

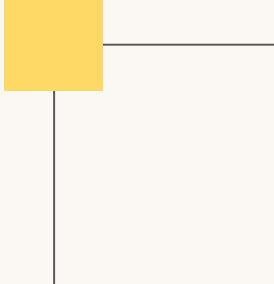


# Curt Flood v. Major League Baseball: The Intersection of Race and Labor in America

Jack Fitzgerald

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This paper examines the implications of Flood's lawsuit on sports labor and compares that to other labor movements in the United States. It argues that Curt Flood's legacy must be discussed through both the lenses of race and labor.

# Who was Curt Flood?

- Major League Baseball Center Fielder from 1956 - 1971
- Born in Houston, grew up in Oakland
- "We were not poor, but we had nothing" - Flood
- Mostly played for the St. Louis Cardinals (1958-1969)
- Accolades
  - 7x Gold Glove
  - 3x All-Star
  - 2x World Series Winner
  - MVP votes in 6 straight seasons with the Cards





# Curt Flood v. Major League Baseball



- October 7, 1969: Curt Flood was traded to the Philadelphia Phillies
- The Major League Baseball labor system binded a player to one team, with the team being able to trade players at will and set their salaries
  - The Reserve Clause
  - Anti-Trust Exemption
- Flood was involved in Philanthropy and owned multiple art/photographic businesses in St. Louis
- Refused to be traded against his will, sued Major League Baseball up to the Supreme Court

“After twelve years in the Major Leagues, I do not feel that I am a piece of property to be bought and sold irrespective of my wishes. I believe that any system which produces that result violates my basic rights as a citizen and is inconsistent with the laws of the United States and of several states.”

Curt Flood, Dec 24, 1969

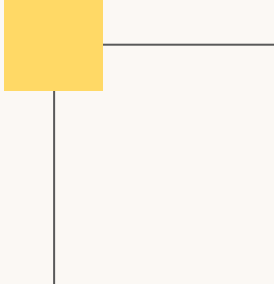
# Sports Labor Pioneer

- Flood's action sparked the movement towards increased player autonomy and free agency
- Flood is a martyr, who sacrificed his career so future generations of athletes could make more money
- Flood salary in 1969 was \$90k, the highest on the Cardinals (~\$730k in today's dollars)
- The highest paid player on the Cardinals today make \$35M annually
  - 47.9 increase since 1969 accounting for inflation
- Minimum contract has risen from \$81,000 in today's dollars to \$700,000.



# Studying Discourse surrounding Curt Flood



- Study public perception of Flood and public discourse to evaluate the impact of race in Flood's blackballing
  - Comparing traditionally white newspapers and traditionally black newspapers
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“It’s been written, Curt, that you’re a man who makes \$90,000 a year, which isn’t exactly slave wages,” he said. “What is your retort to that?”

“A well-paid slave,” Flood said without a moment’s hesitation, “is nonetheless a slave.””

# Newspapers Cited

## Traditionally White Newspapers

- St. Louis  
Post-Dispatch
- New York Times

## Traditionally Black Newspapers

- St. Louis American
- The Wichita Times
- The Chicago Metro  
News
- The Black Panther
- The Racine Courier



**“Organized baseball faced the threat today of a federal court suit against its controversial reserve clause by outfielder Curt Flood, who will have former Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg at his council. The court will have the support of the Major League Players Association.”**

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Dec 30,  
1969

“What I did then,” says Flood, “is relative today only because it happens that other people have benefited by it and that’s cool. These guys are making more money and deservedly so... What happened five years ago is significant in only one respect, that it gave the ballplayer a chance to think, “What am I worth... Do I have to spend the rest of my life in servitude to this one person?”

St. Louis American, October 23,  
1976

**“Frank Lane, former general manager of the Cardinals, says he has no doubt that Curt Flood will report to the Philadelphia Phillies “unless he’s better than Rembrandt.”**

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, October 11,  
1969

“Flood is president of the local Aunts and Uncles Organization, a group geared toward direct help for the underprivileged founded by our friend, black businessman Lawrence Albert. He has repeated his intentions to some of those assembled at the most recent meeting of this august body. The indication is that the portrait painting business, of which the gifted centerfielder is equally adept, is quite lucrative.”

St. Louis American, November 27, 1969

# Curt Flood's Stand and the Greater American Labor Movement

- Curt Flood and his legal team frequently used "Slave Rhetoric" to describe players' unfair relationship with the owners.
- This rhetoric has been commonplace through labor movements in American history

William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878) wrote in vehement defense of the tailors in the New York Evening Post , "because they had determined not to work for the wages offered them! Can anything be imagined more abhorrent....If this is not Slavery, we have forgotten its definition. Strike the right of associating for the sale of labor from the privileges of a freeman, and you may as well at once bind him to a master or ascribe him to the soil."



# Conclusion and Takeaways



- Flood was a martyr who stood up to Major League Baseball for infringing on player's rights
  - This has had massive implications on the whole of baseball and professional sports labor
  - To fully understand Flood's impact, one must study him through the lens of race and labor
  - Case study for the intersection of race and labor
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