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The History and Influence of Black Baseball in the United States and Indianapolis

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THE HISTORY AND INFLUENCE
OF BLACK BASEBALL IN
THE UNITED STATES AND INDIANAPOLIS

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of History
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

and

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When Americans discuss the history of baseball, names like Lou Gehrig, Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Connie Mack, and Walter Johnson are mentioned. But what about men like Rube Foster, Buck Leonard, C. I. Taylor, Josh Gibson, and Oscar Charleston? Most American baseball fans know little about black baseball and the lives of black players. A study of black baseball, focusing on the Negro leagues, answers some of the questions baseball fans and historians might ask out of ignorance. How did baseball become segregated? How did the Negro leagues evolve? What was life like for black baseball players? How was the game in the Negro leagues really played? And did black baseball really have a measurable effect on black society?

The last question can be answered with an emphatic "yes." Black baseball teams were integral parts of the black community from the turn of the century to about 1950. They reflected the burdens of segregation yet provided examples of how to live within its boundaries by providing heroes for the black community. In response to the segregation in this Jim Crow era, blacks developed a distinct parallel culture, which included baseball teams replete with black sport heroes and a

thriving black press. As in white society, black baseball reflected a "culture of professionalism" which elevated the status of sport figures within black society.

Negro league baseball put before the black community's eyes what was already in their minds -- blacks had the same abilities as whites. Black baseball, especially as it was manifested in the Negro leagues, was an important part of the awakening of black consciousness.

Baseball provided blacks with opportunities to disprove the racial stereotypes perpetuated by Jim Crow laws. As they became more certain of their ability to perform at the same or higher level than whites, blacks grew less tolerant of racial discrimination. Baseball, therefore, was one dimension of the unfolding struggle for black equality. Athletic feats helped to set the stage for civil rights challenges later in the century, such as the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 and the Greensboro sit-ins of 1960.¹

Discrimination against blacks was reflected in Indianapolis in the early 20th century. And like blacks across the nation, Indianapolis blacks established a parallel culture led by black businesspersons, such as Madame C. J. Walker; black newspapers, such as the Freeman and Recorder; black entertainment centered on Indiana Avenue; and black sports, such as the Indianapolis ABCs.

CHAPTER 1

BLACK BASEBALL IN THE NATION

Bud Fowler, who was born in Cooperstown, New York, became the first black to play organized baseball in 1872.² In 1879 there was a National Agreement among all the leagues, including the present-day National League, not to raid rosters. Included in this was a "gentlemen's agreement" to bar blacks from playing. No team was forced to accept this and several blacks played in the leagues, though not without some racial incidents.³

By 1892, no black players or teams remained in organized baseball and, with a couple of very short and minor exceptions in the late 1890s, none reappeared until 1946.⁴ Organized baseball was never integrated but now it was totally segregated. What had happened?

Baseball mirrored American society in the late 1800s. Through Jim Crow laws and practices that separated whites and blacks in virtually all aspects of life, blacks were denied access to elevators, books, hotels, and baseball leagues designated for whites only. Historian C. Vann Woodward writes, "The Jim Crow laws, unlike feudal laws, did not assign the subordinate group a fixed status in society. They were constantly pushing the Negro farther down."⁵

Paralleling the emergence of Jim Crow, a "culture of professionalism" arose as people of different trades created organizations and set criteria for entrance into occupation and performance. By denying inclusion due to race or ethnicity, vocations and businesses appeared to be more distinctive and the people who were included in organizations achieved higher status than those denied inclusion. Organized baseball was equally exclusive as it tried to present itself as pure and honest, a white man's sport with no gambling, and any baseball team that did not exhibit these traits was deemed "outlaw" by the officials of "organized" baseball.⁶

As a result, the situation for black baseball players began to deteriorate in the late 1880s. The International League prohibited new contracts with black players and current black players were soon released. The League of Colored Baseball Clubs, intended to produce future major league black players, lasted only one week.⁷ George Stovey, a black pitcher for Newark, voluntarily withdrew from a starting assignment against the Chicago White Stockings when Cap Anson demanded the removal of black players from the opposing team.⁸

The only choice black baseball players had at the turn of the century was to play on independent all-black teams which barnstormed to make money. The first great barnstorming team was the Cuban Giants, originally formed by workers at the Argyle Hotel in Babylon, Long Island, in the 1880s.⁹ The word "Cuban" was meant to suggest that the black skin of the

players was related to race mixing in the Caribbean, but no one was fooled. The success of the team led many black teams to use the names "Cubans" or "Giants," and "Cuban" became synonymous not only with great black baseball but also with a country where being black was not equivalent to second class citizenship.¹⁰

The Negro leagues resulted from the hassles black independent teams had with scheduling, the self-defeating competition for players, and white booking agents.¹¹ Rube Foster, a black player and manager, was able to make a league work as the Negro National League began play in 1920 with Foster's Chicago American Giants, Chicago Giants, St. Louis Giants, Detroit Stars, Indianapolis ABCs, Kansas City Monarchs, and the Cuban Stars. Foster was also instrumental in starting the Eastern Colored League in 1923. The champions of the two leagues played their version of the World Series for a Negro baseball championship at the end of their seasons.¹²

These leagues were gone by 1932 due to the Depression and a leadership vacuum following Foster's departure from baseball in 1927. Many teams played as independents, as they had before the leagues were formed.¹³ Within this economic despair, however, existed a way to revive the Negro leagues. The numbers racket was an established part of the black community and the gangsters of the black ghettos who ran the rackets were among the few blacks with the desire and capital

funds that black baseball required.

Gus Greenlee, head of Pittsburgh's north side racket, spearheaded the revitalization of the Negro leagues in the East with his Crawford Giants, a team he began to sponsor in 1930. Greenlee wanted his Crawfords to exceed the tremendous popularity of the crosstown rival Homestead Grays and he was willing to spend large sums of money to accomplish this. He had five future members of the Hall of Fame (Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, Oscar Charleston, Judy Johnson, and Cool Papa Bell) on his payroll in the early 1930s and in 1932, at a cost of \$100,000, he built Greenlee Field.¹⁴

Though it was common knowledge that all the owners of the new Negro National League of 1933 were gangsters, almost all of them were admired for their involvement in black baseball.¹⁵ As most baseball and gambling transactions were in cash, it was easy for owners to conceal or launder money in their baseball businesses.¹⁶

Under the leadership of J. L. Wilkinson, the white owner of the Kansas City franchise, the Negro American League developed in the Midwest as the Depression subsided in 1937. This league also featured some southern cities, such as Atlanta, Birmingham, Jacksonville, and Memphis, due to increasing urbanization in the South and stronger ties between the communities of the North and the South caused by black migration.¹⁷

Life in the Negro leagues involved constant travel.

Teams played anywhere so they could make money. Most of the games teams played were outside the league against local teams of varying abilities and, in the winter, against major league players. Negro league teams played nearly every day, including some tripleheaders on Sundays.

"You were tired, you'd ridden 200 miles to get there, rode all last night maybe, you're going to play here today, and you got a game to play tonight somewhere," recalled Buck Leonard. "You've got to change your sweatshirt after this game, go somewhere maybe fifty miles tonight, you're trying to save a little from this evening's game for tonight's game." Leonard believed he travelled 30,000 miles one summer.¹⁸

Negro league players saw more of the world than most Americans did. Since major league baseball was not played in the West until 1959, the major league quality of Negro league teams playing minor league teams in the region helped the West satisfy its hunger for baseball.

Negro leaguers encountered segregation in their travel in the United States. Ted Page remembered playing a minor league team in Zanesville, Ohio, where the Pittsburgh Crawfords could not dress or shower in the clubhouse because they were black. The team had to travel 135 miles to Columbus to find an establishment that would serve them.¹⁹

Negro league players spent winters playing baseball in Latin America, where they played with and against major leaguers.²⁰ In the eyes of Latin Americans, the Negro

players were as valued and revered as the white major league players. Some Negro leaguers played summer baseball in the Caribbean when that region attempted to strengthen its summer leagues. Some players, such as Ray Dandridge, found the respect they received in Latin America so appealing that they spent much of their careers in foreign nations.

On the diamond, black players usually did not find their white counterparts hostile. Though there were a few like Ty Cobb, who absolutely refused to participate in the same game as blacks, and Jake Powell, who said that as an offseason policeman he "kept in shape by cracking niggers over the head," most white players respected, and some admired, the black players.²¹ Babe Ruth, Hank Greenberg, Joe DiMaggio, Dizzy Dean, and Stan Musial all spoke positively of the Negro league players. Dean, and later Bob Feller, developed all-star teams to barnstorm with Paige and other black players.²² White players were grateful for such money-making ventures just as the Negro leaguers were. Musial once publicly stated he made more money doing this than he could by winning the pennant, which according to Feller, "scared the heck out of the league."²³

The major leaguers had to play on "all-star" teams against Negro leaguers after 1923, the result of a ruling by Commissioner Kenesaw Landis, who was disturbed with the success of Negro teams against intact major league squads. Blacks still attached importance to "all-star exhibitions"

while such a distinction allowed whites to downplay the significance of the contests.²⁴

Because black players knew there were many others ready to replace them and recognized the low-paying alternatives to baseball, they felt tremendous pressure to perform. "When we lost a game, we'd sit up practically all night discussing it," Ted Page said. "This is the way I had to keep from washing the windows in a downtown store or sweeping the floor, and these were the kinds of jobs that were out there for us."²⁵

As white society created a "culture of professionalism," so, too, did blacks. Virtually every black community had a local baseball team, and those players who made it to the pinnacle of the Negro leagues were held in high esteem. The teams copied major league uniforms (and in some cases bought used originals), played in major league stadia (which was profitable for major league owners), and got equipment directly from such companies as Spalding and Wilson. Many teams had dress codes and curfews, though Sammy T. Hughes said of the curfews, "They were like all curfews: if you win, OK; if you lose, you better be in." In the 1920s, the teams travelled in Pullman parlor cars. This was a source of pride as black Pullman porters were serving passengers of the same oppressed race.²⁶

The Negro leaguers succeeded in creating a "culture of professionalism" within black society. They achieved more fame and money than the overwhelming majority of blacks while

displaying a "model of accomplishment and achievement." Statistical evidence which supports the claim of black baseball professionalism includes the large number of players who wed teachers, another one of the few occupations that constituted the small black professional class.²⁷

Negro league players also mixed with the black elite and the players were among the few blacks who entered the clubs of Harlem, often as the guests of musicians. "We knew them but we weren't part of them," stated Hilton Smith. As black players acknowledged the need to stay in contact with the black masses, so did the black elite, and baseball was their method. They made certain that black newspapers supported black baseball and attempted to turn important contests, especially the East-West classic, into social happenings.²⁸

The East-West Classic, usually held in Chicago, was the biggest game of the year (even bigger than the Negro World Series). Crowds generally ranged from 30,000 to 50,000, the largest crowd being 51,723 in 1943, to see the best of the Negro leagues. So important was the game that it attracted white sportswriters as well. Middle-class blacks from around the nation rode the extra Union Pacific cars needed to carry all the fans who converged to Chicago to witness this contest. Because this important game was held in Chicago, it strengthened the common idea among southern blacks migrating north that the Windy City was the most favorable destination.²⁹

Black baseball fared well in the 1940s as crowds often topped 10,000 and were even larger for the Negro World Series, the East-West Classic, exhibitions against white baseball stars, and appearances by Paige.³⁰ But the end was to come quickly.

When Jackie Robinson began to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, black fans flocked to major league parks to see him and the blacks who trickled into the major leagues after him instead of patronizing black baseball teams.³¹ The Negro leagues had lost almost all popularity by 1950 and faded out of existence by 1960.³²

Since the inception of organized black baseball by Foster, the ultimate goal of the Negro leagues had always been integration of the major leagues. Most Negro league owners, however, thought integration would occur not by individual players, but by whole black teams becoming part of the major leagues, and of course each owner hoped to control a club that would be selected.³³ As integration took its course and the owners recognized the inevitability of the demise of their teams, they did nothing to hinder their players from going to the major leagues and they usually received little compensation for their player losses.³⁴

The Negro leagues rose from a need to organize players banned from the major leagues by prejudiced owners and a prejudiced commissioner (it was no accident that integration began soon after Landis's death in 1944) who wanted to produce

an image for their sport. Blacks also sought a professional image for the Negro leagues. As they did, they became heroes to the black masses and provided a means for the black elite to maintain popularity. Through their kind of baseball, which they played throughout the continent, the Negro leaguers emerged as an important part of black society nationally.

This was reflected locally by the Indianapolis entry in the Negro leagues -- the ABCs (the Indianapolis Clowns of the 1940s to 1960s actually rarely played in the city and are therefore not a part of this study). The ABCs exhibited this "culture of professionalism" for blacks in Indianapolis and played an important role in the black history of Indianapolis.

CHAPTER 2

BLACK BASEBALL IN INDIANAPOLIS

Baseball was the game most people played for recreation at the turn of the century. Bill Owens, who grew up in the Haughville part of Indianapolis and played ten years of black professional baseball (including one season with the ABCs), remembered that children in the city would play baseball whenever they could get the chance.³⁵

Historian Gunther Barth wrote of the position baseball held at the turn of the 20th century:

Baseball occupied a special position as the most popular and organized of all spectator sports in the last decades of the nineteenth century. It was the most convenient way for city people to enjoy themselves and also to demonstrate a commitment to the standards of excellence in a leisure-time activity. Within a generation the game had made the transition from a pastime for gentlemen to a social institution illuminating the inner workings of new patterns of urban life.³⁶

Sandlot and semi-pro teams appeared in Indianapolis by the turn of the century, and in 1914 the American Brewing Company at 315 West Ohio Street began to sponsor the semi-pro Indianapolis ABCs (the black team's appellation carried the initials of its sponsor).³⁷ But the crucial person behind the formation of the ABCs would not arrive until the next year.

Charles I., or "C. I.," Taylor had been managing the

Birmingham Giants for ten seasons when he moved the club to West Baden, Indiana, in 1914. Rube Foster's Chicago team dominated the Midwest, but Taylor sought to challenge him with his West Baden Sprudels. In 1915, the team came to Indianapolis and merged with the existing ABCs, with Taylor at the helm.³⁸

Taylor and Foster became the two most important men in black baseball in the Midwest, but they did not always get along and the rivalry between their teams became intense. There was a tremendous personality difference between the two, as the Freeman noted when it wrote that Taylor

does have a rather sad expression, perhaps like Cassius of Shakespeare fame -- lean and hungry. In his tout ensemble he is more like an undertaker or a hired mourner at a funeral. Foster could easily be mistaken for a baker, or cook, or a cellar man in a³⁹ wholesale liquor house -- rubicund and jolly.

A local expert on the Indianapolis ABCs, Paul Debono, believes that Foster wanted to be sure that his name would go down in history and acted in a manner that would help insure this. On the other hand, Taylor was sure that as people looked back on his time, he would be remembered as the key figure in black baseball.⁴⁰

These personality descriptions were borne out by the aftermath of an American Giant forfeit in Indianapolis on July 18, 1915. Rube Foster stopped the play of his team until he was satisfied with the infield conditions, but the umpires warned him to either continue playing or forfeit, and he chose

the latter. The visitors alleged that in the confusion an Indianapolis policeman pulled a gun on one of them. Foster subsequently wrote a letter of explanation to the Freeman, in which he called Taylor an ingrate, "because I have found him to be one of the lowest kind." Near the end of the lengthy letter Foster demanded respect by writing,

at the present time, players, the manager of the ABCs, in fact all colored players, are indebted to me for favors, when they were not playing, and could not get assistance from any other source, and it was done at times when travelling with the owner of the clubs... This is merely mentioned, not as a boast, but to prove that all my efforts have always been to try and help, and not tear down, and advance colored baseball, as well as the players, and I hope the lovers of right, and fair play, will-- as in the past-- judge me by what they know, and not what they hear.⁴¹

In his response to Foster's letter, Taylor said that he did not want to be drawn into a controversy, and the public could draw their own conclusions as "the truth will ultimately be known." Instead of assailing Foster, Taylor wrote of his concern for baseball's potential for blacks:

Baseball is in its infancy among colored people and with the nourishment of organization, it will grow to be a giant organization such as the entire race will be proud of, and hundreds of our young men who are athletically inclined and desire an education, can become members of professional ball clubs during the summer months and get sufficient pay to enable them to go through college on their own account, for the day of our young college men getting enough out of hotel waiting seems to be a thing of the past.⁴²

This war of words raged the next season as the Chicago American Giants and the ABCs vied for the consensus Negro world championship. While the Freeman hailed the hometown

ABCs as the champions, five games to four, Foster and others argued that the series was really a draw at four games apiece. The dispute centered around Foster again pulling his players from the field, this time after Foster was ejected (he believed unfairly) from a contest. Once again, the Chicago manager presented his case in the Freeman, where he stated that there was probably no other place he would have taken such rash action besides Indianapolis, for he was sure he could not get a fair shake in the city.⁴³ Black baseball historian Robert Peterson considered this series between the American Giants and the ABCs a stalemate.⁴⁴

C. I. Taylor is cited by some as the greatest black baseball manager in history. Peterson describes him as "a patient, suave man, a shrewd psychologist and perhaps the first to have clubhouse meetings before and after games to discuss strategy and the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition."⁴⁵ A former Negro league player, Arthur W. Hardy contrasted Taylor's method of persuasion with Foster's reliance on discipline, and said the result for Taylor was that

his players were tremendously loyal to him. The ABCs, in their dress and general decorum, more nearly approximated the modern professional athlete than any other group that I ever saw in those days. They were conservative in dress and quiet-spoken. I suppose some of them got liquored up and all that sort of thing,⁴⁶ but if they did it was never ostentatiously.

Blessed with such a great and well-respected manager in C. I. Taylor, the ABCs were able to accumulate a number of

excellent players, such as pitcher Dizzy Dismukes, third baseman David Malarcher (discovered while attending New Orleans University), first baseman and C. I.'s brother Ben Taylor, second baseman Bingo DeMoss (an innovator of the squeeze play), catcher Biz Mackey (a mentor of Hall of Famer Roy Campanella), and Oscar Charleston.

Arguably the best player ever to don an Indianapolis uniform (and some would say any black uniform) was one of the city's own -- the left-handed outfielder Oscar Charleston. Jimmie Crutchfield, a sixteen-year Negro league veteran, said, "If I had to pick the best player I saw in my time, it would be hard to pick between Charleston and Josh Gibson."⁴⁷ Twenty-game winner Hollie Thurston of the Chicago White Sox remarked that when he barnstormed against Charleston in the 1920s, Charleston "hit a home run every night." Pitcher Connie Johnson said, "He'd come to bat with the score tied and they'd walk him. I wondered why. 'Til one day they pitched to him and he hit it out of the park."⁴⁸

Charleston was a batboy in Indianapolis as a child and he returned to the city after his Army discharge in 1915. He had shown dazzling speed in the athletic events of the 24th Infantry in the Philippines, and his ability to combine speed with power helped him raise his paycheck from fifty dollars a month in his rookie season to \$350 per month the next year. Charleston was popular with the crowds, especially the children.⁴⁹ He was later enshrined at the Baseball Hall of

Fame at Cooperstown, New York in 1976.

With such great players under a topnotch manager, the ABCs were the one team in the Midwest which consistently challenged Foster's Chicago American Giants. The ABCs played weekday games at Northwestern Park (16th Street and the Central Canal) and weekend games at the Federal League Park, where the Indianapolis Indians played.⁵⁰ If the Indians were out of town, then the ABCs were required to use the park, which could make for some long trips home to meet that obligation.⁵¹

The ABCs became charter members in the Negro National League in 1920, and they had become very popular in their short existence. Playing their home dates at Washington Park, the Indianapolis team was often able to draw 8,000 to 10,000 people on holidays and weekends.⁵²

Such popularity allowed baseball to have an influence on the Indianapolis black community. Historian Rob Ruck wrote in Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh that black sport had three important effects. As in Pittsburgh, the ABCs fulfilled those three functions.

First, it brought forth "potential for self organization, creativity, and expression" by encouraging pride in the black community as people identified with the teams and players. Second, sport was an important social function, helping to establish neighborhood and community identity. This provided a contrast to the harsh conditions often

encountered by black citizens. And third, sport served as "a forum for symbolic political assertion and an arena for real political struggle." It helped to energize black consciousness as blacks saw their heroes successfully compete with whites.⁵³

The booming population of blacks in the city allowed baseball to affect more people. The black population of Indianapolis grew 57% between 1910 and 1920, and another 26.8% from 1920 to 1930. At this time, blacks were becoming a proportionally larger part of the city's population (see Table 1). The 9.3% figure for 1910 put Indianapolis eleventh among large cities in highest percentage of black residents, behind such cities as Memphis (40%), Birmingham (39.4%), Nashville (33.1%), Washington (28.5%), and New Orleans (26.3%), but ahead of midwestern cities such as St. Louis (6.4%), Cincinnati (5.4%), Chicago (2%), Cleveland (1.5%), and Detroit (1.2%). The only city in the region with a higher percentage was Louisville -- 18.1%.⁵⁴

The surge in Indianapolis's black population reflected a larger social movement -- the migration of rural, southern blacks to northern industrial cities around World War I. Historian Clifton Phillips described the black migration to Indiana at this time:

Most Negroes entered Indiana from Kentucky, often settling at first in cities along the Ohio River. Many followed the railroad lines northward to become residents of such cities as Indianapolis, Muncie, Richmond, and Terre Haute. Within the state the Negro population was redistributed in

this period.⁵⁵

Immigrant quota laws passed by Congress in 1922 and 1924 contributed to the Great Migration, as jobs formerly filled by foreign immigrants were now open to black workers.⁵⁶ Though the black population in Indianapolis surged between 1910 and 1930, blacks generally remained in the same areas of residence -- wards 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (see Table 2 and Map 1).⁵⁷

One can analyze baseball's social impact in the city by perusing the Indianapolis Freeman, a black newspaper which covered the ABCs, as well as Foster's American Giants. In many respects, the black press in the late 1800s and early 1900s paralleled the role played by the white metropolitan press. Gunther Barth, who has analyzed the metropolitan press, concludes that "in the modern city, law, custom, and tradition lacked the authority to assign people to a station in life, but newspaper stories about neighbors, work, and leisure helped residents identify themselves."⁵⁸ This source of identification was especially important to blacks in Indianapolis who had migrated from the South. In fact, Barth felt that the press was particularly attractive to city newcomers:

Recognizing the multitude of life-styles composing the modern city, the metropolitan press identified the democratic base of the urban world. It held out a measure of political and social freedom that appealed to migrants running away from the restraints of the countryside as well as immigrants⁵⁹ escaping from the bondage of their homelands.

It was not rare to see a baseball story or cartoon on the

front page of the Freeman -- it happened in eight editions of the weekly periodical in 1915. Linescores (and some boxscores) of the past week's contests were regularly printed, as were occasional editorials.

Opening day was a big event for the community. The first home game for Taylor's ABCs in 1917 featured a parade that included "upwards of 30 automobiles with prominent colored people" heading to Washington Park, where a crowd of 10,000 witnessed the contest.⁶⁰ Ever the gentleman, Taylor wrote a letter of thanks in the Freeman for the "monster parade," with special thanks to the Citizens Booster Club and the ladies, whose participation was "a clear demonstration that the game has been properly placed before them."⁶¹

Jewell's ABCs, a team that split from Taylor in 1916 but lasted only a couple of seasons, also had a big time planned for their season opener that same year at Northwestern Park, as a flag raising and a military drill were to take place after the game. The owner was planning to add car service, amusement areas, a pool, and dancing and skating pavilions to the area.⁶² Decoration Day and the Fourth of July were also festive days on the baseball calendar.⁶³

There were other promotions designed to bring the fans in for more than just baseball, and sometimes things did not go according to plan. A June 1918 contest against some aviators from Speedway was to include some airplane stunts, but when a baseball was tossed, the plane took a dive and crashed,

killing one and injuring another (both in the plane), and the game had to be rescheduled.⁶⁴

Baseball players often spent their leisure time in the establishments of Indiana Avenue. The epitome of the pool halls on Indiana Avenue was C. I. Taylor's Pocket Billiard Parlor (440 Indiana Avenue). Bill Owens, who hustled pool to supplement his baseball pay, said, "That was a popular place. Most popular of all the pool halls in the city. A first-class place."⁶⁵ Baseball players frequented the hall, as did much of the black community centered along Indiana Avenue. This was a place where the community and team could intermingle, and citizens could observe the behavior of which Hardy spoke.

Stories about the ABCs appeared in the newspaper even in the offseason. The Freeman ran a feature on the team in the middle of December 1916, noting that "every member of [Taylor's] club is now engaged in some legitimate and lucrative occupation." Several were working in Indianapolis at restaurants, groceries, and barber shops. Taylor said people in the city were always asking him how his players were doing.⁶⁶ Taylor was also featured off the sport page in an article entitled "Some folks who are doing things in Indianapolis," which was about notable blacks in the city.⁶⁷

Blacks in Indianapolis did identify with the team, the players, and the sport of the ABCs. There was a YMCA industrial league that would play on weekends and often do things afterward. One day there were races and boxing at

Douglass Park and a dance at Foster's Skating Rink. Baseball provided the community with opportunities to socialize both inside and outside of the ballpark.

This provided a contrast to and a respite from the hard life blacks led. According to Owens, times were not great in the early to mid-1900s. He felt fortunate to play on an integrated team as a child in Haughville, but recalled many altercations between whites and blacks. He felt discrimination even at a young age when one of his regular newspaper customers passed him over for a white child standing right beside him to purchase that day's Indianapolis Star.⁶⁸

Discrimination was a fact of life in Indianapolis in the early 20th century. In 1920 there were nearly 800 black students at Emmerich Manual, Arsenal Technical, and Shortridge, but team sports and club activities were traditionally segregated, as were some classroom seating arrangements. Many whites seemed to be willing to accept some integration in secondary schools, but when residential housing patterns were threatened by the appearances of some blacks in traditionally white neighborhoods, fears of integration grew. By December 1922, the school board unanimously agreed to construct a new high school (later named Crispus Attucks) exclusively for blacks.⁶⁹

It was during the 1920s that the Ku Klux Klan was beginning to impact the state of Indiana. The Klan's membership had been swelling in the state's population,

affecting social, business, and governmental affairs. Though many writers and historians believe the Klan's role in education was minor, Depauw education professor Stanley Warren wrote that it "seems reasonable to believe that the atmosphere stemming from activities of the Klan was ideally suited to the growth of overt racism" such as this.⁷⁰

Archie Greathouse, a black Indianapolis parent, filed an unsuccessful lawsuit to stop the construction of the new Crispus Attucks High School, and he also failed in his attempt to revoke the transfer of his children out of the "white territory" in the North Capitol Avenue area from P. S. 36 to P. S. 42. The PTA also had some thoughts on the plans to build black schools, as the organization stated:

May we earnestly petition the board to do all in their power to keep these schools south of 25th St.; [sic] nearest 21st St. A colored park and a colored orphan's home has [sic] been pushed into white territory. Therefore, as taxpayers and citizens, we again ask the board to place the colored schools in colored territory... Do we not as white citizens and taxpayers deserve as safe and healthful a school as the colored of the city... A white high school is to be erected at a cost of \$500,000; a colored at \$550,000.⁷¹

The Indianapolis News also sought to keep blacks in their place, as its editors wrote:

One thing certainly should be done as soon as possible, and that is to pave the streets in colored neighborhoods, and make them so attractive that there will be no desire to get out of them. The colored people who move into white sections are not, as a rule, seeking to get in relations with whites, but are moved by the desire to live in better surroundings. The surroundings should be made as good as those in white sections, so there may be no reason for leaving them.⁷²

As if it were ordained, the City Council passed legislation (declared unconstitutional eight months later) in March 1926 limiting where blacks and whites could live. The trustees of Butler University continued this pattern, announcing in 1927 that there would be a limit of ten black students entering per year.⁷³

There was no shortage of racial bias and legal discrimination in the 1920s, so the relief provided by a day of baseball was no small matter. Barth recognized this in writing about the role baseball played in urban life:

City people, at the turn of the century, considered the ball park not as a testing ground for the egalitarian promises of their society but as a source of diversion. As with their limited role in urban politics, they were satisfied with being represented on the field by their sports idols... In the warmth of the afternoon sun, the spectators transcended temporarily the physical limitations urban life imposed on them and experienced relief from the tension of their complex surroundings.⁷⁴

Of course, blacks were even more underrepresented in urban politics and experienced more strain than whites in an age of Jim Crow. While the game was a diversion, the discrimination that made black baseball a necessity hit blacks in the face whenever they went to the ballpark. This supports Barth's claim that for people in general:

Watching a professional baseball game, as well as knowing its ins and outs, turned them into true spectators who not only saw the events on the field but also could sense their significance for everyday life. The experience made crowds of people conscious that rules regulated the happenings of their world, too, and that beyond the fences of the ball park, restraints tempered the competition to get ahead in the world.⁷⁵

This certainly applies to black baseball in the black community, where the sport fulfilled an important social function.

Black baseball was also a source of organization and pride in Indianapolis. Teams competing in an indoor YMCA baseball league adopted the names of black baseball, instead of major league baseball, teams.⁷⁶ Moreover, though the ABC players needed to play lots of games so they could make money, they often helped other organizations by playing to raise funds for charities. The ABCs and the Cuban Giants donated the proceeds from their July 1, 1915, game to Charity Hospital, located on North Missouri and West 15th Street.⁷⁷ The ABCs also travelled north to play the Kokomo Red Sox to benefit the Howard County Tuberculosis Society.⁷⁸

The Freeman offered some suggestions regarding how the Negro leagues could be self-organized and encourage education so blacks would have greater opportunities in the future. One proposition was to eliminate whites from the Negro leagues as much as possible, and another was to get sponsors for the leagues so that intelligent blacks could get tuition stipends through involvement with the leagues.⁷⁹

Black baseball in Indianapolis was a symbol of political assertion of blacks in an environment controlled by whites. The ballparks themselves became arenas for this; according to Bill Owens, white fans usually outnumbered black fans. Owens attributed this phenomenon to C. I. Taylor's stature in the

white community, which was attained through his gentlemanly manner. White baseball fans who wanted to see a good game were willing to go to a black ballpark to fulfill such a desire, which was an acknowledgment by whites of the quality of the black game.⁸⁰

Occasionally, blacks could watch the ABCs play teams of minor and major leaguers in Indianapolis, which helped further the belief that blacks certainly had the ability to compete in the totally white leagues.⁸¹ The Freeman kept the plight of black ballplayers in the forefront with articles proclaiming that the "Color line has kept many a good ball player out of the majors."⁸²

Taylor himself used baseball as an avenue for reaching fellow blacks in his writings in the Freeman. During the ABCs' 1915-16 winter tour of Cuba, Taylor wrote back to the local paper what he was seeing in that Caribbean country:

I find great opportunity here for brilliant young colored men and women. I mean, men and women of high character who want to make good, not only for their own personal aggrandizement, but for the best interests of the colored people. It is easy to see that these people are anxious to learn to speak the English language -- which in time is sure to be universally spoken. It seems clear to me that many of our college bred young men and women in the overcrowded cities in the States could make a splendid investment of their time and talent by taking a course in Spanish and then come here well prepared in every way for the many positions that will soon open up on this island.⁸³

Taylor meant for writings such as this to help blacks advance, both as individuals and as a race, by asserting themselves and by taking advantage of the few opportunities

which the world presented. The high regard in which blacks held Taylor, based on his conduct and success in the world of baseball, gave him credibility when he addressed that population on issues outside the realm of athletics.

The ABCs fared well at the start of the Negro National League. No final standings were published for the 1920 inaugural season (the American Giants were given the pennant), but Indianapolis was 30-29 in 1921 (9 1/2 games behind Foster's club), 46-33 in 1922 (1 1/2 games behind the American Giants, who played twenty fewer games), and 45-34 in 1923 (6 1/2 games in back of the Kansas City Monarchs).⁸⁴

But in June 1924, the Negro National League dropped the ABCs because officials felt that the team, suffering through an abysmal season, was not playing at the level the league demanded. The deterioration of the team really began two years earlier upon the death of C. I. Taylor on March 2, 1922, due to a heart attack. His wife took control of the team, but there was no one who could fill the tremendous void created when he died. As noted above, the ABCs still won without Taylor, but his absence allowed other teams to lure players away.

Successful raids by the Eastern Colored League ultimately led to the demise of the ABCs. The owners in the East had more capital than their midwestern counterparts, and when they flashed more money, players jumped teams. Without C. I. Taylor, the ABCs lacked leadership and were not as solid an

organization. Consequently, in 1924 ten players left the ABCs to head east, and though the team continued to play until 1939 and it returned to league play in 1925-26, 1931-32, and 1936, it never achieved its former greatness. Jimmie Crutchfield, who had only a verbal agreement with the ABCs, departed the team in 1931. He said the ABCs could hardly make ends meet and,

we weren't being paid. That would go on maybe for two months till we had a good gate. Then perhaps you got some of your back pay. Maybe one or two of the fellows would be getting something under the table, but most of us weren't being paid. So we were going to Pittsburgh to play and when we got there, ⁸⁵ the Crawfords gave me \$25 or \$50, so I stayed.

After 1924, the ABCs had only two winning seasons.⁸⁶ The Freeman called for reforms in order to stop the team jumping and raiding, and there was an unstable agreement reached between the Negro National League and the Eastern Colored League in 1924.⁸⁷

Until they disbanded in 1939, the ABCs kept playing as an independent team, playing at or hosting Indiana teams from West Baden, Lafayette, Kokomo, and Frankfort, and also playing some of the league's black clubs. Fans still came to watch these contests and see their black baseball heroes when they were in town. Semi-pro teams, like the Indianapolis Stars (857 Edgemont), Crescent Stars (211 West 14th Street), Indianapolis Monarchs (1502 Columbia), Lincoln Highways (618 North Senate Avenue), and The Favorites (941 West 25th Street) also offered baseball action in the city.⁸⁸ Black baseball

was still alive in Indianapolis, but an era passed with the demise of the ABCs.

CONCLUSION

The early twentieth century in athletics was not a time of blacks playing a white sport, but rather of blacks playing a black sport. There were many exceptional players, such as Josh Gibson, Oscar Charleston, Smokin' Joe Williams, and Satchel Paige, who became heroes to blacks, not whites. The games were often part of a day of black social opportunities. The black press provided coverage of the contests. Blacks even created their own athletic holiday in the East-West Classic.

Factors such as these made black baseball a successful vehicle for pride in black accomplishments. But this entity was also a component of all organized baseball, and even sports in general. From this perspective, blacks affirmed their belief that they were just as competent and capable as whites, for they knew of black triumphs by individual players and teams in games involving both races. This belief, along with black pride, became a key factor in the emergence of the modern civil rights movement.

While black baseball exerted a strong social influence on black Indianapolis, the political impact was less evident than in Pittsburgh, where the sport had direct organizational,

social, and political impact.

This might have been different in Indianapolis had C. I. Taylor, who owned a legitimate and successful billiards hall and was highly regarded among blacks, lived longer and his ABCs, in turn, continued at their high level of play. But while black baseball may not have conferred direct political benefits on black Indianapolis, its precedent of providing an athletic basis for black civic pride may have laid the groundwork for other black institutions to fill this role. An example would be the Crispus Attucks High School basketball team in its success while the modern civil rights movement was underway.

The impact of black baseball has been largely ignored by historians, probably because they and the public are more familiar with the history of the white American and National leagues, and possibly because they do not believe sports are critical to historical study. But indeed, black baseball did play an important part in the social and political history of blacks in cities across the United States, including Indianapolis. As such, an analysis of African-American history is incomplete without the inclusion of black baseball's role.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1

BLACK PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION IN INDIANAPOLIS,
1890-1930

	Total population in Indianapolis	Black population in Indianapolis	Black percent- age of popula- tion
1890	105,436	9,154	8.7%
1900	169,164	15,931	9.4%
1910	233,650	21,816	9.3%
1920	314,194	34,678	11.0%
1930	364,161	43,967	12.1%

Source: James J. Divita, "Ethnic Settlement Patterns in Indianapolis," paper written for the State of Indiana Division of Natural Resources, Indianapolis, 1988.

TABLE 2
 INDIANAPOLIS WARDS AND THEIR BLACK POPULATIONS,
 1920 AND 1930

	Number of Blacks (1920)	Percentage of City's Blacks	Number of Blacks (1930)	Percentage of City's Blacks
Ward 4	4,782	13.8%	9,585	21.8%
Ward 1	5,079	14.6%	7,002	15.9%
Ward 5	5,857	16.9%	6,898	15.7%
Ward 3	6,128	17.7%	5,594	12.7%
Ward 2	2,392	6.9%	4,446	10.1%
Ward 6	3,103	8.9%	2,355	5.4%
Ward 10	1,083	5.2%	2,210	5.0%
Ward 15	1,000	2.9%	1,674	3.8%
Ward 8	1,335	3.8%	1,021	2.3%
Ward 12	524	1.5%	772	1.8%
Ward 7	921	2.7%	592	1.3%
Ward 9	539	1.6%	556	1.3%
Ward 14	456	1.3%	520	1.2%
Ward 11	379	1.1%	359	0.8%
Ward 13	380	1.1%	383	0.9%

Source: James J. Divita, "Ethnic Settlement Patterns in Indianapolis," paper written for the State of Indiana Division of Natural Resources, Indianapolis, 1988, p. 61.

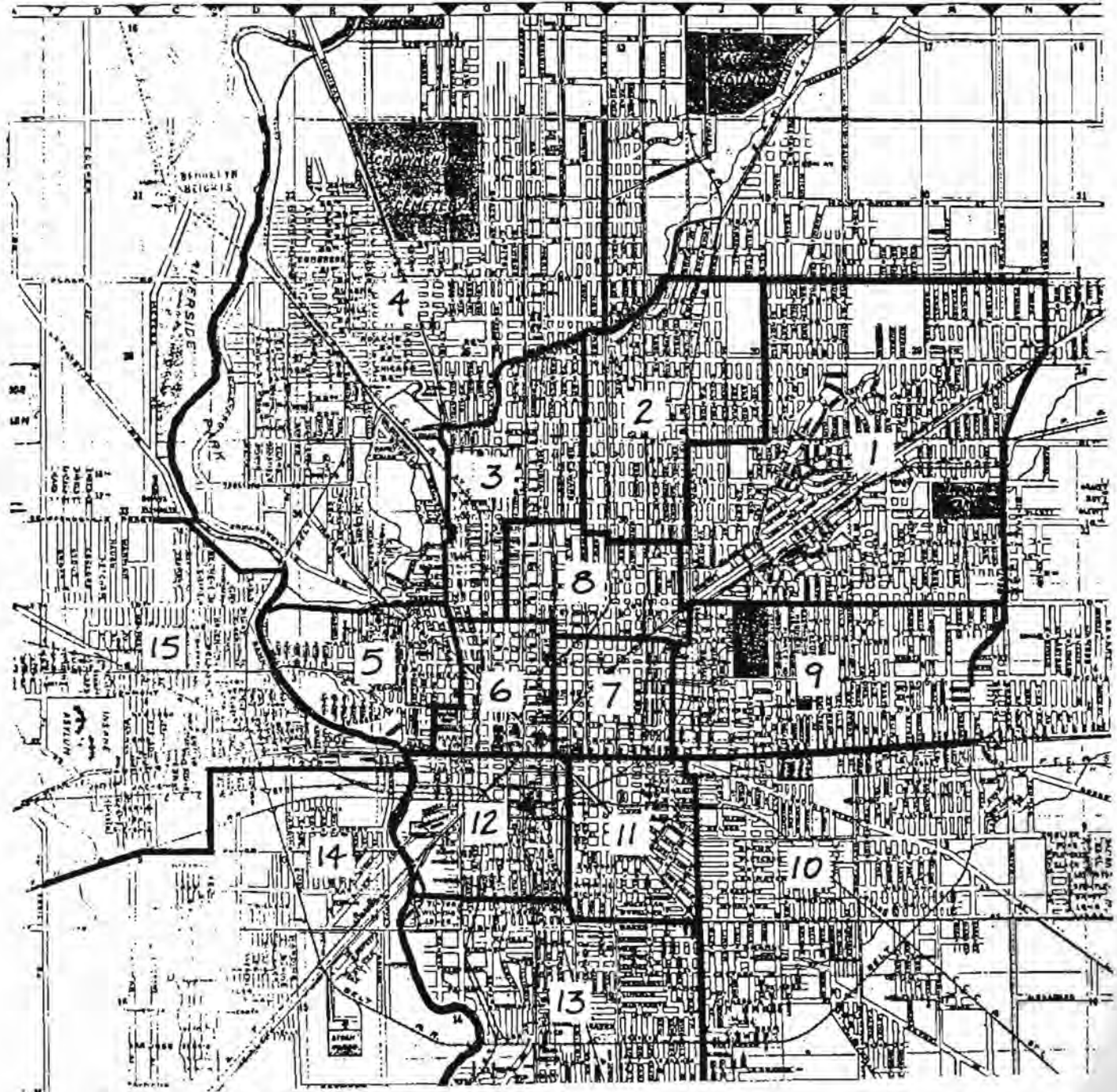
MAP 1

INDIANAPOLIS WARD BOUNDARIES, 1910 AND 1920

EXPLANATIONS
ELECTRIC RAILWAYS
RAILROADS
CANALS
FRIDIAN ST DIVIDES THE CITY EAST & WEST
BRINGTON ST — NORTH & SOUTH

MENDENHALL'S
INDEX MAP OF

GREATER INDIANAPOLIS



Source: Divita, following p. 38.

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