



# **1954: The Year Willie Mays and the First Generation of Black Superstars Changed Major League Baseball Forever**

*Bill Madden*

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1954: Perhaps no single baseball season has so profoundly changed the game forever. In that year—the same in which the US Supreme Court unanimously ruled, in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, that segregation of the races be outlawed in America's public schools—Larry Doby's Indians won an American League record 111 games, dethroned the five-straight World Series champion Yankees, and went on to play Willie Mays's Giants in the first World Series that featured players of color on both teams.

Seven years after Jackie Robinson had broken the baseball color line, 1954 was a triumphant watershed season for black players—and, in a larger sense, for baseball and the country as a whole. While Doby was the dominant player in the American League, Mays emerged as the preeminent player in the National League, with a flair and boyish innocence that all fans, black and white, quickly came to embrace. Mays was almost instantly beloved in 1954, much of that due to how seemingly easy it was for him to live up to the effusive buildup from his Giants manager, Leo Durocher, a man more widely known for his ferocious "nice guys finish last" attitude.

Award-winning, *New York Times* bestselling author Bill Madden delivers the first major book to fully examine the 1954 baseball season, drawn largely from exclusive recent interviews with the major players themselves, including Mays and Doby as well as New York baseball legends from that era: Yogi Berra and Whitey Ford of the Yankees, Monte Irvin of the Giants, and Carl Erskine of the Dodgers. *1954* transports readers across the baseball landscape of the time—from the spring training camps in Florida and Arizona to baseball cities including New York, Baltimore, Chicago, and Cleveland—as future superstars such as Hank Aaron, Ernie Banks, and others entered the leagues and continued to integrate the sport.

Weaving together the narrative of one of baseball's greatest seasons with the racially charged events of that year, *1954* demonstrates how our national pastime—with the notable exception of the Yankees, who represented "white supremacy" in the game—was actually ahead of the curve in terms of the acceptance of black Americans, while the nation at large continued to struggle with tolerance.

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