



## ABHM Book Club Discussion Guide

May 20th, 2025 at 6 PM CT

*I Had a Hammer* by Hank Aaron with Lonnie Wheeler

### How to Use this Guide:

[America's Black Holocaust Museum](#) staff and Ken Bartelt (UWM Doctoral Candidate and baseball historian) created this guide to assist in reading and discussion of *I Had a Hammer*. Please feel free to print a copy and keep it with your book as you lend to friends and others who are interested. Do not expect to get through all of the questions during the upcoming meeting nor in one sitting. Perhaps consider them as conversation starters or an invitation to reflect more deeply about this book.

### Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Early in the book, Hank Aaron claims that he was, “one of the lucky ones,” acknowledging that he earned his platform by excelling at a skill that white people would pay to see performed for their entertainment. How does Aaron feel that he should use this platform?
2. Jackie Robinson played a significant role in the life of Aaron and Black ballplayers across the country. How specifically does Aaron talk about Robinson’s impact on his life in the book? What does this impact say about the importance of representation for young people?
3. While the gradual integration of Major League Baseball produced both tangible and symbolic positive developments for American race relations, baseball’s integration also resulted in negative consequences for Black communities. What were some of these negative consequences? What do these consequences say about the nature of integration during this period in American history?

4. Towards the end of Chapter 4, Aaron discusses his minor league teammate, Horace Garner. How does Garner's story exemplify the real-life consequences of segregation?
5. In Chapter 3, Aaron recalls his first at-bat against a white pitcher while playing for the Eau Claire Bears. How does Aaron remember feeling about this at-bat at the time? What do these feelings reveal about the power of racist ideas? How are these racist ideas reinforced by segregation?
6. Throughout the book, Aaron's reflections provide insight into the complex regionality of American racism. How did Aaron, his family, and Black teammates experience racism differently in the South versus the North? What similarities existed between the two parts of the country?
7. In Chapter 4, Aaron reflects upon the experiences of his teammate, Felix Mantilla, an Afro-Latino ballplayer from Puerto Rico. What does the culture shock that Mantilla experienced playing in the Jim Crow South tell us about the unique differences between racism in the United States and in Latin America?
8. Throughout the book, Aaron highlights multiple white people in his life who were important allies. Who were some of these allies and what do Aaron's recollections say about the importance of allyship?
9. What role did the mainstream press play in advancing stereotypes about Aaron and other Black ballplayers? How did coverage of Aaron change as he became more vocal about social issues?
10. Reading the various examples of racist hate mail that Aaron received during his pursuit of Babe Ruth's all-time home run record, what stands out to you?
11. What role has baseball played in the long Black freedom struggle? In what ways has baseball both advanced and hindered progress in the fight for civil rights? What is it about baseball's place in American popular culture that makes its contributions particularly meaningful?
12. Henry Aaron spent most of his career playing for the Braves both in Milwaukee and in Atlanta. In the book, Aaron does not discuss the significance of playing on a team with a controversial American Indian mascot that many consider to be racist. What does this omission say about the nature of American racism at the time of his writing? Are certain forms of racism considered more socially acceptable than others?