural Times.”

<sup>158</sup> [Globe Staff], “In Boston—People Wept,” *Boston Globe*, November 23, 1963.

bearing the hopes of his countrymen for a new departure in national policy, for a fresh tone in national life. Young, dedicated, and vigorous, he represented the country's need for modern thinking in a period of rapid change and of great and continuing dangers. His shocking death throws cruel light on the inadequacy of the response to his leadership."<sup>159</sup> Kennedy's death sent shock waves throughout the nation, but the nation had to soldier on during this critical time period.

July 1964 saw the enactment, with the considerable legislative skills of now President Lyndon B. Johnson, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That summer also saw what was called Mississippi Freedom Summer in which SNCC, SCLC, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the NAACP organized voting drives, schools, and community centers in an attempt to bring more racial justice to the state of Mississippi. In August, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party attended the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, NJ to protest the all-white representation in Mississippi's official delegation to the Democratic Party. The testimony of Fannie Lou Hamer in particular brought light to this injustice. During the same time period that critical legislation was passed, it was clear that more work needed to be done.

The year of 1965 followed a similar trend to that of 1964. On February 21, 1965 the assassination of Malcolm X in New York City made national news. Many in Boston reflected on his death, some, such as the Rev. Samuel Laviscount and his half-sister Ella Mae Little Collins, knew him personally. Difficult news continued to come in early March as King's attempt to march from Selma to Montgomery for voting rights was met with a violent response at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. March 7 became known as "Bloody Sunday" as police forces attacked demonstrators with clubs and tear gas. The march was finally completed on March 25, and within a few months, on August 6, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 became law. Yet, within five

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<sup>159</sup> Oscar Hanlin, "He Lived His Ideals," *Boston Globe*, November 24, 1963.

days race rioting broke out in the Watts district of Los Angeles signaling once again that justice would not come quickly or easily. America had reached a crossroads in the mid-1960s, and its problems reached all corners of the nation, including in the city of Boston.

### **Boston and Civil Rights: 1963-65**

During the Birmingham Campaign in March 1963, Boston held a rally that saw a crowd of about ten thousand people converge on Boston Common. As Robert Levey of the *Globe* wrote, “Marchers, converging from three directions, streamed into the heart of Boston 10,000 strong and assembled on the same Common where 100 years earlier abolitionists rallied for the freedom of the Negro.”<sup>160</sup> Celtics stars Bill Russell and K.C. Jones were present at the rally. Though Boston was rekindling its abolitionist past, and the city was showing a large outpouring of support for blacks in the South, not all news out of the event was positive. Kenneth I. Guscott, the president of the Boston branch of the NAACP, took the occasion to have Boston examine its own situation as he said,

Massachusetts has a Negro population of about 125,000, of whom 73,000 live in Boston and 63,000 live in a three square mile area of Roxbury. This is in fact segregated living. There are, nonetheless, presumably responsible persons in Boston who appear to think that the Boston Negro lives voluntarily under these circumstances. There are not here the physical outrages of Birmingham, but the attitudes are the same.<sup>161</sup>

Throughout the nation a time of reckoning had come in the ‘60s, and Boston was not immune to this.

Yet, significant differences did exist between the North and South, particularly with respect to the more subtle (or sometimes just ignored) forms of racism that existed in the North. Joseph Alsop of the *Globe* commented on this as he wrote, “Such demonstrations will be far harder to deal with if they come, for it is much simpler to desegregate lunch counters than to

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<sup>160</sup> Robert Levey, “Hub Rally Backs Alabama Negroes,” *Boston Globe*, March 13, 1963.

<sup>161</sup> Robert Levey, “Hub Rally Backs Alabama Negroes.”



solve the problem of the hideous Negro ghettos of the Northern cities.”<sup>162</sup> Pent-up frustration existed throughout the cities of the North from Detroit and Chicago to New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. One way in which Northern discrimination had affected African Americans in Boston was through the public school system. Thus on June 18, 1963 Boston’s African-American leaders conducted a “Stay-Out” in which students boycotted Boston’s public schools in opposition to the city’s *de facto* segregation of the schools. Students who chose to stay out of the public schools spent the day at “freedom schools” taking in lessons on subjects from African-American history to stories from the Civil Rights Movement. Some also heard Bill Russell speak as he visited several freedom schools where he told his listeners to “wear our color like a badge.”<sup>163</sup> Many in Boston did not agree with the theory behind the Stay-Out, but regardless of opinion the city clearly had an issue on its hands.

The Stay-Out came about in part due to a report from the group Citizens for Boston Public Schools. In May, the report had revealed that thirteen of the city’s schools were over 90 percent black and that 11 of these schools were at least fifty years old.<sup>164</sup> On June 11, the same day that George Wallace attempted to block the integration of the University of Alabama and President Kennedy addressed the nation on civil rights, Boston’s branch of the NAACP brought this report to the attention of Boston’s School Committee. Thus began Boston’s battle with segregation in its public schools that erupted in violence in the 1970s.

Boston’s African-American community was beginning to become a more active political force during the 1960s due to what historian Thomas O’Connor terms “a rising tide of anger and discontent.”<sup>165</sup> Issues of housing went alongside issues of education. Many had thought that the

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<sup>162</sup> Joseph Alsop, “Thoughts for Whites and Negroes,” *Boston Globe*, May 31, 1963.

<sup>163</sup> Gloria Negri, “... ‘Marching Up to Freedom Land,’” *Boston Globe*, June 19, 1963.

<sup>164</sup> J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 124.

<sup>165</sup> Thomas O’Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 227.

Boston Redevelopment Authority was going to help revitalize their decaying buildings, but just as had happened with previous BRA projects, the residents of these communities often had their homes torn down and were left with no alternative housing. New, higher-end housing for white-collar professionals replaced their old neighborhoods.

Against this backdrop, Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Boston in April 1965. Returning to the city where he had received his doctoral degree, King sought to examine the issues facing African Americans in Boston as well as to gain financial and moral support for his cause, just one month after the Selma to Montgomery marches. On April 22, King toured Roxbury's housing and schools. While at P.T. Campbell Junior High School King told the *Globe*, "You must not let anyone lull you to sleep. Some of the same things wrong in Alabama are wrong in Boston, Massachusetts. And we must organize ourselves, for problems don't work themselves out."<sup>166</sup> King also took the occasion to reminisce on part of his experience as a student in the city in the early 1950s as he said, "I remember very well trying to find a place to live. I went into place after place where there were signs that rooms were for rent. They were for rent until they found out I was a Negro, and suddenly they had just been rented. But I am not here to say Boston is the worst city in the United States."<sup>167</sup> The next day, in light of these issues, King held a march that ended with a rally at the Common once again.

The crowd at the Common on April 23 was more than twice the size of the crowd in March '63 with an estimated gathering of 22,000 people on hand to hear King speak. King told the crowd, "We must not become a nation of onlookers. This fight is not for the sake of the Negro alone but rather for the aspirations of America itself. All Americans must take a stand

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<sup>166</sup> Robert Levey, "Dr. King Appeals for Brotherhood," *Boston Globe*, April 23, 1965.

<sup>167</sup> Levey, "Dr. King Appeals for Brotherhood."

against evil.”<sup>168</sup> King continued, echoing some of the sentiments of “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” as he said, “Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy. Now is the time. Now is the time to make brotherhood a reality. Now is the time.”<sup>169</sup> On a note that more directly addressed the situation in Boston, King implored, “The vision of the New Boston must extend into the heart of Roxbury. Boston must become a testing ground for the ideals of freedom.”<sup>170</sup> King was clearly challenging Bostonians to take a long, hard look at themselves.

The crowd at the rally was described as a fairly diverse one featuring the young and the old—around a third of the marchers were deemed to be white.<sup>171</sup> The *Globe* did question some in the crowd, due in part to a certain disconnect, as the paper wrote in an editorial, “Quite a few white children from the bedroom suburbs joined in the march Friday, since they were on school vacation. Many of their well-meaning parents admire Dr. King and speak well of his cause. But in their mostly lily-white enclaves—unsoiled and unshaken by the visceral issues disturbing the city—the stirring voice of the Negro leader has a far-off ring.”<sup>172</sup> Some questioned King for choosing Boston as his first Northern city to bring his campaign to. Just weeks earlier a Boston minister, James Reeb, had been killed in Selma as a part of King’s marches. J. Anthony Lukas in *Common Ground* describes the attitude of Alice McGoff, a poor white woman living in Boston, who felt that poor whites were no better off than blacks in the city.<sup>173</sup> Further describing the mentality of McGoff and other like-minded individuals, Lukas writes, “No longer were politicians, professors, and editorial writers talking merely about giving Negroes an equal shot in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. By the mid-sixties, they were proposing to take real

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<sup>168</sup> Robert Levey, “A Mile of Marchers,” *Boston Globe*, April 24, 1965.

<sup>169</sup> Levey, “A Mile of Marchers.”

<sup>170</sup> Levey, “A Mile of Marchers.”

<sup>171</sup> Levey, “A Mile of Marchers.”

<sup>172</sup> [Globe Editorial], “Dr. King Strikes Home,” *Boston Globe*, April 24, 1965.

<sup>173</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 22.

things—money, jobs, housing, and schools—away from whites and give them to blacks.”<sup>174</sup>

Indeed, trying to apply the ideas of the Civil Rights Movement in a concrete, material way often proved more difficult than finding the moral high ground in a theory. Boston was coming to a head and had difficult decisions ahead of it.

Also in April of 1965, Boston’s public schools were still under examination. In that month the Advisory Committee on Racial Imbalance and Education had released another detailed report on the racial divisions in the city’s public schools. The committee found forty-five of Boston’s schools to be considered racially imbalanced and proposed busing as one potential solution to remedy the situation. The Boston School Committee, including Louise Day Hicks, whom some called the “Bull Connor of Boston,” and many others did not agree with the proposal. Lukas describes their argument, albeit porous, as he writes, “The School Committee continued to insist that such racial segregation was due entirely to residential segregation, combined with the tradition of ‘the neighborhood school.’ In fact, Boston had long since abandoned the neighborhood as an organizing principle for attendance at the middle and high school levels. Students shuttled around the city, following elaborate ‘feeder patterns.’”<sup>175</sup>

Regardless, on August 16, 1965, just days after the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Watts Riots, the state legislature passed the Racial Imbalance Act, and Massachusetts became the first state to outlaw *de facto* segregation in its public schools. However, this would effectively represent only the first chapter in Boston’s struggle with segregation of its schools.

### **Bill Russell and Civil Rights: 1963-65**

Boston and the nation experienced an extraordinary confluence of events during the mid-‘60s, and Bill Russell, Boston’s most socially active athlete, found himself caught up within it. In

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<sup>174</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 26.

<sup>175</sup> Lukas, *Common Ground*, 133.

describing the period of 1963 to 1965 for himself Russell writes in his autobiography, “The glow had worn off basketball; I thought it was a child’s game, and said so publicly. How could I ‘play’ basketball as a grown man in the same way that I had played it as a kid, when there were so many more important things going on? I wanted to help change the world, and was looking for a way to do it.”<sup>176</sup> Russell conducted basketball clinics during Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964 at the invitation of Charles Evers whose brother Medgar Evers, a civil rights leader, had been assassinated on June 12, 1963, the day after Kennedy’s address to the nation on civil rights. Russell told the *Globe*, “I guess they call people like me ‘outside agitators’ but no American is an outside agitator anywhere in America. What happens in Mississippi concerns people in Massachusetts and vice versa.”<sup>177</sup> Indeed, Russell knew full-well that Massachusetts and Boston had many issues of its own.

On Boston’s racism, Russell writes, “To me, Boston itself was a flea market of racism. It had all varieties, old and new, and in their most virulent form. The city had corrupt, city-hall-crony racists, brick-throwing, send-‘em-back-to-Africa racists, and in the university areas phony radical-chic racists (long before they appeared in New York).”<sup>178</sup> On the relationship between Bostonians and King Russell writes,

Initially, however, I had the same reservations about Dr. King that I had about the Vietnam war; the white people in Boston liked him, and so I knew something must be wrong... Nevertheless, everybody in Boston rushed to speak out in favor of Dr. King, and the newspapers went on a crusade on his behalf. Virtually nobody opposed him overtly, though many were patronizing in their support. I was mystified. The only explanation I could come up with was that perhaps Dr. King’s dream of a color-blind society based on love was being misrepresented by Bostonians. To them, ‘color-blind’ meant that blacks would be invisible, which would be fine with them and not much different from the reality.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Bill Russell and Taylor Branch, *Second Wind: Memoirs of an Opinionated Man*, (New York: Random House, 1979), 182.

<sup>177</sup> Michael Lydon, “Russell Wows Boys in Miss.,” *Boston Globe*, July 10, 1964.

<sup>178</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 183.

<sup>179</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 183.

Russell's opinions clearly demonstrate how matters of race heightened his passion. Here, he touches on the idea that there was a disconnect in Bostonians' support for civil rights that was previously discussed as well as the idea that Boston was not letting the boil of racial injustice out into the sun harkening back to King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

Russell continues expounding his view on the people of Boston as he writes,

I had no doubt about those people in Boston because I saw them every day. They constantly surprised me, since I'd thought of Boston as the city where Paul Revere rode for freedom. If Paul Revere were riding today, it would be for racism: 'The niggers are coming! The niggers are coming!' he'd yell as he galloped through town to warn neighborhoods of busing and black home-owners. Most of the Irish Catholics in Boston were ready to pick your fillings out if you weren't from the right religion or from the right clique—much less from the right race—and almost everybody else wouldn't acknowledge you unless you'd gone to the proper school and came from the proper family. I had never been in a city more involved with finding new ways to dismiss, ignore or look down on other people.<sup>180</sup>

The insularity of Boston had a deeply negative effect on Russell's experience in the city. Russell opened a restaurant in the city during the '60s and found difficulty in opening the establishment because he had not used the right contractors for certain jobs or had not paid off the inspectors. Boston's levels of racism and insularity would continue to reveal themselves in the years ahead, and Russell and Boston's other athletes would encounter these currents in some shape or form.

### **The Boston Red Sox and the Boston Celtics: 1963-65**

During the span of 1963-65, the Celtics took home their sixth, seventh, and eighth NBA titles winning the championship in '63, '64, and '65. The team had garnered the league's crown in eight of the previous nine seasons, with '58 representing the lone season in which Boston's professional basketball team had not come out on top. Boston's black players played critical roles on these teams, and in 1965 the Celtics had six black players alongside five white players, much in line with the league as a whole which had 51 black players and 48 white players at one

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<sup>180</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 183.

point in February 1965.<sup>181</sup> Yet stereotypes still dogged African-American players as the *Globe's* Harold Kaese wrote, "Negro players are even more prominent in pro basketball than they are in baseball and football. Their speed, coordination, ability to relax, and springy legs make them naturals at the game."<sup>182</sup> Despite these stereotypes that seemed to state that a team with mostly black players would lack skill, determination, or basketball knowledge, Red Auerbach's desire to win trumped any sort of prejudice. From December 26, 1964 to January 20, 1965 the Celtics became the first team to start five black players in a game as K.C. Jones, Sam Jones, Satch Sanders, Bill Russell, and Willie Naulls suited up as the starting five for each game during that span. Over those three-plus weeks, the team posted a 12-0 record.

On the opposite side of the success ledger stood the Boston Red Sox. In 1963 they placed seventh in the American League, in '64 they came in eighth in the AL, and in '65 they finished in ninth. The Red Sox had essentially hit rock-bottom with no more Ted Williams and a country-club mentality that was out of control. The team did however hire its first black scout, Ed Scott, in 1964, and in September '65 Tom Yawkey finally came to his senses, firing general manager Pinky Higgins and replacing him with the competent and capable Dick O'Connell. O'Connell became the driving force behind turning the franchise around, particularly with his willingness to target talented players regardless of race. The Red Sox did not see immediate dividends in '66, but that changed in a big way in 1967, and just like the Red Sox, the Celtics, the city of Boston, and the country as a whole continued to experience a seemingly endless barrage of significant events, many of which centered on race.

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<sup>181</sup> Harold Kaese, "What Can City Give to Russell?" *Boston Globe*, February 25, 1965.

<sup>182</sup> Kaese, "What Can City Give to Russell?"

## **Chapter 8: The Struggle Continues, 1966-1967**

### **Bill Russell, Boston, and Civil Rights: 1966-67**

In the years directly after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s visit to Boston, the city's racial issues increasingly came to light. A new wave of young African-American activists was making their voices heard and challenging Mayor John Collins to do more for their community. Boston's black community was beginning to push outside the confines of its Roxbury neighborhood into formerly all-white neighborhoods such as Dorchester, Mattapan, and Jamaica Plain. This spreading community met strong resistance from many whites in Boston who feared their housing and jobs would be taken from them. These events were occurring at a time when the national economy was taking on an increasingly heavy burden trying to fund the war in Vietnam, and many social programs saw their funding slashed. President Lyndon Johnson's plans for a Great Society and a War on Poverty were looking less and less likely to come to fruition.

In June of '66 an incident occurred at P.T. Campbell Junior High School in Roxbury as the Rev. Virgil Wood protested the presence of Louise Day Hicks at the school's commencement ceremonies. The commotion significantly disrupted the ceremonies, which resulted in a second ceremony being held a week later in the basement of a Catholic church on Blue Hill Avenue, with Bill Russell as the class's commencement speaker. Russell urged the crowd as he said, "Where are the other voices crying out for change? Every dilapidated, antiquated, rat-infested fire trap of a school in Roxbury has its counterparts in South Boston, Charlestown, East Boston."<sup>183</sup> On his presence at the commencement Russell told the *Globe*, "Why am I here? ... Because I'm me ... Because I was a Negro man before I was a coach, and because I'll be a Negro man after I'm through as a coach. I've always said what I thought, and people are bright

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<sup>183</sup> Robert Anglin, "'Freedom Class' Gets Diplomas," *Boston Globe*, June 23, 1966.



enough to know it's still me, and that I'm not representing the Boston Celtics here. The people of Roxbury are important to me, and so are all the people of Boston. The schools are bad everywhere in the city—this is every citizen's fight, not just Roxbury's.”<sup>184</sup> Russell could have passively stood by and read about such incidents in the paper, but his personality did not allow it.

For Russell found himself completely enthralled with justice during this time period just as he had throughout his life dating back to his days as a youth in Monroe, Louisiana and Oakland. Russell saw a significant problem in Boston as he said in his commencement address,

The Negro in Boston is being systematically eliminated from the mainstream of the economy...there's a fire here in Roxbury that the school committee refuses to acknowledge...and the fire that consumes Roxbury will also consume Boston...because of a lack of real communication, a polluted atmosphere hangs over our cities, an atmosphere of hate, distrust, ignorance, a complete lack of knowledge of each other...I do not say we have to love each other, but we must try to understand and respect each other.<sup>185</sup>

Russell had lived in Boston for close to ten years, and his experience in the city had for the most part left him frustrated. Both the resistance of whites and the accommodating attitude of many blacks vexed the Celtics star. Russell sought to use his status as a prominent public figure to bring about change, yet, as Howard Bryant writes, “In Boston, as well as most other sports towns, the concept of black assertiveness was not particularly welcome, much of it for the basic reason that most sports fans take a certain position of ownership over the local athlete.”<sup>186</sup> These two forces—Russell's strong stances on civil rights and Boston's somewhat paternalistic attitude towards its athletes—had a significant impact on Russell's relationship with the city.

Indeed Russell's experience with the city had far reaching implications, as Bryant continues, “Black athletes, just coming into their own both athletically and socially in the 1960s, slowly viewed Boston with great trepidation. The general wisdom for athletes had been simple:

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<sup>184</sup> Bud Collins, “Russell Wants Unified Boston,” *Boston Globe*, June 23, 1966.

<sup>185</sup> Collins, “Russell Wants Unified Boston.”

<sup>186</sup> Howard Bryant, *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 82.

if you play hard and win the paying white customer will embrace you. But here was Russell, winning championships every year—the Boston Celtics won eight straight titles from 1959 through 1966—and responding to life in Boston with real vitriol.”<sup>187</sup> Russell felt the need to make his opinions heard in a nation and world that desperately needed some direction, but many in Boston did not want to take advice or even acknowledge that issues existed from someone such as Russell. Indeed, some of Russell’s teammates, such as K.C. and Sam Jones, found Boston much easier to navigate than Russell because they had a more easygoing attitude toward Boston and did not get caught up in any of the controversies that existed within the city.

In June of 1967, controversy surrounding race again struck the city. In that month a group of mothers staged a sit-in of the welfare department’s Grove Hall office in Roxbury. The mothers were looking for better services from education to housing to sanitation. The sit-in precipitated rioting and violence throughout Roxbury as Boston’s African-American community began to resemble much of the rest of the country in taking a more forceful stand against discrimination. On the rioting, *Globe* sportswriter Bud Collins wrote, “Maybe the riot knocked some of the smugness out of us Bostonians who shook our heads at the uprisings in Watts and Harlem and Hough, deploring conditions in those distant slums—and thought our own turn wouldn’t come.”<sup>188</sup> Stokely Carmichael had popularized the use of the term “Black Power” in 1966, and in that same year Huey Newton and Bobby Seale had founded the Black Panther Party. A more militant approach to civil rights was sweeping the nation, and one month after the rioting in Roxbury, large-scale riots broke out in Newark and Detroit making national news.

Russell had warned Boston of the fire that consumed Roxbury, and he had told anyone who would listen that more communication was needed on the issues surrounding racial

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<sup>187</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 58.

<sup>188</sup> Bud Collins, “Bill Russell Warned Us...,” *Boston Globe*, June 10, 1967.

discrimination. Collins hoped that the riots would lead to more dialogue as he wrote, “Sure the riot in Roxbury was regrettable and intolerable, but maybe it had this positive effect: it drew attention to those ills, and told us that the civil rights situation in our own town is as bad, in some instances, as in Mississippi.”<sup>189</sup> African Americans in Boston had received second-class treatment at the institutional level from a variety of sectors, and the frustration that this caused was beginning to overflow. The notion of a “New Boston” during this time period brought further irony to the situation. As Collins continued, “We have to beat this cancer because the concept of a new, good Boston is completely phony as long as we keep 75,000 people in a Class D world. Boston deserves the newness of Big Pru and Government Center, but it has also deserved the ugliness of riot.”<sup>190</sup> The issues existed, the only question became at what time Bostonians were going to attempt to engage them.

November brought with it another mayoral election featuring a race between the up-and-coming Kevin White and school committee member Louise Day Hicks. Whoever was elected mayor faced a difficult test. The city found itself under the stress of financial inflexibility and clear social and racial issues. White did prevail over Hicks with a margin of 12,000 votes, but his inauguration in January 1968 came at the beginning of one of the most chaotic years in American history.<sup>191</sup> In 1967 as well, Boston elected Tom Atkins to its city council—the first African American to serve on the Boston City Council since 1895. Yet before White took the reins as mayor of Boston, other events from Boston’s sports world helped in shaping the city he inherited.

### **Bill Russell as Head Coach of the Boston Celtics**

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<sup>189</sup> Collins, “Bill Russell Warned Us...”

<sup>190</sup> Collins, “Bill Russell Warned Us...”

<sup>191</sup> Thomas O’Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 238-239.

The naming of Bill Russell as player-coach of the Boston Celtics on April 18, 1966 stood as potentially the most significant event that tied sport and society during the time period of 1966-67. With Russell's acceptance of the position he became the first African American to become a head coach in any of the four major North American sports, and some considered his ascendancy to the ranks of coaching to take on a significance similar to that of Jackie Robinson's breaking of the color line in baseball in 1947. However, just as Red Auerbach's selection of Chuck Cooper in 1950 had not been based solely on humanitarian reasons, so too was this the case with his choice of Russell as the Celtics new head coach. Auerbach was looking for a new way to motivate Russell and naming him as the team's player-coach was the perfect way to keep Russell's competitive motivations thriving. Clif Keane of the *Globe* waxed on the hypothetical as he wrote, "Abraham Lincoln would have loved the luncheon. A Negro, so sure of himself, drawing applause a couple of times for his remarks. The first of his race to lead a major professional team. This was the 20<sup>th</sup> century at its best, with Bill Russell talking as the future coach of the great Celtics team."<sup>192</sup> Whether Abraham Lincoln would have loved the press conference or not is open to debate, but certainly the Celtics were moving in a different direction than the city of Boston with regards to race as the '60s moved into its later stages.

Keane had some further thoughts on the naming of Russell as the Celtics coach as he wrote, "Off the court Russell is so often a glum, morose, moody character, who refuses autographs for kids, fails to talk to people in the lobby of different arenas, glaring at them as though they didn't exist... He can no longer think of himself as a coach, he is in the public relations business. He must build up the game, show people he has warmth. The game of basketball weak as it is compared to other sports, needs this kind of help."<sup>193</sup> Keane's words

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<sup>192</sup> Clif Keane, "Russell Must Warm to Fans in New Role of Player-Coach," *Boston Globe*, April 19, 1966.

<sup>193</sup> Keane, "Russell Must Warm to Fans."

demonstrated two important revelations—Boston’s generally negative perception of Russell as a person, and the city’s relative level of disinterest in basketball as a sport. For although the Celtics proved during this time period just how successful blacks and whites could be when they worked together (winning another title in ’66 and losing in the Eastern Conference Finals in ’67) and that a black man could lead this sort of group to the pinnacle of success, the city often took its cues on matters of race from its beloved baseball team, the Boston Red Sox.

### **Earl Wilson and Cloud Nine Bar**

Earl Wilson, the second African-American player to play for the Red Sox, looked toward 1966 as an important season for himself. Wilson had come up to the Sox in 1959, had thrown a no-hitter in 1962, and was coming into his prime in ’66. Yet an incident at the Cloud Nine Bar in Winter Park, FL seemed to derail all that.

Early in Spring Training in February 1966, Wilson was denied service at two local nightspots with the more controversial episode happening at Cloud Nine. Though not at the level of Russell, Wilson was not as willing as Pumpsie Green to take discrimination lightly, and on the incident Wilson said, “If it happens again, I’ll pack my bags and leave. I don’t want apologies. I want to know where I stand... The thing that hurt me most was the embarrassment. If I had an idea that something like that was going to happen, I would never have gone to the place to start with.”<sup>194</sup> Continuing on the situation Wilson said, “I decided to see if the thing was an isolated case the first time. So I went into another spot and before I got through the door, a man told me I wasn’t wanted. I left... In the first place they let me sit down and suffer the embarrassment of having to walk out of the place again. That was the longest walk I took in my life and I don’t want to take another like it.”<sup>195</sup> Winter Park officials apologized to Wilson on the Sunday after

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<sup>194</sup> Will McDonough, “Fla. Night Spot Denies Service to Sox Pitcher,” *Boston Globe*, February 28, 1966.

<sup>195</sup> McDonough, “Fla. Night Spot Denies Service.”

the Saturday incident—officials from Cloud Nine did not issue an apology until the Tuesday after the incident. The Red Sox deemed both bars out of bounds to Red Sox players in the aftermath, and Dick O’Connell received a letter from the president of the NAACP, Kivie Kaplan, lauding him for his handling of the incident, but a certain lack of closure seemed to hang in the air.

Billy Herman, the manager of the Red Sox, had told Wilson to simply forget the incident and not to make a controversy out of it with the press, embodying a larger attitude. In general, baseball tried to shy away from disturbing social customs in the South, and the Red Sox in particular did their best to stay away from controversy. Besides Green and Wilson, the Red Sox had only had six other black players—Willie Tasby, Billy Harrell, Roman Mejias, Felix Mantilla, Al Smith, and Lenny Green—actually suit up for the team, with only Mantilla, an infielder/outfielder, having much of an impact outside of Wilson.<sup>196</sup> Due to their lack of integration the Red Sox had encountered few such incidents of race before and showed little desire to take a particularly strong stand in defense of one of its black players.

Over time Herman and the press increasingly labeled Wilson a drinker and a troublemaker, and the possibility of his getting traded became more and more likely. On June 13, 1966 the Red Sox acquired two black players, Jose Tartabull and John Wyatt. With the new influx of black players, the Red Sox engaged in their customary racial balancing, and Wilson was traded four days later to the Detroit Tigers for Don Demeter and Julio Navarro. Wilson, a pitcher in his prime, was traded away for what amounted to very little talent. In August, the *Globe’s* Harold Kaese looked back on the situation and wrote, “What the team needs most for next season is pitching...starters...three starters who can go every fourth or fifth day and have a better than 50-50 chance of winning. Like Earl Wilson? Exactly. But the Red Sox traded Earl

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<sup>196</sup> Harold Kaese, “Sports Shatter Segregation Shackles,” *Boston Globe*, August 22, 1966.

Wilson to the Tigers for Don Demeter. Why? How come? Aren't they sorry? If they are sorry, they are not admitting it."<sup>197</sup> Yet despite the bitter taste that Wilson's situation left with the Red Sox, the team had brought seven other black players (Joe Foy, George Smith, George Scott, Mantilla, Lenny Green, Reggie Smith, and Joe Christopher) into camp that spring, five more than they had the previous spring under Pinky Higgins coupled with the fact that O'Connell had traded for two players of color showed that the Red Sox were beginning to move in a different direction with regards to race.

### **The Boston Red Sox and 1967**

Dick O'Connell's hiring as general manager of the Red Sox in September 1965 had enormous consequences for the direction of the franchise as Howard Bryant writes, "The hiring of Dick O'Connell as the team's general manager in 1965 would be the single most important front office move in Red Sox history; it was the first concrete step the franchise took outside usual Yawkey cronyism, and it would pave the way for what would be the most progressive era the franchise would enjoy until the mid-1990s."<sup>198</sup> O'Connell began to rebuild the club heading into the 1966 season and actively targeted black players. With the Red Sox nowhere near title contenders, O'Connell had nothing to lose in giving his young African-American players a chance at the big-league level, giving opportunities to the reigning *Sporting News* Minor League Player of the Year, Joe Foy, as well as George Scott, Reggie Smith, George Smith, Lenny Green, and Joe Christopher. The team once again finished in ninth place in '66 in the American League just as it had done in '65, but the team was undoubtedly moving in a new direction away from the country club and toward an invigorated drive to win.

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<sup>197</sup> Harold Kaese, "Did Red Sox Trade 20-Game Man?" *Boston Globe*, August 22, 1966.

<sup>198</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 67.

Also in July 1966, Ted Williams was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, and the former Red Sox star used the occasion to argue for the inclusion of players from the Negro leagues into the Hall of Fame. In his induction speech on July 25, 1966 Williams said, “And I hope that someday the names of Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson in some way can be added as a symbol of the great Negro players that are not here only because they were not given a chance.”<sup>199</sup> That Williams chose to use his induction into the hall of fame as the time to bring up such an important issue sent a powerful message. Williams clearly believed that skill and determination should trump race in every way in giving players a chance to make it in the major leagues. For Williams to take such a stance on race in such a prominent way spoke to a repudiation of the Red Sox’s previous ways and an endorsement of the direction in which the franchise was in the process of moving.

However, all that happened in ’66 was merely as a prelude to quite possibly the most important season in Red Sox history, 1967. For as Glenn Stout and Richard Johnson write, “The 1967 season saved the Sox. Had it never happened, it is not inconceivable to think that within a few seasons the Red Sox may well have called another city name.”<sup>200</sup> The Sox had Tony Conigliaro, Rico Petrocelli, and Jim Lonborg, while Carl Yastrzemski captured the Triple Crown. The team even hired its first scout of Latino descent, Pedro Vasquez, in ’67. The 1967 Impossible Dream Team took on proportions that went far beyond the dimensions of a baseball diamond as Bryant writes, “The Red Sox were a young, integrated team coming of age at a time when young people across the country were breaking with convention. That a staid game like baseball had a team like the Red Sox, one that was young, energetic, and reflected small parts of

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<sup>199</sup> Theodore Samuel Williams, “Hall of Fame Induction Speech,” Cooperstown, NY, July 25, 1966, <http://baseballhall.org/node/11160>, Accessed: March 28, 2012.

<sup>200</sup> Glenn Stout and Richard A. Johnson, *Red Sox Century: One Hundred Years of Red Sox Baseball*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 317.



the social discussion, elevated the Red Sox of 1967 into a mythic symbol.”<sup>201</sup> The Red Sox took New England by storm that summer and reengaged its fan base in a way that totally rehabilitated the team’s image.

That the team had a level of racial balance that departed so strongly from previous years should have had a more significant impact on the team’s fan base. The Sox had an emerging black star in outfielder Reggie Smith. Smith, a native of Compton, California, played the game hard and well with a tenacity that fans normally love to see in their team’s players. Yet, as a black player, Smith’s intensity was perceived as a volatile characteristic rather than a positive one. As Bryant writes, “White players who ran hard, slid harder, and took no shit were intense team guys, the ones every club needs. Black players who did the same were distant and moody... The white player with scars on his knees was considered a future general, the black player an outcast.”<sup>202</sup> Along these lines, Smith took on an attitude similar to that of Bill Russell in regards to issues of race, and his stance would become more prominent and controversial in later years. Yet, the Impossible Dream Team Sox were bringing far too much joy to the city for fans to focus on peripheral issues such as race.

All eyes were on the Sox as they entered the stretch run of the ’67 season. The team even traded for Elston Howard, the first black player to play for the New York Yankees in 1955, late in the season—a further sign of just how different attitudes toward race were in the front office of Dick O’Connell. Yet, the Red Sox did eventually wake up from their Impossible Dream. Tony Conigliaro was hit in the left eye socket with a pitch on August 18 forcing Conigliaro out for the rest of the ’67 season and for all of the ’68 season. The Red Sox did win their first pennant since 1946 sending New England into a frenzy, but ultimately lost the 1967 World Series to the St.

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<sup>201</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 87.

<sup>202</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 91.

Louis Cardinals in seven games. The Impossible Dream Team rerouted the history of the Red Sox bringing the franchise back into the hearts of its fans. More importantly the team showed its city that it could win with a roster interwoven with black and white players. Yet at the same time that the '67 Sox surged, rioting and violence tore through Roxbury. Clearly a gap existed between Boston and its sports teams, and as the '60s came to a close, chaos engulfed the nation and Boston, making it even more difficult to identify and solve issues regarding race.

## **Chapter 9: The Ending of an Era, 1968-1969**

### **America: 1968-69**

The United States sat on the precipice of turmoil heading into the years of 1968 and 1969. The nation had seen racial violence break out even after the passage of civil rights legislation, and the Vietnam War continued to escalate with commensurate backlash from anti-war protesters. The Tet Offensive that began in January of 1968 caught America off guard both in Vietnam and at home, and despite its failure as a military effort, the offensive sowed further doubt in the minds of Americans as to how soon the US could win the war. On February 27, Walter Cronkite, the newscaster considered by some to be “the most trusted man in America,” reported from Vietnam, telling the nation that he could not see the war ending anytime soon. On March 12, at the New Hampshire primary, President Lyndon Johnson barely defeated anti-war candidate Eugene McCarthy. Johnson, who had wanted to be remembered for his domestic legislation such as the Great Society, not for Vietnam, told the nation he would not run for reelection in a television address on Sunday, March 31, 1968.

Yet, Vietnam was only one side of the two-headed monster of war and race that dogged the last days of the Johnson administration. After the rioting that had engulfed Newark and Detroit in July of 1967, Johnson had appointed the Kerner Commission to analyze America’s racial situation. On February 29, 1968 the commission revealed its report and famously stated, “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.” Then, on Thursday, April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated outside the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, TN (King’s assassination is detailed below). King’s death led to rioting and violence throughout the country in over 125 cities.

Just over two months later, Democratic presidential hopeful Robert F. Kennedy, the brother of the late President John F. Kennedy, was shot on June 5 after winning the California primary. He passed away the next day. Robert Kennedy had cultivated a reputation as an advocate for the forgotten and disenfranchised in America from African Americans to poor whites. Robert Healy of the *Globe* reported, “A reporter told a colleague that he felt sorry for the 10 Kennedy children; that they would miss him most. A black cab driver heard it and turned around: ‘I’m sorry mister, but a lot of kids in the street are going to miss him even more.’”<sup>203</sup> Charles Evers, the brother of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers, said of Kennedy, “He was like my brother.”<sup>204</sup> As the country stared down yet another assassination of a prominent American, reactions were strong. Jim Murray of the *Globe* wrote,

Freedom is being gunned down. The ‘right’ to murder is the ultimate right in this country. Sloth is a virtue. Patriotism is a sin. Conservation is an anachronism. God is over 30 years old. To be young is the only religion—as if it were a hard-won virtue. ‘Decency’ is dirty feet, a scorn for work. ‘Love’ is something you need penicillin for. ‘Love’ is handing a flower to a naked young man with vermin in his hair while your mother sits home with a broken heart. You ‘love’ strangers, not parents... What have the Kennedys ever done to deserve ambushes every five years at the hands of people they ask only to serve? What apology can we offer to a noble family except to resolve to stop being ruled by our refuse, our human refuse, that is? How many good men have to die before we wrest weapons from the terrible hands of our barbarians, demand respect for our institutions, stop glorifying hate? Who is going to repair America?<sup>205</sup>

For some, events in America were taking on meaning outside of themselves, giving symbolism to a society that seemed to have dissolved into chaos. Yet, the country followed along this trend of chaos in the coming months.

The country continued to unravel in late 1968. In late August of that year, violence broke out at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago as police clashed with anti-war and civil rights protesters. Two events in October of ’68 further marked how far the country had moved

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<sup>203</sup> Robert Healy, “Robert Kennedy—He Understood Those Who Had Been Left Out,” *Boston Globe*, June 7, 1968.

<sup>204</sup> Healy, “Robert Kennedy—He Understood Those Who Had Been Left Out.”

<sup>205</sup> Jim Murray, “America the Beautiful is Sick,” *Boston Globe*, June 7, 1968.

from the hopes of the early years of the decade. In that month Jackie Kennedy, the widow of John, married 62-year-old Greek shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis in an event that Thomas Whalen felt further symbolized “the end of Camelot,” the time period when anything seemed possible during the Kennedy administration.<sup>206</sup> Also in that month Tommie Smith and John Carlos caused controversy for giving the black power salute of a raised fist after finishing first and third respectively in the 200 meters at the Summer Olympics in Mexico City, Mexico. Chivalry and nonviolence found little foundation in 1968 America.

The year of 1969 did little to bring respite to the nation. Richard Nixon was inaugurated as president in January after pushing a campaign of restoring “law and order” to America and reaching out to the concerns of the “silent majority” who did not identify with America’s hippie, protest culture. Yet, at Harvard University, in April, around 300 students, most of them members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), seized control of the school’s administration building and called for the end of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) at the school. On the situation with ROTC, the SDS stated, “These businessmen want Harvard to continue producing officers for the Viet Nam war or for use against black rebellions at home for political reasons.”<sup>207</sup> The fraying of the country continued during the trial of the Chicago Eight/Seven that began in September ’69. The defendants were on trial for their participation in the riots at the DNC in ’68. The trial developed into a farce as singing and protesting disrupted court proceedings as a generation seemed to be on trial.

By the end of the 1960s the nation had reached its limit of protest and chaos. Yet, as the country forged ahead in the subsequent years and decades, the events of the ‘60s influenced how Americans would view their world. The events of ’68 and ’69 demonstrated that the Civil Rights

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<sup>206</sup> Thomas Whalen, *Dynasty’s End: Bill Russell and the 1968-69 World Champion Boston Celtics*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 124.

<sup>207</sup> Whalen, *Dynasty’s End*, 211.

Movement would not have a “happy ending.” America lost a part of its soul in those years, and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. most symbolically represented the disintegration of the initial hopes of the 1960s.

### **The Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Martin Luther King Jr.’s death sent shock waves across the nation including in the city of Boston—a city that King knew well. As the *Globe* wrote, “He used to like to call Boston his ‘second home.’ It was here 20 years ago that he spent his student days at Boston University. It was here in the Spring of 1965 that he brought his 20<sup>th</sup> century civil rights crusade to the first of the great northern cities.”<sup>208</sup> Many, though not all in the city, likened King’s death to that of John F. Kennedy. Indeed, the *Globe* had run an image of the statue of Abraham Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial with his face in his hands after the assassination of Kennedy, and the *Globe* appropriately re-ran the image after King’s death.<sup>209</sup> Both deaths were irreconcilable for many.

The assassination gave Bostonians a chance to reflect, and one of the fears that came with reflection was the threat of more violence in reciprocation. The *Globe* interviewed average people on the street, and one respondent, McDonald Gittens of Boston, told the paper, “It’s a very tragic loss. There’s more to it than his being a symbol. People are disenchanted; they want things now. They won’t believe in gradualism anymore.”<sup>210</sup> The Rt. Rev. Anson P. Stokes, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts said, “He made us see ourselves and many of us were unwilling to look ourselves in the face—hence, the anger he aroused. The best tribute we can pay this great American is to heed what he was trying to tell us and change our ways.”<sup>211</sup> Yet, Bryant Rollins, a black journalist and author representing the United Force of Roxbury,

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<sup>208</sup> [Globe Staff], “Boston Was His ‘Second Home,’” *Boston Globe*, April 5, 1968.

<sup>209</sup> Joseph Dineen, “Across the City Desk,” *Boston Globe*, April 7, 1968.

<sup>210</sup> William Davis, “Bostonians Express Their Shock,” *Boston Globe*, April 5, 1968.

<sup>211</sup> Robert Kenney, “Shocked Boston Area Leaders Praise Dr. King,” *Boston Globe*, April 5, 1968.

said, “It’s the end of non-violence.”<sup>212</sup> Thus, the city of Boston braced for the possibility of rioting in the wake of the assassination.

However, the city came out relatively unscathed in comparison to scores of other cities across the nation. On that first night of April 4 thirteen people were injured and dozens were taken into custody, but no serious injuries occurred that night.<sup>213</sup> Most of the property damage that did occur came in the Grove Hall area of Roxbury, mostly at the hands of groups of youths taking their frustrations to the street. Mayor Kevin White, just three months into his first term, stayed on the alert in conjunction with his staff, community leaders, and law enforcement agencies to assure that any incidents could be dealt with swiftly. White announced that memorial services for King would be held at all of Boston’s public schools the next morning.

White was one of Boston’s first politicians to take seriously the needs and concerns of Boston’s African-American community, and his increased awareness was put to the test in this trying situation. On Friday, April 5 James Brown, “Soul Brother Number One,” was scheduled to give a concert at the Boston Garden, and the need for Brown’s presence as a calming force became increasingly clear. Neither White nor his chief aide, Barney Frank, had heard of Brown before (White continually referred to Brown as “James Washington” and Frank thought he was a football player), but the two recognized that they needed to make sure Brown played a concert that night without causing a riot.<sup>214</sup> Boston City Councilor Tom Atkins, the first African American voted to the council in the twentieth century, also played a prominent role in helping advise White and his staff on both the situation with Brown and the city at large. Brown eventually agreed to allow the concert to be aired live on Boston’s PBS Channel 2 so that people

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<sup>212</sup> Kenney, “Shocked Boston Area Leaders Praise Dr. King.”

<sup>213</sup> [Globe Staff], “Gangs Roam in Boston,” *Boston Globe*, April 5, 1968.

<sup>214</sup> J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 32.

could stay home to watch the show, but Brown only did so after White promised to pay him the full gate price of the Garden, with money coming out of the city's coffers.

That second night, April 5, also saw sporadic acts of violence, but Brown's concert and other preventative actions went a long way in keeping the city safe. At the concert White told the small audience, "This is our city and its future is in our hands...No matter what any other community may do let us in Boston honor Dr. King in peace."<sup>215</sup> White continued, "Twenty-four hours ago Dr. King died for all of us, black and white, that we may live together in harmony without violence, and in peace. I'm here to ask for you to stay with me as your mayor, and to make Dr. King's dream reality in Boston."<sup>216</sup> In a sign of popular response during the day on that Friday, residents in Roxbury, Dorchester, and the South End wore armbands that read "Cool it and survive," and groups of youths passed out fliers that said "Cool it."<sup>217</sup> Tom Atkins went to the airwaves encouraging citizens to stay at home and off the streets while Boston's soul station, WILD, broadcast news updates and public service announcements encouraging peace in the days after the assassination.

Reaction and reflection continued in Boston in the days after King's death. On Saturday, April 6, with Mayor White in attendance, services were held at Twelfth Baptist Church in Roxbury where King had preached as a student at Boston University. On Sunday the *Globe* ran an editorial looking back on King's death and its reverberations. The editorial praised Boston's African-American community for acting in such a non-violent way to the assassination, but on the larger situation of discrimination in the city the editorial read, "Responsibility for the conditions which have given rise to unrest in the black community of Boston lies almost exclusively with white people... This responsibility will not have been discharged until all the

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<sup>215</sup> [Globe Staff], "The Mayor Talks Cool to City," *Boston Globe*, April 6, 1968.

<sup>216</sup> [Globe Staff], "The Mayor Talks Cool to City."

<sup>217</sup> Alan Lupo, "In Boston... Tension, but Self-Control," *Boston Globe*, April 6, 1968.



people of the black community enjoy full equality in employment, housing, education, and the ungrudging respect of all their fellow citizens.”<sup>218</sup> Boston had many of the same problems cities throughout the country had, but it was spared the violence that marred so many of its counterparts. Taking a look at the national scene, the *Globe* editorial continued, “Everyone knows that the riots in America’s large cities were sparked by Thursday’s assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in Memphis. Yet that horrible event was only a catalyst, and it tends to obscure the real cause: the condition of the Negro ghettos in our cities, the miserable housing, the totally inadequate schools, the lack of jobs.”<sup>219</sup> Clearly the progress of the 1960s had not cured all the country’s ills, and King’s assassination only further proved the dissatisfaction of the nation with continuing racial inequality.

Amidst all the competing responses to the assassination, Boston’s black community made sure to voice its grievances as well. At a gathering on Monday, April 8 on Boston Common a predominantly white crowd heard a number of speakers including Mayor Kevin White and Cardinal Richard Cushing. The crowd also heard from Bryant Rollins who said, “Do we eulogize him with rhetoric and hollow words and tomorrow we go back to business as usual, or do we eulogize him by putting into action the program that he was working for at the time of his assassination—the program for freeing black people from the oppression of whites?”<sup>220</sup> At a memorial at Boston University on Tuesday, April 9 John Bryant, a 24-year-old theological student, made his anger heard as he said, “You white America, are condemned by God for murder in the first degree,” and continued, saying of white people, “You appear to us as an alcoholic. You are always sorry, but you go back to the same thing.”<sup>221</sup> Also at the BU memorial,

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<sup>218</sup> [Globe Editorial], “In Boston, a Beginning...,” *Boston Globe*, April 8, 1968.

<sup>219</sup> [Globe Editorial], “...And a Nation on Trial,” *Boston Globe*, April 8, 1968.

<sup>220</sup> Jeremiah Murphy, “On Commons, an Echo of April 1965,” *Boston Globe*, April 9, 1968.

<sup>221</sup> James Stack, “Whites ‘Indicted’ at B.U. Memorial,” *Boston Globe*, April 10, 1968.

the Rev. Gilbert Caldwell of Union Methodist Church in Roxbury said, “Since last Thursday there has been a national orgy of veneration for a man they could not receive in his lifetime.”<sup>222</sup> Indeed, for many the need for concrete progress stood as far more important than some of the high-minded rhetoric that came in the aftermath of the assassination.

Within the context of King’s death and all the other chaotic events of 1968 and 1969 the Boston Red Sox and Boston Celtics continued to play their contests. Yet, the teams did not play these games in a vacuum—the political happenings of the time were just as real to these players as to the average person on the street. The two franchises both had the opportunity to respond or not respond in some shape or form to the turmoil that surrounded them.

### **The Boston Red Sox: 1968-69**

Major League Baseball made an unprecedented move in the aftermath of King’s assassination delaying the start of the 1968 season from April 8 to April 10 as all twenty MLB teams, including the Red Sox, took to the field that day.

The Red Sox were fresh off the “Impossible Dream” season, but already ’68 was off to a much more ominous start than ’67. On April 4 on the same day as King’s assassination came the announcement that Tony Conigliaro’s career was possibly over as his eyesight continued to worsen, and indeed, Conigliaro would miss the entire 1968 season though he did earn Comeback Player of the Year honors in ’69 for his successful return to the team in that season.

In August ’68, at the same time violence was erupting at the DNC in Chicago, first baseman George Scott, mired in a dreadful slump, voiced concerns over his treatment as a player. As was often the case with the Red Sox, race played a part in the lack of communication between Scott and the white coaching staff. Clif Keane of the *Globe* noted that little interracial communication went on in Major League Baseball as had been the case since the days of Jackie

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<sup>222</sup> Stack, “Whites Indicted at B.U. Memorial.”

Robinson and that black players on opposing teams often talked to each other more than they did to their own white teammates.<sup>223</sup> Keane, however, took his argument a step further as he wrote, “A lot of what created the barrier is due to those sociologists who say that it is the white man’s job to help. That’s bunk! These ball players aren’t stuffed away in a Harlem apartment. They’re in the big leagues. And it is their job to help themselves.”<sup>224</sup> Keane’s comments show a striking insensitivity to the backgrounds of athletes, fly in the face of the *Globe* editorial after King’s death that urged whites to take responsibility for racial inequalities, but for the most part demonstrate the attitudes of a larger segment of the population, particularly in Boston. This environment of limited support made finding a comfort zone difficult for Boston’s players of color. Though the Sox fielded nine black players in ’68, the overall atmosphere of the franchise remained tenuous for African Americans.

The Sox had a decent season in ’68 winning 86 games—only six less wins than in the “Impossible Dream” season—and were on their way to 87 victories in ’69 when on September 23 Tom Yawkey instructed Dick O’Connell to fire manager Dick Williams and his entire staff. Yawkey then left for South Carolina to avoid questions from the Boston media. On the situation, Glenn Stout and Richard Johnson write, “It hadn’t mattered that the Red Sox had won under Williams after losing for a generation. They hadn’t won the way Yawkey wanted them to. He couldn’t keep Williams on and still be buddy to the players. To Yawkey, being a buddy to the players was more important than winning.”<sup>225</sup> Despite all the progress the Sox had made under O’Connell the team was still under the thumb of Yawkey, and the franchise would reflect that. Now that Yawkey had the city of Boston back in the palm of his hand after the “Impossible

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<sup>223</sup> Clif Keane, “Scott Boiling at Treatment,” *Boston Globe*, April 27, 1968.

<sup>224</sup> Keane, “Scott Boiling at Treatment.”

<sup>225</sup> Glenn Stout and Richard A. Johnson, *Red Sox Century: One Hundred Years of Red Sox Baseball*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 347

Dream” season, he was free to continue to run the team in any way he saw fit, knowing that few Bostonians would protest the team’s beloved owner. The Red Sox would embark on an exciting decade of baseball in the 1970s, and Yawkey had made his mark on the franchise, with his legacy carrying on well after his death in 1976.

### **The Boston Celtics: 1968-69**

Given his deep connections to the happenings of his time, Bill Russell was probably one of the most appropriate individuals to seek comment from on the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Russell had met King briefly during the 1963 March on Washington and admired him in many ways though Russell did not consider himself a nonviolent person. Russell was upset that the Celtics game against the Philadelphia 76ers in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Finals was played as scheduled on Friday, April 5—just one day after the assassination. On that topic, Russell said, “Business as usual. A lot of people in this country are trying to do that. Then, three days later they realize, ‘Hey, he is important.’ When Kennedy got killed it was automatic.”<sup>226</sup>

Russell also took the occasion to reflect on larger issues within society as he said,

Everybody talks nice. They say one thing and then they do another. Prejudice is a funny thing. It’s irrational. Yet people try to rationalize it. When you put people in categories it’s one-dimensional. People say Negroes or blacks—you choose the word—and that’s all they see. There’s more than that to a man. Take this team. There’s [Tom] Thacker and there’s [Tom “Satch”] Sanders. Do you think they’re the same? Of course they’re not. Those two guys are as different as night and day. Yet people put them in one category: they’re black and they’re basketball players. There are more dimensions than that. They’re individuals.<sup>227</sup>

The Celtics and Russell had always had more salient ideas on race than the Red Sox, and the occasion of King’s death proved no different. Russell himself and his ideas stood as a bridge between his sport, his team, and larger society.

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<sup>226</sup> Bob Sales, “Russell Sees U.S. on Racial Collision Course,” *Boston Globe*, April 8, 1968.

<sup>227</sup> Sales, “Russell Sees U.S. on Racial Collision Course.”

Although Friday's game in Philadelphia had gone ahead as scheduled, Game 2, originally scheduled to be played in Boston on Sunday, April 7 was pushed back to Wednesday, April 10. The Celtics won that first game in Philadelphia in part because of the way in which they dealt with King's death. Wilt Chamberlain, in his last year in Philadelphia in '68, later wrote on the situation, "Red Auerbach called the Boston players together, and they talked about whether or not they should play the game or ask for a postponement. They agreed to play. The day of the game, they came to Philadelphia together, united in their grief—and in their determination. But Alex [Hannum, the 76ers head coach] didn't think to call a player meeting. Most of us didn't see each other until we got into the locker room that night."<sup>228</sup> The sort of togetherness that the Celtics exhibited stood in striking contrast to not only the 76ers but to the Red Sox, Boston, and the nation. The Celtics went on to defeat the 76ers in seven games avenging their previous season's loss and went on to take down the Los Angeles Lakers in six games to capture the franchise's 10<sup>th</sup> NBA title.

The next season, 1968-69, would prove to be the last for the Bill Russell-led Celtics dynasty. The team continued to overcome the poor fan support they had always experienced, and in this season triumphed over the twin problems of aging players and injuries. The Celtics honored Sam Jones with his own day at the Garden on March 9, 1969 as the guard planned to retire at the season's end. Despite finishing fourth in the Eastern Conference that season, Boston defeated the 76ers and New York Knicks to reach the NBA Finals and beat the Los Angeles Lakers, who now had Chamberlain alongside Elgin Baylor and Jerry West, in seven games to capture their 11<sup>th</sup> title in Russell's 13 seasons.

Yet, by the end of 1969 the NBA was changing as Harvey Araton and Filip Bondy write, "The days of basketball as organic sport and small-time business were coming to an end. Filling

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<sup>228</sup> Whalen, *Dynasty's End*, 118.

the seats, which meant attracting the fans however one could, would be essential. In Boston, the local yokels were still out there, waiting to be pleased.”<sup>229</sup> In the aftermath of his 11<sup>th</sup> championship, Russell decided to retire and did so through a story in *Sports Illustrated* published on August 4, 1969. The Celtics had come so far with Russell as their centerpiece, yet in future years the franchise could not or perhaps chose not to continue his legacy. In the 1968-69 season the Celtics fielded eight black players and would not reach that number again until the 1990s. The Celtics had seen the end of an era just as America had, and in the aftermath of that era, the Celtics went in a different direction without a figure such as Russell. Although the team won two championships in the ‘70s (’74 and ’76) and three titles in the ‘80s (’81, ’84, and ’86), the franchise bared little resemblance to that of the late ‘50s and ‘60s as the spirit of Russell faded, and the need to appease the Boston fan base took its place.

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<sup>229</sup> Harvey Araton and Filip Bondy, *The Selling of the Green: The Financial Rise and the Moral Decline of the Boston Celtics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 58.

## **Chapter 10: Epilogue, After 1969**

### **The City of Boston: From the '70s to the '00s**

The single-most identifiable connection between the city of Boston and race in modern memory came with the court-ordered busing that shook the city beginning in 1974. On June 21, 1974 Judge W. Arthur Garrity ruled in the case of *Morgan v. Hennigan* in a suit that the Boston branch of the NAACP had brought against the Boston School Committee in March 1972. Garrity ruled that busing would be necessary in order to eliminate segregation in the city's public schools. The city broke into disarray with racial violence occurring on a myriad of occasions as the decision took effect that fall. In some sense, Boston was finally reckoning with what much of the nation had gone through in the '60s, and the issue of race now took center stage in the city. Indeed, Bostonians found new meaning behind the idea of "neighborhood spirit" even though that notion had decreased considerably during the 1950s and '60s.<sup>230</sup> With forced busing the city now earned the nickname as the "Little Rock of the North."<sup>231</sup> On the situation, sportswriter and author Bill Reynolds writes, "It was as though all the hate and anger and violence had blown up all the myths of what Boston had thought it was, the realization that beneath all the history and all the tradition was a city that had never dealt with race and class and all the other hidden issues that didn't make the travel brochures."<sup>232</sup> As the rest of the country worried about Watergate, energy, and "stagflation," Boston now had to concern itself with racial violence and inequality.

An incident on April 5, 1976 helped to encapsulate the tensions in Boston. A group of white high school students were milling about City Hall Plaza that day, boycotting classes as a protest to busing. The students then attacked Theodore Landsmark, an African-American man

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<sup>230</sup> Thomas O'Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 243, 245.

<sup>231</sup> Bill Reynolds, '78: *The Boston Red Sox, a Historic Game, and a Divided City*, (New York: New American Library, 2009), 22.

<sup>232</sup> Reynolds, '78, 23.

who had received his law degree from Yale. An image from the incident was broadcast across the nation as one of the students attempted to stab Landsmark with an American flag. Bill Reynolds writes on the incident, “To them, Landsmark was invisible, just another faceless black guy, a symbol of everything they had grown to hate.”<sup>233</sup> That an innocent, educated black man could be attacked in broad daylight in the shadow of the headquarters of the city government seemed to show just how deep hatred and racism ran in Boston.

During these turbulent years, sports and the Red Sox in particular became an escape for the people of Boston. The Sox reached the World Series in 1975 and narrowly missed the playoffs in 1978, losing a one-game playoff to the New York Yankees. Yet, as Howard Bryant writes, “In fact it was an ironic twist that the race-torn city looked to the traditionally resistant Red Sox for a desperately needed sign of racial harmony.”<sup>234</sup> Bostonians could look to their sports pages and check to see how the Sox were doing as a respite from the turmoil of busing.

The ‘80s, ‘90s, and ‘00s saw Boston take both forward and backward steps with regards to matters of race, as the city looked to move on from the legacy of busing. In 1983, Mel King, a leader in Boston’s African-American community made a strong run for the mayor of Boston (though he ultimately lost to Ray Flynn) as Kevin White chose to step down after 16 years in office. Yet, the city came under the microscope again in 1989. On his way home from Brigham and Women’s Hospital with his pregnant wife, Charles Stuart shot his wife and wounded himself blaming his wife’s death on a fictitious black man. Boston police combed the neighborhoods of Roxbury and Mission Hill looking for the would-be assailant and only called off the search when Stuart’s brother, Matthew, confessed to being an accomplice in the murder. As the twentieth century came to a close and the twenty-first century began, Boston experienced an influx of new

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<sup>233</sup> Reynolds, ‘78, 193.

<sup>234</sup> Howard Bryant, *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 120.



immigrants from Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa bringing an increasing diversity to the city. In 2006, the state of Massachusetts elected Deval Patrick as the first African-American governor in the history of the state, and in 2009 Ayanna Pressley became the first woman of color elected to the Boston City Council. Yet, the Boston area made national news with a racial incident again in July of 2009 as Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., an African American, was arrested trying to enter his own Cambridge home by a white police officer. The city has made great progress since the turmoil of the 1970s but, like the nation as a whole, has yet to reach any sort of post-racial era and can still make progress on matters of race.

### **The Boston Red Sox: 1970-2007**

Prior to dealing with busing the Red Sox and Boston were confronted with charges of racism from outfielder Reggie Smith particularly once he was traded to the St. Louis Cardinals in October 1973. Along the lines of Bill Russell, Smith had always felt that Bostonians lived in ignorance to the racial injustices that dogged the city and felt he was treated differently by the team, the city, and fans because of his race. Smith was upset with the team when he was asked to play hurt. On the lack of support, Smith said, “They don’t promote black athletes here and the fans react to that. I’ve been here eight years and had to fight to get on television and get the kind of endorsements that players like Yaz, Carlton Fisk, or even Billy Conigliaro got.”<sup>235</sup> Smith also took umbrage to what he felt were unfair expectations, “I got awfully tired of people saying that I never lived up to my potential. Everybody expected me to be a Willie Mays or a Hank Aaron. A superstar. Why couldn’t I just be Reggie Smith... But I guess people here didn’t like to think of their black athletes having perhaps good or average ability.”<sup>236</sup> The public and the press reacted strongly to Smith’s opinions, but Smith had had personal experiences that backed up his claims,

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<sup>235</sup> Larry Whiteside, “Never a Mays nor Aaron, ‘Why couldn’t I just be Reggie Smith,’” *Boston Globe*, October 27, 1973.

<sup>236</sup> Whiteside, “Never a Mays nor Aaron.”

and he could always point to the fact that of the team's 300 ushers, 100 ticket takers, and 400 vendors only two or three were people of color.<sup>237</sup>

Despite, the racism that continued to linger over the franchise, the Red Sox acted as a safe haven from the racial strife that engulfed the city during the busing crisis. Busing did not affect any of the Red Sox players in any direct way, most lived in the suburbs and were not from the city, and yet the controversy surrounded the city that they represented. The Red Sox during their runs in '75 and '78 featured Jim Rice, whom many consider to be the Red Sox's first black superstar, and Luis Tiant, a black Cuban, received cheers from the Fenway faithful that were normally reserved for the team's white stars. Ironically, oftentimes the same fans who cheered for the black players on the Red Sox were the same people who did not want African Americans going to school with their children. On this paradox Bill Reynolds writes, "As if sports and the Red Sox were somehow exempt from the hatred and tension that ran through Boston, the one island of refuge in an ever-churning sea, even if race always had been the elephant in the living room for the Red Sox, the legacy of being the last team in baseball to integrate."<sup>238</sup> Yet neither Rice nor Tiant took much of a stand in regards to busing, not like Bill Russell likely would have, and instead let their play act as a healing mechanism for the city.

Race continued to be a topic for the Red Sox in subsequent years. Dick O'Connell was fired in 1977, replaced by Haywood Sullivan, and the team in many ways returned to its pre-O'Connell tendencies. In 1979 Jim Rice was the only African-American player on the team, and between 1979 and 1984 the team fielded only two black everyday players.<sup>239</sup> This situation was in part based on recent events as Howard Bryant writes, "There was a feeling among blacks in the game that the Red Sox were reluctant—in a city that had suffered through busing—to tilt the

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<sup>237</sup> Robert Jordan, "Racism in the Front Office of Sports," *Boston Globe*, September 25, 1973.

<sup>238</sup> Reynolds, '78, 27.

<sup>239</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 139.

racial balance of the team toward blacks and Latinos for fear that the city would not in those years embrace a largely minority team.”<sup>240</sup> Indeed that notion continued to bear weight four years after the team’s collapse in the 1986 World Series as Ellis Burks was the only African-American player on the Sox for the majority of the 1990 season.

Yet the team’s image did begin to change with the emergence of Red Sox slugger Mo Vaughn in the ‘90s. Though Vaughn had disagreements with management and the Boston media, the Connecticut native helped to begin to bridge the gap between Boston and the city’s black community. Momentum continued as the new ownership group of John Henry, Larry Lucchino, and Tom Werner took control in February of 2002. In 2004 the Red Sox won their first World Series since 1918 with players of color such as Pedro Martinez, Manny Ramirez, and David Ortiz leading the way. The team won again in 2007 with Ramirez and Ortiz again providing the pop in the middle of the lineup. Those two teams helped to ease the pains of ’46, ’67, ’75, ’78, and ’86 and demonstrated that talent and not race would be the only limit to the team’s success in the future.

### **The Boston Celtics: 1970-2008**

The Celtics also continued to deal with issues of race after the ‘60s. In June of 1973, just months before Reggie Smith was traded, Bill Russell publicly acknowledged Boston as a racist city in his opinion. Russell, felt the media mistreated him in particular, saying of that group, “When I went there...I felt they had a code of conduct—first for athletes and another for black athletes.”<sup>241</sup> Russell also felt a certain lack of appreciation in conjunction with racism as he said, “In Boston we won 11 championships and after the last championship all I could hear was that

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<sup>240</sup> Bryant, *Shut Out*, 143.

<sup>241</sup> [UPI], “Russell Deplores Boston Bigotry,” *Boston Globe*, June 6, 1973.

there were too many black guys on the team.”<sup>242</sup> Many in the Boston media reacted strongly to such accusations and attempted to discredit Russell. As Leigh Montville of the *Globe* wrote on Russell, “He built up a cover of aloofness and called it ‘dignity.’ He didn’t want to be involved.”<sup>243</sup> However, Larry Whiteside, a native of Chicago and essentially the first black reporter to work for the *Globe*, came to the defense of Russell. Whiteside, as an objective observer of Boston, saw Russell as a brilliant player who had won consistently as a player and as a trail-blazing head coach. On the situation Whiteside wrote, “He stated that the city has ‘racist attitudes,’ and unless you are unwilling to admit that Boston is part of the United States, it is hard to disagree with that... Russell said the city was segregated. He was referring to the communities in the area which through economics, or by design, close their doors to blacks.”<sup>244</sup> Whiteside further critiqued the city’s lack of support for Russell as he wrote, “No one laid out the red carpet for him after his career, like a Ted Williams. And all those goodies that a Bobby Orr or a Phil Esposito gets today—endorsements, camps, books, Russell missed out on... Too bad some member of the media failed to take the time to learn about the man instead of the athlete.”<sup>245</sup> Yet rather than attempting to understand Russell and his legacy the Celtics and the city chose to move in a different direction.

During the ‘70s and ‘80s the Celtics turned away from the days of Russell and became increasingly perceived as a racist franchise. The trajectory of the franchise led filmmaker and New York Knicks fan Spike Lee to say, “To me, the Celtics represent white supremacy.”<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> [UPI], “Russell Deplores Boston Bigotry.”

<sup>243</sup> Leigh Montville, “Haughty Russell Hard to Fathom,” *Boston Globe*, June 7, 1973.

<sup>244</sup> Larry Whiteside, “Why Not Hear Russell Out?” *Boston Globe*, January 8, 1974.

<sup>245</sup> Whiteside, “Why Not Hear Russell Out?”

<sup>246</sup> Harvey Araton and Filip Bondy, *The Selling of the Green: The Financial Rise and the Moral Decline of the Boston Celtics*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), xi.

Others closer to the team also had an opinion. Jo Jo White, a Celtic from 1969-79, commented on the way the team approached race as he said,

Management is aware of the city. Red was always smart enough to understand [racism] is there. Red plays the hand that's dealt him. That's why Red's always tried to keep it even—six whites, six blacks, maybe seven to five. No matter what they'd say for the record, it was always assumed there had to be a certain amount of whites on the team. We would predict what the team was going to be before we even played an exhibition game. You'd start with the blacks you knew would make it and figure everyone else would be white.<sup>247</sup>

Though the Celtics won titles in 1974 and '76, the team had made a break from the days of Russell with a desire to placate its fans as the franchise's focus.

A similar trend continued into the 1980s, particularly with the emergence of Larry Bird as one of the league's best players. Bird became a hero in Boston even though his personality was, in many ways, similar to that of Bill Russell. The Celtics won three titles in the decade, in '81, '84, and '86. K.C. Jones guided the team as head coach in '84 and '86 becoming just the fourth African-American head coach to win an NBA title and making the Celtics the first franchise to have had two black head coaches win titles in NBA history. Yet, race stood as a significant factor for the team, particularly in their rivalry with Magic Johnson's Los Angeles Lakers as Harvey Araton and Filip Bondy write, "The entry for many into the emerging NBA of the eighties was the natural, ready-made marketing campaign of Magic versus Bird. Black versus white. The NBA could not have wished for better."<sup>248</sup> Indeed, during the eighties when close to three-fourths of the players in the league were black the Celtics played 24 blacks and 22 whites, and at one point in 1986, 10 of the team's 14 players were white.<sup>249</sup> Although the Celtics continued to make history with Jones as their head coach, the Celtics had taken on a new image as a racist franchise and America's white team.

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<sup>247</sup> Araton and Bondy, *The Selling of the Green*, 61.

<sup>248</sup> Araton and Bondy, *The Selling of the Green*, 114.

<sup>249</sup> Araton and Bondy, *The Selling of the Green*, 116, 122.

After a period of obscurity in the 1990s, that image began to change with the dawn of the twenty-first century. In the early years of the new century Paul Pierce and Antoine Walker helped bring the team back to relevance, a harbinger of future events. Prior to the 2007 season the team added Ray Allen and Kevin Garnett and went on to win the franchise's first championship since '86 in June of 2008. In that NBA Finals every player to take the floor for the Celtics was black. The team's head coach, Doc Rivers, became the first African-American head coach to win an NBA title since Jones in '86, giving the Celtics three of the five black head coaches to ever win a championship in the NBA. During the postgame celebration Garnett embraced and shared an emotional moment with Bill Russell. The Celtics had once again found both the person and spirit of Russell and gave the city another example of what it was capable of when it did not allow race to stand in its way.

## **Chapter 11: Conclusion**

### **Summary Overview**

The Red Sox, the Celtics, and the city of Boston had a distinctive and often trying relationship with issues of race in the time period of 1945-1969. The city's history prior to the rise of professional sports provided the context for the events of those decades. Boston represented a past built on the ideals of freedom and liberty from the days of the American Revolution and to its notoriety as a key location for the abolitionist movement in America. Yet, these high-minded images of Boston often did not represent reality for the city's African-American population which grew throughout the twentieth-century.

As World War II drew to a close the Red Sox, the city's most popular sports team had the opportunity to break baseball's color barrier, holding a tryout for Jackie Robinson. Yet, the attitude of owner Tom Yawkey as well as the general atmosphere of the city and the country kept the team from making history. The Red Sox followed similar lines as they swung and missed on an exclusive opportunity to sign Willie Mays in 1949. Boston saw two new arrivals in the 1940s as Walter Brown established the Boston Celtics in 1946 and John Hynes won the city's mayoral election in 1949. Brown brought a new sport to the city, and Hynes brought hope for a new direction for the city, away from the machine politics that had dominated the landscape for decades.

The Celtics looked to set a new tone for the city as the 1950s began, by drafting Chuck Cooper, the first African-American to be picked to play in the NBA in 1950 and by acquiring Don Barksdale in 1953. The nation's attention began to shift towards civil rights in the coming years with *Brown v. Board of Education's* ruling to make "separate but equal" unconstitutional in 1954 and with the Montgomery Bus Boycotts of 1955-56 led by a young Martin Luther King,

Jr. Bill Russell arrived in Boston in December 1956, forever changing the landscape of sports and race in the city of Boston.

With their backs against the wall in a changing nation and with the Celtics representing such a strong counter-example in their own city, in 1959 the Red Sox became the last team in Major League Baseball to integrate, as Pumpsie Green became the first black player to play for the team on July 21. The late '50s also saw the additions of Sam Jones and K.C. Jones to the Celtics as well as Tom "Satch" Sanders in '60 while Boston welcomed a new mayor in John Collins in January 1960. Collins brought with him the promise of a "New Boston," an idea that would have particular significance for Boston's emerging African-American population.

The Civil Rights Movement kicked into full gear in the 1960s as the Sit-ins of 1960, the Freedom Rides of 1961, and James Meredith's acceptance at the University of Mississippi in 1962 made national headlines. The Red Sox continued to struggle in the early parts of the decade both on the field and with regards to issues of race, continuing to drag their feet while the Celtics won the NBA title every year from 1959-1966. In the same years of King's "I Have a Dream" speech, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 the country also saw the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, and rioting in the Watts section of Los Angeles.

The Civil Rights Movement came to Boston in April of 1965 as King toured the city and spoke before a crowd at Boston Common. The city slowly began to realize that it could not continue with the blatant racial inequality that existed in the city. In August of '65 the state of Massachusetts passed the Racial Imbalance Act outlawing *de facto* segregation in the state's schools. In June of 1967 a group of mothers on welfare protested their inadequate living conditions, and in that same month rioting broke out in Roxbury and the South End.



However, the summer of 1967 belonged to the “Impossible Dream” Red Sox in the city of Boston. All of New England became caught up in the pennant race, and Bostonians could easily continue to ignore the racial injustices that existed just miles away from Fenway Park. Yet, the Red Sox of 1967 actually demonstrated what a racially integrated group of men could accomplish as the Sox took a marked turn toward scouting talented players of color under general manager Dick O’Connell who had taken over in September of 1965. Of course, if Bostonians had paid greater attention to the Celtics they would have already known that blacks and whites could work together to achieve the pinnacle of success. The city continued to embrace sub-par campaigns from the Boston Bruins and did not seem particularly interested in paying to watch African-American basketball players such as Russell and the Joneses.

The country and the city saw the ending of an era in the years of 1968 and 1969 as the nation seemed to fall apart. The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968 dealt a significant blow to the momentum of civil rights, and the country dissolved into further chaos as Robert Kennedy was assassinated in June and violence erupted at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August. The Celtics dynasty of the late ‘50s and ‘60s came to an end as well as player-coach Russell led the Celtics to one final title in 1969 before retiring.

Boston finally had to reconcile its racial inequalities as court-ordered busing rocked the city in 1974. The Red Sox and Celtics functioned as an oasis for Bostonians as the Sox made runs at the pennant in ’75 and ’78, and the Celtics began a new era of racial balancing winning titles in ’74 and ’76. The ‘80s saw another round of “whitening” for the Red Sox isolating Jim Rice at the start of the decade and Ellis Burks at the end of it. The Celtics came to represent white Boston more than ever at the same time, as Larry Bird took center stage in the minds of the city’s sports fans. Yet despite this trend that broke away from the hopes of the ‘60s, these two

franchises and the city renewed the hopes of the “Impossible Dream” team and the successes of Russell’s Celtics with World Series victories in 2004 and 2007 and a 17<sup>th</sup> banner for the rafters of the new Garden in 2008.

### **Final Thoughts**

Sports hold an integral place in the lives of Bostonians, and the city’s teams often represent the dreams of the city and present an image to the rest of the nation. As Bill Russell writes, “Only four kinds of events—politics, religion, the arts and sports—have been able to draw consistently large crowds of paying customers throughout history.”<sup>250</sup> In a lot of ways however, Boston’s sports team encompassed all four of those events. During this time period most Bostonians were able to identify more with the Red Sox as the team took no sort of progressive attitude toward race during the decades following the end of World War II. Even as the Celtics presented a model of integration, Boston did little to end racial injustices in the city and took only a passing interest in their professional basketball team.

On prejudice Bill Russell writes, “Show me a person with no prejudice and I’ll show you a person with no taste. The struggle is to keep the prejudice from turning bigotry into hatred. Bigotry takes possession of people, and is mankind’s biggest enemy.”<sup>251</sup> The people of Boston certainly had a lot of taste during this era and although their prejudices did not necessarily come out in the most violent of ways prior to 1974, they were still not controlled. With an African-American population that had little political clout, whites in Boston were free to ignore their concerns and continue to cheer for the Red Sox with little concern for bringing racial progress to the city.

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<sup>250</sup> Bill Russell and Taylor Branch, *Second Wind: The Memoirs of an Opinionated Man*, (New York: Random House, 1979), 94.

<sup>251</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 190.

Bill Russell writes, “I already knew that there are no final victories in sports. The games just keep on going, and the only final victory you can have is to walk away from the last game intact.”<sup>252</sup> Indeed, Russell did that and more in his time as a Celtic, winning 11 championships in 13 seasons while in Boston. Yet, the Celtics continued to play games and broke away from Russell’s model in the coming decades. The Red Sox seemed to just barely walk away from each season intact as the team often struggled on the diamond and in the clubhouse during this time period with the notable exception of 1967 in which the Red Sox almost captured a final victory, at least for that Impossible Dream season. The city of Boston had remained on a neutral playing field with regards to its racial issues, not really moving any closer to a final victory at any point from the 1770s to the 1960s. In a way the city moved backward in an attempt to move forward with the busing crisis of the 1970s, for when dissent is not given an appropriate, peaceful way in which to be heard, it almost always comes out in a violent, confrontational way.

However, the games continued for these two teams and the city they call home. The city and its teams may not have found a final victory in the late 1960s, but the success of Russell’s Celtics and the “Impossible Dream” team stood as examples for which the ’04 and ’07 Sox and the ’08 Celtics could capitalize upon. Those championships represent a final victory for the Red Sox, Celtics, and Boston in a journey that began in the years of 1945-1969. Yet as Russell says—there is no final victory—the Sox, the Celtics, and Boston will continue to play games, and we can only hope that these groups in the future take the same lessons that the championship teams of the ‘00s were able to take out of the rubble of the games played in the 1950s and 1960s.

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<sup>252</sup> Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*, 167.

# Chronology

Date	Event
<b>18<sup>th</sup> &amp; 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries</b>	
March 5, 1770	Crispus Attucks the first to die in the Boston Massacre
1783	Slavery deemed unconstitutional in Massachusetts with Quock Walker case
1829	David Walker issues his <i>Appeal</i> from Boston
1831	William Lloyd Garrison founds the anti-slavery newspaper, <i>The Liberator</i>
1845	Frederick Douglass publishes his first autobiography in Boston
1850	Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw rules against the integration of Boston Schools In the Sarah Roberts case introducing the doctrine of “separate but equal”
1855	Massachusetts legislature rules against segregated schools
1860	Boston’s African-American population is 2,280
May 28, 1863	The 54 <sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, the first black Northern Regiment in the Civil War, leaves for South Carolina
1876-1895	Boston City Council contains at least one African-American representative
1895	Redistricting of Boston city wards splits small African-American population
1896	<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> entrenches “separate but equal” in South
<b>Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century</b>	
1901	Founding of Boston Red Sox
1909	Founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People with first branch in Boston
1910	Boston’s African-American population reaches 14,000
1915	D.W. Griffith’s <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> shown in Boston despite protests of William Monroe Trotter and other black leaders
1929	Opening of the Boston Garden
1933	Tom Yawkey purchases the Red Sox
1933-1958	Red Sox player movement under the control of Eddie Collins and Joe Cronin
<b>The 1940s</b>	
1940	Boston’s African American population reaches 23,675
1941	The March on Washington Movement led by A. Phillip Randolph Convinces Franklin Roosevelt to desegregate defense industries during World War II
1941	Founding of the Congress of Racial Equality in Chicago

February 1941	Malcolm X moves to Boston
September 1944	Richard Cushing becomes Archbishop of Boston
April 16, 1945	Jackie Robinson, along with Sam Jethroe and Marvin Williams, has tryout With the Red Sox
1946	Walter Brown begins Boston Celtics franchise
1946	Major League Baseball steering committee suggests that having too many Black fans watching baseball games would decrease white attendance
April 15, 1947	Jackie Robinson makes first appearance with Brooklyn Dodgers
July 26, 1948	President Harry Truman ends segregation in the armed forces
1949	Red Sox have exclusive opportunity to sign Willie Mays
1949	Boston's City Charter amended to replace ward-based elections with at-Large system
November 8, 1949	John Hynes defeats James Michael Curley to become Mayor of Boston

### **The 1950s**

1950	Boston reaches highest population in a federal census at 801,444
1950	Red Auerbach and Bob Cousy both arrive with the Celtics
1950	Red Sox sign their first black player, Lorenzo "Piper" Davis. He does not Make it to the major leagues.
May 13, 1950	Piper Davis released based on "economics"
1950	Celtics draft Chuck Cooper, the first African-American player in the NBA
September 1951	Martin Luther King, Jr. begins study at Boston University's School of Theology and Ministry
Spring 1952	Prudential Insurance Company looks to Boston for regional office
1953	Red Sox sign black catcher Earl Wilson, convert him to pitcher
1953	Don Barksdale becomes the second black player on the Celtics
1954	<i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> overturns <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i>
1954	Pinky Higgins hired as Red Sox manager
April 14, 1955	Elston Howard becomes the first black player to play for the New York Yankees
1955	Bill Russell and K.C. Jones lead San Francisco to the NCAA Basketball Championship
August 28, 1955	Murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till
1955-56	Montgomery Bus Boycott
1956	Bill Russell and K.C. Jones win second championship at USF
1956	Bill Russell and Tom Heinsohn drafted by the Celtics
December 1956	Bill Russell arrives in Boston after the Olympics
1956-57	Celtics average 10,517 fans per game at the Boston Garden
1957	Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) founded
1957	Major John Hynes establishes Boston Redevelopment Authority

April 13, 1957 Boston Celtics win their first NBA title  
 1957 Celtics draft Sam Jones  
 September 1957 “Little Rock Nine” integrate Central High School  
 1958 K.C. Jones joins the Celtics after two years in the military  
 1958 Willie O’Ree becomes first black player in NHL for Boston Bruins  
 1958 Mayor John Hynes initiates urban renewal program in West End  
 1958 Joe Cronin promoted to President of the American League  
 1959 Boston Celtics win their second NBA title  
 July 3, 1959 Billy Jurges hired as manager after firing of Pinky Higgins  
 July 21, 1959 Pumpsie Green is the first black player to make an appearance with the Red Sox  
 July 31, 1959 Earl Wilson makes his first appearance with the Boston Red Sox  
 1959 Bill Russell makes trip to Africa during off-season

**1960-1964**

1960 Boston’s African American population reaches 63,165  
 January 4, 1960 John Collins inaugurated as mayor of Boston  
 February 1, 1960 Sit-in at Woolsworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, NC  
 Feb.-May 1960 Sit-ins in Nashville, NC  
 April 1960 Founding of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)  
 June 1960 Billy Jurges fired and Pinky Higgins rehired as Red Sox manager  
 1960 Willie Tasby is the first black player acquired by trade by the Red Sox  
 1960 Celtics win their third NBA title  
 1960 Celtics draft Tom “Satch” Sanders  
 Sept.-Oct. 1960 Kennedy-Nixon presidential debates appear on TV  
 September 22, 1960 “Ninety Million Dollar Development Program for Boston” unveiled by BRA Director Edward Logue  
 1961 Celtics win their fourth NBA title  
 May 1961 Freedom Rides go from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans  
 1961-62 Celtics average 6,852 fans at home per game in Boston Garden  
 1962 Celtics win their fifth NBA title  
 1962 Pinky Higgins promoted to General Manager of the Red Sox  
 October 1, 1962 James Meredith becomes the first African-American student at the University of Mississippi  
 1963 Celtics win their sixth NBA title  
 1963 Bob Cousy retires from Celtics  
 1963 Willie Naulls acquired from the San Francisco Warriors  
 April 16, 1963 Martin Luther King, Jr. writes “Letter from Birmingham Jail”  
 June 11, 1963 Boston branch of the NAACP goes before the Boston School Committee Seeking improvement in school conditions

June 11, 1963 Governor George Wallace blocks admission of two black students to the University of Alabama

June 11, 1963 President John F. Kennedy addresses the nation on Civil Rights

August 28, 1963 March on Washington and “I Have a Dream” speech

November 22, 1963 Assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas

February 1964 Muhammad Ali publicly announces his conversion to the Nation of Islam

1964 Celtics win their seventh NBA title

July 2, 1964 Enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer

August 1964 Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party attends Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, NJ

December 26, 1964 Celtics become the first team in the NBA to have an all-black starting five

### 1965-1969

February 21, 1965 Assassination of Malcolm X in New York City

March 1965 Selma to Montgomery marches led by Martin Luther King, Jr.

March 11, 1965 Bostonian James Reeb dies from head injuries in Selma

March 1965 *The Moynihan Report* on African-American families released

April 15, 1965 “Havlicek stole the ball” game in Eastern Conference Finals

April 20, 1965 Boston branch of NAACP files suit in Federal District Court seeking desegregation of Boston Public Schools

April 23, 1965 Martin Luther King, Jr. makes speech on Boston Common

1965 Celtics win their eighth NBA title

1965 Dick O’Connell replaces Pinky Higgins as Red Sox general manager

August 6, 1965 Enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965

August 11-15, 1965 Riots in Watts section of Los Angeles

August 16, 1965 Massachusetts legislature passes the Racial Imbalance Act making Massachusetts the first state to outlaw *de facto* segregation in public schools

Spring Training 1966 Earl Wilson refused service as the Cloud Nine bar in Lakeland, FL

April 18, 1966 Bill Russell named Coach of the Boston Celtics becoming the first African-American coach in the NBA, MLB, NFL, or NHL

1966 Texas Western College becomes the first school to win the NCAA Basketball championship with an all-black starting five

1966 Celtics win their ninth NBA title

June 13, 1966 Red Sox acquire Jose Tartabull and John Wyatt

June 17, 1966 Earl Wilson traded to the Detroit Tigers

July 25, 1966 Ted Williams inducted into Baseball Hall of Fame, argues for induction of Negro leagues players in acceptance speech

September 18, 1966 Reggie Smith makes first appearance with Red Sox

October 15, 1966	Founding of Black Panther Party
June 1967	Group of mothers on welfare from Roxbury stage sit-in at City Hall
June 1967	Riots in the South End and Roxbury
August 3, 1967	Red Sox acquire Elston Howard
1967	“Impossible Dream” Red Sox team
November 1967	Kevin White elected mayor of Boston over Louise Day Hicks
1967	Tom Atkins elected to Boston City Council, first African-American on the council since 1895
February 29, 1968	Kerner Commission releases report on race
April 4, 1968	Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis
April 5, 1968	James Brown performs in concert at the Boston Garden
1968	Celtics win their 10 <sup>th</sup> NBA title
June 6, 1968	Assassination of Robert Kennedy in Los Angeles
August 1968	Violence breaks out at Democratic National Convention in Chicago
October 1968	Tommie Smith and John Carlos raise fists for black power at Olympics
1969	Celtics win their 11 <sup>th</sup> NBA title
August 4, 1969	Bill Russell announces his retirement from the Celtics

### **The 1970s**

1973	<i>Boston Globe</i> hires Larry Whiteside, first long-time black sportswriter at the paper
1974	Celtics win 12 <sup>th</sup> NBA Title
June 21, 1974	Judge W. Arthur Garrity, Jr. rules that Boston Public Schools must be desegregated in <i>Morgan v. Hennigan</i>
September 1974	Busing to desegregate Boston schools begins
September 1974	Jim Rice called up to the Red Sox
1975	Red Sox lose World Series to Cincinnati Reds
April 5, 1976	Theodore Landsmark, an African-American, assaulted by a white student with an American flag in City Hall plaza
1976	Celtics win 13 <sup>th</sup> NBA Title
July 9, 1976	Death of Tom Yawkey
1977	Dick O’Connell fired as Red Sox General Manager
October 2, 1978	Red Sox lose one-game playoff to New York Yankees

### **The 1980s**

1981	Celtics win 14 <sup>th</sup> NBA Title
1983	Mel King runs for Mayor of Boston
1984	Celtics win 15 <sup>th</sup> NBA Title
1986	Celtics win 16 <sup>th</sup> NBA Title
October 1989	The Charles Stuart case begins



1986 Red Sox lose to New York Mets in World Series

**The 1990s**

1990 Ellis Burks only African-American player on Red Sox

**The 2000s**

2004 Red Sox win first World Series since 1918 over St. Louis Cardinals

November 2006 Deval Patrick elected as first African-American governor in Massachusetts

2007 Red Sox win World Series over Colorado Rockies

2008 Celtics win 17<sup>th</sup> championship over Los Angeles Lakers

July 2009 Henry Louis Gates, Jr. arrested outside his own home

November 2009 Ayanna Pressley first woman of color elected to Boston City Council

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