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Trisha L. Bucholz '04
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Take Me Out To The Ballgame:
How The East-West Classic All-Star Game Affected the African
American Community of the Midwest.

Trisha L. Bucholz

Spring 2004

For my father Douglas W. Bucholz, Sr, who first told me about Satchel Paige,
Cool Papa Bell, and Willie Mays and also taught me to be a baseball fan.

Introduction

Thirty years ago only baseball aficionados and some African Americans were very familiar with the existence of the all-black Negro League baseball teams. Since then, the general public has been made more and more aware of these teams and their histories. Surely, though, these teams had more importance for the black community than to simply represent a “blip” on the cultural radar of African Americans. In the halcyon days of the “Roaring Twenties,” the darkest days of the Great Depression, and the most fearsome days of World War II, these teams existed. For better or worse they seemed determined to continually find a field to play on and a crowd to play for, and they rarely faced disappointment. In the Midwest, where the population of some towns only numbered a few thousand, and the black population significantly less, the crowds arrived to watch one of these “barnstorming” teams.¹ Society pages in newspapers buzzed about special games, and women’s clubs fêted players’ wives.² Although their heyday was in the first part of the twentieth century, the Negro Leagues are still remembered fondly among members of today’s black community. These facts force a deeper look at what entertainment, in this case baseball, does for a community.

Scholarship on the Negro Leagues has been very popular in recent years. Discourses on the merits of Black baseball versus White baseball, and how the Negro Leagues advanced the sport can be found in a vast array of scholarly journals and books.³

¹ “Barnstorming” is a general term that refers to a traveling exhibition team, usually baseball.

² Examples of this will be seen in the *Chicago Defender* later in the paper.

³ Examples of such work includes; Jules Tygiel’s *Extra Bases: Reflections on Jackie Robinson, Race, & Baseball History*, Janet Bruce’s *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball*, and Larry Lester’s *Black Baseball’s National Showcase: The East-West All-Star Game, 1933-1953* were all published

Why, then, is this topic still worth discussing? Because amongst all of these theories of the “hit and run” play and the almost mythic proportions of Satchel Paige's fastball, no one has written about why these events or people were embraced by the black community. The effects and impacts that these people and teams had on their intended audience remain only hinted at in other works. Black newspapers published page after page of sports reports, and the society pages even wrote about baseball.⁴ Players detailed their memories in story after story.⁵ From all of this information, a clear picture emerged.

African Americans attended Negro League games for reasons important to their society and culture. Clearly, many of the members of the community would come out for these games, and they offered a popular choice to relax and enjoy the company of others. In addition, the style of baseball played by the Negro League teams differed from that of the “lily-white” Major Leagues. That is to say that black baseball had its own take on how to play the game that made it distinctly different, and therefore, a cultural phenomenon that held great meaning for the members of the black community. Baseball also provided a great deal of business for blacks. Generally owned and operated by black businessmen, promotion of games brought money into towns, and into black owned hotels, restaurants, and shops (not to forget the salaries paid to players, which would support them and their families). Was it simply the abstract notion of baseball that had such an impact on the black community? Of course, any player or any team could impact a community in one way or another, but what of an event, a large-scale symbol of the strength of the black community and its love for baseball? The East-West Classic, the Negro League version of an All-Star game, provided this polarizing event for the black

within the last two decades, Tygiel's and Lester's book being published within the last three years. This list is not all-inclusive, but represents a fair sampling of the sort of work that has been recently done.

⁴ Black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, and *Kansas City Call*.

community of the Midwest. From its inception in 1933 to the outbreak of war in 1941, the East-West Classic furnished the socio-cultural and economic forum through baseball, for the black community of the Midwest.⁶

At a time when public facilities, schools, and neighborhoods were segregated, either by law or common practice, the black communities of the United States needed to develop their own social spheres. Aside from ladies societies and men's fraternal organizations, though, what else did the black community have for entertainment? Cinemas, concerts and dance halls, and sports arenas offered limited availability coupled with the humiliation of being relegated to the back rows and balconies of these venues. The black community answered its needs by creating its own baseball teams. These teams functioned through a certain time period in which they answered a need for so much more than just escapism. They endeared themselves to a community of people and eventually to the history of a nation.

Background concerning topic limits

Before examining the impact of the East-West Classic on black society, two basic questions will be answered. First, an attempt must be made to understand why baseball was so influential. Then, we must explain the choice to study Midwest, and specifically Chicago. The first question that must be answered concerning this topic is: why baseball? Intrinsically speaking, what about the sport of baseball made it so accessible and loved by the black community? The theories that apply to the appeal of baseball in general hold particularly true for African Americans.

⁵ Player interviews like those collected in Holway's works.

⁶ The East-West Classic would continue to be played in Chicago from 1941 to 1953. Stopping before the outbreak of war is meant to focus strictly on the initial way in which the game impacted society and first

The cost of the game of baseball is one factor that figures heavily into its popularity. At its most basic, a game of baseball only requires a ball and a bat. Even at the height of the depression several children could pool their pennies and afford such goods, because they were never expensive products. This would also be assuming that every group of playmates was in need of a ball and a bat, which would not necessarily be true. Thus, baseball did not present a financially prohibitive barrier, which, considering the generally depressed economic situation of African Americans, particularly during the first half of the twentieth century, proved a positive advantage.

As previously stated, baseball really only required a bat and a ball for minimum play. Helmets, cleats, and even mitts could be disposed of to make the game as simple as possible. The game can also be easily amended to accommodate any number of people or space. Sports anthropologist Allen Guttmann would argue this point saying, “Two people can play catch and four can play work-up, but baseball requires at least eighteen players, a bat, a ball, and an open space.”⁷ Guttmann’s point is that the game is only baseball if it fulfills these technicalities. Baseball’s ability to metamorphose to fit any situation, however, is exactly why it appeals. A group of teenagers would be just as happy to knock a ball around an alley or play a “pick up” game in the park as they would to play an “official” game on an actual baseball diamond. This changeling quality of baseball is how it remained popular in the large urban areas and rural areas alike. Urban areas had a surplus of players with limited space, and rural areas had space to spare but not enough players. In either setting, all players available would certainly be able to settle on some variation of baseball agreeable to everyone. Because of this flexibility, African

began to grow. This is also because the war years would bring about a separate set of problems for the African American community that would change the nature of black baseball and the East-West Classic.

Americans could easily play baseball, whereas sports like golf or tennis were very strictly defined and not as readily available to the black community.

The final contributing factor to baseball's popularity among the black community was its popularity within American society at large. Baseball, never competing with an indigenous sport, beat out its English counterpart cricket, once popular in the United States, to be the "American" game. It also fulfilled the role of the pastoral for Americans, the idyllic symbol of American life.⁸ Baseball, dubbed "the national pastime," played on the radio and most major cities showcased at least one professional team. Even when the teams remained segregated, African Americans idolized various white players. Crush Holloway, for example, said of Ty Cobb, "that was my hero. I said, 'I want to slide like Ty Cobb. I want to run bases like him.'"⁹ African Americans followed white Major League teams as well. A letter written to the Chicago White Sox owner, J. Louis Comiskey, read, "There are thousands of loyal Negro White Sox fans...."¹⁰ Even the East-West Classic would have to compete with white teams. One of the concerns for the second annual game included the fact that the Chicago Cubs were opening a series with the New York Giants the same weekend. "This attraction," columnist John Clark wrote, "and the performance of 'Old Man Weather' are factors over which we have no control."¹¹

People also played in their spare time, or in company-organized "industrial leagues." The *Defender* printed stories about the standings of the "Industrial Y.M.C.A." league, with teams like the "Armour Stars," "McCormick Giants," and "Chicago Paper Containers." The Industrial Y.M.C.A. League faced competition from the "Church

⁷ Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 98.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁹ John Holway, *Voices From the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1975), 62.

¹⁰ *Chicago Defender*, 22 August 1936.

League,” which consisted of teams from Providence Church, Jubilee Temple, Friendship Church, and St. Paul’s Church.¹² Even adults played “pick up” games for fun. One year when Cab Calloway and his band performed in Chicago they put together a team and played against a team put together by the staff of the *Defender*. With Cab himself playing shortstop, the “hi de ho band” “whipped The Chicago Defender Thursday morning in a free hitting melee, 15-14, before a large crowd.”¹³ Even in their disenfranchised state, the African Americans of the country enjoyed baseball just as all other Americans did. The advent of black teams running in an organized fashion would allow African Americans to enjoy baseball on a deeper more personal level than in the previous years.

With the clear community love of the game in mind, what exactly did the Midwest hold as an advantage that made it a particularly fruitful location for teams?¹⁴ Furthermore, what did the city of Chicago possess over other cities that made it such a perfect venue for the East-West Classic?

Baseball has long been a part of Midwestern culture, the Chicago Cubs and White Sox and Detroit Tigers are some of the oldest franchises in professional baseball. It would then be perfectly reasonable to assume that since Midwesterners in general were fond of baseball that the black communities in the Midwest would share the same love of the game. This can be seen in the fact that the Midwest had a large share of Negro League teams, The Kansas City Monarchs, The Chicago American Giants, The Detroit Stars, and The Indianapolis ABC’s to name a few. In addition to this, the majority of the

¹¹ *Defender*, 11 August 1934.

¹² *Ibid.* The industrial teams were funded/organized by leading Chicago businesses like Armour Meats and McCormick Reapers. The Church teams would most likely be made up of congregates and supported by the church body.

¹³ *Defender*, 20 July 1935.

¹⁴ For the purposes of this study, the Midwest is defined as Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan.

good barnstorming teams spent large amounts of time in the Midwest.¹⁵ There must be something about the region that makes it ripe for this type of support of baseball.

First off is the fact that the major urban centers of the Midwest are more isolated than their Eastern counterparts. They are further apart and the miles in between are filled with fewer secondary cities. For example, the distance from Chicago to St. Louis is 300 miles, and the only major cities in between are Bloomington-Normal, and Springfield. From New York City to Boston, however, is only 217 miles and one would pass through Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven, Connecticut and Providence, Rhode Island before arriving in Boston.¹⁶ What this meant for individuals in the Midwest is that one traveled farther for large-scale entertainment, cultural events, and socializing.

In the East, the opportunities for other forms of entertainment abounded, so the cultural ties and community building associated with baseball in the Midwest were not as strong in the East. Baseball was certainly very popular in this area of the country, among both the black and white communities, but not nearly to the extent in the Midwest. Ed Harris, writing for the *Philadelphia Tribune* about the East-West Classic game, put it best when he wrote,

“Blasé New York, with its ‘Living in Harlem is the only thing,’ . . . won’t ever make the progress racially that the new up-and-coming communities of the West are. There have been all-star games here and in New York. . . The Stadium and the Polo Grounds aren’t five minutes’ car ride from the heart of Harlem, but do you think 50,000 people got that far? I won’t wait for an answer.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball was White* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 1970), 155.

¹⁶ In today’s world, the difference of eighty-three miles means an added time of only about an hour. In the 1920’s, 30’s, or 40’s without the benefit of a modern interstate system or of modern vehicles the difference of eighty-three miles at an average of thirty-five to forty miles an hour meant several extra hours of traveling, assuming one even had a car in the first place: Ibid. 35 to 40 miles an hour is listed as good traveling time on the bumpy country roads of the Midwest.

¹⁷ *Philadelphia Tribune*, 7 August, 1941: Jim Reiser, *Black Writers/Black Baseball: An Anthology of Articles from Black Sportswriters Who Covered the Negro Leagues* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1994), 159. What we call the Midwest was referred to as the “West” at this time.

Small towns in the Midwest had cinemas and certainly put on some cultural activities, but New York teemed with clubs and concert halls that could lure people away from the ballpark. Even the excitement of a city like Chicago did not remove the entertainment emphasis from baseball, in fact it only added to the glamour of black baseball.

Chicago had a distinct ability to host such an important event as the East-West Classic. This can be linked to a few factors. First of all is that Chicago was a “baseball town.” The city supported many baseball teams. There were two white Major League Teams, the White Sox and the Cubs, and dozens of white semi-professional or industrial teams. There were also two black Negro League teams, the Chicago American Giants and the American Giants, plus other black semi-professional or industrial teams.¹⁸ Next, Chicago also had a healthy black society. There were women’s clubs and civic boosters that lobbied to bring exciting events to the city. Finally, Chicago’s importance as a railroad hub for all of the Midwest, and technologically savvy city cannot be ignored. As historian Donald L. Miller wrote:

Baseball, like Chicago, was made possible by the railroad, which linked competing cities together; the telegraph and the telephone, which put fans in touch with their teams through the daily newspapers; and cable cars and electric trolleys, which brought fans from all over the spread-out city to the park.¹⁹

Chicago, based on these facts, had the right location and the right atmosphere to support an event like the East-West Classic. Attempting to capitalize on the game’s success in Chicago the communities of the East tried to have the game relocated to another city. There was an attempt in 1936 to which the organizers of the game, W.A. Greenlee and Thomas T. Wilson, said, “the game belongs in the Windy City...And that is why the

¹⁸ Despite the similar names, the Chicago American Giants and the American Giants were completely separate entities.

¹⁹ Donald L. Miller, *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 528.

game remains in Chicago this year.”²⁰ Over the years other cities would try to replicate the East-West Classic of Chicago, but never would they achieve the same success afforded by Chicago’s unique qualities.²¹

Depression Era Black Baseball

The “Roaring Twenties” ended abruptly with the stock market crash in October of 1929. Suddenly, America found itself thrown into the depths of an economic depression, the likes of which had never been seen before. Banks folded, businesses failed and people lost jobs. No sector of the population went unaffected. African-Americans were particularly hard hit. Already receiving wages lower than whites throughout the 1920's, the Depression brought on an even worse situation. In 1934 about seventeen percent of white families were unable to support themselves, while thirty eight percent of black families were unable to do so, a figure more than double that of whites.²²

Despite the hard times, people still searched for ways to forget their troubles. Movie theaters, concerts and particularly baseball games remained popular forms of entertainment. With the uncertainty of the age, there was a tangible uncertainty to baseball as well. No one doubted that baseball, black or white, would carry on, but the question was; in what format?

Nothing changed the face of black baseball quite like the Depression. When the stock market crashed in 1929, organized black baseball went right down behind it. The first Negro National League finally crashed to an end in 1931, and professional,

²⁰ *Defender*, 22 August 1936.

²¹ Cleveland, Memphis, New York are a few examples of cities who hosted other, less successful, versions of the East-West Classic. The 1939 All-Star game in New York, for example, attracted only 12,000 to which Fay Young wrote, “That looked like a sack of gooberpeas in the huge Yankee Stadium.” By comparison, the Chicago game drew 32,000. *Chicago Defender*, 9 September, 1939; Reisler, *Black Writers*, 59.

organized black baseball became a thing of the past. Obviously black baseball carried on, as the “color barrier” remained in place until 1947. What took place during these dark years of baseball? Perhaps, they were not as troublesome as one might think. After a few rocky years the reorganization of a second Negro National League (NNL) and the advent of the East-West Classic All-Star game managed to save black baseball and ensure its place in the community for years to come.

The first NNL, organized by Rube Foster of Chicago, managed teams in a professional and efficient manner for twelve years.²³ Foster stepped down from league management in 1926 when mental health problems forced him to resign. Judge W.C. Hueston took over after Foster, but lacked his flair for management and when the financial realities of the Depression hit, he was unable to hold the league together. Once the organization fell apart there was nothing that kept 1932 from becoming the “nadir of organized black baseball.”²⁴

The year 1933, however, marked a turnaround. W.A. “Gus” Greenlee, owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, organized the second Negro National League. Greenlee's NNL included the Pittsburgh Crawfords, the Homestead Grays (Pennsylvania), Cole's American Giants (Chicago), the Indianapolis ABC's, the Detroit Stars, and the Columbus Blue Birds (Ohio). By the late 1930's, the league and teams functioned in a relatively stable financial manner.²⁵ Player's salaries rebounded as well, with the help of Greenlee's

²² Hine, *African Americans*, 337.

²³ John Holway said of Rube Foster: “He was Christy Mathewson, John McGraw, Connie Mack, Al Spalding, and Kenesaw Mountain Landis—great pitcher, manager, owner, league organizer, czar—all rolled into one.” : John Holway, *Blackball Stars: Negro League Pioneers* (Westport, Connecticut: Meckler Publishing, 1988), 8.

²⁴ Peterson, *Only*, 91.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 92-3. In 1932 Cumberland “Cum” Willis Posey attempted to organize an East-West league. Posey's personality was strong enough to run a league, but the financial trappings were not present. Posey continued to run the Homestead Grays, however, and remained a strong force in the NNL.

organization. Salaries ran from \$250 to \$500 a month.²⁶ At a time when the jobless rates for African Americans were 48% in Chicago and 60% in Detroit, baseball seemed to be one of the most lucrative ways to survive the tough times.²⁷ Greenlee's authoritative personality directed the league well. He actually shared the same vision as Rube Foster, for a viable league that would improve baseball and induce "black people to embrace 'race baseball' as their own."²⁸

The comparative stability of the league belied the precarious situation of most teams. Just as "desperate times call for desperate measures," black baseball needed to come up with a plan in order to survive the Depression. Some teams included minstrel shows or ran other similar special promotions. The most ingenious plan of all belonged to the Kansas City Monarchs. J.L. Wilkinson of the Kansas City Monarchs "resurrected" the idea of lighting a baseball field, first done officially in 1927, and built a portable system for Kansas City so that people could come to games at night.²⁹ The revenues gained from more frequent games outweighed the loss of revenue from fewer attendants. In other words, night baseball helped Kansas City turn their operation into a more high-volume business. Portability proved the most important feature of the Monarch's lighting system. By bringing their own lights the Monarchs increased the opportunities to play multiple games in multiple locations in one day. The lights also made the Monarchs a bit of an attraction simply for the experience of saying one had seen a baseball game after dark. A series played between the Monarchs and the Homestead Grays in July of 1930 featured a night game in Pittsburgh under the Monarchs's lighting system that drew a crowd of

²⁶ Holway, *Voices*, 235. Interview.

²⁷ Hine, *African Americans*, 337.

²⁸ Charles C. Alexander, *Breaking the Slump: Baseball in the Depression Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 213.

²⁹ Janet Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, (University of Kansas Press, Lawrence KS, 1985), 68-69.

30,000 people.³⁰ This style of play changed black and white baseball forever.³¹ Today, the vast majority of professional games are played at night, the exception being, as it was even in the 30's, Sunday afternoons. This is one of the best examples of how the Negro Leagues affected the institution of baseball in America even before the integration of the sport. Not only did night baseball help save black baseball from complete ruin, it represented the sort of ingenuity and energy in the upper ranks of black baseball that would lead to the creation of the East-West Classic.

The East-West All-Star Classic

The advent of the East-West All-Star game represented the other great achievement of the time.³² The brain-child of Gus Greenlee and Robert A. Cole of Chicago, the East-West game served as the largest sporting event in all black sports and one of the largest cultural affairs for blacks in the Midwest. All of the troubles and hard-times of the Depression could be easily forgotten in an afternoon at the ballpark. "The fans really turned out for the East-West game," wrote Monte Irvin. "But more than anything else, our games gave black Americans hope...they went to a game and saw players the same color performing well... They made them feel pretty good...."³³ The East-West All-Star Classic made for an exciting summer event for all African Americans to rally around, but most especially those of the Midwest, where the game made its home.

³⁰ Peterson, *Only*, 124. The novelty of night baseball most likely also drew a significant number of whites to this game. It also bears mentioning that this was the first night game ever held at Forbes Field, home of the Pittsburgh Pirates.

³¹ Ibid., 125.

³² It would seem that the first East-West game served as a bit of an experiment and was not intended to be an annual event at first.

³³ Monte Irvin, with James A. Riley, *Nice Guys Finish First* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1996), 64-66: Lester, *Showcase*, 156.

In anticipation of the game, readers of the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender* clipped out small write-in ballots and mailed them to either newspaper office to elect team players. The first game, set for September 9, 1933, received no small amount of coverage in the *Defender*. Before the game, an advertisement appeared imploring people “Don’t Fail to Attend the Game of Games.” Ticket prices varied from fifty-five cents up to one dollar and fifty cents, and they could be purchased at the *Defender* office, the Grand Hotel or the Metropolitan Funeral System.³⁴ The rosters for the game and anticipated crowd attendance graced the front page of the paper. High society even got interested in the game. It was reported:

Society is awaiting with baited breath for another sports affair which promises to outshine any of the other sports events which have been coming one right after the other, and that is the baseball game of the century...Society is awaiting the coming of their many friends to help make this a social as well as sports affair, and baseball lovers are anxiously looking forward to seeing such a game...³⁵

The stage had been set. All of Chicago indeed waited with “baited breath” to see if this experiment of athletics and business venture would pay off in a way that would uplift the black community of Chicago.

The first game ended as an amazing success. William Nunn, of the *Pittsburgh Courier* wrote; “They made me proud that I’m a Negro, and tonight I’m singing a new song.”³⁶ The West won in a thrilling eleven to seven finish. Fans watched James “Cool Papa” Bell, Norman “Turkey” Stearnes, Mule Suttles, Oscar Charleston, and Raleigh “Biz” Mackey play this amazing “Game of Games.” The week after the game (the *Defender* ran only weekly) the sportswriters did not have enough space to write all of

³⁴ *Chicago Defender*, 9 September 1933.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

their praise. Al Monroe rejoiced that “The depression didn’t stop ‘em—the rain couldn’t—and so a howling, thundering mob of 20,000 souls braved an early downpour and a threatening storm....”³⁷ The weather certainly kept some people away from the game, but a crowd of 20,000 in inclement weather is impressive nonetheless. The strong showing of the first game obviously influenced Greenlee and Cole to continue the game in an annual format.

The reception of the game and excitement at the prospect of an annual attraction became immediately apparent the next year in the advertising and campaigning for players. The *Defender* ran cartoons featuring different players and urging readers to vote for their favorites. One July edition ran Theodore “Ted” Trent’s cartoon. The captions read, “Fastball pitcher deluxe for Chicago American Giants. He ranks as the leading pitcher in the league for the first half of the season” and “Trent is a menace to the Pittsburg Crawfords having defeated them every time he has faced them.”³⁸ The captions are very telling about the attitudes of Midwestern blacks and baseball. Chicago blacks had an obvious pride in their “fastball pitcher deluxe” and his ability to defeat the Eastern team. Advertisements like this ran in Pittsburgh during the years as well. A cartoon from the *Courier* showed players labeled “East” and “West” fighting over a ball marked “2 Game Tie.” After four games, each team had won two, and the fifth year of competition was a “rubber match” that the East clearly tried to rally its players to win.³⁹ Each area cultivated in its readers a vigorous rivalry to which people responded. Rivalries made for a deeper connection to the team and the East-West Classic provided circumstances in

³⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*: Chris Lamb, “‘What’s Wrong With Baseball’: The Pittsburgh *Courier* and the Beginning of its Campaign to Integrate the National Pastime.”

³⁷ *Chicago Defender*, 16 September 1933.

³⁸ *Chicago Defender*, 28 July, 1934.

³⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*: Bruce, *Monarchs*, 89.

which people could develop long-lasting allegiances and build their respective communities.⁴⁰

The success of the first game grew even larger in subsequent years. Attendance at the games from 1934 to 1938 numbered 30,000, 25,000, 26,400, 25,000, and 30,000 respectively⁴¹. The figures remained very consistent for these five years, which made the game a very bankable investment. In 1939 the crowd is recorded at 40,000 and in 1941 the crowd reached a staggering 50,256.⁴² The numbers serve as the best quantifiable proof that the game strengthened the black community.

It is not difficult to understand why these games impacted the community so much. If a regular game was an exciting experience, then an All-Star game would have been even better. The black community knew what a great event this was, and the white press even caught on. A reporter for the *Chicago Daily News* named Lloyd Lewis covered the East-West game one year. He wrote: “The bases were run with a swiftness and daring absent from the white man’s game for 20 years.” The style of play reminded him of “the game when it was in its golden age, the days of McGraw and Tinker and Cobb and Chance.”⁴³ Black baseball had once again proven its ability to capture the mind and excite the fan. James “Cool Papa” Bell said, “When I came up, we didn’t play baseball like they play in the major leagues. We played tricky baseball.”⁴⁴ Bell referred to the hit-and-run play and the various ways to score on an infield hit. Bell, himself, even said it looked “unorthodox.” With all of the movement and action that took place on the

⁴⁰ The East-West game provided this more than just regular games or teams could because teams came and went so frequently that allegiance to one team could be difficult. Even if the exact teams changed, the West was always the West.

⁴¹ Lester, *Showcase*, 62, 78, 92, 105, 118.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 132, 170. 1940 was a bit of an aberration with an attendance of only 25,000, 150.

⁴³ *Chicago Defender*, 27 August 1938: Alexander, *Slump*, 229.

field, it is very easy to imagine how one could get wrapped up in a game played in this style. When played by the best players organized black baseball had to offer, the sheer excitement of it overwhelmed the crowd. An argument about the various rules and regulations of the sport, and whether or not the Negro Leagues met those standards, could go on indefinitely, with no real purpose. It is not important whether the black style of play followed every written rule on baseball, which it did not. What is important is that the Negro Leagues served their intended audience. Cool Papa went on to say, “I think we had a better system than the majors. Whatever it takes to win, we did. We were playing our style and they were playing their style.”⁴⁵ The Negro Leagues had their own distinct brand of baseball that was instantly recognizable as “black,” that yielded exciting daily games, but phenomenal All-Star games in the fashion of the East-West Classic.

The games became something that every member of society could enjoy. Sports fans watched an excellent game of baseball and the social circles buzzed with stories of “who’s who” at the ball game. Reporter Elizabeth Galbreath recorded:

Attractive girls, some of whom represented contestants for this year’s title of Miss Bronze America, were busy collecting dimes....Mrs. Satchel (Lucy Rodriguez) Paige...was there to watch her husband’s enthusiastic fans cheer him. She wore a rose colored frock. And the most loyal of all of the East-West classic supporters, Fannie Mae Jones....Says she: ‘I haven’t missed a game.’—And hers is a special effort for she has to be brought out in her wheel chair.⁴⁶

Again, the society pages point out how much these games influenced the community. These were the same society pages that devoted column after column to debutante balls and engagement parties; now they buzzed about baseball. Baseball had already taken such a hold in the community of the Midwest that even “society women” were interested

⁴⁴ Holway, *Voices*, 119. Interview.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 120. Interview.

⁴⁶ *Defender*, 2 August 1941.

in putting down their tea cups in favor of a cold soda at the ballpark. The popularity even seemed to surprise a few of the women themselves. One society columnist wrote: “strange to say, the park will not be filed solely with the male species of the sport lovers but with women too, who have developed a taste for baseball that is scarcely less than enthusiastic.”⁴⁷ Women came out to watch games in their fine clothes and used the occasion to collect for charity and to “star gaze” at women like Lucy Paige. A photo from the 1941 game shows women with their hair done or wearing fancy hats, and one woman appears to have a corsage pinned to her dress. The men are all in shirts and slacks, some also wore ties and many had hats.⁴⁸ People felt this occasion worthy of their nice clothing, but also of their hard earned (and difficult to come by) money. The East-West game truly brought out the community and represented an annual focal point for the black community of the Midwest.

Children even had good cause to pay attention to the East-West Classic. Any young boy dreamed of making it to the professional ranks of baseball, and a chance to see the super-stars of the sport would be leapt at. After the second Classic was played in 1934 the *Defender* published an article on the *Defender Junior* page titled, “Bat Boys Responsible For East Team’s 1-0 Victory.” The two batboys for the Eastern team, Clarence Horne and William Harris “sat in the Grand hotel café Sunday evening and ate a well-prepared chicken dinner topped with desserts of ice cream and cake. The waitress was told to give them as many helpings of ice cream as they wished for.”⁴⁹ What other opportunity would two boys from Pittsburgh have to come to Chicago, eat dinner and all of the ice cream they could hold in one of the best black hotels sitting across from Satchel

⁴⁷ *Defender*, 10 August 1935.

⁴⁸ Photo Reproduced in: Lester, *Showcase*, 160.

Paige if not the East-West Classic? Such a game could only inspire two youths to keep playing and achieve their goals of one day playing in the NNL, and in the words of Horne to one day be “even greater than Paige.”⁵⁰

The game’s role as a facilitator of community ranked almost equally with its role as a moneymaker. The sheer size of the game almost guaranteed a large financial return. The leagues rented Comiskey Park every year and spent on advertising and various administrative and transportation costs. A certain percentage went to each league and to the *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier* for promotion of the game. After all debits and credits added up, each team in the league received a portion of the profits.⁵¹ The East-West game provided teams with a small “nest egg” to keep themselves operational for one more year. The success of the game eventually became the engine behind black baseball during the difficult Depression years. The East-West game allowed many teams to stay afloat during the Depression, which also meant that they were able to keep players and other associates employed for one more year. The receipts from the East-West game not only paid the expenses of the current year, but also left teams with “a small reserve with which to open the next season.”⁵²

The game naturally served the NNL and later, the Negro American League (NAL)⁵³, but it added to the coffers of the black community of Chicago as well. Hotels, boarding houses, restaurants, cafes, and nightclubs benefited greatly from having extra

⁴⁹ *Chicago Defender*, 1 September 1934.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Lester, 460; appendix. The financial data is available for 1942-1953, but earlier games certainly would have run in a similar fashion.

⁵² Peterson, *Only*, 100.

⁵³ Alexander, *Slump*, 223-4. The NAL formed in 1937 as a rival to Greenlee’s NNL. Members included, The Kansas City Monarchs, Chicago American Giants, Indianapolis Athletics, Birmingham (Alabama) Black Sox, Memphis Red Sox, Detroit Stars, St. Louis Stars, and Cincinnati Tigers.

clients in town for a weekend. This event became so huge that it might have been the best reason for a family to make their way to Chicago for a short vacation and patronize the black businesses of the city. Monte Irvin recalled in his autobiography:

The East-West Games were played in Chicago...and each one was always a joyful experience...People like Count Baise, Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday would always make it their business to be in town for the East-West game, and we'd be sure to check them out at the jazz clubs. People would come from all over the country to be part of the spectacle. They came all the way from Mississippi, New Orleans, Birmingham, Mobile, Kansas City, Detroit, and from all over just to see the big stars.⁵⁴

All of the out-of-town visitors and newspaper reporters would need places to sleep and eat, and a way to amuse themselves before the game and readily turned to the open arms of the Chicago black business community.⁵⁵

Often times the weekend before the East-West game would have an exciting event as well that only further encouraged people to come to stay in Chicago for a week. One of the best examples is in 1935. On August 7 of that year, Joe Louis fought a boxing match against King Levinsky.⁵⁶ A match-up of that caliber brought out an estimated crowd of 60,000 people, many of whom stayed in town for the East-West game that took place on 11 August. "The Matron" wrote in her society column: "In Chicago, especially there is no deadlock in society now as with the Louis fight fans in the city staying over for the East-West ball game, there is much to do and many places to go."⁵⁷ Quincy Gilmore, the secretary for the Kansas City Monarchs Booster club "arranged a special trip to Chicago in 1935 so that Kansas Citians could see the Joe Louis-Levinsky fight and the East-West

⁵⁴ Monte Irvin, with James A. Riley, *Nice Guys Finish First* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1996), 64-66: Lester, *Showcase*, 156.

⁵⁵ Irvin's list is a good example of the draw from all over the country for spectators. The *Defender* of 17 August 1935 listed reporters from St. Louis, Indianapolis, Houston, Pittsburgh, New York, and Atlanta.

⁵⁶ *Defender*, 27 July 1935.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 August 1935.

Game.”⁵⁸ People organized special arrangements all the way from Kansas City to enjoy the fruits of the Chicago sport and social scene.

Then there would be the issue of what one would wear to the ballpark. Men might put on nice slacks and a tie, but it behooved women to be fashion plates for the contest.

Alberta Russell recorded in her article:

I had the chance to see who all was there from Pittsburgh—and (as a woman will do) see what who was wearing or vice versa. One particularly stunning costume was a salmon colored ensemble with navy blue accessories. Those ladies looked as if Chicago stores had capitalized on the game.⁵⁹

The Chicago stores did indeed capitalize on the game and all of the visitors who might fill their time shopping. Even buying a ticket to the game ensured supporting black businesses. In 1940, tickets could be purchased at the Hotel Grand, South Center department store, the Jones Brothers Ben Franklin store, and the Metropolitan Funeral home.⁶⁰ Selling tickets to the popular game meant that stores and shops would have increased foot traffic and since one was purchasing a ticket, why not a new hat for the game as well?

As the country slowly climbed out of the Depression, the black community of Chicago and all of the Midwest showed their support for the East-West game with ever increasing numbers. The shadow of war loomed heavy over the country and after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, the country, and baseball itself would never be the same.

⁵⁸ Bruce, *Monarchs*, 88.

⁵⁹ *Defender*, 11 August 1934.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 20 July 1940.

Conclusion

The East-West Classic continued to draw near sell-out crowds throughout the war and even a few years after the integration of baseball. Black baseball, however, existed as a necessary answer to segregation and racism and as the country moved towards greater civil rights, both on and off the baseball diamond, the community support for such institutions slowly weakened and eventually died. The community did support the teams and especially the East-West Classic very well for the Depression years and beyond. In fact, the community support was so strong that as the East-West game faded from the Chicago summer calendar, black businesses slowly disappeared from the streets of Chicago. Such losses would include; Charlie Glenn's New Rhumboogie Café, Club Delisa, Monarch Tailors, and American Giants Garage.⁶¹

For twenty years, though, the East-West Classic brought out black baseball fans of all ages and classes from Chicago "Detroit, Columbus, Cincinnati and Dayton, Ohio, Kalamazoo, Mich., Battle Creek, Mich., Gary, Ind.; Milwaukee, Kansas City, Mo.; St. Louis, Springfield, Ill., Rockford, Ill., and thousands of other towns within a radius of 500 miles."⁶²

Though the memories may have faded, the Negro Leagues still figure heavily into the great baseball narrative of the United States. Even once the East-West Classic was a thing of the past, all of America joined together over the sport of baseball, where color was no longer an issue to sing all together, "Take me out to the ball game, take me out to the crowds..."

⁶¹ Lester, *Showcase*, 281. Lester's list includes these and others to total 23, though one would suspect that this listing was not all-inclusive. These businesses did support other civic events, but only went out of business after the East-West game ended.

⁶² *Defender*, 26 July, 1941

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1. *The Chicago Defender*
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3. *The Kansas City Call* (Missouri)
4. *The Pittsburgh Courier*

Books:

5. Holoway, John. *Black Diamonds: Life in the Negro Leagues from the Men Who Lived It*. Meckler Books (Westport, Connecticut, 1989.)

A collection of interviews from players in the Negro Leagues from approximately 1910 through the 1950's. An excellent primary source as it is like several autobiographies bound into one volume. This volume is cited extensively because of the information players give about why they chose to play and statistical information on salaries or game attendance.

6. Holoway, John. *Voices From the Great Black Baseball Leagues*. Dodd, Mead and Co. (New York, 1975.)

A collection of interviews from players in the Negro Leagues from approximately 1910 through the 1950's. An excellent primary source as it is like several autobiographies bound into one volume. This volume is cited extensively because of the information players give about why they chose to play and statistical information on salaries or game attendance.

7. Lester, Larry. *Black Baseball's National Showcase: The East-West All-Star Game, 1933-1953*. University of Nebraska Press (Lincoln, Nebraska, 2001.)

This book has been one of the most helpful. An impressive volume, it contains newspaper articles, team rosters, box scores, letters and pictures from the time period it covers. It also covers the circumstances surrounding the East-West Game such as the status of the league or certain players and race relations as a whole. No one doing research on the Negro Leagues in this time frame should miss using this book.

8. Reisler, Jim, ed. *Black Writers/Black Baseball: An Anthology of Articles from Black Sportswriters Who Covered the Negro Leagues*. McFarland and Company Inc. (Jefferson, North Carolina, 1994.)

This is a nice little compilation of several articles from several African American sportswriters from all over the country. The African American perspective on the Negro Leagues is, obviously, the most credible and the availability of several viewpoints together makes this book very useful. A thorough index and brief introduction of each writer adds to the ease of usage.

9. Alexander, Charles C. *Breaking the Slump: Baseball in the Depression Era*.
Columbia University Press (New York, 2002.)

This is an exceedingly useful piece of scholarship. Details the struggles of professional baseball during the Depression and also contains useful information on the Negro leagues during the same period. This book is also highly readable, a “page-turner” so to speak. Because it makes for such good reading it makes research a bit difficult, so attention to note taking is key, or one will get absorbed into the narrative.

10. Bruce, Janet. *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball*.
University Press of Kansas (Lawrence, Kansas, 1985.)

Bruce’s work deals only with Kansas City, but is very well written and very in-depth. Very useful in reference to all of the Negro Leagues because of the importance of the Monarchs team. The most useful aspect of this work is how one can see the evolution of the game through a case study of one team. Also helpful are the many pictures, handbills and posters reproduced in the book.

11. Dorinson, Joseph and Joram Warmund, editors. *Jackie Robinson: Race, Sports, and the American Dream*. M. E. Sharpe (Armonk, New York, 1998.)

This book contains the compilation of many essays on Jackie Robinson and his affects on baseball. The essays proved to be well written and interesting. The book was not very useful just because of the depth to which it focused on Robinson. It would, however, be a good resource for anyone working specifically with Robinson.

12. Guttmann, Allen. *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*.
Columbia University Press (New York, 1978.)

A sociological study on the cultural impact and history of sports in America. Contains chapter specifically on baseball. An excellent source to explain why the sport of baseball was so important in America and answer concerns about why the black community might have embraced the sport.

13. Hine, Darlene Clark, William Hine, Stanley Harrold. *African Americans: A Concise History*. Prentice Hall (New York, 2003.)

Excellent resource for background history on African Americans. This has been very useful for statistics and even mentions baseball in some sections. Although it can be a bit brief on some subjects, overall it gives more than enough information to at least get started. I would assume that the more extended volumes by these authors would be a good place to get some more detailed information if needed.

14. Holway, John B. *Blackball Stars: Negro League Pioneers*. Meckler Books
(Westport, Connecticut, 1988.)

Holway’s book is a collection of Biographies of pioneers and innovators of the Negro Leagues. While not a primary resource it still contains very valuable information concerning many of the important names of the sport.

15. Lamb, Christopher. “ ‘What’s Wrong With Baseball’: The Pittsburgh *Courier* and the Beginning of its Campaign to Integrate the National Pastime.” *The Western Journal of Black Studies* vol. 26, No. 4. (2002): 189-192.

A fascinating article with a good use of primary sources. A good study on the causes behind integration of baseball. Only used for its citation of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, as it did not perfectly pertain to the topic at hand.

16. Lester, Larry, Sammy J. Miller, and Dick Clark. *Black America Series: Black Baseball in Detroit*. Arcadia Publishing (Chicago, 2000.)

The groups work is a pictorial history told all in captions. The captions themselves give interesting and useful information, but the reproduction of the pictures makes it a very valuable source. Many of the photos came from private collections and would not otherwise be available to scholars.

17. Miller, David L. *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America*. Simon & Schuster (New York, 1996.)

This book is an excellent history of Chicago. The book covers all topics even remotely pertaining to the city and is very readable. Anyone looking at the Midwest or Chicago should use this book.

18. Peterson, Robert. *Only the Ball Was White*. Prentice Hall Inc. (Engelwood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970.)

As one of the first pieces of serious scholarship on the subject, Peterson's book is considered the seminal work on the subject. I found it tremendously useful for a general history of the Negro Leagues, but for in-depth research people will need to look for other works as well.

19. Rogosin, Donn. *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues*. Kodansha International (New York, 1983.)

Rogosin's book is an interesting and entertaining history of the Negro Leagues. It provided some very good photo and handbill reproductions. I did not find it as useful as Peterson's book and would recommend that Peterson be used first.

20. Tomlinson, Gerald, ed. *How to Do Baseball Research*. Society for American Baseball Research (Cleveland, Ohio, 2000.)

The Society for American Baseball Research, SABR, publishes many small books and articles every year. This volume was very useful in considering how to look up and write about the subject. This book also pointed out many of the potential difficulties especially in researching the Negro Leagues. The book also lists many acclaimed works on all possible aspects of the game, including biographies and autobiographies of players. This should be the first step for anyone interested in starting a research project on baseball.

21. Tygiel, Jules. *Extra Bases: Reflections on Jackie Robinson, Race, and Baseball History*. University of Nebraska Press (Lincoln, Nebraska, 2002.)

Tygiel's book covers a wide variety of topics pertaining to Robinson and the integration of baseball. Some of the topics were not useful as they discussed the merits of the sport in the 1980's which went beyond the scope of this paper. The topics which dealt with earlier time periods, though, were extremely useful.