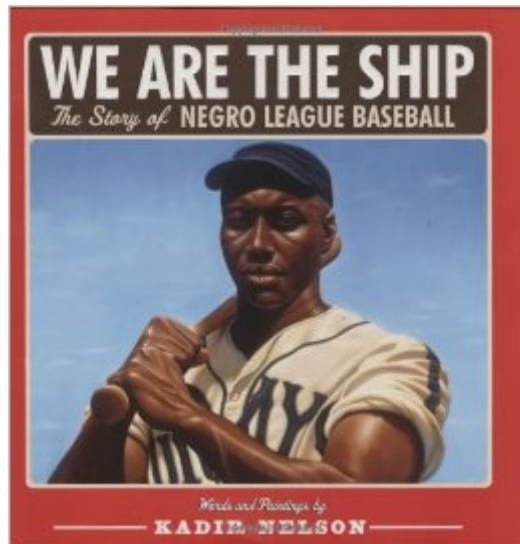


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# We Are The Ship: The Story Of Negro League Baseball



## Synopsis

"We are the ship; all else the sea."-Rube Foster, founder of the Negro National League The story of Negro League baseball is the story of gifted athletes and determined owners; of racial discrimination and international sportsmanship; of fortunes won and lost; of triumphs and defeats on and off the field. It is a perfect mirror for the social and political history of black America in the first half of the twentieth century. But most of all, the story of the Negro Leagues is about hundreds of unsung heroes who overcame segregation, hatred, terrible conditions, and low pay to do the one thing they loved more than anything else in the world: play ball. Using an "Everyman" player as his narrator, Kadir Nelson tells the story of Negro League baseball from its beginnings in the 1920s through its decline after Jackie Robinson crossed over to the majors in 1947. The voice is so authentic, you will feel as if you are sitting on dusty bleachers listening intently to the memories of a man who has known the great ballplayers of that time and shared their experiences. But what makes this book so outstanding are the dozens of full-page and double-page oil paintings-breathtaking in their perspectives, rich in emotion, and created with understanding and affection for these lost heroes of our national game. *We Are the Ship* is a tour de force for baseball lovers of all ages.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (79 customer reviews)

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[African-American](#)

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Nope. Sorry. Not fair. Kadir Nelson, I hate to be the one to tell you this, but you've completely overdrawn your account in the creativity department. I could accept that you are one of the greatest living illustrators making his way today. I didn't even mind how young and talented you were. That was fine. But dude, did I actually have to learn that you were a remarkable writer as well? Now wait just one darn tooting minute here, buster. How fair is it that most of us schlubs can't draw more than a stick figure or write more than a tortured haiku while you proceed to write AND illustrate what I'm going to have to call one of the greatest children's books of 2008? Ladies and gentlemen, I don't know how he has done it, but illustrator and first-time author Kadir Nelson brings us a baseball book that will make fans out the least sports-enthused children out there. Lush pictures, great text, and startling facts bring the story of Negro League baseball to life like never before. Rube Foster was the founder of the Negro National League. Said he of his men, "We are the ship: all else the sea." All long as there has been baseball in America there have been African-American ballplayers. Men like Sol White and Bud Fowler. Before Rube Foster, however, there was no organized professional league. Then, on February 20, 1920, Rube called together owners of black baseball teams, like himself, and the Negro National League began. Through the collective voice of the players, we hear about these years and these men who played together. We hear about amazing plays, crazy rules, outright characters, and the greats. We hear about the hardships of being a player, including the low pay and the dangers of playing in the South.

This book is set in the time between the formation of the Negro League by Rube Foster in the 1920's and Jackie Robinson's cross over to the majors in 1947. This was the era of the Negro League's time of greatest activity and fame. Black baseball had its own superstars. These included Oscar Charleston, Josh Gibson, Cool Papa Bell, and the great Satchel Paige. This was a period when Negro players frequently couldn't find hotels that would let them stay overnight or restaurants that would serve them. Frequently, they spent nights sleeping in their buses or in tents beside the road. Not only is this book an intriguing account of Negro League Baseball, but Kadir Nelson's illustrative paintings are outstanding works of art. The bind black players were caught in is illustrated by baseball's great white pitcher Walter Johnson's comment about the talented catcher Josh Gibson, "He can do everything. He hits the ball a mile. And he catches so easy he might as well be in a rocking chair....too bad this Gibson is a colored fellow." Gibson was so good that some people said Babe Ruth should have been called "the white Josh Gibson." Nelson portrays the "triumphs and defeats on and off the field," as well as adding intriguing facts. Did you know that Satchel Paige had a wonderful singing voice? That Oscar Charleston was such a mean son-of-a-gun that he once

snatched the hood off a Ku Klux Klansman? Or that Louis Armstrong owned the "Secret Nine" ball club and that Bill "Bojangles" Robinson was part-owner of the New York Black Yankees? An especially moving part of this book deals with the exhibition and barnstorming games members of the Negro League played against white major leaguers: "I guess we beat those major leaguers as often as we did because we could out-think them.

I heard an interview with the author on the radio a few months ago and kind of tucked this book into the back of my mind as possibly interesting. Then when I ran across it in the bookstore I had to buy it. Kadir Nelson tells the story of Negro League baseball in a wonderful way that highlights both the joys the players had in playing as well as the challenges they faced - everything from lumpy ballparks and crowded team buses to the difficulties imposed by segregation and prejudice. He tells it from the "we" perspective that gives it an atmosphere of a voice speaking from the past but also makes it sound personal. He introduces us to many of the greats, men who would have been stars in any league, like Satchel Paige, "Cool Papa" Bell, "Judy" Johnson, Josh Gibson - the "black Babe Ruth" (or was Babe the "white Josh Gibson?") - and many, many others. He includes information on those who made the Negro League possible, like Rube Foster, and some of the team owners. I also thought numbering the chapters as Innings (with "Extra Innings" for the final chapter) was a clever touch. But the text alone isn't what makes this book so great. The artwork is stunning in this oversize book, and hardly a page goes by that doesn't have a full page painting (including one fold-out). Some are simple poses of the men on the field and a few show them getting off trains or riding on the bus, but my favorites are the ones that show the action of the game. Several would be good enough to hang on the wall (as reprints, of course, not cut from the book). It has a look and style of the old depression-era artwork that was used in murals and public places. My little-league son and I have been reading the book and have both learned a lot.

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