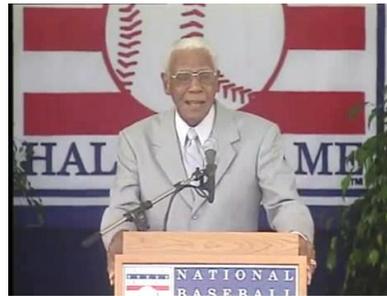




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Buck O'Neil

Speech at the at the National Baseball Hall of Fame



Delivered 30 June 2006

AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio and edited for continuity

Alright, sit down. This is outstanding! I've been a lot of places. I've done a lot of things that I really liked doing. I hit the homerun. I hit the grand slam homerun. I hit for the cycle. I've had a hole-in-one in golf. I've done a lot of things I liked doing. I shook hands with President Truman. Yeah. Oh, man, I [shook hands] with the other President and I hugged his wife, Hillary. So I've done a lot of things I liked doing. But I'd rather be right here, right now, representing these people that helped build a bridge across the chasm of prejudice -- not just the ones like Charlie Pride and me that later crossed it. Yeah. This is quite an honor for me.

See, I played in the Negro Leagues. Tell you what: The Negro Leagues was nothing like Hollywood try to make it. The Negro Leagues was the third largest black business in this country. Yeah. First, black insurances to white insurances -- ten cent policy, just enough to bury us. But the black insurances insured our crops, our homes, yeah, our stock. They made millions.

Next, Madame C.J. Walker -- cosmetology. You see that pretty hair over there? Don't you see it on Mrs. Robinson? Tell you what. Yeah. That's right. Yeah. Yeah. Madame C. J. Walker was doing that a hundred years ago, and she made millions, to tell you the truth. Madame C. J. Walker was the first black woman millionaire in this country. And to tell you Madam C.J. Walker might have been the first woman millionaire in the country that earned it. They had other women millionaires but they inherited the money. Madam C.J. Walker earned it.

Next, Negro League baseball. All you needed was a bus, and we rode in some of the best buses money could buy, yeah, a couple of sets of uniforms.



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You could have 20 of the best athletes that ever lived. And that's who we are representing here today. It was outstanding. And playing in the Negro leagues -- what a lot of you don't know. See, when I first came to the Negro leagues, five percent of Major League ball players were college men because the major leaguers wanted them right out of high school, put them in the minor league, bring them on in. But Negro leagues, 40 percent of Negro leagues, leaguers, were college men. The reason that was, we always spring trained in a black college town and that's who we played in spring training, the black colleges. So when school was out, they came and played baseball. When baseball season was over, they'd go back to teaching, to coaching, or to classes. That was Negro League baseball. And I'm proud to have been a Negro league ball player. Yeah, yeah.

And I tell you what, they always said to me Buck, "I know you hate people for what they did to you or what they did to your folks." I said, "No, man, I never learned to hate." I hate cancer. Cancer killed my mother. My wife died 10 years ago of cancer. (I'm single, ladies.) A good friend of mine -- I hate AIDS. A good friend of mine died of AIDS three months ago. I hate AIDS. But I can't hate a human being because my God never made anything ugly. Now, you can be ugly if you wanna, boy, but God didn't make you that way.

So, I want you to light this valley up this afternoon. Martin [Luther King] said "Agape" is understanding, creative -- a redemptive good will toward all men. Agape is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. And when you reach love on this level, you love all men, not because you like 'em, not because their ways appeal to you, but you love them because God loved them. And I love Jehovah my God with all my heart, with all my soul, and I love every one of you -- as I love myself.

Now, I want you to do something for me. I'm fixin' to get off this stage now. I think I done my six minutes. But I want you to do something for me. I want you to hold hands. Whoever's next to you, hold a hand. Come on, you Hall of Famers, hold hands. All you people out there, hold hands. Everybody hooked up? Everybody hooked up? Well then I tell you what. See, I know my brothers up here, my brothers over there -- I see some black brothers of mine and sisters out there -- I know they can sing. Can you white folks sing? I want you to sing after me:

The greatest thing -- come on everybody --

The greatest thing in all of my life is loving you.

The greatest thing in all of my life is loving you.

The greatest thing in all of my life is loving you.

The greatest thing in all my life is loving you.¹



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Thank you, folks. Thank you, folks. Thank you, folks. Thank you, folks. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Now, sit down. Now, sit down. I could talk to you 10 minutes longer, but I got to go to the bathroom.

¹ = from the contemporary Christian praise song, *The Greatest Thing* by Mark Pendergrass, Sparrow Records (1977)