

The BLACK C o m m e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

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March 5, 2009 - Issue 314

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Witch Hunt at the Ballpark

The African World

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The revelation of alleged steroid abuse by Alex Rodriguez has further demoralized many athletes and sports enthusiasts. After repeated denials, Rodriguez held a press conference announcing that he and his cousin had used some substance in the past; that he was ashamed; and that he had been young and stupid.

While I take as a given the documented physical impact of steroids on the human body, I am very disturbed by the steroid investigations and the cloud that it has cast on Major League baseball. Please do not get me wrong. I am not apologizing for Barry Bonds, Alex Rodriguez, or any of the other players who have either been accused or admitted to the use of steroids. Rather, I am trying to figure out what is actually behind what increasingly feels like a witch hunt.

It is one thing to say that from a particular date forward steroids will no longer be permitted, but what is to be gained by examinations into the past? What comes from exposes such as the one in the case of Rodriguez? All that can result is worsening the name of baseball and smearing the reputation of the Major League Baseball Players Association (the player's union) which is obligated to defend its members.

Unless that is the point...

In other words, are we looking at an attack on the players and a means of weakening them and their organization? It is all very odd. Consider for a moment that alcoholism and other forms of substance abuse have historically run wild in sports generally, but certainly in baseball. Yet, there has never been this intense demand that an asterisk be put after the names of great players who may have either allegedly engaged in

substance abuse or have been proven to be substance abusers.

I do not believe that the use of steroids is a small thing. I do not think that anyone should make light of this drug. Yet perhaps it is my suspicious mind that leads me to wonder whether this entire hoopla is being used to weaken the players in their individual and collective negotiations. It also seems to have flared up when there is this developing discussion of having owners and players cut their salaries in light of the current economic crisis.

While I tend not to go in for conspiracy theories, conspiracies and otherwise naughty behavior do exist. If there are to be investigations in baseball we might be better off asking about the new stadiums that are built that involve substantial public financing yet the price tag for the fan keeps going up. If we want to do investigations in baseball, perhaps we should examine why greater attention is not devoted to redeveloping a significant African American cadre of players rather than stealing players from various parts of the world.

While I happen to think that Alex Rodriguez's press conference was gobbledygook, that is actually beside the point. These exposes regarding alleged past behavior are doing no good other than pushing further underground any discussion regarding why players have felt, over time, the need for artificial enhancements. Whether that artificial enhancement is alcohol, marijuana or steroids, the use of these substances speaks more to the nature of the pressures in real baseball than it does to the character of any one particular player.

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BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor, Bill Fletcher, Jr., is a Senior Scholar with the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), the immediate past president of [TransAfrica Forum](#) and co-author of, [Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice](#) (University of California Press), which examines the crisis of organized labor in the USA. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Fletcher.

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