

## An Open Letter to the New England Community:

Recently, as part of an important series examining whether Boston deserves its reputation as a racist city, the *Globe's* Spotlight Team looked at the role of sports in contributing to this perception, including the history of the Red Sox under former owner Tom Yawkey.

The story described calls by team (and *Globe*) owner John Henry to change the name of Yawkey Way outside of Fenway Park as a sign of “hope” for improving the city’s image, since “no other professional sports franchise plays near a street named for such a racially divisive figure.”

As the Spotlight series makes clear, perceptions do matter. But they can be unfair and often based on misinformation and myths. And because Tom Yawkey cannot speak for himself we feel compelled to speak for him.

The *Globe's* characterizations of Tom Yawkey, presented as a generally accepted viewpoint at a time when its publisher is seeking to rename Yawkey Way, are a prime example of why it is important to look behind perceptions to see what is fact and what is fiction.

It is indisputably true, and regrettable, that the Red Sox were last in the Major Leagues to integrate, in 1959. But the *Globe's* claim that Yawkey worked to keep his team white “longer than anyone else” is contradicted by the notable efforts that he and general manager Joe Cronin made during the 1950’s to acquire and develop black players.

In 1950, according to [negroleaguebaseball.com](http://negroleaguebaseball.com), “the Boston Red Sox ended their era of racial exclusion” when they signed Lorenzo “Piper” Davis to a minor league contract with their Scranton Class A affiliate.

In 1950 and 1952, the Red Sox sought to acquire Larry Doby, a black center fielder for the Cleveland Indians, at one point offering to trade Dom DiMaggio, but Cleveland decided Doby was too valuable to let go. The team also tried in late 1952 to acquire black St. Louis Cardinals pitching prospect Bill Greason, but the offer was rejected.

In 1953, the Red Sox signed a highly rated 19-year-old black prospect, Earl Wilson. After he won a 5-2 victory pitching in a spring training game against the team's Major League squad in 1957, the consensus was that he was ready to be promoted, which would have put the Red Sox ahead of several other teams in integrating. But within two weeks of his win, Wilson was drafted by the Marines. After serving his country for two years, he returned to the team in 1959, a week after Pumpsie Green officially integrated the Major League club.

In 1954, the team offered \$100,000 to the Dodgers to acquire black second baseman Charley Neal, but was rebuffed, as reported in contemporary press accounts, including the *Globe's*.

The often-repeated story that Tom Yawkey yelled a racial slur at a tryout for Jackie Robinson and two other black ballplayers in April 1945 is demonstrably false. According to several sources, including Yawkey’s wife, Jean, he was not even in Boston at the time, and *Globe* columnist Will McDonough, based on his reporting, wrote in 1997, “That never happened.”

It is reasonable to ask why the Red Sox could not achieve integration of the Major League club sooner, or why, like many other teams, they were unable to sign black stars like Robinson and Willie Mays. But it is highly unreasonable to use those facts without context to paint Tom Yawkey as racially divisive.

In fact, Tom and Jean Yawkey treated everyone alike. Through the Yawkey Foundations they left almost all of their wealth for people in need, regardless of their color. To date, the Foundations have poured nearly \$450 million into charities -- \$280 million to Boston charities.

Boston must confront the question posed by the Spotlight series and seek to change the city’s stubborn image as an inhospitable place for minorities. But there should be no doubt about Tom Yawkey’s character or about keeping the name of the street that honors his memory. ■

Sincerely,

The Trustees of the Yawkey Foundations

John L. Harrington, Chairman | James P. Healey, President

**To learn more about Tom Yawkey and his ownership of the Red Sox visit:**

[WWW.YAWKEYFOUNDATION.ORG/STRS.HTML](http://WWW.YAWKEYFOUNDATION.ORG/STRS.HTML)

TOM YAWKEY

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