

March 7, 2017

The Honorable Marlene Anielski  
Chair, State and Local Government Committee  
Ohio House of Representatives  
77 South High Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Chairwoman Anielski, Vice Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Bishoff, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 59, legislation that will designate October 7<sup>th</sup> as Moses Fleetwood Walker Day.

My name is Craig Brown, and I am an adjunct lecturer at Kent State University. It is a pleasure to encourage you to designate a day in honor of Ohioan Moses Fleetwood Walker.

This effort is a result of a class discussion from one of my political science and government classes regarding civil rights. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today about a forgotten Ohioan.

Moses Fleetwood Walker was an inventor, author, businessman, and one of our nation's first celebrity athletes. On May 1, 1884 Walker took the field as the first African American to regularly play baseball for a major league team. His career in the majors was brief, and his team, the Toledo Blue Stockings, would only last a year, but what he did for professional sports and civil rights was monumental. After leaving Toledo, he would play for other predominately white baseball teams in Newark, Cleveland, Toronto, and Syracuse.

After the Civil War, America struggled to accept a new multiracial society where the boundaries of race and class were blurred. Many would create laws and rules that divided and segregated Americans. Others would seek scientific and religious reasons to justify such actions. Actions we would consider abhorrent today.

On May 1, 1884 many white Americans viewed African Americans as inferiors both intellectually and physically. When Moses Fleetwood Walker walked onto a field in Toledo he did more than just play a game. He was more than just an athlete. He did more than throw, catch, or hit. That day and everyday he played he started a conversation.

Walker lived a life that was more than merely a game. He lived life as a spectacle. A life where he was a walking experiment. People went to see games, because they wanted to see if an African American man could compete. They wanted to see if this black man or any black man could be as good as a white man. As a member of this committee you are being asked to honor an athlete that was one of the first people to create a public dialogue. A dialogue that continues today.

Moses Fleetwood Walker was a baseball player, but he was so much more. He not only helped lead America into the eventual integration of athletics, but helped America discuss what it meant to be equal. This being in itself a discussion of what it means to be an American.

Unlike Jackie Robinson, Moses Fleetwood Walker will never be a household name, He didn't live in a time of ESPN Sportscenter, televised games, or million dollar contracts. Still, his life made a huge contribution to the history of our state and nation. Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. I am more than happy to answer your questions.

Thank you,

Craig Brown  
Adjunct Lecturer, Kent State University