

Legislative Analysis



NEGRO LEAGUES DAY

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House Bill 4519 as introduced
Sponsor: Rep. Helena Scott
Committee: Government Operations
Revised 5-24-23

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

SUMMARY:

House Bill 4519 would declare May 2 of each year as Negro Leagues Day.

BACKGROUND:

On May 2, 1920, the first game of Negro National League baseball was played at Washington Park in Indianapolis between the Chicago American Giants and the Indianapolis ABCs.

There had always been Black baseball players and teams, but the national major leagues had enforced a race-based prohibition against their participation since the late 1800s. While there had been attempts to organize a specifically Black league, none had yet been successful. As a consequence, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Black baseball teams generally played exhibition games in a barnstorming circuit at different venues throughout a region or across the nation.¹

The Negro National League was organized by Rube Foster, a former star pitcher who at the time owned and managed the Chicago American Giants.² In addition to Chicago and Indianapolis, the charter members of the league included the Kansas City Monarchs, the St. Louis Giants, the Dayton Marcos, Joe Green's Chicago Giants, the Cuban Stars, and the Detroit Stars.³

The success of the Negro National League inspired the formation of several other major African American leagues, of varying longevity, over the next three decades. (The Negro National League itself folded at the end of 1931, in the headwinds of the Great Depression, but a second league of that name was organized in 1933.) The Eastern Colored League (1923-1928) and the Negro American League (formed in 1937) were perhaps the most notable of these rival leagues. During the 1920s and 1940s, the champions of those leagues played the champions of the Negro National League in a World Series.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson, who had played for the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro Leagues, debuted as a Brooklyn Dodger and became the first Black player since the 1880s to play in the white major leagues. As formerly all-white teams slowly became more racially integrated over the next decade, the Negro Leagues began to diminish, both in player quality and box office draw. By 1950, the golden era of the Negro Leagues, begun in 1920, had ended.

¹ <https://sabr.org/jackie75/segregation/>

² <https://sabr.org/journal/article/andrew-rube-foster-gem-of-a-man/>

³ <https://sabr.org/journal/article/rube-foster-and-black-baseball-in-chicago/>

The Detroit Stars, founded by Rube Foster himself in 1919, played at Mack Park on Detroit's East Side until a fire destroyed the grandstand in 1929. The team played at Hamtramck Stadium in 1930 and 1931, but folded along with the first Negro National League at the end of that year. In 1932, a new team called the Detroit Wolves also played at Hamtramck, but its league (the Negro East-West League) ended before the year was out. In the ensuing years, a few other Detroit teams took the name the Detroit Stars, but none with the success of the original franchise.⁴

FISCAL IMPACT:

The bill would have no fiscal impact on the state or local units of government.

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.

⁴ <https://www.mlb.com/tigers/community/african-american-heritage/detroit-stars>