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Marvin Miller, Curt Flood and the Baseball Hall of Fame The African World By Bill Fletcher, Jr. BC Editorial Board

I was out of the country when word reached me of the passing of the legendary Marvin Miller, the retired Executive Director of the Major League Baseball Players Association. While I was not completely surprised to hear the news - Miller was 95 at the time of his death - his fierce determination often led me to think that he would actually be around a bit longer!

It is an understatement to suggest that Marvin Miller changed baseball. Under his leadership, not only was the Players Association transformed from an anemic organization into a vital representative of the players' interests, but it took on the struggle for free agency and against the notorious "reserve clause."

It was Curt Flood who, with the backing of Miller and the MLBPA, challenged the *de facto* indentured servant provisions of the reserve clause that locked most players into both low salaries and bondage with particular teams. First, through the unsuccessful court challenge by Flood, and later through the combination of organizing, shrewd tactics, and the terrible publicity that the owners received in the context of Flood's challenge, Miller led in the process that resulted in a whole new ballgame, so to speak. The reserve clause imploded and the provision of free agency, which is largely accepted in most sports today, was introduced.

The owners of the baseball teams hated both Flood and Miller. As a result, every effort to place both of them into the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame, due to their roles in the development of

baseball, has failed. In the last effort to get Miller into the Hall of Fame he fell short by one vote. The owners refuse to acknowledge the contributions of these two giants and they will never forgive Miller for altering the status of the baseball player through the building of the Major League Baseball Players Association and the victories that they won.

Though Miller appeared to have taken the block on his candidacy in stride, the failure to have him and Curt Flood placed in the Hall of Fame is of greater significance than the ego of either of these individuals or the importance for their families. It is really about history.

There is a famous story by Aesop that tells of a human and a lion who engage in a debate over the superiority of humans vs. lions. In a clearing they discover a statue of Hercules standing on top of a defeated lion. The human exclaims that this proves that humans are superior. The lion replies that were it the lions who built the statues the lion would be standing on top of Hercules.

Refusing to admit Flood and Miller into the Hall of Fame is a matter of who is building the statues. It is a matter of telling the *actual* story of the evolution of Major League Baseball. Just as the real story of baseball as a phenomenon in the USA cannot be told without attention to the often forgotten Negro Leagues, so too is it true that the story cannot be told unless one gives attention to the struggle of the players. This struggle went beyond Flood and Miller, actually being a multi-decades-long fight for respect and dignity on the part of the players. At nearly every step they were blocked by the owners, the media, and frequently by the government. It was through organization and determination that there was a breakthrough. That organization was the Major League Baseball Players Association and it was Miller who guided it as it moved toward becoming a real labor union, fighting on behalf of its members and periodically making its case to the broader public of baseball fans.

No, Marvin Miller did not build the MLBPA by himself. One would be foolish to think so. But leadership is always critical. There are moments when the stars align, so to speak, but opportunity is lost precisely because innovative and visionary leadership is lacking. The players, in this 'game,' were blessed to have had the leadership of Marvin Miller.

For those who love baseball, Miller will be missed. For those who love justice, he will also be missed. So, let's get Miller and Flood into the Hall of Fame. Further excuses are simply unacceptable.

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