



What does a D'var Torah,
Baseball and the
American Jewish Committee
Have in Common?

Irvin Ungar for AJC
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Tonight, the National League playoffs in Major League baseball begins, and it is, of no minor consequence, to mention, that, the *d'var Torah* today, comes from the Bay Area of northern California, home of the San Francisco Giants who are not only the winningest team in baseball this year, but also the host of the second winningest team, their California rivals, the Los Angeles Dodgers. Only one game separated the two this year—107 victories for the Giants (the most in their history), 106 for the Dodgers. This evening they begin play for the right to advance to the National League championship series.

Their rivalry dates to the late 19th century when both were New York teams, and that competitiveness, the longest-standing rivalry in baseball, is perhaps most well-known and signified best by the famous home run, hit 70 years ago this week, by New York Giants' ballplayer Bobby Thompson, in the last game of the 1951 season, in the bottom of the ninth inning, to defeat the Brooklyn Dodgers and give the New York Giants the pennant—Thompson's homer canonized in baseball lore as the “shot heard 'round the world” – a euphoric, but conversely stunning, hypnotic, and paralyzing shot inflaming their bitter rivalry to this day.



Now I would like to share with you this amazing historic and rare baseball poster which once hung in the subways of 1948-1949 New York city, in which representative ballplayers from several teams, including the Dodgers and Giants,

stood not as rivals, but united as teammates, as we of the American Jewish Committee stand at this hour—against racial and religious prejudice heard 'round the world in our own day. Simon and Garfunkel, in the 1960s, well affirmed and echoed the sentiments of this poster that “the words of the prophets were written on the subway walls.” The great non-Jewish ballplayers of that bygone era, Joe DiMaggio of the New York Yankees, and pitcher Bob Feller of the Cleveland Indians, stood with New York Giants ballplayer, Sid Gordon, a Jew from Brownsville, whose parents, Morris and Rose emigrated from Russia; who stood with Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers— the first black man to play in the Major Leagues when he broke the color barrier in 1947; who all stood with, and were presided over, if you will, by one of the greatest broadcasters of all time, “the voice of the Yankees” Mel Allen. Melvin Allen Israel, son of immigrants Julius and Anna Israel, whose family, like Gordon’s, had fled persecution in czarist Russia, was the principal spokesman of the Institute of American Democracy, the printers of this poster, as part of its National Campaign Against Racial and Religious Prejudice.

As baseball fans tune in tonight and turn to American sports’ favorite pastime, we would all do well to remember, that “in America HITS are made by men of EVERY

race, religion and color.” Each of us, in the spirit of our heroic sports’ legends of the past, and the AJC mission of the present, should take the mound and high ground and “keep pitching,” and step up to the plate and “keep swinging” against racial and religious prejudice, as we touch and circle all bases, not as rivals, but as teammates, united in common cause. Now, let’s “play ball!” and the ballgame of our lifetime. Shabbat Shalom.