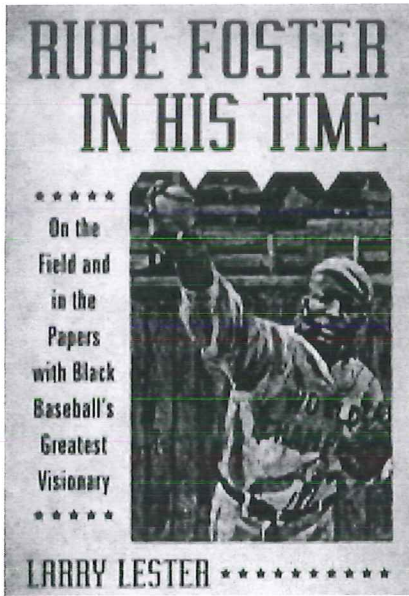


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**RUBE FOSTER
IN HIS TIME:
ON THE FIELD AND
IN THE PAPERS WITH
BLACK BASEBALL'S
GREATEST VISIONARY**

BY LARRY LESTER

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McFarland & Company
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Reviewed by
Wes Singletary

There was no greater player or entrepreneur in early black baseball than Rube Foster. The big, strong-armed pitcher stormed out of the south to become the most recognizable figure in the black game's early history, a titan on a level with Babe Ruth himself, yet one who evolved into the ranks of management. Similarly, Larry Lester, author of *Rube Foster In His Time*, is a singularly

important figure in regards to the research of black baseball. Lester's NoirTech Research has provided many scholars with the archival photographs needed for their particular subjects, and his work with the SABR journal, *Black Ball: A Negro Leagues Journal*, and as Chairman of the Negro Leagues Research Committee, has been stellar. It is not surprising then to find that Lester, delving into his own exhaustive repository, should determine to pen a comprehensive documentary history of the legendary Rube Foster and the era that he so dominated.

In this work, Larry Lester goes beyond what many researchers could expect to find in gleaning the information necessary for this exceptionally well-documented look at the black game's early years, one that was dominated by Foster. Rube Foster was among the great African-American pitchers of the early 1900s, the leader of the legendary Chicago American Giants, a team that in 1917 captured not only the World Championship of black baseball, but also toured the country, taking on all comers, like no other team before it. As founder and president of the Negro National League, the first all-black league to survive for more than a season as a viable business enterprise, Foster established himself as something more than just another ballplayer, providing jobs and a venue in which African-American ballplayers

could participate. Lester goes to great lengths to examine this individual – one inning at a time – through his rise in the makeshift, barnstorming early days of black baseball, to his work in establishing the Negro National league, and his own team, the American Giants, to his untimely death.

While Lester tells the story well, it is the research accompanying the narrative that stands out. In so many works, the original reports of sportswriters from the black press in papers such as the *New York Age*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Indianapolis Ledger*, *Pittsburgh Courier* and others, is woven into the narrative of the contemporary author, with perhaps a citation for the research coming in the notes at the end. Lester goes out of his way to incorporate the actual reportage into his narrative, and does so in workable fashion, one not clumsy or lashed together. As with any outstanding documentary work of history, the actual research is the gist of this work, and can therefore be used by others seeking to expand upon their own study. Here is where the book adds value.

The author's appendices also include significant information, such as a daily record of Foster's pitching performances, his draft registration cards, birth certificate, and census records. What is most appealing, however, is the collection of team depth charts from 1902 – 1918 that Lester prepared and

Deadball Era Committee newsletter

included. This record, compiled from the black press and based upon the number of games played by Foster-led teams that Lester was able to uncover, is a valuable record for anyone researching other players or teams during this time frame.

Lester's narrative, while given over to the vast amount of research included within, does conjure a sense of being there for the reader. In expanding on black baseball and the Negro leagues, other outstanding ballplayers are detailed, those playing with Foster and against him. Lester reminds readers that the Cuban hurler Jose Mendez, *El diamante Negro*, was once described by Hall of Fame manager John McGraw, as the "greatest pitcher of all time." Other players, like Bullet Rogan, Spot Poles, John Henry Lloyd, Red Ant Wickware, Cyclone Joe Williams, and Foster's half brother Willie, are treated likewise, with ample research placing them within the context of their time. He also notes that Foster was named by more than two dozen historians as the top executive

in the Negro leagues over such black ball counterparts as J. L. Wilkinson, C. I. Taylor, and Ed Bolden, each of whom this book details in their relations with Foster.

In providing this thoroughly documented biography of Foster, Lester gets "behind the man," ably reconstructing the development of Foster's life and Black Baseball, while detailing all of the conflict and glory in both, from the perspective of its seminal participant. As he hoped he would, Lester has provided a "one-stop resource for those with a strong interest in Rube Foster, his teams and time, and the very rise of the Negro Leagues." While some may view it more as a reference guide than a definitive biography, I found the book fascinating and do recommend it.

Wes Singletary is the author of Al Lopez: The Life of Baseball's El Senor (1999), The Right Time: John Henry "Pop" Lloyd and Black Baseball (2011), and numerous articles on the history of baseball.

As always, *The Inside Game* appreciates the review copies of the books featured in this issue that were generously provided to us by their publishers and we encourage your patronage. The Herschel Cobb memoir can be obtained from ECW Press, 2120 Queen Street East, Suite 200, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4E 1E2 or Tel: 416-694-3348/E-mail: info@ecwpress.com. The Rube Foster and Black Sox judicial proceedings books were published by McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640 or Tel: 336-246-4460/E-mail info@mcfarlandpub.com.



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