byname of LEROY ROBERT PAIGE (b. July 7, 1906?, Mobile, Ala., U.S.--d. June 8, 1982, Kansas City, Mo.), American professional baseball pitcher who earned legendary fame during his many years in the Negro leagues; he finally was allowed to enter the major leagues in 1948, after the unwritten rule against black players was relaxed. A right-handed, loose-jointed "beanpole" standing 6 feet 3 1/2 inches, Paige had considerable pitching speed and developed a comprehensive mastery of slow-breaking deliveries.

In his later years Paige, a humorous man, derived much amusement from the controversy about his age; his birth date is sometimes placed as early as Dec. 18, 1899. He was surely well past his prime in 1948 when team owner Bill Veeck signed him for the Cleveland Indians, but he helped to spark that team to American League pennant and World Series victories that year. When Veeck purchased the St. Louis Browns, Paige joined that team and was its most effective relief pitcher from 1951 through 1953.

Before his major-league career, Paige was a pitcher for various teams in the Negro Southern Association and the Negro National League. Wearing a false red beard, he also played for the bearded House of David team. A true "iron man," he pitched in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America during the northern winter. As a barnstormer he would travel as many as 30,000 miles a year while pitching for any team willing to meet his price. In 1935 he pitched every day for 29 days. He is reputed to have pitched a total of 2,500 games during his nearly 30-year career, winning 2,000 of them.

Despite the colour bar, Paige faced the best major-league players in exhibition games before 1948. He once struck out Rogers Hornsby, probably the greatest right-handed hitter in baseball history, five times in one game. In Hollywood in 1934 Paige scored a spectacular 1-0 victory in 13 innings over Dizzy Dean, who won 30 games for the St. Louis Cardinals that year. Paige was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1971.