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## Baseball, with a Southern Accent: The Urban Game in the Post-Reconstruction South

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Baseball, with a Southern Accent: The Urban Game in the Post-Reconstruction South

by

Paul Dunder

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in History  
Department of History  
College of Arts and Sciences  
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## Dedication

To Michael: my partner, my best friend, and my inspiration.

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## Abstract

Numerous scholars and historians have illuminated the importance of baseball within American society from the end of Reconstruction to the Great Depression. Yet their gaze has often been turned to the northern professional game. Very little has been written about how the game played a role in the South in the aftermath of the Civil War. This study considers how baseball in the South helped to reflect and underscore some of the tensions within a society marked by racial, class, and gendered conflicts. Baseball played an instrumental role in shaping aspects of Southern society and community identity in new urban areas that became more established in the aftermath of the Civil War. In fact, baseball was key to industrial and urban development in the cities of Atlanta, Tampa, and the factory towns of the Piedmont region of North and South Carolina. Throughout this time frame, variety of local, regional, and inner-city leagues in bigger and smaller cities hosted recreation teams, professional teams, and industrial-sponsored clubs which long predated the premier of the Atlanta Braves in 1966. Within the emerging industrial society of the New South, elites and working classes, whites and Blacks, and native-born Americans and immigrants all helped to shape the meaning and usefulness of baseball in the post-Civil War South. For many in these cities, baseball was a sort of training program for the industrializing New South since baseball offered structure, mechanization, and modernity. At the same time, baseball appeal was linked to notions of the antebellum south. Taking their cue from northerners, southern civil and business leaders encouraged the game for its association with morality. Lastly, the game also offered officials in these newer industrial cities a useful tool against labor agitation.

## Introduction

On the night of April 13, 1966, the first Major League baseball game was played in the former Confederacy. That evening, the Atlanta Braves played their first game in their newly adopted city. The previous winter, the team relocated to Atlanta from Milwaukee after originating in Boston in 1876. Despite an Atlanta loss to Pittsburgh Pirates, the night was considered a success by many of those involved and was a night celebrated by many in the city. To mark the team's arrival, the civil leaders organized parades and meet-and-greets. Officials noted that the arrival of the Braves was a prestigious moment in both Atlanta and Southern history. Atlanta's mayor, Ivan Allen Jr., jovially explained to reporters that the game was a monumental occasion since that "Tonight is the premiere of Major League baseball in the Southeast. Now we have dropped all limitations of the past." The chairman of the city's stadium authority echoed similar sentiments by stating that "It's a great night for Atlanta and Georgia and the Southeast." While many in Atlanta and the South were pleased that Major League Baseball had finally arrived in the city, others were less enthused. The team's arrival was met with restraint by some of the onlookers. One office worker in Atlanta said, "It's nothing like the excitement over 'Gone with The Wind' in 1939." Another onlooker sourly noted, "They had to go North and import a bunch of damn Yankees from Milwaukee. We ought to have our own ball club."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ted Simmons, "A Dream Comes True in Baseball," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 13, 1966, 8. "'Gone with The Wind' Better Show Than Parading 'Yankees' in Atlanta," *Tampa Bay Times*, April 13, 1966, 22.

While Atlanta city officials and other southerners trumpeted the coming of Major League baseball, they disregarded an important fact: professional baseball had been a staple of the South since the end of Reconstruction. In fact, baseball had been an integral part of southern society through the turn of the twentieth century. Not only was the game an important part of urban life in Atlanta, in the company towns of North and South Carolina and in the emerging industrial center of Tampa, baseball was key to industrial and urban development. A variety of local, regional, and inner-city leagues in bigger and smaller cities hosted recreation teams, professional teams, and industrial-sponsored clubs which long predated the premier of the Atlanta Braves in 1966. While it is true that the National and American leagues were slow to expand into the region, baseball was a constant in the South.

From the end of the Reconstruction until the beginning of the Great Depression, baseball in the South both reflected and underscored some of the tensions within a society marked by racial, class, and gendered conflicts. Thus, baseball was instrumental in shaping aspects of Southern society and community identity. Within the emerging industrial society of the New South, elites and working classes, whites and Blacks, and native-born Americans and immigrants all helped to shape the meaning and usefulness of baseball in the post-Civil War South. For many years, southern baseball was more grassroots in nature – meaning that local individuals, from all classes, races, and ethnicities, were active in the establishment and management of baseball. Elite organizers, professional and amateur players, and working-class spectators attempted to influence their society. Civil War veterans believed that the game could reinforce notions of masculinity and pride within southern society. Industrial elites saw the game as a way of building civic boosterism and creating modern, efficient citizens. That is not to say that workers, African Americans, and immigrants did not find baseball useful. For workers, the game



was an essential part of their workplace culture. And even though they lived in a society that was obsessed with their otherness, African Americans and immigrants saw the game as a way of gaining inclusion. Still, inclusion was often limited for minorities living in the South as elites controlled the game of baseball.

Concurrent to this expansion of baseball, southern elites sought to spur industrial growth and diversify the region's economy. This movement was a response to the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War and to the perceived shortcomings of Reconstruction. This "New South Creed" promoted economic reforms, industrialization, and modernization. Instead of committing to an economy based on agriculture, southern elites and industrialists invested capital and resources into new and existing industries throughout the region. The establishment of tobacco workshops, cotton mills, cigar factories, steel mills, and mining caused more than a shift in the region's economics. For many southerners, the traditional agrarian lifestyle that was synonymous with the antebellum South had been replaced by a new industrial wage-labor system. These transformations caused people to migrate from rural areas to urban cities that grew around these industries. As this new class of workers established themselves in these urban locations, baseball became a popular recreation. Eventually, in many southern cities, baseball would be promoted by civic and business leaders to provide amusement while also manipulating working-class loyalty and stymieing labor organization. In this way, the game of baseball became a marker for the industrial identity of the New South.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 1993). Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (Louisiana State University Press, 1976). C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Louisiana State University Press, 1981). Gavin Wright, *Old South New South: Revolution in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

In many ways, the game of baseball encapsulated the tension that arose within the society of the New South. In the wake of the Civil War, cities in the South expanded as more individuals migrated from the rural South to the urban South. As cities grew, baseball grew in popularity. It was a leisure activity that resonated with both elites and the working-class of the New South since it incorporated values of both the Old and New South. For many, baseball was heralded as a modern, industrial game that imparted the principles of the evolving mechanized world. As the ideology of the New South promoted the urbanization, corporatization, and industrialization of the region, industrialists argued that baseball could teach workers the values of teamwork, standardization, and corporate oversight. Much like the defending team, who must rely on one another to throw a runner out, an efficient workplace also relied on similar concepts of cooperation and communication. The structure of a baseball game – three outs in an inning, nine innings in a game – promised to impart these lessons of order and regimentation onto a newly industrial workforce. From the perspective of the region’s elite, baseball was not just a game. It was a training program for an industrializing New South.<sup>3</sup>

While these were all values promoted by the creed of the New South, baseball also contained elements of personal autonomy and masculine valor more affectionately associated with the antebellum South. Much like working the farm, baseball was exclusively played outside during the warm summer months. Even in places like Tampa, where the weather was conducive to playing outdoors all year around, baseball season only lasted from Spring to Fall – a familiar echo of the agricultural calendar. At the same time, baseball offered players a sense of personal

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<sup>3</sup> Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991). Steven A. Riess, *Sports in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson Press, 1995). Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

autonomy. Although teamwork was a major part of the game, an individual player was responsible for his own position and his own part of the playing field. The clearest link to the Old South was the notion of honor. The confrontation between the pitcher and batter, in many ways, harkened back to early eighteenth and nineteenth century duels over masculine notions of honor. In this modern duel, there was a clear winner and a clear loser – the batter either loses by recording an out or triumphs by recording a hit. Because baseball toed the line between the modernity of the New South and the rustic traditions of the Old South, it is the perfect lens to illuminate the tensions within a shifting society.<sup>4</sup>

Many locations throughout the South underwent the processes of urbanization and industrialization during this era. Three locations, however, stand out as places where baseball had the most impact on the growth of the regions: Atlanta, the Carolina Piedmont region, and Tampa. Highlighting how the game was instrumental in remaking southern society and identity, each of the three locations surveyed dealt with the seismic changes that occurred following the Civil War and Reconstruction. They were all relatively inconsequential to the Confederacy during the Civil War. Coming out of the war, Atlanta was a small railroad town that had been destroyed by the Union Army. The Carolina villages that would make up the Piedmont region was farmland and forests along the Appalachian Mountains. And Tampa was nothing more than a fishing village. The three locations all faced the perils of rapid industrialization, racial tensions that came with the end of slavery, strains caused by the shift from the ideology of the New South

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<sup>4</sup> The language of honor was imbedded in the slave society of the antebellum South. With the ending of slavery in 1865, and a move toward a more industrial economy, masculine honor still played a major role in Southern society in the post-Civil War era. For more concerning Southern honor, see: Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: University Press, 1997).

Creed, and vicissitudes caused by migration and immigration. In many ways, Atlanta, the Carolinas, and Tampa are microcosms of issues that faced throughout the South in these years.

Despite these similarities, however, there are significant differences among the three locations, which allow for a greater understanding of the impact baseball had on different communities. Atlanta promoted itself as the jewel city of the New South – rebuilt and remade in the wake of the Civil War. Along with a growing industrial sector, Atlanta also had a large population of African Americans. The other two locations, the Piedmont region of North and South Carolina and Tampa, are also products of the New South. However, their demographics were much different than Atlanta. The Piedmont largely consisted of poor whites who traded the independence of the yeoman farm for the wage labor of a cotton mill. Along with a native-born white elite, Tampa was home to a large population of immigrants who came to the city from Cuba, Spain, and Italy. Both the similarities and differences of these three locations help to better understand how sports and leisure helped to form identity in the South.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, baseball was an urban phenomenon. Southern baseball was socially, culturally, and historically different than those in the North. These cities, which had undergone the process of industrialization before the Civil War, introduced baseball into an already robust industrial environment. In contrast, baseball in the South was part of the industrialization process. Most Northern cities could trace their history to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Factory towns of the Piedmont region and industrial Tampa also were comparatively new and contained a population that was migrant, either by way of rural farms or foreign countries. Moreover, in regions that were shaped by industrial capitalism, residents of cities often created a social and cultural geography rooted within their lived experiences. In many ways, community culture served as a mechanism for

survival among new citizens of the cities. Whereas northern cities were relatively unchanged by the Civil War, places such as Atlanta were both emotionally and physically affected by the war. In hopes of rebuilding the South, local and regional leaders looked to industrialization to lead the region out of being reconstructed.

A major feature of these locations was that each contained a vast working-class community. While many scholars have examined different cultural aspects of working-class communities, they have yet to fully investigate how sports (including baseball) were implemented and affected working class communities. Moreover, historians have rarely investigated the relationships between sports and labor movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this timeframe, workers and employers throughout the United States clashed over wages and working conditions. One of the main demands of labor was the right to leisure. Within the 1878 constitution of the Knights of Labor, the labor union sought to achieve “more of the leisure that rightfully belongs to them.” Unions also recognized how effective leisure – namely baseball – could be for organizing workers. In 1920, the editor of the *Cigar Maker Journal*, a trade paper aimed at workers in the cigar industry, argued that, “Team work is as essential in the trades union movement as it is on the baseball diamond. If the game is to be won, it is up to each of us to play our position to the very best of our ability.” This dissertation will examine the confluence of leisure and the labor movement in the South.<sup>5</sup>

Elites within Southern society sought to shape baseball to fit their own needs. They used the game as a symbol of the disciplinary control to exert power over workers, immigrants, and

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<sup>5</sup> G.W. Perkins, “Challenge and Acceptance,” *Cigar Makers’ Official Journal* 54, no. 6 (June 15, 1920), 2-3. Knights of Labor, “Constitution of the Knights of Labor,” (January 1, 1878). For discussions about the relationship between sports and labor movements, see: Steven M. Gelber, “Working at Playing: The Culture of the Workplace and the Rise of Baseball,” *Journal of Social History* 16 no.4 (Summer, 1983), 3-22, Robert F. Wheeler, “Organized Sport and Organized Labour: The Worker’s Sports Movement,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 13, no.2 (April 1978), 191-210.

racial minorities. They carefully controlled who could and could not participate in the game – at least in the official leagues over which they had control. The traditional color line – the exclusion of African Americans within Major League Baseball – was expanded throughout the South to include Latinos and other immigrants, workers, and the poor. Immigrants were also limited in their actual, on-the-field involvement in baseball. These marginalized classes were often excluded from mill teams, city leagues, and traveling minor league teams. Yet, at the very same time, elites actively promoted the game to the very people they sought to exclude. From the elite perspective, the action on the field was somewhat incidental. Instead, what was important to these southern elites was that marginalized groups were exposed to the virtues of baseball. They believed that the game would help to uplift these people from their assumed social and economic shortcomings. The ball field became a site where otherness was defined, displayed, enacted, and contested.

While contributing to the general knowledge of the three locations under consideration, this study of post-Civil War and Reconstruction baseball highlights the intersection between sports, urban spaces, labor, and the New South. Sports have been part of the national discourses concerning social, political, and economic issues within the United States since the end of the Civil War. With the acceptance of baseball into American popular culture in the late 1860s, sports have provided shared experiences for many Americans. Scholars have argued that sports such as cycling, basketball, football, and boxing have the power to unite social classes, local and national communities, and races. On the other hand, scholars have also noted that sports have been used to demarcate concepts of race, nationality, and gender identity. Beginning in the 1980s, historians began to incorporate sports within the larger trends in the scholarship concerning United States history from Reconstruction until the Great Depression. Within this

scholarship, historians have demonstrated how individual and team sports affected discourses concerning class relations, urbanization, race relations, and imperialism within the United States during this era. These four key points have been woven within a historiography that discusses the role of sports within American society. As Americans discussed its changing society, sports were omnipresent in an increasingly industrial, urban, and modern country.<sup>6</sup>

Although sports became popular in the United States in the late nineteenth century, baseball stood above all other sports and was crowned “the National Pastime” by the popular press. Despite its popularity, historians have only recently begun to explore the impact the game has had on American society. Though scholars have done important work connecting sports – particularly baseball – to the rise American modernity in the post-Civil War era, previous studies have tended to focus on the national game, privileging professional sports as played in northern cities.<sup>7</sup> Yet little scholarship exists regarding southern baseball during this era. Much of the focus has been turned to the North and the emerging and expanding professional game. With the establishment of the American and National Leagues, the focus of popular and scholarly studies has examined how professional baseball evolved in the North. When discussing these ideas, however, scholars have only gazed at the modernizing effects of sports in the North. Therefore, this dissertation is unique because it examines this relationship in the South – a region whose industries and cities developed much differently than the North. Baseball was developed and

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<sup>6</sup> For more discussion on the role of sports in American society, see: Gerald R. Gems, *The Athletic Crusade: Sport and American Cultural Imperialism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006). Steven W. Pope, *Patriotic Games; Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876-1926* (Oxford: University Press, 1997). Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Adrian Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (Berkeley, C.A., University of California Press, 2007). Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983). G. Edward White, *Creating the National Pastime Baseball Transforms Itself 1903-1953* (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1996).

introduced in areas that had already undergone the processes of industrialization in northern cities. In turn, southern baseball was introduced alongside the processes of urbanization and industrialization. Moreover, the South also faced unique racial tensions with the end of slavery and economic issues resulting from the war. Thus, the study of the intersection of baseball and southern society illuminates changes and tensions that existed in the urbanizing and industrializing South.

Within these studies about northern baseball, scholars have demonstrated that the game was promoted – at local and national levels – to reinforce the Victorian ethic and foster economic gain. Moreover, baseball has been shown to be less democratic than the game’s endorsers had promoted. They have argued that baseball was not an agent of social mobility; those who were successful, professional ballplayers were often educated, skilled, white-collar workers. Additionally, scholars have also expanded the lens of who were excluded from the game. Within professional baseball, racial barriers were not only applied to African Americans. In the nineteenth century, Latinos represented an ambiguous and flexible class within the professional game. As the financial importance of winning heightened in the first years of the twentieth century, Latin minorities were slowly assimilated back into the game.

Scholars have also illustrated how elites within the urban society promoted involvement in sports as a remedy for perceived modern urban pathologies. Along these lines, because they promoted being physically active outside, sports were closely associated with public health movements that took place before and after the Civil War. Participation in honorable sports also was believed to help alleviate some problems caused by industrialization, modernity, and urbanization. The mythology of rural ethical values associated with team sports influenced urban reformers to embrace sports and promote them as exercises in character building and as a



democratizing force. Additionally, qualities of teamwork were linked to industrial work ethic and morality in urban America. Lastly, local pride in the home team engendered civic boosterism that often rivaled national patriotism.

This study builds upon the link between urbanization and baseball. Through civic boosterism, scholars have demonstrated how baseball had the ability to bring together people in an urban setting. While this was true of both the North and South, these developments were newer in the South. Since the majority of baseball historiography originate in the North, these studies highlight cities with established local governments and a foundational population. In the South, cities were newer and less established. Until the Progressive Era, city governments in the South were often underorganized and relatively ineffectual. This effected how baseball was organized in the South. Whereas northern city government facilitated baseball regulations (alongside business elites), southern baseball was often controlled only by businesses elites. In this way, this study highlights the role of southern non-government elites in shaping urban culture.

Newspapers were an important element of promoting the New South Creed. By way of Henry Grady's *Atlanta Constitution*, the daily news helped to promote the concept of urbanization, industrialization, and white supremacy through the South, and North as well. At the same time, newspapers were critical to the expansion of baseball. Despite not having a dedicated section for sports during the nineteenth century, papers provided announcements and analysis of games. But most importantly, newspapers provided editorials that hoped to contextualize the meaning of games. Because of their importance, newspapers provide an important source base for these arguments. The *Atlanta Constitution*, *Tampa Tribune*, and numerous papers around North and South Carolina all promoted the social aspects of baseball. While newspapers help to

formulate the intellectual understanding of how baseball helped to institute the New South Creed, oral histories highlight how workers understood and interacted with baseball. Worker interviews from industrial Atlanta, cotton mill workers from the Piedmont region, and cigar workers from Tampa all mention the important role of baseball in urban, southern life. Furthermore, baseball became more professionalized and more archival records exist. These sources highlight the investment in baseball by those involved in the games. These sources highlight financial data such as salaries for players, expenses, and other ways that baseball was financed. Altogether, these sources tell the story of how baseball was an integral part of industrialization and urbanization of the New South.

The first chapter examines Atlanta in the aftermath of the Civil War. For much of the nineteenth century, Atlanta was a small city with big ideas. This chapter argues that baseball was part of the discourse that established the place of Atlanta within a new, postwar South. It helped to unite the city politically, economically, and racially as it transformed itself from an inconsequential antebellum train stop to the center of the industrial New South. At the same time, baseball also exposed its social usefulness for a southern city in the age of racial and economic inequality. In many ways, debates about the nature of the game helped to establish one's place in the hierarchy of the emerging city. Who, when, and where teams could play reflected the evolving social order in the city and within the New South. White collar baseball – organized professional teams that played in regional minor leagues – were seen as a modern, progressive entity which helped to grow the burnish image as the jewel of the New South. baseball was also used to craft the city's narrative of the Lost Cause. Throughout the nineteenth century, the city became the battle ground for defining the meaning of the war for both whites and freed African Americans. White boosters focused popular memory away from the Civil War

as a struggle over slavery and framed the war's meaning around resurgence, progress, and racial order. Discussions of baseball were infused with these concepts. A strong baseball team signaled resurgence and progress.

The second chapter builds on the discussion of baseball in Atlanta and argues the game helped to fulfill the New South rhetoric which was prophesized. While the game was promoted as popular during the nineteenth century, the reality was that games were poorly attended, and teams had difficulty finding financial stability. Led by the popularity of Atlanta's professional team, baseball became the center of the city's urban culture in the twentieth century. By the 1920s, the city was described as being "baseball-mad." During this time, baseball was at the forefront of the expansion of the city. It was an important part of the growth of the city government. Additionally, baseball helped to establish and expand the local railroad company, the city's cotton mill industry, and the quintessential New South business: Coca-Cola. Baseball also played an important role in the entrenchment of Jim Crow laws as sites of baseball were further contested in the city.

After focusing on Atlanta, the discussion turns to the cotton mill areas of the Carolina Piedmont. For the purpose of this study, the Piedmont can be defined as a cluster of industrial towns and cities between Greenville, SC through Charlotte, and into Greensboro, NC. This is an area that saw tremendous industrial growth in the aftermath of the Civil War as cotton mills sprung up all throughout the region. Baseball was an important part of towns that revolved around the mill as owners sought to create communities around the factory. Between 1900 and 1930, mill owners sponsored teams and leagues throughout the Piedmont region. During the summer months, games were often played on Saturday in factory-owned parks which were heralded as bastions of modernity that featured electricity and modern facilities that benefited the

spectators. Mill teams also traveled throughout the region, competing against workers from other mills. Owners provided funds to pay for uniforms, equipment, and travel expenses. Some owners saw these teams as so vital, in fact, that they directed managers to hire workers that were better on the field than they were on the shop floor. While mill owners were certainly fueled by the competitive nature of organized sports, their promotion of baseball also fit their mission of controlling their workforce. Baseball was at the forefront of this incentive to maximize production. Instead of naming the teams for cities or neighborhoods, the teams represented the mills. In theory, this cultivated a sense of familial loyalty that was present within the mill towns. While baseball was a marker of identity in the New South, those who sponsored and participated in the game often controlled the cultural meaning behind the game.

The final chapter examines baseball in relation to immigration and the labor movement in Tampa, Florida. Similar to the Carolinas and Atlanta, baseball was controlled by local elites. However, these business owners and civic leaders believed that baseball could control labor organizing, help to Americanize the immigrant workforce, and create loyalty to the city and not their ethnic heritage. While the city is not traditionally placed within the contours of the New South society, it certainly was participating in the same economic, political, social, and cultural discourses as civic leaders promoted the virtues of the New South Creed. Yet, Tampa was also unique in that it was a major hub for foreign immigration and migration. Thousands of Cuban, Spanish, and Italian immigrants passed through the town in search of work in the city's cigar industry. Influenced by the conditions that many of these immigrants found in their new home, Tampa was a hotbed for labor radicalism. Socialists, anarchists, and communists dominated the political landscapes in immigrant communities. Not only did they discuss radical ideology, but they also implemented many of their ideas into action. Throughout the first years of the twentieth

century, the city of Tampa was home to numerous labor strikes that often turned violent. Following these strike, local elite institute new baseball leagues and promoted professional baseball – either from northern Major League arriving for Spring Training games or the establishment of professional minor league teams.

## Chapter One:

### Atlanta, Part One: Baseball and Imagining the New South, 1868-1906

One of the more famous baseball games to ever be played in the city of Atlanta happens to be remembered as the city's first game. The inaugural game was reportedly played on May 18, 1866; a year after the end of the Civil War and two years after the Battle of Atlanta. The game was played on an open field next to Oakland cemetery – the eventual home to numerous monuments dedicated to the Confederacy. The two teams that waged battle that day were the Atlanta Base Ball Club and the Gate City Base Ball Club. According to accounts of the game, a large crowd gathered to witness the spectacle. The game began as both teams were led onto the field by “a colored brass band.” Despite being novices, the two teams played an entertaining game even if it would not be very distinguishable as a modern baseball game. The players in the field did not wear gloves and, according to the customs of the day, the pitchers for the Atlanta club threw the ball where the Gate City hitters asked. Yet, according to the author of the article, the pitcher for the Gate City club, Jimmy Gregg, was almost unhittable as he threw the Atlanta club curveballs – ten years prior to “Candy” Cummings doing so in the Major League. Gregg was too much for the Atlanta team to overcome. After scoring 25 runs in the first inning, the Gate City club won the game by a score of 127 to 29.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Smith Clayton, “After 22 Years: The First Match Game of Base Ball in Atlanta,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 27, 1888, 5.

The historical accuracy of the game is quite debatable. Despite the lack of primary evidence that the game actual occurred, or at the very least was an important part of the city's day, the legacy of this game can be seen even in contemporary times. Today, the story is part of the tours given by the Historic Oakland Foundation. On the Atlanta Braves' opening day in 2013, Clayton's telling of the game was retold by the local newspaper. The game is also listed on an MLB's database of first and historic games. The story of the game comes from an article written by Smith Clayton for the *Atlanta Constitution*. His story marked the 22-year anniversary in 1888. The story of the first baseball game played in Atlanta – fictitious though it may be -- encapsulates the importance of baseball to the history of the city. Written some twenty years later, Clayton accounts are questionable. No contemporary accounts of the game survived the historical record. Moreover, storytellers who have covered baseball in Atlanta cite only Clayton's article as reference for the game. Nevertheless, the tale of the city's first game highlights how baseball was used as a metaphor following Reconstruction, as the city was re-creating itself along the lines of the New South creed. In the wake of the Civil War, baseball helped to unite the city politically, economically, and racially as it transformed itself from an inconsequential antebellum train stop to the center of the industrial New South. Once the city was fully redeemed by the Democratic party and Reconstruction had officially ended, the idea of a well-organized baseball scene was a rhetorical indicator of success for the emerging city. Competently played baseball – at both the professional and amateur levels – meant that the city was to be welcomed to the brotherhood of modern cities.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronical of Its People and Events, 1880s-1930s Volume II* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969). Peter Morris, "Gate City Base Ball Club of Atlanta" in *Base Ball Pioneers: The Clubs and Players Who Spread the Sport Nationwide, 1850-1870*, ed. Peter Morris, William J. Ryczek, Jan Finkel, Leonard Levin, and Richard Malatzky (New York: McFarland Press, 2012) 314-317. Ryan A. Swanson, *When Baseball Went White: Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Dreams of a National Pastime* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

At the same time, baseball also exposed its social usefulness for a southern city in the age of racial and economic inequality. Debates about the nature of the game – who, when, and where teams could play – helped to establish one’s place in the hierarchy of the emerging city. By the turn of the twentieth century, civic leaders used baseball to craft and define identities throughout the city. White collar baseball – organized quasi-professional teams that played in regional minor leagues – was identified as a modern, progressive entity which helped to grow the city’s image as the jewel of the New South. Baseball also took the forefront in battles between religiosity and industrial modernity as it was at the center of the city’s laws governing the observance of the Sabbath. Along the same lines, baseball played a significant role in delineating the line between white and Black as both races struggled to carve out space within the city. The white game was sponsored by the leading businesses and subsidized by the city, while the Black game was pushed to the edges of city life by white observers. For white civic leaders, Black baseball became a marker of African American’s otherness. Though they played the same game as whites, they were often forced to play at the edges of the city and ridiculed for their supposed lack of skill and propensity for violence and lawlessness.

Additionally, baseball played a role in crafting the narrative of the Lost Cause in Atlanta. Many of the same advocates of baseball were also involved with crafting the narrative around the meanings of the Civil War. Throughout the nineteenth century, the city became a battleground for defining the meaning of the war for both whites and freed African Americans. White city leaders wanted to abandon its Old South economic legacy but not its racial legacy. City advocates, such as the editor for the *Atlanta Constitution* and baseball booster Henry W. Grady, worked to expunge race from the city’s master narrative. Working within the framework of the Lost Cause narrative, white boosters focused popular memory away from the Civil War as a



struggle over slavery. Instead, they framed the war's meaning around resurgence, progress, and racial harmony. Smith Clayton's and origin story of baseball in the city functioned as part of the Lost Cause narrative. Both racial tensions and the devastation of the war were both camouflaged. Moreover, Grady's promotion of baseball focused on both economic resurgences of the South, but also reconciliation with the North. Through baseball, he envisioned a southern major league that would unite with northern major leagues.<sup>10</sup>

Both the New South Creed and the Lost Cause narrative revolve around racial tensions that occurred after Reconstruction. In Atlanta, race was contentious and came to a head in 1906 with the deadly race riots. Prior to the riots, baseball became a useful tool for whites to criminalize African Americans. Scholars have argued that the main facilitators of racial tensions were the four city newspapers – the namely the *Atlanta Constitution*. Led by influential reporters, the newspapers reported on sensational and exaggerated stories that often centered around Black male assaults on white women. Ultimately, these sensationalized stories fueled the devastating race riots of 1906. Baseball was one of the subjects that were used by the newspaper. Black baseball was not overly organized in the nineteenth century. Still, there were reports of African Americans played the game. When discussing these games, the newspaper was critical of Black players and, eventually, reported on violence that occurred on and off the field. By the end of the century, the newspaper reported exaggerated stories about violence during Black baseball as part of their drive to criminalize African Americans.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). William A. Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South: Race and Remembering in the Civil War's Aftermath* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). Wendy Hamand Venets, *A Changing Wind: Commerce and Conflict in Civil War Atlanta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Burns, *Rage in the Gate City: The Story of the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009). David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Race Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004).

## **Rising from the Ashes: Early Baseball in Atlanta**

Similar to the myth of the origins of baseball in Cooperstown, New York, the reports of the first baseball game in Atlanta are rife with exaggeration and imagination. The first game was reported by *Constitution* journalist Smith Clayton. He was an author, journalist, and promoter of the Lost Cause and the New South mantra. Within the 1888 article, Clayton contended the excitement of people living in the city for this game was unmatched and had never seen anything like it prior. For those living in the city in 1866, the game seems to be neither unique, memorable, nor worth noting in the historical record. While there is evidence that baseball was being played in the city during the 1860s, the report of the city's first game is an indication how baseball played an important role in the growth and rebranding of Atlanta in the years after Reconstruction. It is questionable whether the game actually took place. There is no primary evidence of the particular game. Nonetheless, Clayton's retelling in an 1888 article tells the story of a city that rebounded rapidly from the destruction of war to stage a game that brought whites and Blacks, elites and workers, and Confederates and Unionists together for a glorious game. Much like the actual game itself, there is little evidence that baseball actually accomplished any of this in the aftermath of Reconstruction.

The timing of the 1888 article is significant. Until 1886, the political and economic dominance of Atlanta in the state of Georgia had been hoped upon but had yet to be established. The 1880s mark a transition in state politics. Even though the capital had been moved to Atlanta in 1868, residents in other cities – such as Macon, Augusta, and Savannah –challenged Atlanta's

leadership position. By the mid-1880s, the city had consolidated its power as the South emerged from Reconstruction thanks to the influence of Henry Grady and his *Atlanta Constitution*. By the end of the decade, the city had undeniably become the most powerful city in the state and had become a leading region of the New South.<sup>12</sup> By the time of his death in 1889, Grady had become the principal spokesman of the New South creed. With the platform of his paper, Grady was able to address the cornerstones of the creed on an almost daily basis. This included editorials on the industrialization of the region, improvement of southern agriculture, and reunification with northern business elites. Furthermore, Grady was one of the first promoters of the New South ideology to fuse the movement with white supremacy. By the time of his death, Grady's influence had spread from Atlanta and the South, to the North. Given in Boston, his last speech promoted racial unity between northern and southern whites as a way of easing tensions between the two regions. While there is does not exist any known links between Smith Clayton and Grady, it is likely that the two had a relationship at the newspaper.<sup>13</sup> The article about Atlanta's first baseball game fits nicely with Grady's world view. The themes of the story include the rebirth of a unified the city, economic growth was at the forefront of the game as many of the players mentions were influence businessmen in the city, and race tensions are all but scrubbed from the story.<sup>14</sup>

Like Grady, Clayton was an influential member of Atlanta society. As a writer and journalist, he had a tendency to promote the principles of the New South. He also infused his

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<sup>12</sup> Harold E. Davis, "Henry W. Grady, Master of the Atlanta Ring – 1880-1886," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 69 no. 1 (Spring 1985) 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> On the day before Grady's death was announced, Smith published a prayer about sorrow and pain. He ended the prayer by saying "May angel faces smile away face smile away his pain and the great God of love spare him to his people." Smith Clayton, "A Simple Prayer," *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 22, 1889, 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Blight Race and Reunion*. Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South*. Harold E. Davis, "Henry W. Grady, Master of the Atlanta Ring – 1880-1886." Harold E. Davis, "Henry Grady, the *Atlanta Constitution*, and the Politics of Framing in the 1880s," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 71 no. 4 (Winter, 1987) 571-600.

writing with the mantra of the Lost Cause narrative. Born in 1850, Clayton came from a very influential family that had their hand in political, cultural, and economic issues pertaining to the city and state. Prior to the Civil War, the Claytons were by all accounts a typical slave- and land-owning antebellum family. In fact, Clayton County (just south of Atlanta) was named after his grandfather, Augustin Smith Clayton. In 1831, the elder Clayton was one of the premier Georgians to call for nullification and secession in order to protect slavery. Smith Clayton's father, William, also was an influential resident and elected official of Atlanta. During the Crisis of 1850, William Clayton helped to craft the Clayton-Gartrell Resolution that presented a states' rights argument for the continuation of slave ownership in Georgia. In the lead-up to the secession, he retired from politics and became more involved in Atlanta's businesses sector. The family's fortunes took a turn during the Civil War. Smith Clayton's sister, Sallie, noted in her diary how the family had to make financial sacrifices to survive hardships brought on by the war. After receiving a pardon from Congress for his support of the Confederacy, William Clayton became a supporter of the southern industrialization. He founded the Merchants Bank of Atlanta and was influential in expanding the railroad system in the city. Prior to his death in 1885, Clayton returned to politics to become a judge and tax collector for Fulton County. Additionally, Smith Clayton's mother was an influential member of the Ladies Memorial Associations of Atlanta. In 1881, she was elected president of the organization that helped memorialize the memory of the Confederacy.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "Death of Judge Clayton," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 21, 1885, 7. Robert Scott Davis and Sallie Conley Clayton, *Requiem for a Lost City: A Memoir of Civil War Atlanta and the Old South* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999). Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs*. Confederated Southern Memorial Association, *History of the Confederated Memorial Associations of the South*, (1914), 95.

In adulthood, Smith Clayton was an influential feature writer for the *Atlanta Constitution*. His writings focused on a spectrum of topics: the city's history, economic matters, religion, racial issues, and sports. He also was known throughout the city as an entertaining lecturer. He would often lecture on issues of religion. In February of 1895, he gave a lecture on Ingersollism. Named after northern orator Robert G. Ingersoll, Ingersollism was a strain of agnosticism that became popular in the nineteenth century. However, according to reports, other lectures would run off topic and became more of a performance than a serious address. In 1877, the newspaper declared him to be in the "front rank" of orators in the city. In June of 1882, he gave a "remarkable lecture" at the city's opera house entitled "The Gospel of Estheticism." Clayton appeared on stage wearing "Enormous slippers [that were] capped by his favorite flowers, red and blue stockings meeting drab knee breeches, a monstrous orange and white fob adorned with a tin sunflower, and orange and white waistcoat, drab coat cut Quaker-wise and a long brown wig." The topic of the lecture was architecture.<sup>16</sup>

Nationally, Clayton's claim to fame was travel sketches of Europe that were reprinted in newspapers throughout the United States. Despite his international travels, Clayton was beholden to his native city. Politically, he waded into debates regarding local and state issues. In the Spring of 1882, he became engrossed in a highly publicized debate over his party affiliation. At the time, Clayton had been registered as independent, not a member of the Democratic Party. Because of his affiliation, his detractors accused him of advocating for the "Africanization" and "negroization" of Georgia. Upon hearing these accusations, Clayton asserted that "such was the exact state of affairs when I decided to abandon the liberal [independent] movement." From then

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<sup>16</sup> "Mr. Smith Clayton's Remarkable Lecture on the New Gospel of Estheticism," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 16, 1882. "Talk of 'Ingersollism'," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 24, 1895. George Reuben Wendling, *Ingersollism: From a Secular Point of View* (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Company, 1883).

on, Clayton's political leanings were more traditional, aligning with the more conservative nature of southern politics of the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

At the time of writing about the first baseball game in the city, Clayton was also ensconced in the memorialization of the Confederacy. He was a vocal supporter of the Ladies Memorial Associations of Atlanta. Similar to other cities throughout the South, Atlanta had an active association of local women who promoted the legacy of the Confederacy. They helped to dedicate a 65-foot obelisk on April 26, 1874 to commemorate "Our Confederate Dead" and Robert E. Lee. In 1894, the association helped to erect the marble Atlanta Lion memorial to the unknown Confederate dead. These memorials are housed in the same location as the first baseball game: Oakland Cemetery.<sup>18</sup>

Clayton most famous work, outside of the Atlanta baseball story, was a poem he wrote entitled "The Faded Jacket of Gray." First appearing around 1884, Clayton had dedicated it to the city's Ladies Memorial Association.<sup>19</sup> The poem was popular throughout the city and the state of Georgia. The publication *History of the Confederated Memorial Associations of the South* noted that the poem "has been claimed by schoolboys all over the state." It also was popular throughout the South. It was reprinted in newspaper on Confederate Memorial Day and recited during services that remembered Confederate dead. The poem was celebrated throughout the former Confederacy and appeared in the Carolinas, Texas, Tennessee, and Alabama. One of its last reprintings was in Tampa in 1924.

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<sup>17</sup> Smith Clayton, "Smith Clayton Writes a Card," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 26, 1887.

<sup>18</sup> Arlinda Smith Broady, "Ladies Memorial Association Honored Confederate Dead," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 13, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> The exact date when Clayton wrote the poem is disputed. The first mention of the poem comes in 1884. In other locations throughout the South, the poem later appears at the end of the 1880s and into the 1890s and is celebrated as novel. Confederated Southern Memorial Association, *History of the Confederated Memorial Associations of the South*, (1914), 95.

Similar to the baseball story, the poem was about remembering the past while upholding the virtues of rebirth. The first part of the poem discusses the fading memories of the Old South as they transition to the New South: “the new South sweeps to a great and glorious future; white in her weeds, with sad face and bowed heart, the old South bends loving over the sacred ruins of a brave but bitter past. But the South is still the South and the grief of the old shall never be forgotten in the grandeur of the new.” The poem also falls in line with the narrative of the Lost Cause that promotes the nobility of the Confederacy. Clayton wrote: “The faded Jacket of gray...tells the solemn but grand story of thousands of bright swords which sprang from their scabbards at the call of duty. It tells of the fiery charge – the bleeding hero – the dead patriot.” The poem ends with a call to memorialize the Confederate soldiers both living and dead and to recognize the “heroes” of the South, Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee.<sup>20</sup>

Tinged with allusions to the Lost Cause and the mantra of the New South, Clayton’s descriptions about the first baseball game in Atlanta are as detailed as any other game played in the 1860s. Without hesitation, Clayton provides particulars on the specific location, player names, and even intricate details of the game. The theme of the first part of the 1888 article was how woefully bad the Atlanta team was at baseball. In many ways, the play of the Atlanta club – both during their early practices and the game itself – can be seen as a metaphor for prewar Atlanta. The team was comprised of older players who were committed a comedy of errors on the field. Clayton acknowledges that the Atlanta teams was “green as grass,” meaning that they were completely new to the game and it showed on the field. According to the story, both the Atlanta team and the Gate City team had only been playing and practicing for a couple weeks

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<sup>20</sup> Clayton Smith, “The Faded Jacket of Gray,” *Goldsboro Weekly Argus*, June 14, 1894. “The Faded Jacket of Gray,” *Tampa Bay Times*, April 26, 1924. Clayton Smith, “The Faded Jacket of Gray,” *Union Springs Herald*, July 16, 1884. “The Day Throughout the State,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 27, 1889.

before their first game. Clayton goes into great detail on how spectators that witnessed the practices were fascinated by Atlanta's poor play. He stated that: "People gazed in mute wonder at the players – would yell themselves hoarse when the catcher would [make an error] and become almost crazy with delight when some nervous fielder would grab up the ball as if he were digging turnips and knock a base-runner down with [the ball]." Despite being new to the game, the captain of the Atlanta team announced that "he was the head of the earth's greatest and best team" and challenged any other team to a match.

In turn, Atlanta's opponent in the famed first game was a metaphor for the post-war city. Clayton description of the Gate City Club was much more glowing. He noted that the team was younger than the Atlanta club. He stated that the new club was "composed of a younger set of men and more organized." Despite also being novices, he describes the as players as more competent on the field. Likewise, youth was certainly a central theme in the retelling of the story. After observing the age of Atlanta's players, he attaches the prefix of "Mr." next to their name, making them sound more distinguished. On the contrary, the Gate City team were said to be younger and are simply referred to with their full names. Even the name "Gate City" were reflective of the rebirth of the city. While the term does have its origins in the Civil War, the nickname was popular among New South boosters who believed that Atlanta would be the gateway between the Old and New South. Nevertheless, the nickname was rarely used for baseball teams following the 1866 game. Throughout the nineteenth century, teams simply used the name "Atlanta."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Clayton, "After 22 Years: The First Match Game of Base Ball in Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 27, 1888, 5. Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South*, 4-5.



Clayton goes into great detail about the game while contrasting the concepts of rebirth. In describing the team's uniforms, the Atlanta team was dressed in drab outfits: "The uniform was white caps, white flannel shirts and black broadcloth pants, the top of which were encircled with a white glazed leather belt trimmed in red." While the outfits for the Atlanta team were devoid of color, Clayton describes the Gate City team uniforms as being much more vibrant. He noted that they "wore light blue knee pants with broad red stripe, orange shirts, and black glazed military caps." During the game itself, Clayton takes a similar tone. The play of the Atlanta team was sloppy and even outdated for 1866. On the other hand, the techniques used by the Gate City club had yet to be adopted nationally. These included having the catcher near the batter and throwing curveballs to hitters. Here, Clayton was certainly projecting 1880s baseball tactics onto the supposed 1866 game.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting claim made was the limited inclusion of African Americans in the game. In describing the pomp and circumstances of game day, Clayton declared that "music was heard in the distance and pretty soon the two nines marched upon the field headed by a colored brass band." This one sentence helped to soften any racial tensions that existed in the city in the immediate aftermath of Reconstruction. In this way, Clayton attempted to erase the realities of post-war race relations in the city. If the game did not take place, the inclusion of an African American band harkens to the racial aspects of the New South. The sentence suggests that Blacks and whites were able to enjoy a game despite post-war tensions, while also placing African Americans in a subservient position of accompanying all-white teams onto the field. All-Black marching bands were common throughout the antebellum South and continued through the war as African American soldiers were often taught to play in an army band. Still, the inclusion

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<sup>22</sup> Clayton, "After 22 Years: The First Match Game of Base Ball in Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 27, 1888, 5

also recalls the recent history of Black occupation in the city. In December of 1865, 1,030 Black soldiers patrolled the city of Atlanta. Newspaper reports published outrage from white citizens and reported the jubilation when the Black soldiers were removed. The sting of Black occupation would have still been present by the May 1866 game. At the time of the supposed game, Black Union soldiers had recently been removed from the city by the federal government. Now, during this game, the occupation soldiers were relegated to a marching band. While not recent events, these happenings were recent history to people reading Clayton's story in 1888.<sup>23</sup>

Within the article, Clayton stated that "Baseball was a brand-new thing in Atlanta in those days (1866)" and "the whole population had caught the baseball fever." In fact, people that lived in Atlanta and, Georgia in general, would have been somewhat familiar with the game prior to 1866. Within the state, the first mentions of baseball in the local press came with the reprinting of Miss Mitford's *Our Village* stories in 1828. These were sketches of villagers in England that were reprinted in newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic. The game was mentioned twice in one of the stories and was played by girls in an English village.<sup>24</sup> They offer some of the earliest exposure to the game for the people of the city. The first actual games reported in the state occurred on the eve of the Civil War. Between 1859 and 1861, there are reports of games being played in nearby Macon and Augusta. There was even a mention of a

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<sup>23</sup> Gregory Downs, *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015). Gregory P. Downs and Scott Nesbit, *Mapping Occupation: Force, Freedom, and the Army in Reconstruction*, <http://mappingoccupation.org>, published March 2015, accessed May 22, 2021. William Dukes Lewis, *Marching to the Beat of a Different Drum: Performance Traditions of Historically Black College and University Marching Bands*. Thesis. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003. Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South*. Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: Norton, 1997) 205-217.

<sup>24</sup> Historian David Block argues that the game of rounders and American baseball can be traced to English baseball. Despite some disparities in the rules, an English version of baseball was played for almost two centuries. References to the game was found in literature, artistic works, dictionaries and newspapers. Block argues that memory of the game somehow vanished in the nineteenth century. David Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It: A Search for the Roots of the Game* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005). David Block, *Pastime Lost: The Humble, Original, and Now Completely Forgotten Game of English Baseball* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019).

Confederate baseball game in April of 1864 that took place in Virginia and was reported in Atlanta's *Southern Confederacy*. After the war, baseball returned to the state on January 27, 1866, three months before Clayton's game in Atlanta. By 1867, there was a team by the name of the Gate City Base Ball Club who was captained by the player mentioned in Clayton's article.<sup>25</sup>

Clayton's account of the games seems to be the only mention of the game to survive the historical record.<sup>26</sup> On the days preceding and proceeding the game, there is no mention of baseball taking place in any of the surviving newspapers in Atlanta or the state. Furthermore, on the day of the game, there does not seem to be anything of importance going on in Atlanta. The date that Clayton gives in his account, May 18, 1866, fell on a Friday. The train schedules for that day were the same as the schedules for the week before and the week after. The only reference of baseball in the city's newspaper that year, the *Daily Intelligencer*, occurred in October. In a small blurb, the paper reported that a "Radical clergyman" in Utica, NY that spoke out against playing baseball. "How dreadful," noted the newspaper. In fact, first known mention of a baseball club being organized in the city occurred in 1869. The newly formed *Atlanta Constitution* announced simply: "Base Ball Club to be organized."<sup>27</sup>

Even though there are no contemporary records of the game occurring, morsels of truth were embedded within Clayton's story. Each team's players are listed in his story are traceable through the historical record. These players, whether they played in 1866 or later, did help to lay

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<sup>25</sup> Smith Clayton, "After 22 Years: The First Match Game of Base Ball in Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 27, 1888, 5. Mary Russell Mitford, "Jack Hatch," *The Southern Recorder*, September 6, 1828. "There is a Base Ball Club in Macon" September 28, 1859. "Baseball," *The Macon Daily Telegraph*, March 2, 1861. Block, *Pastime Lost*, 84-88.

<sup>26</sup> Outside of Clayton's 1888 article, the only other source for the game comes from an article that appeared in the *Atlanta Historical Bulletin*. Written in 1947, the story of the game is basically a retelling of Clayton's article from 1888 and offers no new insight into the validity of the game.

<sup>27</sup> "Ball Playing," *The Atlanta Daily Intelligencer*, October 2, 1866, 2. "News," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 28, 1869, 1.

the foundation for baseball in the city during the mid-nineteenth century. Significantly, many of the players were all part of Atlanta's upper class. They were involved in businesses, law, and politics. Clayton paints those who played on the Gate City team as young and dynamic. When he writes the story in 1888, many of the player listed for the Gate City team were influential in contemporary society. Clayton identifies Robert Dohme, the team captain for the Gate City Club, as one of the main figures in the game that helped to organize his team. During the game, Dohme was injured by a line-drive to the stomach. "Everybody thought that he was dead," Clayton explained. In 1866, Dohme was part of the class of northerners who migrated to the South in the aftermath of the war. He was born in Germany and immigrated to Kentucky at the age of five. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he enlisted in the Union Army and fought in Tennessee. He was the only player mentioned that fought in the war for the North. He arrived in Atlanta following the war. By the time of his death in 1904, Dohme became a respected member of the city's business class after operating grocery and jewelry stores. Dohme also was a pioneer of baseball in Atlanta. In the Summer of 1867, Dohme and his team claimed the baseball crown of Georgia and challenge other teams to a tournament to defend their "championship.

Besides Dohme, second baseman Willis Biggers was chief of the fire department in the 1870s. Catcher George Cassin and left fielder Peter Morris were both respected and successful doctors in the city. Two other players on the team – Edgar Thompson and Joe Ormond – both ran for office in the city during the 1880s. Thompson also was a well-respected lawyer in the city. Clayton only mentions one player for the Atlanta team, Capitan Tom Burnett. One of the older players on the field, Burnett owned an icehouse at the time of the game. Not only were the players of the elite class, so too were those in attendance. Despite being a "strictly free show,"

Clayton noted that “the wealth, beauty, and fashion of Atlanta rolled out in carriages” to witness the game.<sup>28</sup>

Reminiscing about the 1866 game was not the only time that Clayton interacted with the game in Atlanta. For much of his early life, Clayton played and wrote about the game. He pitched on a variety of amateur clubs throughout the city in his youth and adulthood, including on a company team that represented the *Atlanta Constitution*. There were reports in 1886 that he was a “phenomenal pitcher.” Later in his life, Clayton returned to writing about early baseball in Atlanta. In 1911, he penned another article that revisited the first game he ever saw. He described an undated game between the Gate City Club and a team from Chattanooga. The story that he told was almost identical story of the Gate City/Atlanta game in 1866. The supposed first game in Atlanta contained many of the same pomp and circumstances as the one he described in 1911. Clayton also described the rudimentary nature of the ball game, noting that players did not wear mitts and the catcher caught the ball barehanded. He again asserts that the Gate City pitcher Jimmy Gregg invented the curve ball. The location (Oakland Cemetery), the umpire, and the players were all similar to the story published in 1888. The only difference was with Gate City’s opponent: Chattanooga, TN instead of another team from Atlanta.<sup>29</sup>

## **The New South and the Early Experiment of Professionalization of Baseball**

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<sup>28</sup> “For Ordinary, Edgar Thompson – Rotation in Office the Policy,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 24, 1876. “Dr. George Cassin is Dead,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 11, 1897. “Final Rites Today for Mrs. Biggers,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 9, 1930. Robert Dohme, “We the Base Ball Fraternity of Georgia,” *The Daily Intelligencer*, May 26, 1867. “Untitled” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 29, 1886. “Death Claims Robert Dohme,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 3, 1904. Pete Morris, “Gate City Base Ball Club of Atlanta,” 314-316.

<sup>29</sup> “A Great Game Yesterday,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 5, 1884. “The Scribes Yesterday,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 7, 1884. “Diamond Dust,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 18, 1886. Smith Clayton, “By Way of As You Like It,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 15, 1911.

The story of Atlanta's first game gives the impression that baseball was a highly organized affair. This was simply not the case. Since the end of the Civil War, the reality was far more disorganized. Early baseball lacked cohesiveness and was often nothing more than one-off social and cultural events. Around the time of Clayton's story, city elites and civic boosters argued that baseball needed to be more than these unorganized cultural happenings. This effort was led by New South advocate Henry Grady. The ultimate goal was twofold: to bring professional baseball to the South and have Atlanta excel in the league. Supporters of establishing professional baseball used the rhetoric of the New South creed, which placed Atlanta as the center of the emerging industrial South that closely resembled the North. A professional league made up of southern cities was part of this endeavor. The promise of professional baseball mimicked the possibilities and contradictions inherent in New South boosterism of the 1880s and 1890s. Baseball's advocates were some of the same men who helped to financially rebuild the city in the aftermath of the Civil War and lead the way into the twentieth century. Moreover, the rhetoric surrounding the professional game was expressed in terms of industrial and regional growth. In spite of this, baseball was never as popular as it appeared despite the being romanticized in the newspapers. Teams and leagues often vanished as quickly as they appeared due to financial struggles and lack of interest by middle and working class Atlantans who came to see the professional game as being elements from outside of Atlanta. By the onset of the twentieth century, boosters were leery of outside influence and there was a concerted campaign to keep professional baseball in the hands of elite Atlantans.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 1993). Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (Louisiana State University Press, 1976). Louis M. Kyriakouides, *The Social Origins of the Urban South: Race, Gender, and Migration in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Natalie J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire, and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012). C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Louisiana State University Press, 1981). Gavin Wright, *Old*

At the beginning of the 1880s, baseball in Atlanta was quite stagnant. While there certainly baseball being played in the city, it lacked organization. Nonetheless, the game was often a talking point for the *Atlanta Constitution*. Prior to Grady becoming a member of the newspaper, it lacked a cohesive and organized sports section and often only briefly reported scores and forthcoming games. Most often, baseball was discussed with the other social and cultural event that were going on in the city. The *Constitution* would announce baseball games under the headings of “City News” or “Throughout the City” sections. These mentions appeared alongside discussions regarding local happenings around the city or the activities of well-to-do Atlantans. Prior to 1884, announcements mostly came from teams outside the city that sought to challenge local players. These statements were often bland and offered very little detail. One such notice from 1883 stated, “The independent baseball club of this city [Atlanta], has received a challenge from the Welter nine of Memphis.” Other times, the paper announced games between intercity clubs. An 1882 notice concerning a game featuring commercial teams stated, “A match game of baseball will be played this evening at the old barracks between the ‘State Road Shop nine’ and a picked nine.” Despite the promotion of these games, very rarely did the newspaper report the outcomes or happenings on the field. When they did report details, newspaper writers used poetic prose to describe the action. In discussing a game between two mechanic businesses in 1883, the newspaper declared: “A match was played at baseball and some very fine play all around. Quoits, swings, etc. made up the rest of amusements and

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*South New South: Revolution in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

everyone had considerable fun.” After discussing the ambiance of the game, the final line of the article mentioned the score: 28 to 8.<sup>31</sup>

Although baseball was far from widespread in Atlanta, newspaper correspondences suggest that the game was popular within the state of Georgia. Until 1884, there were numerous mentions of games occurring in the surrounding cities of Columbus, Macon, Athens, and Savannah, as well as other cities in the state. While Atlanta baseball consisted of inner-city games, these other cities had assembled traveling teams. On August 31, 1883, roughly 1,500 people attended a “hotly contested game” in Columbus between the home club and a traveling team from Montgomery, AL. The *Constitution* also reported on numerous games from Macon. Games within the state of Georgia were quite competitive and could be considered as quasi-professional.<sup>32</sup> On September 16, 1883, the final game of a series of three was played between a team from Darien, GA and Brunswick, GA. The winner of the series was awarded 500 dollars. There was even an instance of violence during these games. In October of 1883, an altercation at a baseball game in Waynesboro led to the death of three people. The events began at an organized baseball game on October 20 where an argument broke out between opposing players, Tom Sims on one side and Rufus McNordill and Britton Rodgers on the other. The argument was in regard to something that happened on the baseball field.<sup>33</sup> The following morning, Rogers waited for Sims before the Sunday morning service at McBean church. Once Sims arrived,

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<sup>31</sup> “Mechanics’ Picnic,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 20, 1883. “City News,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 20, 1882.

“Throughout the City,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 4, 1883.

<sup>32</sup> Quasi-professional simple means that there was some sort of financial stake in the outcome. Although players were not paid a flat fee to play, there was usually prize money that would be split among the winning team.

<sup>33</sup> The accounts in the newspapers allege that the altercation was over something that happened on the field. In one report of the incident, the newspaper reported that “The difficulty originated the day previous at the baseball grounds where insulting words were passed by Mr. Tom Sims to Rufus McNordill about playing.” A second account of the incident noted that Rodgers also was involved in the on-field spat. “A General Riot” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 23, 1883.



Rodgers shot and killed Sims and one of his sons. A melee ensued where both Rogers and McNordill were also shot by Sims' surviving son Duff. While it was unusual for baseball to lead to such violence, these games were competitive throughout the state, outside of Atlanta.<sup>34</sup>

The importance of baseball evolved within the city by the mid-1880s. By 1884, the rhetoric used by the newspaper moved away from local recreational games. Instead, discussions began to revolve around the role the city would play in the formation of a professional league among southern cities. Along with other cities in the state of Georgia, southern cities of Memphis, New Orleans, Montgomery, and Jacksonville all hosted quasi-professional teams that traveled the South. Yet, the so-called jewel of the New South was absent from professional baseball. This realization spurred some of the first conversations around better organizing baseball. The mention begins during summer of 1883, when the *Constitution* reported that "There is some talk among Atlanta's baseball players of organizing a paid [team] for the next season."<sup>35</sup> The local amateur baseball club had disbanded in July of that year, but the team looked to the following summer to finally organize something resembling a professional team. Throughout the late summer and early fall, the newspaper began to express the desire of the business community to join a regional league of other southern cities. At first, business elites sought to join the Georgia state league. Through the efforts of John H. Stephens and financed by the Gate City Street Co., a home ballpark was erected at the corner of Jackson and Irwin streets, just north of Oakland Cemetery and opened for play in 1884. The newspaper reported that

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<sup>34</sup> "Columbus, Georgia," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 1, 1883. "The Macon Notebook," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 16, 1883. "A General Riot" *Atlanta Constitution*, October 23, 1883.

<sup>35</sup> "Throughout the City," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 23, 1883.

construction cost about 600 dollars. Despite having a team and field to play on, the prospects of a league dissolved before the Atlanta team could form.<sup>36</sup>

Atlanta's first foray in the professional league finally came a year later with the city's inclusion in the newly formed Southern League of Professional Clubs. Suggestions of a professional league comprised of southern cities was floated by the Henry Grady and the *Atlanta Constitution* in the fall of 1884. Despite not being fully professional, the Atlanta ballclub of 1884 had a successful season playing exhibition games against traveling teams. Yet, they still lacked an organized league in which to play. By the end of the season, the newspaper boasted that the team had won a good majority of its games and often routinely attracted over 5000 people per game. This growth led to speculation of a new professional league for the following summer. The paper confidently mused that "the next season will open under better auspices...with a fine southern league, embracing New Orleans, Montgomery, Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, Atlanta, Augusta, Macon, Savannah, Charleston, and perhaps Raleigh and Richmond." The paper concluded that "we shall have a brilliant ball season and some excellent playing" next season.<sup>37</sup>

The musings of the newspaper turned into reality when the first iteration of the Southern League was announced on November 26, 1884. The day prior, representatives from seven southern cities met in Montgomery, AL to plan a league that they hoped would mirror the Major Leagues in the North. At the meeting, the *Atlanta Constitution's* editor, Henry Grady, was elected the league's president. For all intents and purposes, the leaders of the league sought to create a third major professional baseball league. By 1884, the National League had become

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<sup>36</sup> "Turf and Bat: Sporting Events this Season and the Outlook," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 25, 1883. "Georgia Baseballists," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 16, 1884.

<sup>37</sup> "Kentucky vs Georgia Today," *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 9, 1884. "The Athletic Season," *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 19, 1884

staples of the Northern baseball scene and was joined by the newly formed (and short lived) American Association. The year prior, the two northern leagues signed the “National Agreement.” This agreement governed the length and monetary value of player contracts and stopped the two leagues from poaching players that were under contract. The agreement also defined that two northern leagues as the “major league” and classified all others a “minor leagues.” In the announcement for the new southern league, it was noted that the organizers had sent a telegram to National League president, Abraham Mill, expressing interest in being part of the agreement and thus establishing themselves as a third major league. Despite the interest from southern leaders, the northern leagues were not interested in having another major league in the South. Thus, Southern League was designated a minor league.<sup>38</sup>

The inclusion of Grady at the head of the new league was an important development for both the creed of the New South and the importance of Atlanta to it. At the time of his appointment, Grady was managing editor and part owner of the *Atlanta Constitution*. Through his leadership, the newspaper became a powerful force in the South and had the largest circulation in the United States. The paper’s reach included every state in the Union by the end of the 1880s. It was also around this time that Grady became more involved with the game of baseball. Following his death in 1889, Grady’s friends remembered him as a passionate supporter of baseball throughout his life. There is evidence that Grady played on an Atlanta amateur team in the late 1870s and early 1880s. He moved to the role of an organizer as he became more engrained into Atlanta’s elite society. Along with the presidency of the Southern League, Grady also was president of the Atlanta Base Ball Association. According to his

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<sup>38</sup> “The Southern Baseball League,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 26, 1884. Robert P. Gelzheiser, *Labor and Capital in 19th Century Baseball* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 2006). 47-50.

biographer H. C. Hudgins, Grady spent a “great deal” of money to make sure that the game was a success in his home city. Not only did he support the game on the field, he also was extremely influential in the ways in which the *Atlanta Constitution* reported on the sport. In a time well before the traditional “Sports Page” appeared in newspapers, Grady devoted a significant amount of space to baseball games. During ballgames, Grady reportedly sat among spectators along with his secretary and scribbled down meticulous game notes. After the game, the two would return to the paper’s office and construct a summary of the game for the morning paper. In 1885, during the first year of the Southern League, the newspaper devoted at least two daily columns which reported on league games in great detail. The attention paid to the league was unique in Atlanta. While the news of the novel league made headlines in Atlanta, there was no mention about the meeting or the league’s formation in the local Montgomery newspapers where the initial meeting was held. Nor was there much mention in the other cities that were to be included.<sup>39</sup>

By the 1880s, the game had already been part of the fabric of American culture with the establishments of the two professional leagues in the North. Its popularity within the United States had garnered the game as the patriotic nickname “the national pastime.” It also was a signal of industrialization. Advocates of baseball began to promote its usefulness in industrial cities. Thus, white elites and working-class individuals alike were drawn to baseball. With the unyielding separation of white and African American teams, baseball also fit within the racial context of the New South which promoted the separation of the races. Lastly, the new organized Southern league helped to demonstrate to northerners that southern cities had matured to the point where they could financially support baseball teams in a professional setting. It allowed the

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<sup>39</sup> H. C. Hudgins and Company, *Life and Labors of Henry W. Grady: His Speeches, Writings, Etc.* (Atlanta: H. C. Hudgins & Co., 1890) 46. Raymond B. Nixon, *Henry W. Grady: Spokesman of the New South* (New York, 1943).

region to boost a professional league that, at least rhetorically, was on par with the Major Leagues in the North. Thus, Grady's involvement in the league was key, allowing baseball to play its role in Atlanta's burgeoning New South creed.<sup>40</sup>

While Grady was the face of the New South creed, he was first and foremost a civic booster for Atlanta. Outside of his work with the newspaper, Grady was influential in the local and state politics. Baseball was thought to be a useful tool in establishing the importance of Atlanta as the political center for the state of Georgia. The city's grip on power had been tenuous, as it only became the capital of Georgia in December of 1877. As part of the so-called "Atlanta Ring," Grady and his Atlanta allies actively participated in shaping gubernatorial races during the 1880s. They often favored those candidates that sought to keep Atlanta influential, enact pro-business policies which imposed traditional elements of an industrial economy, and preserve racial segregation and white supremacy. Although Grady himself did not run for office, he often gave speeches in the city on behalf of his chosen candidates. His investment in Atlanta was not only for political gain. He also saw financial benefit in his hometown boosterism. In 1881, Grady and the *Atlanta Constitution* were influential in staging the International Cotton Exposition. In the aftermath of the event, it was estimated that visitors spent two million dollars while in the city. Not only did Atlanta see an influx of money from the event, but it also received notoriety on a national stage. Only a few years later, the promotion of baseball in the city had the potential for a similar outcome. A competitive professional league led to the possibility of renewed focus being placed on Atlanta, especially if the league was eventually recognized as a

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<sup>40</sup> Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: University Press, 1996), 121-24. K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 97-103. Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 21.

major league. Moreover, with a total of four of the league's team located in Georgia – Atlanta, Macon, Columbus, and August all fielded teams that first year – the state could argue that they were the center of southern baseball. With the development of the railroad, coupled with the popularity of the game, the league had the prospects to generate a fair amount of revenue. At the same time, with the new Southern League heavily focused on Georgia teams, success meant prosperity not just in the city, but also the state.<sup>41</sup>

Thanks to the inclusion of Grady as president of the Southern League, Atlanta gained entry in the new Southern League rather quickly and helped to spearhead the formation of league. By February of 1885, the *Atlanta Constitution* proudly announced the eight cities that hosted teams and published the 100-game schedule each team would play over the summer months. The organization of the Atlanta team and the league was surprisingly modern. The 100-game schedule (split between 50 games played at home and 50 game played away from the city) was unique for minor professional leagues which often played significantly fewer games. The Atlanta team also sold a limited amount of season tickets. Two days following the announcement of the schedule, the newspaper announced that 500 ticket packages that included all 50 home games would go on sale for ten dollars. Within the newspaper story, the author noted how the money would be well spent since “the clubs of the Southern League are unexpectedly strong, especially those of Nashville, Chattanooga, and Macon.” In order to entice buyers, the story goes on to tell how, to keep pace in the league, the Atlanta club was in need of capital since “the managers have surpassed the limit they at first set for their expenses.” The paper continued: “In return for this [ticket] policy, they ask for the support of the lovers of the sport in Atlanta. The

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<sup>41</sup> Harold E. Davis, *Henry Grady's New South: Atlanta, A Brave and Beautiful City* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009).

sale of five hundred season tickets will give them such a basis as will make the season a brilliant one.” The Southern League was driven by ticket sales. Visiting teams were assured at least \$65 per game, or 35% of all tickets sold, with home teams keeping the remaining 65%. This money was to pay expenses – such as travel and the cost of hosting games – and player salaries. Even though Grady was president of the league, it was apparent that he had some financial stake in the team, as did the *Constitution*. By promoting the team and tickets, the paper helped to advertise the team to the city.<sup>42</sup>

The day before Southern League games commenced, the Chicago White Stockings of the National League played an exhibition game against Atlanta’s Southern League team. The team from Chicago fielded one of the best lineups in the Major League, including Michael “King” Kelly, the most famous baseball player of the nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> The exhibition game in Atlanta featured Chicago’s full lineup. The *Constitution* was important in promoting the game and framed its importance to Atlanta baseball. “The very fact that this famous club pits its full strength against the Atlanta’s [team] is a deserved tribute to the reputation out team has established of being a hard club to beat,” asserted the *Constitution*. According to reports, around 2000 people came out to see the game. Despite the boasting for the newspaper, Chicago won the game 24-to-3. The *Chicago Tribune* noted “The crowd was enthusiastic over Chicago’s brilliant game. Nothing like it was ever seen in the South before.” Despite the relatively large crowd to see the best team in the United States and the lengthy story in the paper on game day, the *Constitution* had very little to say about the game in the next-day’s paper. The only reference to

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<sup>42</sup> “The Atlanta Baseball Club Chartered,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 23, 1884, 7. “Baseball,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 12, 1885, 7. “Diamond Splinters,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 15, 1885, 8. “The Baseball Opening,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 17, 1885, 41. “The Baseball League,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 15, 1885.

<sup>43</sup> A year later, Kelly was sold to the Boston Beaneaters – the eventual predecessors to the Atlanta Braves.

Atlanta's big loss appeared on the last page of the paper in a small blurb stating: "Atlanta witnessed the game of baseball between the Chicagos and the Atlantas." With its ties to the Southern League and the Atlanta team, the newspaper downplayed the city's lopsided loss to an established professional team. For league boosters, the appearance of elite baseball was more important than reality: the Southern League was not on par with its northern counterparts.<sup>44</sup>

Following their loss to Chicago, Atlanta played their first league game on April 15, 1885 in Augusta. On the morning of the game, the newspaper assured its readers that "To-morrow morning's *Constitution* will tell the story. It will list the four winners in all the distinguishment of bold type." The paper did just that as the reports of the games were quite specific. Atlanta won their game 10-to-1. It was estimated that 1200 people attended the game – notably less than their previous game against the White Stockings – and the gate receipts were over 400 dollars. Still, attendance was strong throughout the league. The games were so successful that northern observers took note. One northern newspaper noted that "The Southern League teams are showing up better than expected. The attendance at the games has been wonderfully large."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "Today's Game," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 13, 1885. "Sporting Affairs," *Chicago Tribune*, April 14, 1885. "Personal," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 14, 1885.

<sup>45</sup> "The Baseball League Games," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 15, 1885. "Atlanta Wipes Up Augusta," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 16, 1885. "The National Game," *Middlebury Register*, April 3, 1885.



attendance was strong throughout the league. The games were so successful that northern observers took note. One northern newspaper noted that “The Southern League teams are showing up better than expected. The attendance at the games has been wonderfully large.”<sup>46</sup>

The games were a particular interest to the business classes of Atlanta. Unable to make the game on a Wednesday afternoon, baseball enthusiasts had to rely on play-by-play over telegram. The paper reported that “As soon as the market closed on the most exciting day in wheat and pork, the commercial boards were pushed out of sight and the baseball board brought to the front. There were four boards, one for each city, and the games were reported by innings, special wires being run from the exchange into the grandstands.” The railroad also caught the so-called baseball fever. Beginning with opening day, the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad Co. offered a reduced fare on game days. Geographically, Atlanta sat at the center of the league. The farthest they would have traveled all season was the roughly 390 miles to Memphis. Because of their centrality, Atlanta’s baseball fans had the ability to travel to away games in the morning, catch the game in the afternoon, and return on the train in the late evening. With this in mind, the railroad offered fares of one dollar to traveling baseball spectators. In their advertisements, the railroad noted that they were offering this reduction since “interest in the game is intense.”<sup>47</sup>

The league began with much fanfare, at least in the eyes of the newspaper. For most of the summer months, the league functioned rather well and avoided major financial issues that often plagued nineteenth century baseball league. This changed towards the end of the season. On September 17, 1885, league officials voted to end the season with two weeks left in the schedule. Two league teams had disbanded weeks earlier; thus, making it difficult for the other

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<sup>46</sup> “The Baseball League Games,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 15, 1885. “Atlanta Wipes Up Augusta,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 16, 1885. “The National Game,” *Middlebury Register*, April 3, 1885.

<sup>47</sup> “Baseball,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 19, 1885.

teams to end the season. At the September meeting, Atlanta was awarded the league championship as they had won seven more games than the second-place team from Augusta. Following this decision, however, Augusta sought to claim the championship since Atlanta would not play their team again. The back-and-forth ultimately led to the league to dissolve a month later. At a league meeting on October 13, Atlanta was made champions of the league by a vote of seven to one. Despite the auspicious outcome for Atlanta, it was not without severe consequences for the league. League president, Henry Grady, sent a note that stated, “that sickness would prevent his being present, to preside over the meeting, and that he desired his unconditional and final resignation as president laid before the directors.” He also protested against Augusta’s claim of the pennant.<sup>48</sup>

The news of the incident traveled north and received the attention of the leaders of the American Association (AA).<sup>49</sup> In a letter to the Southern League officials, president of the AA, Wheeler Wikoff, and secretary, James Williams, presented a clarification of the rules and offered their disappointment to the way that the Southern League’s season ended. In the letter, Williams noted that the northern league’s constitution stated that teams were not obligated to play another team after the end of the season unless in the case of a tie or an agreed upon championship game. They argued that neither of these two conditions applied to the conflict between Atlanta and Augusta. Williams and Wikoff ended their letter to the Southern League by noting their displeasure in the season’s outcome. In doing so, they highlighted the sectional interest that the Southern League generated in the North. Williams stated that “The baseball people in the North were very much disappointed to see an organization that promised so much as the Southern

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<sup>48</sup> “The Southern League Pennant,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 25, 1885.

<sup>49</sup> Together with the National League, the American Association was a major professional league in the north. The two leagues held the first inter-league championship series ten years prior to the modern World Series.

League disband and sincerely hope that its reorganization next season will be on a more permanent basis.” The mid-1880s were a time when the North and the South began to trend toward reconciliation. An established league in the South would help with cultural reconciliation. A strong league in the South would help to strengthen the game in the North by providing northern leagues with a place for young players to develop. An organized baseball league, with a strong relation with the major leagues in the North, offered the region a chance to be reshaped culturally in the image of the North.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the departure of Grady from league affairs, the *Constitution* continued to see value in a league centered around a sturdy Atlanta team. In January of 1886, Grady’s newspaper boasted that the Atlanta team had the potential to compete with any team from the northern American Association. This optimism, however, was short-lived. By the end of the month, representatives from Columbus, GA offered to purchase the Atlanta club. During a scandal the previous season, the Columbus franchise was sold without any discussion among the team’s directors or stockholders. In response, the owners from the former team offered \$5,700 to purchase the Atlanta franchise with the intent on moving to their city. The Atlanta’s franchise owners considered the offer and were on the verge of selling the team. By the following week, however, with the assistance of the *Constitution*, boosters organized an effort to keep the team in the city. They enlisted donations ranging from five dollars to twenty-five dollars. Their goal was to raise the entire sum, \$5,700, to prevent the team moving to Columbus. Although the fundraising was fruitful, it was \$450 short of its intended goal. The paper once again made a call for donations: “All those interested in the sport, and who are willing to contribute anything

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<sup>50</sup> “The Southern League Pennant,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 25, 1885. “Placing the Pennant,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 14, 1885. Blight, *Race and Reunion*.

towards the small balance yet to be raised, will do well to subscribe promptly [in hopes of saving the team].” After securing the purchase price for the team, organizers and boosters requested even more capital from public investors in order to pay the players and make improvements to the ballfield where the team played. Despite all the turmoil of the winter months, the Atlanta franchise fielded a successful team and again won the Southern League championship at the end of the 1886 season.<sup>51</sup>

The role of Grady and the *Constitution* in the sale of the Atlanta franchise is unclear. Nonetheless, they both played a role in the team staying in Atlanta. It was noted that, during talks with the contingent from Columbus, meetings were held at the *Constitution*’s building and the paper was very vocal in the drive to raise money for the 1886 season. Rhetorically, the *Constitution* helped to define the meaning of professional baseball in the city by illuminating what they saw as its importance to Atlanta and its place within the New South. At the beginning of the talks, the newspaper alluded to the financial prospects that professional baseball provided the city. “There were seventy-eight games of ball played here last season. To eleven of these games, sixteen excursion train were run. Crowds came from all quarters to see the games,” noted the *Constitution*. The paper continued: “The playing next season will be very much better, and large crowds will flock to the city to see it. Atlanta will make a mistake if she, being the largest city in the league, sells out and leaves the games in the hands of others.” The paper also provided a few arguments about the importance of baseball in the city. The popularity of the games offered the city – roughly 20 years removed from the destruction of the Civil War – a chance to showcase itself to out-of-town visitors from within the Georgia and the South. National press

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<sup>51</sup> “Our Baseball,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 17, 1886. “A Baseball Sensation,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 23, 1886. “It Means Just What It Says,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 24, 1886. “The Baseball Franchise,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 26, 1886. “The Situation of Affairs as Regards to Atlanta,” February 3, 1886.

coverage exposed the progress to northerners who were curious about the Southern League. Moreover, the baseball league allowed Atlantans to boast about itself within relation to other cities, having won the first two league championships. Notwithstanding, the city could also boast of being the largest in the Southern League until the arrival of New Orleans in later years. At a time when Atlantans were grappling with their civic identity and their place within the New South, baseball provided them with something to boast and thus laying the foundation for a future when Atlanta became the center of the New South.<sup>52</sup>

Even after two successful seasons, Atlanta baseball proved fleeting. Prior to the 1887 Southern League season, the city's franchise fizzled with very little fanfare. The next year, the league reorganized with New Orleans and Nashville as the staple franchisees. After the league made its decisions to reorganize, the *Constitution* lamented the loss of the team. They argued that newspapers and the public outside of Atlanta held prejudice against the Atlanta club. The paper lamented that "The newspapers in the league cities filled their columns with abuse of the Atlanta club and its directors. Such blackguardism has rarely been seen in reputable journals. Prejudice against Atlanta reached such a high pitch that the club, though composed of some of the best professional players to be found in this country, found it impossible to stand up against the unfair treatment to which it was subjected." For the first two years of the Southern League, the newspaper and civic supporter used professional baseball to position inflate the importance of Atlanta to the New South story. With the removal of Atlanta, they assumed the role of noble underdogs fighting against unfair treatment.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "It Means Just What It Says," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 24, 1886. "The Baseball Franchise," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 26, 1886. "The Situation of Affairs as Regards to Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 3, 1886.

<sup>53</sup> "Atlanta and Baseball," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 4, 1887. "World of Sports," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 1, 1887.

Despite the strong language from the newspaper, boosters quickly sought to extend an olive-branch to officials from the Southern League. Prior to the start of the 1887 season, the paper announced that the city's amateur clubs would welcome challenges from league teams. The change in tone from the prior year was quite noticeable. "The league has warm friends in Atlanta who want to see the professional clubs prosper," the *Constitution* reminded their readers. However, as soon as the league faced turmoil, the tone of the paper changed once again, as the Southern League faced financial demise midway through the season. The paper mournfully warned that "every indication seems to point to the early demise of the Southern League." They noted that the New Orleans club was the only one able to pay their expenses. The quarrel with league officials was deep enough that the paper even took the side of the players. They noted that "the players are shamefully treated in many instances." As was common for the nineteenth century, players' disputes with owners were viewed through a similar lens as labor issues between workers and industrialists. Nevertheless, the paper argued that the ways in which players were treated harmed the image of the league, especially in the North. To the *Constitution*, the perception of southern baseball was a major factor in their promotion and involvement with the sport. A strong, well organized league signaled modern industrial progress in the South. For the first two years, with Atlanta as the centerpiece, the league was strong and well-received in northern papers. When Atlanta withdrew from the league and it was centered around New Orleans, the paper was quick to note that the league struggled to survive.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the grim prognosis, the league barely survived the 1887 and 1888 seasons. By the winter of 1889, the newspaper was hopeful that Atlanta would be welcomed back into the league. In response to the financial issues, the *Atlanta Constitution* stated that "The baseball

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<sup>54</sup> "Atlanta's Baseball Club," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 6, 1887.

men in other [southern] cities continue to look to Atlanta for assistance in the reformation of this Southern League...a Southern League cannot scarcely be a success without Atlanta as one of the principal cities.” Despite some issues with financing a team, Atlanta was granted a franchise in the Southern Baseball League. The league sent James Gifford – former manager of the St. Louis Brown Stocking of the National League – to help establish the franchise in Atlanta. In the article announcing the formation of the professional team in Atlanta, the newspaper gathered responses from business and community leaders. While many proclaimed their personal enthusiasm in having a professional team, many trumpeted the effect the team would have on the city’s image. Moreover, city and civic leaders all pledged their financial and emotional support, noting the importance of the success of the franchise in Atlanta.<sup>55</sup>

The new franchise represented a new trend in Atlanta professional baseball. Prior to the 1889 season, Atlanta’s professional teams were sponsored by a conglomerate of individuals who sought investments from public donations. In this way, the team had more of a civic ownership with a few elites operating the team. The new team, however, was different in that it was only owned by five of the city’s young elites. The main investor of the franchise was Thomas Cobb Jackson, a twenty-one-year-old lawyer and socialite. Even at a young age, Jackson had established a successful law practice representing railroad companies, banking interests, and other commercial cliental. Jackson also was an influential investor in the Gate City National Bank.<sup>56</sup> His business practices represented the new breed of Southern elites – instead of owning land, Jackson’s wealth was derived from business interests. Nonetheless, Jackson also held ties

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<sup>55</sup> “Baseball a Decided Possibility,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 7, 1889. “Baseball Booms: Atlanta Will Go in the Southern League,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 21, 1889.

<sup>56</sup> Jackson’s dealings with the bank led to his ultimate downfall. On February 23, 1893, it was reported that 100,000 dollars went missing from the bank. Later that day, Jackson committed suicide. Although Jackson was never posthumously found guilty of embezzlement, he was accused of the crime by his business partner.

to the Old South. His paternal grandfather was General Henry R. Jackson, a revered Confederate general and a successful businessman who was influential in the expansion of the railroad in the South after the Civil War. Young Jackson's father also was a successful lawyer who represented railroad interests. His mother was of equal ancestry. She was the daughter of General Thomas Cobb. Brother of Georgia governor Howell Cobb (who served from 1851 to 1853), Thomas was a practicing lawyer, legal scholar, and an elaborate defender of slavery. He led the secessionist movement in Georgia and represented the state during the formation of the Confederacy. Cobb eventually joined the Confederate army and died in battle in 1862.

While both families were influential in southern society, there is little mention of a sporting heritage in Thomas Cobb Jackson's lineage. Outside of participating in a boxing match in college, Jackson had very little interaction with sports. Therefore, his investment in the 1889 team was a financial and social endeavor. Jackson was joined by Ollie C. Fuller, J. Carroll Payne, John W. Grant, and Charles C. Hart. Payne and Hart themselves were influential lawyers in the city. At a young age, Fuller helped to establish Fuller & Son's grocery store in the city. After becoming successful, he began an investment business and served on numerous boards of directors. Likewise, Grant was a successful investor and worked in the city's banking sector.<sup>57</sup>

The 1889 season became a turning point for the fate of professional baseball in Atlanta. Since the end of Reconstruction, Atlanta civic leaders had attempted to tie baseball with the advancements of the New South creed. At the beginning of the city's foray into professional baseball, local organizers highlighted the imagined importance of the city to the South and the

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<sup>57</sup> "In and About Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 27, 1889. "General Henry R. Jackson," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 24, 1898. "Banking," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 1, 1889. "J.W. Grant's Rites to be Held Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 10, 1938. William B. McCash, *Thomas R. R. Cobb (1823-1862): The Making of a Southern Nationalist* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983).



rest of the United States. Yet, Atlanta had lost its place as the centerpiece of the league. When the league was founded, Henry Grady and the *Atlanta Constitution* fashioned Atlanta as the Southern League's most important and successful members. By the 1889, New Orleans replaced Atlanta as league's cornerstone and its influence within the league began to wane. Moreover, at the end of 1889, baseball's biggest advocate in the city, Henry Grady, passed away after giving a speech in Boston. At this point, the Southern League itself ceased operations. Nonetheless, civic and regional boosters still presented baseball as part of the proof that the South and the city were as industrial – and urban – as the North. With the investment of young businessmen, even if baseball failed for one season, there existed a foundation in the city that could be expanded on into the 1890s and beyond.

### **The Expansion of Baseball into the Business Sector, 1892-1903**

The Southern League and professional baseball attempted a comeback again in 1892. After dormant seasons of 1890 and 1891, Atlanta's elites again sought to reignite the movement for a league comprised of southern cities. Despite the persistence of economic downturns that plagued the 1890s, the Southern League actually prospered until the end of the decade. Even as Cobb and his associates failed to revive the league, they motivated more local businesses to invest in professional baseball. This process began with electric streetcar companies being pressured into investing and eventually owning the city's professional teams. Until 1892, ownership of professional baseball was simply the continuation of processes that occurred in the city following Reconstruction. Teams were owned by a consortium of individuals who invested very little in the team. This began to change in 1890s as club ownership was consolidated amongst a select few individuals and companies. Concurrently, individuals running professional

baseball in the 1890s cultivated the belief that only people that lived and worked in the city ought to invest, own, and eventually play on these teams.

After two years without professional baseball, influential members of Atlanta's business community sought to rejuvenate the Southern League. At the behest of Atlanta's enthusiasts, the city's amateur manager, Al Marshall, was tasked with traveling to southern cities in order to drum-up support for the reformation of the league. The new incarnation of the league hoped to recreate the excitement of the earlier campaigns while also finding "good men at low prices." In fact, much of the rhetoric around the reformed league was the notion of profiting off baseball. Instead of competing with both northern major leagues and each other, the 1892 league was to be more of an association of southern cities. In the lead up to the reformation of the league, Charles Genslinger of New Orleans sent a letter to the members of Atlanta's contingent supporting the idea of profit over ambition. A member of New Orleans' wealthy elite, Genslinger began his interest in baseball in the early 1890s and saw an opportunity to expand his businesses with the southern league.<sup>58</sup> In an interview done in Atlanta, Genslinger noted that the league should focus on minor league players at a lower rate. "I don't believe in going in for fancy-priced players. We can pick up mighty good players for \$75 a month. There is no use in getting players from the big leagues," stated Genslinger when discussing the finances of the new league. He continued by stating that he "would like to see an eight-club league [that] will agree to a division of receipts on a 50 per cent basis." Even with this nineteenth century version of revenue sharing, Genslinger argued that "Atlanta could make \$10,000" during the summer months.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Genslinger was part-owner of Hunter & Genslinger Printers. The company also expanded into the sale of sporting goods. Edward Adams, *Photographic Album of the City of New Orleans, Comprising the Principal Business Houses and Views of the City* (New Orleans: Hofeline & Adams, 1887). Dale Somers, *Rise of Sports in New Orleans, 1850-1900* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing, 1972).

<sup>59</sup> "The Great Big League," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 17, 1892. "About Baseball," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 24, 1892. "A Southern League," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 27, 1892. "Baseball Business," *Atlanta*

While the teams began to rely on wealthy individuals for capital, companies held little controlling interests in the financial backing of the clubs. The 1892 team was organized in a similar fashion as a civic-owned team. Prior to the season, the team was incorporated as a stock company. Stocks were valued at ten dollars a share and stockholders were only responsible for the value of the stock which they purchased. Led by the city's businessmen, investors raised \$2000 in capital prior to the start of the season. While the public was solicited to invest in the team, the catalyst and major investors for the new Atlanta team were Josiah Ohl, city editor for the *Atlanta Constitution*, and Georgie E. Hoppie, part owner and president of the Atlanta West End and McPherson Electric Street Railway Co. Their involvement in the team marked a transition in the business side of baseball. Since Grady's involvement in the initial season of the Southern League, the city's newspaper played a prominent role in how professional baseball functioned in Atlanta. Ohl, considered the heir apparent to Grady, represented continuity. . Yet the ownership role of the newspaper dramatically decreased following the 1892 season. From 1893 until 1901, the Atlanta baseball franchise was owned and operated by the city's streetcar companies. Hoppie's investment in the team marked the beginning of the relationship between local streetcars and baseball.<sup>60</sup>

Prior to 1902, when the city government passed the Consolidated Ordinance which unified the streetcar system, numerous companies controlled the trolley lines in the city's different neighborhoods. The streetcar company that invested in the 1892 team operated in the

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*Constitutional*," February 4, 1892. "To Meet Saturday," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 17, 1892. "The Southern League," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 19, 1892." "We Have Baseball," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 20, 1892.  
<sup>60</sup> "Almost Ready," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 24, 1892. "It's a Sure Go," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 2, 1892. "Officers Elected," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 2, 1892. "Editorial Bouquet," *The Macon Telegraph*, October 17, 1892. "Josiah Ohl Dies of Heart Disease," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 28, 1920.

West End neighborhood of Atlanta and ran service through to the Westview Cemetery.<sup>61</sup>

Throughout the late nineteenth century, city dwellers increasingly relied on streetcars to traverse the sprawling city. For many, the streetcar shuttled them to and from work and leisure. Thus, growing streetcar companies saw value in investing in reasons for city folk to use their service and baseball provided a good opportunity for expanding business. For Hoppie and his company, this meant drumming-up business in middle class and elite neighborhoods. In 1892, the fares for streetcars limited access for underprivileged working-class individuals. But the Atlanta West End and McPherson streetcar line operated in and around one of Atlanta's elite neighborhoods. The rail line linked the elite West End neighborhood with the emerging downtown area and shopping interests in the southern neighborhood of Pittsburgh. The company was chartered in 1890 and expanded quickly into 1891. The 1892 baseball season was an opportunity to further their expansion in a wholesome leisure activity.<sup>62</sup>

That summer, the new Atlanta team occupied a new home. Located along the Atlanta West End and McPherson line, a new ballfield was erected in the winter of 1892. According to reports, the grandstand was to be "the finest and largest in the South." This sentiment was echoed by Brooklyn Groomers' manager John Ward prior to an exhibition game played at the park. The field was located just south of downtown in between the West End, Pittsburgh, and Summer Hill

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<sup>61</sup> Among others, Westview Cemetery is the final resting place of Henry Grady and Asa Candler, the pharmacist that invented Coca-Cola.

<sup>62</sup> Clifford M. Kuhn, Harlon E. Joye, and E. Bernard West, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City 1914-1948* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990) 13-15.

neighborhoods.<sup>63</sup> Not only was the park erected in one of the city's high-end neighborhoods, but it was also notably far from the working-class neighborhood that lay to the east of the city.<sup>64</sup>

Beginning in 1892, the relationship between the streetcars companies and baseball was symbiotic relationship. Baseball relied on the streetcar for transporting fans and providing limited investments. In turn, streetcars profited from increased business at times when ridership was often lower – mid-afternoons and weekends. Yet, even with the investments of Hoppie and the Atlanta West End and McPherson Co., baseball investors sought more from the streetcar companies. Hampered by a decade of economic panics and decline, the Southern League failed to field teams in the summer of 1897. In Atlanta, attention turned to the streetcar companies to do more to save professional baseball in the city. Civic elites argued that “[street] car companies must help” improve “gloomy” prospects of an 1898 season in the city. An editorial that appeared in January of 1898 argued that Atlanta will have a professional baseball team if “streetcar companies aid them and give necessary cooperation.” The article continued: “In all of the other cities the streetcar companies are backing the clubs, while in Atlanta they have not yet offered to help. The owners of the club do not feel that they should put up all the money and let the car companies reap all of the benefit. If there is any money to be made in baseball, the car companies are the ones that make it and as natural consequence they are the ones that should share the

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<sup>63</sup> The exact location of the park was just north of Turner Field, home to the Atlanta Braves (1997-2016). Michael Benson, *Ballparks of North America: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia of Baseball Grounds, Yards and Stadiums, 1845 to 1988* (New York: McFarland Press, 1989) 13-16.

<sup>64</sup> “Pushing the League,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 23, 1892. “Ready for the Game,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 6, 1892. “Dirt Broken,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 11, 1892. Riess, *City Games*, 208-209. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs*, 230-275. “A Dollar for a Hit,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 30, 1892. O.E. Carson, *The Trolley Titans: A Mobile History of Atlanta*, (Glendale, CA: Interurban Press, 1981). Carole E. Scott and Richard D. Guynn, “The Atlanta Streetcar Strikes,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 84 no. 3 (Fall 2000), 434-459.

expense.” The article further argued that, the only way to provide Atlanta with a competitive club, was to have investments from the streetcar companies.<sup>65</sup>

The public plea fell on deaf ears as streetcar companies failed to invest in a professional team by the end of January 1898. Yet, officials of the once-again-resurrected Southern League returned to the same rhetoric of the importance of having a team in Atlanta. To help further the discussion between W.T. Moyers – an attorney in the city who had emerged as the main stockholder in the franchise – and the city’s streetcar companies, the league sent New Orleans Pelicans’ owner Abner Powell to broker a deal. Since the supposed first game in Atlanta during the summer of 1866, Atlanta baseball had featured very little outside influence. In a city where the term “foreigner” often meant either northerners or people outside of Atlanta, Powell presence in the city marked one of the first times that an outsider held influence, but it would not be the last time Powell played a role in Atlanta baseball. Following his initial trip to the city in 1898, Powell returned to the city in 1903 and became the first owner of the famed Atlanta Crackers.<sup>66</sup>

Affectionately referred to as “Papa Powell” in New Orleans, he was quite possible the more famous baseball man in the South at the turn of the twentieth century and revered in his home city. Born in Pennsylvania on the eve of the Civil War, Powell migrated to New Orleans to play for the city’s Southern League team after playing the major league cities of Cincinnati and Baltimore. He quickly rose to stardom playing for the New Orleans Pelicans and, at the age of 26, invested in the team while still playing on the field. During his tenure as player-owner, Powell is credited with introducing southern baseball to the idea of having “Lady’s Day” events. When asked about his idea later in life, Powell stated “I thought the girls would like the game if

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<sup>65</sup> “Baseball Situation Gloomy,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 23, 1898.

<sup>66</sup> “AB. Powell Here Booming Baseball,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 31, 1898.

we could just get them out to the park, but society didn't approve of them attending sporting events. We talked the subject over, and then suggested that we let all the ladies in free and call it 'Ladies Day'. And if they came, we would let them have a regular day of free admittance every week." Powell semi-retired from playing and became manager of a reorganized New Orleans Pelicans in 1895. At the time when Moyers called on Powell to visit Atlanta, the Pelicans' owner was well-known and respected in the city. Powell's purpose was to negotiate with Atlanta's streetcar companies and the Atlanta franchise. Powell was a believer in corporations having a stake in professional baseball. At the time of his visit, it was reported that Powell stated that "he is surprised at the Atlanta streetcar companies. He says they are sleeping over their interests by not helping to give the city baseball. He will be here a day or two and will get a definite answer from [the two sides]."<sup>67</sup>

With the help of Powell, the Atlanta team was able to secure a partnership with the streetcar companies. The negotiations, however, were not quite a cordial affair and there was a tense back-and-forth between W.T. Moyers and the streetcar companies. In his frustration, Moyers threatened to demolish the city's grandstand and bleachers if a deal could not be reached. Finally, a month before the Southern League season was to begin, the Atlanta Street Railway Co. purchased a large portion of the team's stock. In turn, Frank Zimmerman, the superintendent of the streetcar line, was named vice president of the team under Moyers. Despite all of the issues with seeking and securing funding from the streetcar corporations, the *Atlanta Journal* noted that

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<sup>67</sup> "Some Stories Told in Cycling Circles," *The Times-Picayune*, October 18, 1895. "AB. Powell Here Booming Baseball," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 31, 1898. McClelland, Marshall K. "The Abner Powell Story," *New Orleans Item*, August 25, 1953, 17. Derby Gisclair, *Early Baseball in New Orleans: A History of 19th Century Play* (New York: McFarland & Co., 2019). Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans 1850-1900*.

the team was “backed by men who do not care to make a dollar out of the game and are willing to spend every penny that they have invested.”<sup>68</sup>

Prior to the start of the season, the streetcar company projected they would make \$3000 in profit on the season. This prognosis was not met since the league only last roughly six weeks. While lack of interest and poor attendance ultimately doomed the league, a feud between Atlanta’s W.T. Moyers and the Southern League’s president Henry Powers helped to accelerate its downfall. The issues between Powers and Atlanta’s W.T. Moyers began on May 11 when Moyers sent the Atlanta team home prior to a series of games against New Orleans. Moyers became angry when Powers suspended one of his players without a hearing. The two parties exchanged angry letters which each were accused of subverting league roles with Moyers threatening legal action against Powers. Further complicating the outlook of the league occurred when Montgomery abandoned the league due to “poor attendance and little enthusiasm” a few days later. Despite newspapers promising that the league would continue, the Atlanta franchise offered to sell their team to Montgomery for \$400. After difficulty securing investments from Atlanta’s streetcar companies, the Atlanta team withdrew from the league on May 20, 1889.<sup>69</sup>

Atlanta had always operated under the assumption that the business of baseball ought to benefit the city over other interests. While elites wanted to use baseball to focus national attention on the South as a whole, foremost was the profit – economically and socially – the game brought to the city. Moyers was a firm believer in baseball as a local endeavor that ought to be run by local businessmen in order to ensure that the game benefited the city. In a letter sent

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<sup>68</sup> “Atlanta Club is Organized,” *Augusta Chronicle*, February 18, 1898.

<sup>69</sup> “The Men Who Wear Local Uniforms,” *The Times-Picayune*, April 28, 1895. “Montgomery Quits the Game,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 14, 1898. “Atlanta Club May Quit Game,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 19, 1898. “Death Knell to Baseball Sounded,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 21, 1898.



in response to the end of the league, Moyers argued that the Atlanta club had initially believed that the league would be run by those individuals outside the city to insure a profitable league. Instead, he stated that “the league has been playing all along under bad management. He went on to say that “the Atlanta club officials are not at all charitable in either their feelings or their expressions about the New Orleans club and President Powers. To his mismanagement is due the decease of what promised to be a prosperous league...[we] declare that Atlanta will never enter another league with New Orleans until she is running her own [league] instead of New Orleans.”<sup>70</sup>

Local officials took Moyers’ advice to further localize baseball in the wake of the Southern League. Out of the ashes of the Southern League formed Atlanta’s first city league, which was announced only two days after the Southern League official ended. The idea for the league originated Walthall Joyner. At the time he was the city’s fire chief and eventually became the city’s mayor in 1907. Moyers and Zimmerman, both of the Southern League’s Atlanta franchise, also joined the city league officials. Judge John Bloodworth – who lived and presided in the West End neighborhood – also served as a league official. The Atlanta Railway Company offered the league the use of Brisbane Park and also offered the use of the streetcars. The officials stated that they still expected to turn a profit with the league, even after they decided to not charge for admission. Nevertheless, those attending the games were still expected to pay for rides to and from the ballpark. The city league featured amateur players and it was specified that “no professional ball players or college players will be allowed to play in the league.” The players were expected to be employed by those sponsoring the teams. There were six teams in the

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<sup>70</sup> “Atlanta Club May Quit Game,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 19, 1898. “Death Knell to Baseball Sounded,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 21, 1898.

league: a team of southern Atlanta merchants, Southern Railway, the Press team, a team comprised of commission men, workers from city hall, and a team of firemen. It is notable that the teams all represented professions that were located in and around the West End neighborhood. Notably, the league did not contain teams from the city's burgeoning industries – such as cotton or steel industries – that were located east of downtown. Despite the anticipation, the games on the field were said to be inferior to what had been played in the years of the Southern League. Nevertheless, there was enthusiasm for an all-Atlanta league with players and officials from the city. For the first game of season, more than 3000 people saw a game between the firemen and the merchant teams. The games continued to be popular throughout the summer.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> “J.G. Bloodworth Crosses Divide,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 21, 1911. “Atlanta to Have a City League,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 23, 1898. “Atlanta Now Has a City League,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 24, 1898. “The Firemen Fight with Red-Hot Balls,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 15, 1898.

professional ball players or college players will be allowed to play in the league.” The players were expected to be employed by those sponsoring the teams. There were six teams in the league: a team of southern Atlanta merchants, Southern Railway, the Press team, a team comprised of commission men, workers from city hall, and a team of firemen. It is notable that the teams all represented professions that were located in and around the West End neighborhood. Notably, the league did not contain teams from the city’s burgeoning industries – such as cotton or steel industries – that were located east of downtown. Despite the anticipation, the games on the field were said to be inferior to what had been played in the years of the Southern League. Nevertheless, there was enthusiasm for an all-Atlanta league with players and officials from the city. For the first game of season, more than 3000 people saw a game between the firemen and the merchant teams. The games continued to be popular throughout the summer.<sup>72</sup>

For the most part, teams kept with the promise to use only amateur players. Only one player, James Lafitte, had a small conflict of interest regarding the city league’s player role. Lafitte played for the Georgia Tech baseball team in the spring of 1898. However, he also played for on the firemen team in the summer. He also worked for the fire department. While it was possible that the end of the college season allowed for him to play on the team, he is the only exception to the rule that banned professional or college players. Additionally, there were standout players that competed in the city league. Clem Powers was regarded as one of the league’s best players. He worked in the composition room for the *Constitution*. The 1898 city league season was his only recorded baseball experience. Reports from the league praised Clem

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<sup>72</sup> “J.G. Bloodworth Crosses Divide,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 21, 1911. “Atlanta to Have a City League,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 23, 1898. “Atlanta Now Has a City League,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 24, 1898. “The Firemen Fight with Red-Hot Balls,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 15, 1898.

for his speed and hitting prowess. Other players also stood out for their on-field performance. William Fain, who worked as a grain dealer and played on the Commission Men team, and Ben Carlton, a firefighter who played second base for the fireman team, were both mentioned as players who excelled.<sup>73</sup>

The luster of the city league waned as the summer progressed. Even with the few good players in the league, the games were often error-filled, high scoring games. For nineteenth century standards, these types of games were considered substandard. So much so that the *Constitution* ran an end-of-season article portraying pictures of the players as cartoonish. The article also contained tongue-in-cheek scouting reports. The newspaper also recounted some of the lowlights of the season. Nevertheless, the city league was an important marker in the early history of baseball in Atlanta. The league demonstrated how Atlanta could support baseball, no matter the quality of play or the players. Also, more city businesses and civic leaders gained experience with the business side of managing baseball teams and leagues. Eventually professional players returned the two years later, as the Southern League reformed as the Southern Association in 1901. Yet, the 1898 city league helped to build upon the city's Atlanta-first concept concerning baseball.<sup>74</sup>

The meaning of baseball evolved in Atlanta during the 1890s. In the decade prior, baseball was a communal endeavor that helped to enrich interest that included the city and the region. Baseball had a rhetorical usefulness, establishing Atlanta as the center of the New South and promoting the New South creed. It is no coincidence that in a decade when Atlanta became

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<sup>73</sup> After 35 years with the Atlanta fire department, Carlton was accused of embezzling over six thousand dollars from the Fireman's Benevolent Association in 1931. Wake Forest Team Defeat the Techs," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 9, 1898. "The Firemen Fight with Red-Hot Balls," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 15, 1898. "Board Dismisses G. Ben Carlton," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 4, 1931.

<sup>74</sup> "The City Baseball League and its Star Players," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 28, 1898. United States Census, 1900, Population Report, <https://genealogybank.com/#>.

increasingly important to the region, baseball became more important locally to the city and its financial interests. Beginning with the death of Henry Grady in 1889, Atlanta baseball enthusiasts began to focus on the city. Instead of advocating for a strong league that mimicked northern Major Leagues, the city's officials sought to use baseball to improve their own standing.

### **Morality and the Expansion of Baseball**

As the meaning of baseball changed in the city, the sport experienced growing pains that pushed it up against two dominant issues that shaped post-Civil War southern, and Atlantan, society: morality and race. During the 1880s and 1890s, baseball grew into being an important part of the city's economic makeup. The game also was increasingly inserted into discussions regarding the social complexion of the burgeoning city. The thread that linked the dual issues of morality and race, as they related to baseball, was the threat of violence and lawlessness. Atlanta was subject to the same Evangelical culture that was found throughout the South. Usually aimed at masculinity, this culture emphasized self-control and the elimination of animal-like characteristics. In the pre-war era, rural men were able to expel their masculine tendencies by hunting, drinking, swearing, fighting, and gambling away from the family unit. Being clustered in the city meant that men had to withhold these supposed urges. Thus, those who promoted baseball saw a civilized opportunity for these masculine tendencies to be exerted. The concern, however, was that the traditional version of masculinity would begin to play a great role at baseball games. There were certainly instances of lawlessness and violence that occurred during white and Black baseball. For the players were white, these concerns came from the elites who

worried about working-class players and spectators violating religious laws and partaking in violence during and after games.<sup>75</sup>

The issues of morality trickled down to the emerging professionalization of baseball in the late nineteenth century. Before the start of the inaugural season of the Southern League in 1885, organizers took a “firm stand” against playing baseball on Sundays. This position was accepted rhetoric that linked concepts of morality with baseball. In promoting the edict by the emerging league, it was declared that “Baseball is an honest, manly sport, and fascinating to a degree, and those who rid it of its disreputable features should have hands held up.” The elimination of Sunday baseball was included with the removal other vices, namely the sale of liquor and gambling. Additionally, the league founders argued that, by removing these vices, they helped to promote morality throughout the region. The league announced that “In our southern cities it has the support of the best classes and has been lifted to the level of its clientage.” As this statement illustrates, morality was tied to the financial and social success of the new baseball league. Even at its highest levels, abolishing Sunday games and eliminating gambling and alcohol sales was considered prudent business practices. Shortly after the founding of the National League in 1876, league president William Hulbert said, “The National League was organized as a necessity to rescue the game from its slough of corruption and disgrace.” Thus, Hulbert argued that organized leagues that policed issues of vice helped to make the game honorable, respectable, and profitable.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Gail Biederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University Press, 1996). John Jayes, *Hard, Hard Religion: Interracial Faith in the Poor South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, & Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). Arthur Remillard, *Southern Civil Religions: Imagining the Good Society in the Post-Reconstruction Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

<sup>76</sup> “Echoes of the Week,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 12, 1885.

By addressing Sunday baseball and the issues around morality and vices, Southern League organizers argued that only a certain type of baseball was moral. Without guidance and control of elites, baseball becomes corrupt and has the propensity to be immoral. Thus, organization of baseball led to a wholesome (and approved) experience for players and spectators alike. In these discussions surrounding issues of morality, it is clear that league officials hoped to attract a certain type of spectator. While industrial workers were never specifically excluded, games were played mostly on weekday afternoons. These games were often too early for industrial workers to enjoy. The Southern League employed an ambitious schedule, with teams scheduled to play 100 games over the span of six months. That included games to be played on most day outside of Sunday. During the seasons, Saturday games were the most attended of the week. Even still, for many workers in 1885, having a day-off on Saturday was not assured. Still, the issue of morality during the inaugural season was tied to both profit and the meaning of baseball to the New South creed.

For the president and most vocal advocate of the Southern League, the intersection of business and controlling vice were also tenants of the New South creed. As president of the league, and editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, it was likely that Henry Grady wrote the article announcing the forbidding of Sunday games, alcohol, or gambling at league games.<sup>77</sup> For all intents and purposes, Grady's level of religiosity was common for a man of his age. Religious and biblical references are interspliced throughout his speeches, but they are used as anecdotes to clarify his messages. Grady was a member of and often attended services at the First Methodist Church in Atlanta. He also was friends with Methodist preacher Sam Jones. Like Grady, Jones

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<sup>77</sup> The article does not give the name of the author. However, it appears in the editorial page under the name "Echoes of the Week." Scholars have attributed unnamed editorials to Grady. Thus, it is likely that he either wrote the column or had someone write it for him.

was a vocal advocate of the industrial New South and established much of the religious rhetoric of the creed. Nevertheless, Grady's own views of religion emerge in a nationally published treatise titled "The Atheistic Tide Weeping over the Continent." Appearing in 1881, he warns of the "swelling tide of atheism and unbelief that has already swept over the outposts of religion." Grady's argument, however, is not one promoting the notion of salvation. Instead, Grady was concerned with the threat posed by non-belief on social control. Grady argues that "The vastly greatest influence that religion has exercised has been the conservative pressure that it has put upon the bulk of the people... [This pressure] has preserved the integrity of society." In spite of hopefulness that religion will win out, Grady warns that atheism has the ability to put an end to civil society. In this vein, religion was still very important in the New South. However, for individuals such as Grady, religion offered a respite to the undesirable elements of industrial society – such as work on Sunday, overindulging in alcohol consumption, and gambling. As professional baseball arrived in the city, boosters sought to make the game into the wholesome image they had hoped for their society.<sup>78</sup>

Breaking these moral regulations had serious consequences for teams and cities. In June of 1885, the Southern League's Memphis team was threatened with expulsion from the league for violating the sale of alcohol. In a game against Columbus, the Memphis team allegedly sold beer and whisky at the ballpark. According to reports, this caused the visiting team to be "hooted and cursed by the audience." The league and its officers blamed the team, and it was suggested the Memphis be expelled and replaced with a team from Savannah. Two weeks prior to the story

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<sup>78</sup> Henry Grady, "The Atheistic Tide Sweeping Over the Continent," *The Abbeville Press and Banner*, May 16, 1981. "Echoes of the Week," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 12, 1885. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 166-173. Davis, *Henry Grady's New South*, 11-12. David B. Parker, "'Quit Your Meanness': Sam Jones's Theology for the New South," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 77 No. 4 (Winter 1993) 711-727.



about the alcohol sales, an exhibition game took place in Savannah. In a game against Atlanta, an estimated 3000 spectators – over double the attendance of the first game Atlanta played in August early in the season – witnessed the exhibition game. As the league met days later, it was decided that the Memphis team would be allowed to stay in the league. However, the men who ran the team had to forfeit their share of the team and local businessman, Sam Carnes, gained control of the team.<sup>79</sup>

Outside of the apprehension over Sunday baseball in the Southern League, the issue was not a concern in Atlanta. However, the *Constitution* made readers aware of the battle against Sunday baseball in both the North and elsewhere in the South. The reports of these stories concerned the legal test of how far policy and local governments would push the issue of outlawing Sunday baseball. In April of 1887, a game between Nashville and Savannah was played on a Sunday. In reporting on the game, the paper noted that “there was some apprehension that the state law against Sunday baseball would be called in...but nothing was done by way of interruption.” With great interest, the paper continued following the issue in Nashville and noted how the state’s supreme court affirmed the law that banned baseball on Sunday in Tennessee. On August 23, 1887, two stories appeared regarding the arrest of players for their willingness to play ball on Sunday. One story involved a team being arrested in Birmingham, Alabama. The other case was the arrest of John Stricker, captain of Cleveland’s major league club, who was charged with breaking the city’s laws against Sunday baseball. The paper also followed closely Chicago’s efforts to abolish Sunday baseball. The theme that ran through these reports was how they played out in the court of law. Many of the reports of Sunday

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<sup>79</sup> “Baseball,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 23, 1885. “A Report in Favor of Memphis’ Expulsion,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 5, 1885. “The Trial of Memphis Association,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 6, 1885. “The Directors Meeting,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 9, 1885. “Dust from the Diamond,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 11, 1885.

baseball tested the validity of the Sunday laws. However, Sunday baseball was seen as a debate that could unite. In a story about Sunday laws being broken in Nashville, the paper noted that the issue could unite “without regard to party, creed, or race.”<sup>80</sup>

Throughout the much of the 1880s and 1890s, Atlanta’s evangelical advocates were successful in suppressing Sunday baseball. However, a significant controversy emerged in 1897. Sunday baseball had been a staple of Fort McPherson. Originally occupied by Union soldiers during Reconstruction, the base was made a permanent Army installation on May 4, 1889. Similar to other military bases, baseball was an aspect of life for those stationed Fort McPherson. Nineteenth century proponents of the usefulness of baseball in American society – namely Albert Spalding and Henry Chadwick – used military metaphors to argue that the game could be a valuable way to teach young men to be soldiers both on the ballfield and on the battlefield. Moreover, newspapers throughout the country also help to advocate the sport as a useful way to training soldiers. By the 1890s, the United States government instituted an athletic policy that promoted baseball as part of the army’s on-base routines. Members of the local community also benefited from games that military teams played. Specifically, in Atlanta, the team from Fort McPherson played against other college and amateur teams. The public was invited onto the base to watch these games. Again, local businesses stood to gain financially from these games. While attendance was free, the games gave Atlanta’s baseball enthusiasts another reason to use the streetcars and other businesses associated with transportation and the area surrounding Brisbane park.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “Sunday Baseball,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 25, 1887. “The Sunday Baseball Players,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 24, 1887. “The Sunday Baseball Decision,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 11, 1888. “The New Ball Scheme,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 26, 1887

<sup>81</sup> Robert Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out: How Baseball Sold U.S. Foreign Policy and Promoted the American Way Abroad* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 34-36. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events, 1880s-1930s*, 113.

In or around 1891, the Fort McPherson baseball team began to play on Sundays. These were some of the first organized games in the city to be played on the Sabbath. In one such game, 2000 spectators witnessed a Sunday game at the fort. Of course, this was a violation of the city's Blue Laws and these games incensed Atlanta's Evangelical Association. They called the games "Sabbath desecration." It was further reported that "nearly every preacher in Atlanta has joined the movement and they say they will not stop until there is no such thing as Sunday baseball at Fort McPherson." The battle over Sunday baseball became one between the city and the federal government. When they raised the matter with local authorities, the association was told they had no jurisdiction over the fort. One of the fort's officers referred the association of ministers to the War Department and the secretary of war Russell Alger. Eventually, the games were stopped on Sunday. Commanding officer at the fort, Colonel A. E. Buck presented a letter to Secretary Alger who referred the matter back to Buck. With that, it was decreed that Sunday baseball be stopped at the fort. The question of Sunday baseball at Fort McPherson was again raised in 1904 under President Theodore Roosevelt's administration. The fort wanted to begin playing games on Sunday. The city's Evangelical Association, led by Rev. Len Broughton, once again appealed to the federal government and the Secretary of War William Howard Taft. This time, however, Taft deferred to the commanding officer at the fort. In lieu of confrontation with the federal government, the association changed tactics. Instead of targeting stopping the games being played on Sunday, they argued that games ought to be closed to the public.<sup>82</sup>

Both debates about Sunday baseball at Fort McPherson follow similar patterns which were present in discussion about the game in the city. Certainly, nineteenth-century traditions of

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<sup>82</sup> "Sunday Baseball," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 19, 1891. "Was a Sabbath Violation," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 3, 1897. "Sunday Ball Playing," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 4, 1897. "Uncle Sam Calls Time at the Fort," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 5, 1897. "Post to Play Tech," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 3, 1897.

observing the Sabbath played a major role in the move to ban Sunday baseball at the fort. However, in their arguments, the Evangelical Association worried more about those attending the games than those playing. In this way, the debate was more about who belonged in the city and were able to participate in state and local sponsored recreation. The association's main concern was that the games attracted what they called 'objectionable' people to the city and the fort. The association noted so in their 1898 letter to Secretary Alger. The letter was written by Dr. R. V. Atkisson, who was bothered "that as a rule, an objectionable class of people were at the garrison on that day [of Sunday games]." Accordingly, these 'unruly' class of individuals in attendance yelled and "the whole place was disturbed." Sunday laws were often xenophobic and localist in nature. Reformers such as Atlanta's Evangelical Association often argued that, since the majority of the city practiced Christianity, it was the duty of the government – local, state, and national – to protect worship on Sundays. Shaped by the recent history of northern occupation and the migration of northerners after the Civil War, Fort McPherson was viewed as being external and Sunday baseball posed a threat to the city's southern, Christian values.<sup>83</sup>

For the players of the games, the debate over Sunday baseball was view through a different prism. While understanding the nature of the theological arguments against recreation on the Sabbath, those soldiers stationed at Fort McPherson saw the complexity in the issue. One the most vocal proponents of the game was a commanding officer by the name of Edward J. Hill. In his defense of Sunday baseball, Hill argued against the matter being handled by a group of Atlanta's religious leaders and Washington officials. He argued that those playing the game should also have a say in the matter. In an editorial, Hill made sweeping arguments about how local officials, especially those in a city that had been occupied by the military only 30 years

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<sup>83</sup> "Uncle Sam Calls Time at the Fort," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 5, 1897.

earlier, had been predisposed to tensions with the military base. In tying this sentiment with the issue of Sunday baseball, Hill argues that it has suffered the American military has “more or less at the hands of sentimentalists. People oppose things because they are on the outside and cannot see the inside working of a proposition. They permit themselves to become prejudiced by the agitating utterances of the leaders who allow their seal to take too thoroughly to one side.” He continued by stating that these leaders “are inclined to the opinion that when a proposition is declared bad that there is no other side to it. The army, more than any other organization, has been called to face this state of affairs.” Specifically defending the Sunday games, Hill argued that those games were no more sinful than the usual weekday games. Nor were they worse than those games played on Sunday by “fashionable church members in every social circle.” Moreover, he contradicts the Evangelical Association’s claim that games on the fort attracted those “disreputable people and gambles to *our* city.” Instead, Hill emphasized the moral good that the game provided to those playing. Taking cues from the nineteenth century discourse surrounding the usefulness of the game, Hill note that games at the fort “promote friendship between the young men of the city and the soldiers, a thing to be greatly desired by Atlanta now that she is becoming quite a military center.”<sup>84</sup>

Within Hill’s argument, he claimed belongingness within the city. Nevertheless, he does highlight another factor of the debate surrounding Sunday baseball: when could those who worked a six-day week have the opportunity to play? This was a common counterpoint in the debate. Early nineteenth century customs centered on elites having time to leisure and sport during the week, whereas working classes were not afforded such privilege. By the turn of the century, as sports became more popular, working classes were only able to participate on

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<sup>84</sup> Edward J. Hill, “Soldier Tells of Sunday Baseball,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 7, 1904.

weekends, especially Sundays. Hill highlights these arguments in his defense of Sunday baseball. Here, he places the work of the military on the same level as the city's working class and asks: "Why don't [the soldiers] have their games on during the week? On weekdays the soldier's time is taken up with the study of the arts of war. I think it a cruel mistake, no matter how well interested, to strive to deny him the privilege of taking the Sunday afternoon to indulge in Athletics."<sup>85</sup>

Sunday baseball was not the only concern the city's elite held toward the game. While national journalists and pundits argued that moral and social value of the game, the lived experiences of the game would sometimes lead to violent outbreaks on and off the field. One of the more infamous case of violence on the baseball field was the so-call "Base-ball Murder." On the afternoon of July 18, 1878, sixteen-year-old Carl Mitchel and Charles Venable were playing a game with some older players at a park near McPherson barracks. A fight broke out between Venable and twenty-one-year-old Willie Lawshe. In an effort to free his companion, Mitchell struck Lawshe in the head with a baseball bat. The blow killed Lawshe and Mitchell was tried for homicide. The trial in December made front page news and large crowds gathered at the city's courthouse. After a two-day trial and an abundant of witnesses, Mitchell was found not guilty. Nonetheless, this was not the only time violence erupted on the ball field.

Another infamous incident occurred during the first months of the Southern League in 1885. At the end of April, two Atlanta players were fined ten dollars by the umpire. The evening following the game, the two players sought to accost the umpire in his hotel room. The two players, Sullivan and McVey, met the umpire in his room and the three agreed to go into the

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<sup>85</sup> Edward J. Hill, "Soldier Tells of Sunday Baseball," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 7, 1904.

courtyard to fist fight. When Burkalow, the umpire in question, was getting dressed, Sullivan attacked him from behind and the three men brawled in the room. Eventually police were summoned to the scene, but no charges were filed. While the story was an interesting interlude during the early part of the season, the *Constitution* worried that word of the fight could damage the league and the game's image in the city. They mused that "if something is not done to prevent future kicking, and such disgraceful behavior as that of this morning, baseball will quickly lose its hold on this city. The people of Atlanta have been thoroughly disgusted, claiming that they paid their money to be amused not to be annoyed by continual kicking and threats."<sup>86</sup>

### **African Americans, Jim Crow, and Baseball**

The discourse around baseball and belonging in the city bled over into issues of race in the aftermath of Reconstruction. Similar to the experience of white Atlantans, baseball also was an important part of Atlanta's African American community. Often played on the periphery of the city's society, African Americans participated in amateur and professional baseball. Black-owned teams and ballparks were a feature of the city. The Atlanta Black Crackers were established in 1919 and were part of the Negro Southern League. An African American-owned ballpark was erected near Clark University as early as 1904. Like other cultural undertakings, however, African American participation in baseball was subjected to the regime of white supremacy as the game became part of the larger project of holding power over the city's African American communities. Since white baseball followed the same threads that established the creed of the New South, so too did Black baseball. The game was subjected to the same Jim

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<sup>86</sup> "Carl Mitchell's Case," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 18, 1878. "Not Guilty!," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 19, 1878. "Warring Baseballists," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 24, 1885. "Yesterday's Games Surprise Atlanta, Nashville, Macon," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 5, 1885.

Crow ideology as other parts of society. This included rhetoric that belittled the playing experiences of African Americans, excluding and segregating amateur and professional games, and, ultimately, the use of baseball in the movement to incarcerate African Americans after the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>87</sup>

There does not exist a grand narrative regarding the first African American game played in the city. More than likely, baseball became popular in African American communities concurrently to white communities in the 1880s. Comparably to white baseball, the game's popularity culminated with the formation of Southern League of Colored Baseball (SLCB) in the Spring of 1886. This was the same year that the Southern League began with Henry Grady as president. While the original idea for the league originated in Jacksonville, there was quick movement on securing a spot in the new league in Atlanta. On the night of April 12, 1886, business owner J.C Higgins initiated a meeting at his tailor shop. "The meeting was enthusiastic," stated the *Constitution*. According to reports, the members of the meeting raised around \$300. The league featured ten teams: joining Atlanta were three representing Jacksonville, two from Memphis, two from Savannah, and one each from Charleston, and New Orleans. The first league game was played in New Orleans on April 26. The game was part of a Knights of Labor picnic. While it is unclear whether the league was professional, the Atlanta team's players were in their early-to-mid-twenties and worked as laborers. These early players were born into slavery and gained freedom as young children. According to the reports, Harvey Thompson was the star of the team. Born in 1860, his occupation was listed as driver for the

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<sup>87</sup> James E. Brunson III, *The Early Image of Black Baseball: Race and Representation in the Popular Press, 1871-1890* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2009). Robert Elias, *Baseball and the American Dream: Race, Class, Gender, and the National Pastime* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe Printing, 2001). Roberta J. Newman and Joel Nathan Rosen, *Black Baseball, Black Business: Race Enterprise and the Fate of the Segregated Dollar* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014). Swanson, *When Baseball Went White*.



train. On the ballfield, the pitcher had “remarkable speed and great endurance.” There were two sets of brothers that played on the team. Outfielders Thomas and William Cox worked in retail and infielders William and George Hughes were laborers. The team was rounded out by Freeman Coachman, who played shortstop on the team and was a driver for the railroad.<sup>88</sup>

The SLCB was poorly reported on and failed within the first year. Nevertheless, it offers a glimpse into racial relationships within the city and the South as a whole. Even though the SLCB was the first mainstream foray into Black baseball in Atlanta, social norms concerning the segregation of games, teams, and leagues were still prevalent. Although there were instances of interracial games, there are no records of Black teams competing against white teams. Nevertheless, SLCB games did feature an interracial audience. The paper reported that around 400 people witnessed a Wednesday afternoon game in June of 1886. “The audience was composed largely of colored people, but quite a few white admirers of the game went out and were rewarded with a good game,” noted the report. Considering the popularity of baseball – and its rhetorical ties to modernization, urbanization, and industrialization of the New South – it was socially acceptable for whites to participate in games involving African Americans. After all, the white Southern League had formed to much fanfare only a year prior and the so-called baseball fever had gripped the city. Still, there were caveats placed on interracial audiences. First was the when the African American teams had access to the ballpark. The games in 1886 were played at the city’s Athletic Park. When the Black Atlanta team played a league game in August, it began at nine o’clock on a Friday morning. The team charged twenty-five cents for admission. Early

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<sup>88</sup> “Baseball Gossip,” *The Daily Telegraph*, April 6, 1886. “Diamond Dust,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 13, 1886. “Colored Baseball Players,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 10, 1886. U.S. Census Bureau, “Inhabitants Table,” June 9, 1880. James E. Brunson III, *Black Baseball, 1858-1900: A Comprehensive Record of the Teams, Players, Managers, Owners, and Umpires* (Jefferson: McFarland Press, 2019) 604.

morning baseball would have been difficult time for many to attend. Although the eight-hour day traditional workday that begins at nine in the morning was not in vogue, Saturday afternoon baseball garnered more attention than Friday morning. This meant that whites who had time to leisure were able to attend, whereas African Americans had to find times to play. Also, games within the SLCB had to conform to the traditional values of white southern society. In the write-up to one of the games, the paper stated that “The game was quiet and orderly.” This phrase was rarely used when discussing white baseball as fights between players and umpires were a somewhat common occurrence. Because the game was “civil,” however, white could freely attend within the confines of racial customs.<sup>89</sup>

The hallmark of the league in Atlanta was the relatively little attention that it did receive. The SLCB was founded ten years after the Compromise of 1877 that effectively ended Reconstruction. Additionally, its founding was on the cusp of the implementation of the regime of white supremacy and Jim Crow laws. In terms of the 1880s, the game was mostly well received in Jacksonville, New Orleans, and Charleston and garnered attention in those cities. Local press somewhat frequently reported on the games throughout the Summer months. And there lacked any long diatribes concerning the meaning of African Americans playing baseball. In particular, the game was reported on quite frequently in New Orleans. For example, in the write-up for the first SLCB game, the *Times-Picayune* stated that “colored ball players of the South certainly deserve credit for their enterprise in getting up a league on such a large scale.” Nevertheless, outside of the initial meeting for the Atlanta team, Henry Grady’s *Atlanta Constitution* did not mention the league at all, and only reported on a handful of games. Even

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<sup>89</sup> “Colored Baseball Players,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 10, 1886. “Atlanta Colored Baseball,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 6, 1886.

though games reports are condensed to a few lines, the language is generic and does not comment on the meaning of the game or the fact that formerly enslaved people are playing in an organized league.<sup>90</sup>

Despite being praised by newspapers throughout the South, the SLCB folded within its first year. The league lacked the organizational and financial backing of its white counterparts. While the league did receive praise in cities in the South, it received little support from the Atlanta's white community outside of the occasional attendance. The end of the SLCB coincided with the further deterioration of race relations in the city. Throughout the latter decade of the nineteenth century, Black baseball became subjected to the same racial mythologies which structured all aspects of southern race relations. Baseball was simply another space where southern whites wielded power over African Americans. Specifically, baseball helped to reinforce the notion that African Americans were predisposed to lawlessness. From the beginning of the 1890s until the Atlanta Race Riots of 1906, stories about African American baseball repeatedly discussed either instances of violence, lawlessness, or both. Though violence among white players was far from uncommon, such discussions were never central to coverage of white baseball. These episodes always occurred on the field and were reportedly perpetrated by the players themselves. Reports concerning violence among spectators were never reported.

Part of this process included delegitimizing African American baseball and rhetorically highlighting how it was different than white baseball. Beginning in the aftermath of the SLCB, Black baseball was unorganized but still continued and Atlanta's teams played against other African American teams in the city and throughout the state of Georgia. In the fall of 1893, a championship game between the Darktown Deppens and the Atlanta Grays was played at

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<sup>90</sup> "A Southern Colored League," *The Times-Picayune*, June 7, 1886.

Brisbane Park. The Grays won the championship. However, instead of focusing on the game, the newspaper was fixated on the supposed rituals that occurred following the game. The post-game ceremony reportedly featured a greased pig and a mock marriage. The newspaper noted that “The affair was peculiarly African in its character, and the crowd appreciated it and felt proud of it as such.” The longwinded report of the ways in which the Black players celebrated their win emphasized an uncivilized nature of African American baseball. For the author of the article, pig wrestling and an illegitimate marriage was so different than the traditions that had been established in white baseball.<sup>91</sup>

Critiques like this continued throughout the early decade of the twentieth century. In a write-up which examined how African Americans celebrated the Fourth of July, the *Constitution* noted that quite a few Black teams played baseball as a celebration of the American holiday. This was not an uncommon way to celebrate. White celebrations throughout the South also included baseball games. Yet, for Black teams, the scores or action on the field were rendered inconsequential. What mattered was the perception that the games contained fights and were not played up to the standard of whites. “On all the available vacant lots in the city, negro baseball teams met and had a fight on the diamond, literally as well as figuratively,” noted the paper. It was not just violence of the games that needed to be mentioned. The writer felt that games were theatrical and uncivilized by white standards. The reporter argued that “A Fourth of July negro baseball game is better than any negro minstrel show that ever played on the boards. The players play ball in deep earnest, but they play with little regard for order of rules.” After degrading and mocking other celebrations, the reporter used condescending language to belittle African

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<sup>91</sup> “An Unique Fair,” *Atlanta Constitutional*, Oct. 24, 1893.

American citizenship. They noted that “the Atlanta negro enjoyed his Fourth, believing he had exercised his American citizenship.”<sup>92</sup>

Once the game had been delegitimized with the end of the SLCB and the critique of African American customs, white supremacists turned to the places where the games were played. This included the contestation over public spaces and questions of who were allowed to enjoy open spaces within the urban environment. As advocates of white supremacy strengthened segregation of urban areas in the South, African Americans were expected to navigate these spaces or risk incarceration. Thus, baseball offered a unique opportunity to enforce segregation on public spaces. Even though baseball was segregated into all-Black and all-white teams from the game’s very beginning in the city, ball parks were not segregated until 1903. Yet, citizens from around the city campaigned to institute bans on Black baseball with the charge of lawlessness. This pertained to both adults and children who played the game. In the summer of 1893, The Courtland Street Leapers – an all-African American team – were arrested for playing a game on a vacant lot near Pine Street in Atlanta. The team was comprised of youths between the ages of twelve to sixteen. In reporting the arrests, the newspaper noted that: “Every day people make complaints at police headquarters about *this* kind of boys playing ball on vacant lots and gathering a noisy and motley crowd of street gangs about them [emphasis added].”<sup>93</sup>

The debate over where African Americans could play baseball culminated in 1903 when the city passed an ordinance banning Black teams from playing in one of the city’s major ballparks. At the turn of the twentieth century, there were two major location where baseball was played: Brisbane Park and Piedmont Park. Dubbed the Central Park of the South, Piedmont Park

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<sup>92</sup> “How Atlanta’s Darktown Citizens Spent the Glorious Fourth of July,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 6, 1902.

<sup>93</sup> “The Courtland Leapers,” *Atlanta Constitutional*, June 19, 1893.

was quasi-segregated. It was originally built for the Piedmont Exhibition in 1887 and, in 1895, the location for Booker T. Washington's famous "Atlanta Exposition Speech." It also was home to Atlanta's white professional baseball team from 1902 to 1904. There was a section of the park that was reserved for African Americans – Lincoln Park – and a section where whites congregated. While the park was not officially segregated, there is no record of Black teams playing in the park's baseball field. The city's other baseball field was Brisbane Park. Built in 1892 and located to the southwest of downtown, it was home to both baseball and collegiate football games through the turn of the twentieth century. The park had been integrated since it was built and, until 1902, was home to Atlanta's Southern League team. Yet, questions remained about who should be allowed to enjoy the field. Over the winter months of 1902, members from the Mechanicsville and Pittsburgh neighborhoods collected petitions that sought to ban African Americans from using the grounds. It was one of the only parks left in the city where African Americans were welcomed to play organized baseball. On April 20, the city passed an ordinance that forbade African Americans from using Brisbane Park.<sup>94</sup>

While neither the city nor the local residents ever plainly stated specific reasons why African Americans were banned from the park, it is clear from responses that white belief in the violent nature of African Americans played a role in the decision. Days after the ordinance was passed, Moses Amos – Atlanta's first Black pharmacist and member of Booker T. Washington's National Negro Business League – wrote an editorial defending use of the park. Amos acknowledged that at the center of the ban was supposed unruly behavior by Black players. He noted that "[African Americans] have been using that park for a long time and it is well known that we keep as good order than is kept at Piedmont [park]. I have been to Brisbane several times

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<sup>94</sup> "May Renumber City Streets," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 21, 1903.

to witness games and never seen a single negro beyond control.” Amos placed his criticism against the ban in terms of the ongoing civil rights battle that occurred with the onset of Jim Crow. He continued: “Punish us when we are guilty and censure us not when we do not deserve it. We hope that day will yet come when you will be proud of the negro. The negro is not an ingrate.” Amos’ defense of Black baseball was tied to civic pride and being a citizen of Atlanta. He notes the other city-owned parks where whites have claimed as their own and he asks for the city to allow one where African American can play. For this claim, he reminds his readers of Black investment in the city. He stated that: “The law-abiding negro feels an interest in the city and the city to feel a little of interest in him. We simply ask for justice and right.”<sup>95</sup>

Despite the exaggerated rhetoric, it was true that some violence or lawlessness did occur during Black baseball games. But the discussions around these games supposed that violence in white baseball was either nonexistent or, at most, rare. Even African American leaders in Atlanta noted the double standard that existed between Black and white baseball. In his rebuttal to the banning of African American baseball at Brisbane Park, Moses Amos stated noted “I have visited the other ball ground and have seen white players arrested for disorderly conduct; have even seen a white player throw a wild ball amid the spectators because some on criticized a bad play.” In his critique of white baseball, Amos highlights the complicated relationship that the game had with turn of the twentieth century morality. Advocates throughout the United States argued that baseball was a wholesome game that attributed to the betterment to the character of both the spectators and players. Yet, Atlanta’s reporters were focused on the lawlessness of Black players and, within their critiques, ignored violence at white baseball games. As mentioned above, white baseball was littered with instances of lawlessness and violence. And Amos had clear memories

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<sup>95</sup>“Negro Registers Protest Against Council’s Action,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 23, 1903.

of the more infamous instances where white players assaulted an umpire a few years earlier. These memories emerge as he reminded his white readers that they too have witness violence on the ball field.<sup>96</sup>

When discussing Black baseball and its relationship to lawlessness, the newspaper usually focused on the male athletes. Since the end of Reconstruction, newspapers throughout the South promulgated the myth of the “negro rapists” and the threats of African American masculinity. In attempts to justify white supremacy, journalists chastised African American men as uncivilized and the antithesis to white morality. Certainly, the demonization of Black masculinity was displayed on the front pages, it also provided the burgeoning sports sections. The ban on Black baseball in the city’s park was the culmination of a campaign that began approximately ten years early. Through this time, newspaper reports emphasized and highlighted violence episodes which occurred during Black baseball games. In the summer of 1891, one of Atlanta’s Black teams traveled to Macon to take on the local African American team. In the report concerning the game, titled “The Same Old Story,” the *Constitution* discussed Atlanta’s victory that was tinged with violence. There was little reporting on any of the gameplay. Instead, the brief story stated how the teams became agitated and threatened a disturbance. The report stated that “Atlanta sent down her colored baseball team to Macon yesterday and they hand no more trouble with the club there than the Atlantas had, the score was 7 to 4. The Macon team was so disappointed that it tried to raise a row.”<sup>97</sup> Even though the statement is vague, the article insinuates some sort of ruckus or violence occurred during the game; specifically, on the field<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> “Negro Registers Protest Against Council’s Action,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 23, 1903. Riess, *Touching Base*, 25-28.

<sup>97</sup> The idiom “raise a row” means to cause a disturbance.

<sup>98</sup> “The Same Old Story,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 21 ,1891.



Mentions of violence in the paper occurred even when a game did not include a team from Atlanta. Moral outrage came naturally to white reporters when incidents occurred between African American teams. A lengthy article appeared on June 5, 1895 discussing a melee that had broken out in a game that featured teams from Macon and Athens, GA. The teams met to play a game in a lot behind Macon's Lucy Cobb Institute, a white all-girl schoolhouse. The *Constitution* describes in great detail the "almost riot" that occurred. During the game, Charlie Baldwin, a Black resident of Athens, "stole a water bucket." Suddenly, a Macon player named Will Thomas began shooting his pistol toward the crowd. Eventually, Thomas ran down the alley toward the school with shots being aimed at the institute. The chase continued and terrorized Athens' business district. Two people were shot: a Macon player was shot in the foot and an African American spectator was shot in the side. The paper then went into great detail about the arrest of those that participated in the riot. It reported that "the policemen worked rapidly upon clues furnished by the [spectators]. It was a difficult job to arrest four men that were dodging among a thousand of their friends." Despite the difficulty, the paper reports that the officers – who are named in the story – were successful in apprehending the culprits. While certainly it was news that shots were fired at a baseball game, the length and detail of the article differ from white violence that occurred during baseball games. Often, when white players engaged in on-the-field violence, reports were generally forgiving and hinted that tempers were just a part of the game. Here, there are clear consequences to the incidents. The story can also be contrasted by the accounts reported in Macon on the same day. The report of the incident in the *Macon Telegraph* is brief and only mentions the riot in passing. According to the *Telegraph*, in the last line of the article, the incident began when one of the players "claimed a water bucket belonging to the Macon ball players. The Macon negroes refused to give it up and the Athens negroes began

throwing rocks.” Even though the story was true, it highlights the ways in which Atlanta’s journalists sought to highlight the criminality of African Americans with longer, more detailed articles. This was true from front page news to back page sports.<sup>99</sup>

In the lead-up to the 1906 race riots, the paper increased its rhetoric in its limited discussions of Black baseball in the city. These stories of violence further highlight the unbalanced way that justice was handled in the city. Two episodes involved incidents on their field: one allegedly perpetrated by an African American baseball player and one allegedly by a white player. In July of 1904, there was an altercation during a Black baseball game in the city’s Pittsburgh neighborhood that led to a riot. The paper reported that an Atlanta police officer shot the offending player for inciting the riot. It was believed that the player would not survive the gunshot wound to the stomach. This can be contrasted with the story of Atlanta’s catcher Jack Evers. In May of 1906, Evers accused an African American youth by the name of John Young of stealing ginger ale to sell at the baseball game. A heated argument ensued when Evers confronted those selling refreshments at the game. The catcher became so enraged that he picked up a baseball and attacked one of the Black vendors. The police arrested Evers and he had to pay a five-dollar fine.<sup>100</sup>

In contrast to ways in which African American baseball was reported in Atlanta, other newspapers narrated Black baseball much differently. The rhetoric around Black baseball and the banning of the game in the city’s larger parks meant that Atlanta was often on the sidelines when it came to games with other cities. In the aftermath of the segregating of parks, Macon’s Black community organized a state league for the summer of 1904. Teams from all over the state were

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<sup>99</sup> “Almost a Riot,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 5, 1895. “A Small Riot” *The Macon Telegraph*, June 5, 1895.

<sup>100</sup> “Short Items of Local Interest,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 6, 1904. “Baseball Catcher Fined,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 27, 1906.

asked to participate. The one glaring omission was Atlanta. In fact, until 1910, Atlanta lacked representation in colored baseball leagues in the state, despite having the most African American residents in the state. Cities such as Macon, Albany, Brunswick, and Savannah all participated in some sort of organized games through the first decade of the twentieth century. How the game was reported had a lot to do with Atlanta's exclusion. African American baseball was rarely covered in the city's paper. And on the occasions when it was reported, Black games were demeaned and presented as violent. This was not true in other cities throughout the state of Georgia. Black games were covered more often in Macon, Savannah, and others smaller cities. While it was never on par with white baseball, the newspapers were at least respectable to Black players. In one instance, the *Savannah Morning News* actually praised their ability. On June 17, 1901, the city black baseball team played against a team from South Carolina. In announcing the game, the paper noted the acumen of the players by stating how they expected a good game to be played. The paper also noted that "Good ball may be expected, as it is a specialty of colored players." Another report in Brunswick, GA urged its readers that "those who desire to see some real good ball playing should go to the fair grounds today" to see two African American teams play. Segregation of baseball also limited any financial gain that Atlanta's Black baseball players could hope to gain. From at least 1900, games that featured Black players in a quasi-state league would win more than pride. Often, winning teams were rewarded with a prize of \$50 to \$200. This does not include money that would have been made at the ball parks. Thus, not only was Atlanta's African Americans exclude of the partaking in the recreation of baseball, but they were also prohibited from earning extra money by playing.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> "Colored Teams to Meet," *The Morning News*, July 18, 1900. "Baseball Today," *The Brunswick Times*, August 25, 1900. "Won Again," *The Brunswick Daily News*, September 5, 1900. "City Brevities," *The Morning News*, June

On the evening of September 22, 1906, tensions between Atlanta's white and Black citizens erupted in a string of violence unseen in the city since the Civil War. Working-class whites, who became incensed by newspaper reports of alleged assaults on white women, randomly attacked African Americans and the businesses in which they owned. The violence left a lasting mark on the city that would last long into the twentieth century. Baseball was not the cause nor the sole focus of the rhetoric that led to the deadly riot. Yet how the game was reported was just part of the larger narrative which supported and fostered white supremacy in the city. The game became another avenue to insinuate that Black men were predisposed to violent tendencies. Thus, helping to criminalize African American manhood.

## **Conclusion**

From the end of the Civil War, baseball was an important factor in the rebirth of Atlanta. Throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century, the game was interwoven throughout many of the developments that established the city as the Jewel of the New South. It became part of the New South creed, played a role in establishing the Lost Cause narrative, and helped to refine what it meant to be an Atlantan and southerner. Yet, the game was more valuable as a concept than an actual practice. The popularity of baseball does not become widespread until the twentieth century. Into the next century, baseball became financially profitable for individuals and local businesses alike. Still, baseball in the nineteenth century was invaluable for the ways that the game helped to image what type of city Atlanta could become.

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17, 1901. "Colored Baseball League," *The Brunswick Daily News*, November 24, 1903. "Colored Teams will Play Ball Today," *The Morning News*, May 12, 1904.

In the 1880s, baseball was a tool used by orators to erase the supposed stain of Reconstruction. Poet, reporter, and Atlantan elite Smith Clayton used baseball to paint a post-war picture of prosperity, youthfulness, and harmony in the city. In a story that has been retold countless number of times, Clayton depicts Atlanta's first baseball game only a year after the end of the war. But the 1888 story was for a contemporary audience and glosses over the fact that the city was still facing issues caused by the war. It also delineates a clear line between Atlanta of the Old South and Atlanta of the New South. Representing the New South, younger players for the Gate City club, who were influential members of Atlanta's business community in the 1880s, were the stars of the game. On the other hand, older, slower players on the other team represented the Old South. The game also camouflaged race relations in the city with the inclusion of an all-African American marching band, even though there were likely Black Union Soldiers still in the city when the supposed game takes place in 1866.

With the establishment of the Southern League in 1885, baseball was viewed as a way of promoting the importance of Atlanta in the New South creed. The main organizer of the league, Henry Grady, saw it as an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of Atlanta and the South to a national audience. Many of the league's founding principles were similar to Grady's view of what the South, and the city, could be in the aftermath of the Civil War. Even though the league was not always successful, the *Constitution* gave the appearance that Atlanta was a vital part of baseball's success in the South. The Southern League also highlights class divides in the city. It was not just baseball, but only organized baseball – run by elites – that reinforced southern white, middle-class values. Baseball alone could not police vices in the city. Only professional, organized baseball could police on and off the field violence, drinking, and preserving the Sabbath with outlawing baseball on Sundays. Lastly, baseball also was part of the campaign to

reinforce racial stereotypes in Atlanta. As a larger attempt to criminalize African Americans, local newspapers focused on the propensity of violence at Black baseball games. Prior to the Atlanta Race Riots of 1906, baseball involving African Americans was ridiculed and often focused on violence which occurred at these games. Despite being a novel form of entertainment in the city, baseball was a factor in establishing Atlanta as the Jewel of the New South.

## Chapter Two:

### Atlanta, Part Two: Baseball and Fulfilling the New South Creed, 1900-1933

One of the greatest pennant chases in southern baseball history occurred over the summer of 1913. The year prior, Atlanta's famed team, the Crackers, finished in last place of the Southern Association. The team's fortunes quickly turned the next summer as the Crackers had one of their best seasons in team history. Toward the end of the year, the team won 22 of their last 23 games and were statistically tied with the Mobile Sea Gulls. A double header was scheduled against the Sea Gulls for Saturday, September 6, 1913. Anywhere from 15,00 to 20,000 people traveled to Ponce de Leon park. So many people attended the game that spectators filled the two teams' dugouts and players sat on the field. The first game saw the Crackers win a nail-biter in ten innings. The second game was called in the third inning when the Gulls'

manager pulled his team off the field in order to catch the train back to Mobile despite the efforts of those in attendance to pay for a later train. Spectators were livid and Atlanta's players were despondent as they were expected to lose the pennant despite winning the game on Sunday. Mobile's game on Sunday was against the last-placed New Orleans Pelicans. Atlanta's baseball enthusiasts, however, held out hope. Between the hours of 3:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., enthusiasts gathered to hear updates from Mobile as 20 telephone lines were hooked up to relay the play-by-play. When news was received that Mobile lost, celebrations were had all over the city. The next morning, the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that, with the support of the city, the outcome was inevitable. "The same spirit has won many civic triumphs," noted the paper as Atlanta had conquered the Southern Association.<sup>102</sup>

The 1913 season was envisioned years prior by the same individuals who promoted the New South creed. Throughout the first 30 years of the twentieth century, baseball developed into a multifaceted business which did its part in to help propel the burgeoning metropolis into becoming the so-called capital of the South. During the previous century, men such as Henry Grady saw a future where Atlanta was not only at the center of southern industrial growth, but also at the center of the South's baseball landscape. By 1913, Atlanta was well on its way to fulfilling these prophecies. The population of the city had grown substantially since the turn of the twentieth century; in the South, Atlanta was second only to New Orleans in total number of residents. Moreover, Atlanta had become home to some of the South's biggest companies. Steel and textile manufacturing had become an important commercial part of the city. These industries

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<sup>102</sup> "Crackers Tied with Gulls for Southern League Rag," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 6, 1913. "Local Baseball Season Will Come to Close Today When the Lookouts Meet Locals in Decisive Battle," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 6, 1913. "Atlanta Wins by Half a Game," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 8, 1913. "Atlanta and Baseball," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 9, 1913.

were supplemented by the railroad companies, the electric and streetcar company, and the fledgling Coca-Cola Company. From the turn of the century until the onset of the great depression, these growing industries were all involved with the game of baseball in some way. The 1913 Atlanta Crackers were owned by the Georgia Railroad and Electric company. The individual that ran the club, John Dickinson, was owner of the Southern Belting Company, one of Atlanta's newly established steel mills. The Coca-Cola company was also involved as one of the team's major advertisers. Furthermore, baseball itself began to develop into an industry of its own. Throughout the era, the Crackers routinely attracted over 10,000 people to Ponce de Leon park. Baseball likewise enhanced company-sponsored leisure as manufacturers such as the Fulton Bag Co. subsidized company baseball teams and factory leagues. The newly formed Negro League teams were also popular throughout the city. Instead of relying on invented historical memories and rhetoric to promote the importance of baseball, the game was a significant part of life as the city grew into the South's largest city.<sup>103</sup>

As modernization occurred, the city certainly experienced growing pains. The heightened popularity of the Negro League and the establishment of the Black Crackers coincided with a strengthening of Jim Crow laws that were born out of the deadly race riots of 1906. The exciting pennant race of 1913 occurred the summer before the violent 1914-1915 strike at the Fulton Bag and Co. mill. As industrial consolidation and the growth of mega-corporations occurred during the 1920s, the city's largest company, Coca-Cola, bought the Atlanta Crackers, helping them to further fuse America's game with America's beverage. Within these three major trends that transpired in the growing city – the strengthening of Jim Crow, labor unrest, and business

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<sup>103</sup> Gary M. Fink, *The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills Strike of 1914-1915: Espionage, Labor Conflict, and New South Industrial Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993). Gregory Mixon, *Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006).



consolidation and growth – baseball was at the forefront. For some, the game offered a chance to subvert social norms and challenge stereotypes. In other instances, baseball offered a way to reinforce social and workplaces norms. For others, the game offered financial benefits that helped their economic standing in the city, region, and throughout the United States. Without the popularity of baseball, Atlanta’s trajectory of becoming the so-called “Jewel of the South” would have looked completely different.

Baseball also offers a glimpse into how the city itself grew in during the first years of the twentieth century. In years prior, the operation of baseball was untouched by local government and local politics. Mayors and city council members were certainly interested in the game. However, the city government itself was uninterested in the affairs of the game. This changed as baseball became much more of a for-profit enterprise. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, city officials operated on the belief that baseball was above issues that arose with for-profit businesses. This assumption assumed the purity of the game and labeled it as a public good, even for professional teams. As twentieth century entrepreneurs found that there was money to be made, baseball organizers and promoters began to make decisions that skewed toward profit. In turn, local government used newly found power to tax those that promoted the game while still benefiting from the cultural impact that the game entailed. Along with financial benefits, governments sought to use baseball within the emerging prison system that was being established in the city. Throughout the 1920s, baseball games were a part of Atlanta’s Federal Penitentiary. Even though the prison was run by the federal government, residents ran the prison and installed baseball in similar ways as did the city’s industrial leaders.

### **The Georgia Cracker in a New South City**

The popularity of Atlanta's professional baseball team led to baseball being an integral part of class and race relations throughout the city during the first decades of the twentieth century. The Atlanta Crackers were one of the most successful baseball teams of the twentieth century. Although they were considered a minor league team, only the New York Yankees won more championships than the Crackers. For over 60 years, the team was the pride and joy of the city. With a lineage that could be traced to the early days of the Southern Baseball League, the Crackers were a mainstay in newly founded Southern Association (SA). Founded in 1902, the SA was one of the longest lasting minor leagues in the United States. In their existence, the Crackers won 28 league pennants and twice won the Dixie Series championship.<sup>104</sup> Originally, the team was owned by a consortium of local elites. By 1903, the ownership had moved to the hands of New Orleans' baseball promoter Abner Powell. Eventually, larger corporations replaced individual owners. In the 1910s, the team was purchased by the city's streetcar company. Plagued by financial troubles, the team was eventually purchased by the Coca-Cola company. From their very beginning, the more modern and organized Crackers represented the internal struggle that was omnipresent in the city. On one hand, the team embodied urban modernity with a long-standing, and prosperous, professional baseball club which supported local business development and promoted the industrial growth of the city. On the other hand, the teams' nickname and practices harkened back to the rural antebellum South. The nickname itself was tinged with notes of the city's past and linked with the notion of southern rural heritage.

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<sup>104</sup> Nicknamed the Southern World Series and beginning in 1920, the Dixie Series featured the pennant winner of the Southern Association and the pennant winner of the Texas League to determine the champions of southern baseball.

After a few successful years following its founding in 1884, the Southern Baseball League struggled in the 1890s and ceased operation by 1899. The failure of professional baseball in Atlanta and the rest of the South was due in part to the economic depression that began with the Panic of 1893. Nonetheless, baseball returned to the South in 1901 with the formation of the Southern Association of Baseball Clubs. It was projected that Atlanta would be part of the new league; however, their participation was withdrawn when they could not find a suitable place to play (Brisbine Park was deemed unacceptable). In the winter of 1902, a new grandstand was constructed at Piedmont Park despite a lack of assurance that Atlanta would participate in 1902 season. “Will be best in the South,” proclaimed the *Constitution*. Along with the new location, 1902 saw the team transition away a conglomerate of investors to a single owner of the team. By the following summer, Abner Powell had gained control of the franchise. Nicknamed “Papa Powell” in his native New Orleans, Powell greatly influenced the historical trajectory of the Crackers. Unlike prior owners, Powell was driven completely by financial success. Instead of musing over how baseball was good for business, he sought out to make baseball good financial business. He had gained the reputation since his playing days. When asked his opinions on Powell, a former teammate, M.K. Terry, stated that “In the first place, I have known Mr. Powell ever since he began playing ball and if anybody will show me that he was ever after anything but money, I will take a back seat.” His greatest strength to accomplish a profit as an owner was the ways in which he promoted baseball in the towns where he ran local teams. During his time in New Orleans, Powell helped to develop the “rain check” for games that were delayed by the weather, instituted the concept of “Ladies Day” at the ballpark, and introduced the tarp which covers the infield during rain. Upon arriving to Atlanta, Powell expanded the new grandstands at

Piedmont Park, installed seating that was more spacious for spectators, and introduced box seating above the grandstand.<sup>105</sup>

For all intents and purposes, 1903 was the first time that those reporting on the games employed the nickname of the “Crackers.” Despite mentions in the historical record on the teams’ name, local newspapers used the phrase “the Atlanta baseball club” when reporting on games. However, this changes in 1903 when the paper begins to refer to the club as the Crackers. The use of “Crackers” in Atlanta was part of a larger national trend where team nicknames were popularized by sport journalists. Throughout the nineteenth century, these names were often an afterthought and tended to change from season to season. By the turn of the twentieth century, however, all Major League baseball clubs had begun being identified by their respective team names. Prior, teams’ names were a reference to a part of their uniforms (such as the Red Sox or White Socks), or they were only referred to by the name of their city. By 1903, newer nicknames represented part of the city’s culture, wildlife that was associated with the city, or names that had become synonymous with the team.<sup>106</sup>

The Atlanta baseball team reportedly first used the nicknamed the “Crackers” during the 1895 and 1896 Southern League seasons. During these two years, the city’s newspaper does not use the term to refer to the team. When Atlanta returns to the professional baseball in 1902, scholars have noted that the team was known at the Atlanta Firemen. Again, the *Constitution* does not report on the team with such a nickname. It was not until the following season the paper used the nickname to describe the team. In announcing the arrival of the team’s first paper, the

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<sup>105</sup> “Best Tam Ever, States Powell,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 11, 1903. “Big Changes at Ball Park,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 4, 1903. “Atlanta Fans Are Knocking,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 16, 1904.

<sup>106</sup> Herold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960). Herold Seymour, *Baseball: The Golden Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

paper noted that “Adam Vogt is the first of the Crackers to arrive and came in yesterday from Toledo, OH.” Yet, the usage of the nickname was sporadic. A few days later, when discussing the first exhibition game between the New York Highlanders and the Atlanta team, the newspaper did not use the term “Crackers” to describe the team. Then, about a month later, the nickname was used when reporting on a game between the Atlanta team and a professional team from St. Paul, Minnesota. “Crackers Meet Apostles Today,” announced the paper. By the beginning of the 1903 Southern Association’s season, the term “Crackers” was used more often when reporting on the games. Subsequently, by the end of the season, the name was clearly associated with the Atlanta baseball team.<sup>107</sup>

The evidence suggests that the use of the Cracker nickname was part of Abner Powell’s focusing more on off-the-field success of the team. In essence, the team adopted a name that was tinged with racial and sectional meanings as the term “Cracker” conjured meanings of being a rural, white Georgian, an identity that stood in implicit contrast to that of emancipated African Americans. The exact circumstances surrounding the naming of the 1903 team are not entirely clear. The paper does not state whether it was their reporters who initiated the use of the nickname or if owner Abner Powell did. Still, the evidence suggest that the nickname was part of the Powell’s plan to brand the team in order to make them more successful financially. During his time in New Orleans, the team in that city began to use the nickname of the Pelicans. In fact, the nickname was first used during Powell’s initial season as player and manager in 1887. When he arrived in Atlanta in 1903, Powell was quite concerned with the popularity of the team. One of his first actions when he arrived in the city was to modernize the baseball grounds to create a

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<sup>107</sup> “First Player Arrive,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 12, 1903. “New Yorkers Come in Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 17, 1903.

better experience for those attending; thus, leading to greater profits for the team. Urging reporters to use a nickname such as the Crackers fits with the concept of modernizing the team since most teams had begun to adopt nicknames.<sup>108</sup>

Because of the association with the city and the state of Georgia, the “Cracker” nickname helped to reinforce bonds between the team and the region despite the fact that the owner of the team resided outside the city. When examining the name, the contemporary culture provides clues as to why the name “Cracker” was adopted by the team. Researchers who have examined Atlanta’s baseball history have noted that there are a few possibilities regarding the origins of the team’s name. In their studies, they have examined the meaning and roots of the name. However, these evaluations fail to uncover how the term “Cracker” was used in the city and state. Nor do they evaluate the involvement of Powell in naming the team. Some researchers have theorized that the name could have been a shortened version of the 1892 team nicknamed the Atlanta Firecrackers. However, in the years between 1892 and 1895, the Atlanta team also was called the Windjammers and the Atlanta Atlantas. Moreover, the newspaper never actually mentioned either of the nicknames in their review of the games. Other theories point to the name’s relation to the “Georgia Cracker,” which was a nickname for rural Georgians that date backs to the Revolutionary War. In rural folklore of both Georgia and in neighboring Florida, the term “cracker” referred to someone who would crack a whip at livestock. By the turn of the century, the city of Atlanta had outgrown its rural roots and the name’s meaning had evolved. Others have even noted the Celtic and English origins of the name and proposed that it was part of the Anglican heritage of the Old South. The term “Georgia Cracker” had been used in the state as

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<sup>108</sup> Derby Gisclair, *Early Baseball in New Orleans: A History of 19th Century Play* (New York: McFarland & Co., 2019).

early as the 1770s and the meanings and origins certainly have validity. By the end of the nineteenth century, the term had long been part of the state's lexicon.<sup>109</sup>

For many in Atlanta, the term had a similar meaning as “Yankee” did in the North. The two terms began to be used as a nickname for the sections during the Civil War. As Confederate soldiers used “Yankee” to describe the union army, northern newspapers used “Cracker” in a derogatory way of describing southerners. When discussing the people that lived in Atlanta, the *Chicago Tribune* stated “One cannot imagine a more villainous looking set of men that this same Atlanta crew. They are all Georgia ‘crackers.’ The poorest ‘white trash’ of Georgia, without education, or anything that would entitle them to be called men.” This sentiment held until the end of Reconstruction, during the years of reconciliation. An article appeared in 1891 that discussed the role of the “Georgia Cracker” in the New South. It traces the lineage of those individuals that carry the nickname. “He fought the British in the revolution...he helped build steamboats and invented the cotton-gin,” the article reminded its readers. The article then glosses over the Civil War: “he led his way to secession and furnished more troops than any other state; he was the first one to revive after the war, reclaiming the state and making the best of a bad bargain.” As for the contemporary “cracker,” “He is the Southern Yankee; the light of the New South, the hope of the nation...the Georgia Cracker stands the peer of the Knickerbocker on the Hudson or the Carrolls of the Chesapeake.”<sup>110</sup> The Georgia Cracker being compared and contrasted to a New England Yankee occurred also in Atlanta. Often, these discussion about the

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<sup>109</sup> James Denham, “The Florida Cracker Before the Civil War as Seen Through Travelers’ Accounts,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (April 1994), 452-468. Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988). Zsolt K. Viragos, “‘Celtic Oddities’: Patterns of Cracker Culture in the American South,” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 18 no.1 (Spring-Fall, 2012), 101-119.

<sup>110</sup> It is important to note that one of the first baseball teams organized were the New York Knickerbockers who began playing under modern baseball rules in 1845.

Cracker and the Yankee revolved around business acumen of the cotton mills. In an article in the *Constitution*, which discussed the success of the southern cotton mills, the paper noted that “the Georgia Cracker is a full match for the New Englander who settles down by his side.” Other articles promoted the work ethic of the cracker as opposed to their northern counterpart. “If you were to find an island in mid-ocean and build across it an unscalable wall and put on one side a Georgia Cracker – without implements, provisions, or money – and on the other side the smartest New England Yankee – with every imaginable implement – at year end, [the Yankee] would be in the debt [of the Cracker].”<sup>111</sup>

While these theories help to explain the origins of the nickname, they neglect to contextualize how the term was used in the context of post-Reconstruction Atlanta. Undoubtedly there was a Revolutionary War-era meaning to the term which referred to rural southerners who cracked whips at their livestock. Yet at the time the team was named, the term was certainly associated with the antebellum South and more closely aligned with slavery. In the heightened racial animosity of Reconstruction and its aftermath, the term also was associated with antebellum southerners who more directly involved with slavery. The team was ostensibly drawing its name from the Revolutionary-era meaning, but to those living in Atlanta at the time, the other meaning is certainly understood. Readers of the *Constitution* were quite familiar with the term and its connotations of the romanticized Old South. One of the more famous musings on the Cracker was written by Sarge Plunkett, a writer and journalist of the *Constitution*. A veteran of the Confederate army, Plunkett’s writing focused on the romanticized notion of the antebellum South and slavery. Written in February 1895, his article, “Georgia Cracker,” begins

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<sup>111</sup> “The Crew of the Atlanta,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 29, 1863. Pat Walsh, “The Georgia Cracker,” *Buffalo Morning Express*, June 8, 1891. “The Future Site of Cotton Manufacture,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 26, 1890. “Guy Beat the Beater,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 20, 1895.



with the line: “The old-time ‘cracker’ was a great man in his day and in his own way.” He then proceeds to reminisce about the manliness of the rural men of Georgia and directly relates the concept of the “cracker” with the maintenance of slavery and opposition to Black equality:

He was a ‘regulator in days when communities had to depend more upon nerve and muscle than they do now or law and morals. He was a mighty factor in keeping the n\*\*\*\*\* in subjection and his blustering independence made the ‘negro aristocracy’ impossible in Georgia. To be white and honest was all that was needed to make a man the peer of princes. You hear a lot about ‘southern aristocracy,’ but I can tell you that ‘aristocracy was not thought of among the ‘crackers’ – every white man asserted himself as the equal of any, if not just a little better. They were the highest type of physical manhood. Today the off-shoots from these old ‘Crackers’ handle goods with tender hands and strut in store clothes with an anxiety their daddy’s (sic) never knew and submit to a discipline that only n\*\*\*\*\* had to endure.

Throughout the lengthy article, Plunkett glamorizes the generation of rural white men that helped to fortify slavery in Georgia prior to the Civil War. While he was not concerned with the linguistic origins of the word, he argues that the “Georgia Crackers” were antithetical to the current generation of post-Reconstruction urbanites who labored in factories and acquiesced power to former slaves.<sup>112</sup>

Others also illuminated the links between the so-called race questions and the term “Cracker.” Georgia congressman, Thomas W. Hardwick, spoke on the subject in April of 1914. Speaking at a political event, Hardwick “paid beautiful tribute to the well-known Georgia institution, the Cracker” as he spoke about the supposed dangers that racial minorities posed. For Hardwick, the idea of the “cracker” was usefully contrasted with the inferior racial stock of immigrants to the United States. Within the speech, Hardwick juxtaposed the “Georgia Cracker” with “the continued and increasing influx of the scum of the earth, from every land, who come to

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<sup>112</sup> Sarge Plunkett, “Georgia Cracker,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 8, 1891. “Sarge Plunket, Georgia Author, At Rest Forever,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 2, 1922.

this country not to become a part of it, but to strip it bare, to take the bread of labor from American mouths and to carry back in triumph to some foreign shore the spoils of their brief sojourn among us.”<sup>113</sup>

For those who experienced the first season of Atlanta Cracker baseball, the team’s nickname held a very specific meaning to those attending games, rooting on the players, and reporting on the happenings at the ball field. At its heart, the term “cracker’ had become a romanticized nickname for rural farmers in Georgia. It makes sense that Powell instituted a regional nickname that locals identified with as the nickname for his baseball team. The name was instituted during a period where pre-Civil War histories and memories were evolving as part of reconciliation and the establishment of the Lost Cause narrative. Moreover, the naming of the team was part of Powell’s larger attempt to make the Atlanta franchise popular with the locals in order to increase the team’s profitability.

### **Becoming Atlanta’s Team**

Not only does the 1903 season mark the first widespread use of the nickname “Crackers,” but it also represented a major shift in how teams were judged successful. Prior to this, wins and losses were important markers of success. However, since teams were increasingly owned by a group of investors, the team’s financial successes were of the utmost importance. In fact, criticism from local commentators revolved around how successful teams were financially. On the field, the 1903 Atlanta Crackers had a mediocre year. They finished the season with 59 wins

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<sup>113</sup> Sarge Plunkett, “On the Caucasian Blood as Power,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 10, 1910. Sarge Plunkett, “Georgia is Best Place for Georgians,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 13, 1911. “Hardwick Pays Tribute to Georgia Crackers in Speech,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 19, 1914.

and 59 losses and placed fourth in the league. However, off the field, it was reported that Powell grossed somewhere between \$12,000 and \$15,000. More so than in previous seasons, the baseball grounds became a site of employment. It was reported by the *Constitution* that applications for the positions of groundskeeper, seat cushion salesman, ticket takers, and “for any other job under the sun” were to be filed before the season began. Each of these jobs required a salary to be paid for the 59 home games and any exhibition games the Crackers played. Additionally, Powell also had the expense of paying players. On average, players made anywhere from \$150 to \$250 a week, depending on their skill-level.<sup>114</sup> Despite the financial success of the Crackers in 1903, local commentators bemoaned the on-the-field product. Prior to the 1904 season, the *Constitution* noted that “For the past month there has been a controversy among fans of Atlanta as to what Mr. Powell should or could do to win the pennant for 1904.” M. K. Terry, former player and Powell associate, offered criticism and suggestions for the team. He noted that “[Powell] has no field general that is capable of taking charge of the team on the field. Now as to pitchers, Fred Ely is his best and he only ranks about a .500 per cent man, and Johnson cannot be depended on. The others are unknown quantities. None of the three [men that play first base] are in the class of the other first basemen of the league.” Terry continued by asking why the team does not pursue better players and his answer is that Powell was only concerned about the money and profits. “Why doesn’t he go after Gene DeMonteville? The reason he doesn’t is money,” argued Terry. He argues that if Powell really wanted to win on the field, he would spend the money on players or “step down and get out and let Atlanta people take

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<sup>114</sup> Salaries for the 1903 season are incomplete; however, it was reported in the paper that the players made \$100, \$150, or \$250 a week. Still, there were others that cost the team much more. During the 1903 season, Powell purchased the contract of Dave Murphy from a team in the Connecticut State League for the sum of \$500 dollars. Murphy was paid \$100 per-game; however, he only played in one game for the Crackers. Thus, the entire transaction cost Powell \$600. “Murphy Trade Angers Norwich,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 27, 1903.

charge of the team. Then the money spent on the games would largely be left at home and not taken to New Orleans and spent there on his little yacht.” From the expansion of the grandstands to the naming of the team the Crackers, Powell’s focus was profit.<sup>115</sup>

Both on the field and off the field, the 1904 season was a successful one for the Crackers. The team won 78 games and finished just three games back from the first place Memphis team. Still, as the season progressed, criticism of Powell increased in the local paper. At the beginning of the season, the paper painted Powell in a positive light. Unlike 1903, Powell used some of the profits to hire talented players. One such player was third-baseman Robert Cargo. Appearing in two games for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1892, Cargo was one of the most talented and popular players in the Southern Association. Powell spent a considerable amount of money to purchase Cargo from the Nashville team, for whom he played in 1902 and 1903. In meeting with reports in Atlanta, Cargo announced that he decided on living in the city permanently. “He has always been anxious to come to the best city in the United States, that is Atlanta, to play ball, and now he has decided to live here also,” proclaimed the *Atlanta Constitution*. Upon arriving in the city, Cargo was quoted as saying “There’s no place on earth like home, which sounds like Atlanta.” Along with the arrival of other players, Cargo’s signing and statements generated considerable excitement within the city and helped to quiet criticism of Powell. On opening day, the paper proclaimed that “The season will open with the brightest prospects in the history of the sport here.” Another headline proclaimed that Atlanta “is expected to win the 1904 Southern League Pennant.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> “Murphy Trade Angers Norwich,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 27, 1903. “Atlanta Fans are Knocking,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 16, 1904. “Sporting Gossip,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 5, 1904.

<sup>116</sup> “Sporting Gossip,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 20, 1904. “Atlanta’s 1904 Baseball Team,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 16, 1904. “League Season Opens Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 18, 1904.

For Powell, all seemed to be forgiven at the beginning of the season as criticism gave way to excitement. Just a few weeks in, however, tragedy befell the team as Cargo passed away from typhoid pneumonia. Other issues mounted throughout the season. One issue that arose was Powell's interaction with local fans. Over the winter, and continuing into the season, the team and Powell were inundated with requests for passes to games. He nicknamed these people as "pass fiends" and he published the letters he received in the press. One letter read: "Dear Manager Powell: My brother Bill used to know you seventeen years ago in New Orleans. How about a pass for old times' sake?" Another stated "I am one of the most promising young lawyers in the city and may be able to help you in various and sundry ways. Can you help me to a free pass?" Some were more straightforward: "Manager Powell, I would like to get a pass to the game for the season." His mocking tone when discussing the letters angered fans and furthered complaints against Powell as being a greedy out-of-towner.<sup>117</sup>

Along with fans seeking free passes, Powell also engaged in a feud with the municipal government. In May of 1904, the city council examined how much was spent on baseball games in the city. They declared that the city was spending too much to help with the games. They determined that they wanted Powell to pay for three things: the privilege of playing baseball within city limits, the costs associated with the use of Piedmont Field, and the use of city police who were needed to provide security at the games. Since games were played at city owned Piedmont Park, the council had the legal authority to levy taxes on Powell and the team. Still, the extra financial burdens of the baseball team upon the city were not the main factor for levying taxes. At a city council meeting on May 11, 1904, councilman Edward Carter stated that "When

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<sup>117</sup> "Pass Fiends After Powell," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 14, 1904. "Robert Cargo Died Yesterday," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 28, 1904.

a man like Abner Powell come here, gives us poor baseball and plays the kind of baseball we have been having, simply as a business and for the dollars and cents, we ought to place a tax on him.” By all accounts, Carter was impassioned when giving this statement. It was reported the next day that Carter slammed his hands on the table as he finished. After some banter between councilmembers, the consensus was reported that Powell would receive leniency if his team “would do business with the ball and run the race for first instead of last place.” Not only did these initial meetings represent a moment where the city’s government became interested in the business of baseball, it was a moment where the success of a business played a role in how much taxes were levied. The issues of the taxation of baseball helped to redefine the meaning of a successful business. In an impassioned, over-the-top way, Carter makes the argument that baseball was part of the public trust and mere profitability was not enough to judge it successful.<sup>118</sup>

To combat the tax dispute, Powell devised a novel solution: provide city council members and Mayor Evan Howell free passes to all the games. In providing the passes, Powell announced that the gifts were not intended to persuade officials one way or another on the tax issue. Powell also floated rumors that he was considering moving the team to Mobile if the tax ordinance passed. In response, the *Constitution* stated that “If he wants to take up his bag and remove to the little Alabama town, everyone in Atlanta will wish him the best of luck and a big crowd will assemble at the train to see him start on his trip.” The newspaper further emphasized that as the “bustling metropolis of the South,” Atlanta demanded and deserved a winning team. The reporter longed for the days where Atlanta citizens owned the team. Ultimately, the city

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<sup>118</sup> “Manager Powell Must Pay Taxes,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 8, 1904. “Powell’s Tax May Be Low If He Plays Better Ball,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 12, 1904.

council announced that Powell would have to pay \$300 annually and hire police officers to provide security. By instituting a tax, Atlanta's council suggested that baseball games were played not as a sport, but for the sake of revenue. Thus, baseball was business and subjected to the same taxes and licensing as other businesses within the city. Begrudgingly, Powell agreed to pay the tax while noting that his team was the only one taxed in the Southern Association.<sup>119</sup>

Throughout other southern cities where baseball was popular in the South – namely through the Carolinas, Tampa, New Orleans, and the rest of Georgia – baseball had been exempted from paying to play. In fact, the taxation of sports was a relatively new phenomenon. During the Spanish-American War of 1898, the United States Congress passed the War Revenue Act. Thought to increase income for the federal war effort, the act authorized a tax on a wide range of goods and services which included amusements. This line was interpreted to include professional baseball games. According to the Treasury department, there was a distinction between exhibition games – played by college and amateur teams – and professional games. The department deemed that teams that charged admission and ran as a “regular business for money” were subjected to taxation. Following the war, other northern states followed suit. Indiana passed a law regarding licensing professional baseball in 1901. Southern states followed suit. By 1903, Tennessee and Alabama both instituted an annual tax on teams within the state. While Atlanta's drive to tax baseball was not necessarily unique, it was distinctive since it was done at the city level and based on the success of the team on the field.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> “Passes Given to Councilmen,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 10, 1904. “Atlanta Wants a Winning Team,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 24, 1904. “Council Meets Again Tonight,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 7, 1904. “Baseball Taxed \$300 By County,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 10, 1904. Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events, 1880s-1930s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press). 254-256.

<sup>120</sup> United States, Bureau of Internal Revenue, *Treasury Decisions Under Internal Revenue Laws of the United States, Volume 2* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900) 180. Frank A. Horner, *The Revised Statutes of the State of Indiana* (Rochester, NY: Lawyers Co-Operative Publishing Co., 1901) 6836. Kenneth D. Garbade, *Birth*

Criticism, which continued into the summer, over the play of the team failed to recognize how baseball had changed in only a few years. Previously endeavors in the city featured teams that were comprised of a small pool of players, with minimal expenses. Thus, running a small professional league was relatively uncomplicated. By the turn of the century, baseball had become big business. Owners were expected to not just stage games, they also had to navigate complicated agreements with northern major league teams, facilitate the performance of the games, and account for every financial expense that the team incurred. In many ways, the Southern Association and the Atlanta Crackers had become the league and team that Henry Grady had envisioned when he helped to create the first Southern League in 1884. By 1904, the Southern association was tied to the Major Leagues in the North and routinely supplied players to those teams. However, Atlanta was not the center piece of the league. Devotees of Grady and the New South creed believed that Atlanta should be the jewel of the South. As Powell prioritized profit over business, those devotees argued that only an Atlanta citizen could propel the team to success on the field. And as critiques grew louder when Atlanta did not win the pennant, Powell announced that he would sell the team. In the announcement, Powell was specific in his wishes to sell the team to a local citizen.<sup>121</sup>

Powell sold the team in the early months of 1905 to two prominent members of Atlanta's elite society. One was John Dickinson, owner of the Southern Belting Company. Born in Amherst, MA, Dickinson migrated to the city in 1890 and established the steel mill just South of downtown. Dickinson was well known throughout the South and heralded for his business acumen. He had shown keen interest in the local sporting culture, especially the baseball team.

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*of a Market: The U.S. Treasury Securities Market from the Great War to the Great Depression*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012) 29-33.

<sup>121</sup> "Powell Offers Club for Sale," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 19, 1904.



The other investor that bought the Crackers from Powell was Walthall “Cap” Joyner. Chief of the fire department at the time of the sale, Joyner was no stranger to baseball in the city. He had been influential in bringing the game back to the city in 1898 and helped to establish a successful amateur team comprised of members from the city’s fire department. By purchasing a stake in the Crackers, Joyner further continued his interest in the local baseball club. Moreover, it also allowed him to continue to have a role in Atlanta society which helped him successfully run for mayor in 1907. The sale of the team was finalized on January 27, 1905 and the two men paid roughly \$17,000 for the team. The local paper was ecstatic at the news that two local men had purchased the team. A cartoon accompanied the story, titled “Uncle Ab’s Farewell,” displaying a shifty-looking Powell with a sack full of money over his shoulder following the sign to New Orleans. Within the story, the paper further stated that “Atlanta fans have been anxiously awaiting the time when local capital would interest itself in the team.”<sup>122</sup>

For his part, Joyner presided as president of the team while leaving Dickinson in charge of operating the Crackers. While Joyner seemed to have had a genuine interest in baseball, the purchase of the Crackers coincided with a successful run to become mayor of Atlanta. On January 2, 1906, Joyner announced his candidacy for mayor in the city. The announcement was only a year after putting together a bid to buy the team from Powell. Backed by the city’s Press Club, he received favorable coverage when he announced his bid. The story focused on Joyner’s professional and charitable achievements in the city. The *Constitution* praised the fact that, because of his leadership at the fire department, fire insurance rate had dropped dramatically in the city. Moreover, they noted his contributions to poor children in the city. Despite campaigning

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<sup>122</sup> “Conference had with AB Powell,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 26, 1905. “Powell Sells Atlanta Club,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 27, 1905. “Atlanta’s New Baseball Club,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 28, 1905. “John F. Dickinson Dies at Age 67,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 14, 1933.

for mayor, Joyner was still active in the city's baseball scene. The newspaper would report when he would attend games and noted when he would play on amateur teams. Thus, baseball allowed Joyner to keep his name relevant in the newspaper throughout his run. One such instance was a charity game between Atlanta's business and religious communities in which Joyner played first base. The game was umpired by Georgia governor Joseph Terrell and included other dignitaries from the city and state.<sup>123</sup>

Joyner subtly used baseball in his mayoral campaign. While Joyner's name appeared often in the sporting pages of the *Constitution*, so too did his campaign advertisements. Throughout the summer, reports from the previous day's Atlanta Crackers' game were followed by campaign advertisements from Joyner. "Vote for Joyner. Do not be misled by the slanders that have been heaped upon an honest, capable, and patriotic citizens," read one blurb days before the election. In turn, his opponent -- city councilman Thomas Goodwin -- highlighted his baseball dealing as reasons against electing him as mayor. Days before the election, in a full-page campaign advertisement targeted to "The Voters of Atlanta," Goodwin alleged that Joyner used his position in the community to enrich himself. This campaign ad focused on Joyner's baseball dealings. He alleged that Joyner was subservient to the Georgia Railway and Electric Company (GRE), who had a few months earlier purchased stock in the baseball team. Goodwin argued that, because of the railway's importance to the team (shuttling spectators to and from games), Joyner placed the companies' interests above others. Similar to the way that the city's press treated Powell when he owned the team, Goodwin's arguments highlight the tense relationship between personal enrichment and the belief that baseball was a communal treasure

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<sup>123</sup> "Joyner in the Race for the Mayoralty," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 21, 1906. "Chief W. R. Joyner is Indorsed for Mayor," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 12, 1906. "Game Umpired by Joe Terrell," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 26, 1906.

instead of a for-profit venture. Despite Goodwin's attacks, Joyner won the election by 261 votes. With such a slim margin of votes separating the two candidates, Joyner's appeal to the city's baseball fans proved to be decisive.<sup>124</sup>

In the days after his electoral victory, Joyner abdicated the presidency of the Atlanta club. During his campaign the previous year, Joyner enlisted the GRE to invest in the team. Spearheaded by owner Preston Arkwright, the company gained more financial interest in the team following Joyner's departure. The company saw a financial opportunity to increase ridership of the streetcar by promoting the game. With that in mind, the company helped to spur the movement to build a modern baseball stadium on unused company-owned land. Construction of the new stadium began in the first weeks of September of 1906 – days following the mayoral election and just prior to the Atlanta Race Riots. The wooden stadium was designed to hold more spectators than the smaller field at Piedmont Park. In fact, the whole location was thought of as a summertime amusement park. One side of the complex was home to an existing amusement park. On the other side sat the grandstands of the new baseball field. The complex was divided in the middle by GRE's streetcar. When discussing the complex, comparisons were made to parks in New York City and surrounding areas. In announcing the complex, reporters likened the complex to the "breadth of [the] Atlantic City boardwalk, Coney Island charm, and Luna Park likeness." The complex itself was an expensive undertaking. The baseball field alone cost \$60,000 to erect. The first baseball game at the new Ponce de Leon park was to be held on May 25, 1907. However, the opposing team from Shreveport failed to make it to Atlanta in time for the game. Nevertheless, a "record breaking" crowd showed up for the game anyway. The actual

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<sup>124</sup> "To the Voters of Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 19, 1906. "Advertisement," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 22, 1906. "Joyner Wins Over Goodwin by 261 Votes," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 23, 1906.

first game occurred the next day. It was reported that over 10,000 spectators came out for the game, well above the roughly 2,000 people that attended games in Piedmont Park. The principal benefactor of this increase was the streetcar company that helped to shuttle spectators to the new stadium.<sup>125</sup>

The new stadium witnessed the Atlanta Crackers' first pennant championship during their time in the Southern Association. This championship was repeated in 1909 with another pennant. "The end of the season finds Atlanta in first place – where she ought to be," proclaimed the *Constitution* the day following the 1909 season. Despite the successful season, the GRE placed the team for sale in 1911. It was reported that the GRE sought roughly double the price of what Joyner bought the team for in 1905. At the time, the company had two interested buyers. Previous owner, Walthal Joyner, attempted to once again purchase the team. However, he was unable to find enough investors for the \$40,000 asking price. The other interested party was the Coca-Cola company. Having established itself as one of Atlanta's most lucrative companies, the soft drink bottler began its foray in baseball during the first decade of the twentieth century. After negotiation with the GRE, Coca-Cola deemed the price too steep. Nevertheless, the thrilling pennant chase of 1913 proved to be lucrative for the company. That year alone, some 57 million passengers boarded the Atlanta streetcar as it passed through working class neighborhoods and sites of leisure. After three championships in nine years, the building of a

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<sup>125</sup> "Raking Over Cold Ashes of 1906 Season Now Past," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 17, 1906. "Trolley Service to be Improved," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 17, 1907. "Groans Went Up All Over Town," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 25, 1907. "10,000 Fans Witness Opening in New Park," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 26, 1907. Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 111-113.

brand-new ballpark, and increased revenue from advertisements, the team was sold for nearly the asking price put forward by the GRE.<sup>126</sup>

On November 3, 1915, the Atlanta Crackers were sold to a syndicate of investors headed by city councilman Frank Reynolds for a reported \$37,500. The sale included the franchise rights, players' contracts, and equipment. However, the sale did not include Ponce de Leon park, which the Georgia Railway and Electric company still owned. The new owners of the team were deeply tied to the city and the local government. Before entering local politics, Reynolds was a well-connected insurance salesman. He also was involved with the city's hotels. Prior to owning the Crackers, Reynolds was auditor of the famed Kimball House and was manager of publicity for the Ansley Hotel. Reynolds was elected to city council for the city's eight ward. Once the team organized its board of directors, Reynolds was elected director of the board. He was joined by fellow councilman Ed Inman, Coca-Cola executive Charles Rainwater, city trendsetter Charles Murphy, automobile salesman J. W. Goldsmith, whose father was a city councilman as well.<sup>127</sup>

### **Rell Jackson Spiller and "The Greatest Ballpark in the Minor Leagues"**

With the sale, the organization of the Crackers returned to an earlier model of elites pulling money to operate the local team. Under this leadership, the Crackers again won pennants in 1917 and again in 1919. The trajectory of the team changed again in 1921. Three of the

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<sup>126</sup> "Atlanta Wins the Rag," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 16, 1909. Clifford M. Kuhn, Harlon E. Joye, and E. Bernard West, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City 1914-1948* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990) 13-15. Riess, *Touching Base*, 59.

<sup>127</sup> "Frank Reynold Will Direct Hotel Ansley Publicity Campaign," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 4, 1915. "City Hall News," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 2, 1915. "Local Baseball Club Sold By Georgia Railway & Power Co.," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 3, 1915. "Charley Frank to Handle Crackers," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 27, 1915. "Autos," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 25, 1915. Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events, 1880s-1930s*, 126.

original investors sold their shares to Rell Jackson Spiller; thus, giving him a majority ownership in the team. One of Atlanta's most wealthy citizens, Spiller made his fortune in concessions at the ballpark. In many ways, his wealth was a byproduct of baseball's popularity in the city. In the 1920s, Spiller was considered one of the up-and-coming "Men of the South." He was credited with having attained success in life through his own efforts, which had become a hallmark of wealthy southerners in this era. He was born on a small, independent farm in Crawford, Georgia, in 1879. Unsatisfied with life on the farm, Spiller moved to Atlanta in 1900. He tried his hand at selling insurance but was then hired Coca-Cola Company as a traveling salesman. In 1919, he purchased the concession rights for Ponce de Leon park and also at Georgia Tech events. Thanks to his sales, Spiller quickly became one of the city's most wealthy individuals. When describing Spiller, the *Constitution* stated that "Mr. Spiller is known as the 'Chewing Gum King' of the South." The year prior to purchasing the Crackers, Spiller bought Ponce de Leon park for a reported \$75,000. When details of the purchase of the Crackers were published, he noted that "I bought a majority of the stock purely as a business investment, but I have been intimately acquainted with Atlanta baseball for years and I know that the investment will not be a good one unless Atlanta fans are given the very best baseball that money can buy." While baseball had always been owned by elites, Spiller's involvement was unique because he made his fortune directly from the business of baseball. Yet, he also was an example of the new elites of the New South. Spiller was not connected with the decaying elites of the Old South who relied on landownership and agriculture to amass their fortune. While unconventional and outside of the scope proposed by some New South disciples, Spiller was the epitome of a New South

entrepreneur whose wealth came from something other than growing cotton. Instead, he amassed his wealth from a new wave of consumerism stimulated by the popularity of baseball.<sup>128</sup>

Spiller was quite bombastic as owner of the Crackers. Throughout the first few years of his ownership, he made grandiose claims of players that he expected to sign and reports of his travels observing baseball talent amused and excited readers. In the months following the purchase of the team, he traveled to Chicago and Buffalo in hopes of signing new players. Another such trip saw Spiller travel to Cincinnati to offer the city's major league team money for one of their pitchers. He was quoted as saying that "I sent a very attractive offer toward Cincinnati and if it is money the Reds want for Cliff Markle, I believe they will [have an agreement]." Spiller even floated that he would sign hometown hero Ty Cobb to manage the team, despite the fact that the player was still employed by the Detroit Tigers.<sup>129</sup>

Spiller's most memorable accomplishment as team owner, however, was rebuilding Ponce de Leon park following a massive fire. During the early morning hours of September 8, fire spread through the outfield grandstands. By daybreak, the grandstands and clubhouses were destroyed. During a news conference the same day, Spiller stated that "I am willing to replace the stands with a modern concrete plant." He made well on his plans. The new park opened on March 29, 1924. Spiller spent \$185,000 of his own money to rebuild and modernize the field. Once completed, he estimated that the stadium and the land were worth a quarter of a million dollars. The field could hold 20,000 spectators. This was considered a huge number of seats for a

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<sup>128</sup> "The Daily Boil of the Political Pot," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 4, 1918. "R.J. Spiller Throws Big Feed for Hungry Crackers," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 23, 1920. "Local Baseball Club Purchased by R. J. Spiller," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 11, 1921. Daniel Decatur Moore, *Men of the South: A work for the Newspaper Reference Library* (New Orleans: Southern Biographical Association, 1922) 39.

<sup>129</sup> Cliff Wheatley, "Race is Close for All-Southern; Barron and Owen Reynolds Lead," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 30, 1921. Cliff Wheatley, "Spiller Believes That He Will Land Cliff Markle," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 11, 1922.

minor league field. For comparison, newly erected Yankee Stadium held about twice as many spectators as Spiller Field. Even New Orleans, with a population roughly double the size of Atlanta, could only expect to hold 10,000 spectators. The increase in attendance amplified the prospects of more revenue being generated from games. Moreover, the new stadium brought publicity to the city. It was regarded as one of the most unique fields constructed in the South. As far away as Hawaii, reports of this new, modern minor league stadium fascinated reporters. The field featured a luxurious restroom for women and lighting arrangements to play night baseball. The ballpark also updated its African American section. It was reported that Spiller added a separate grandstand and outfield bleachers for African Americans. Ponce de Leon park was much less accommodating for African American. Perhaps the most eccentric feature of the park was a hot-air balloon that hung over the field on days when the Crackers were playing. The balloon could be seen as far as 20 miles from the field. The design of the field – with its focus on profit, modernity, and uniqueness – helped to promote the city. Similar to how Spiller ran the Crackers, an over-the-top stadium was best for his and the city’s economic fortunes while building a modern facility that was unlike anything found in other southern cities.<sup>130</sup>

The Atlanta Crackers defeated Ty Cobb and the Detroit Tigers in the first game played at Spiller Field. Reporters marveled at the site of the new field. Paul Warwick, reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution*, noted that the “new park matches Atlanta.” It “looks metropolitan, like a real ballpark surrounded by real stands made for real people to sit in.” Even though only one game had been played, it was already being called the best ballpark in the South. As word spread

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<sup>130</sup> “Attendance at New Orleans Over 10,000,” *The Birmingham News*, April 21, 1923. Ed Danforth, “Ponce De Leon Park Will Be Remodeled,” *The Birmingham News*, September 9, 1923. A similar story appeared in newspapers throughout the United States that promoted the new stadium in Atlanta: “Atlanta Park Has All Trimmings Even Balloon to Announce Dates,” *The Honolulu Advertiser*, May 25, 1924.



throughout the winter, teams from the North made plans to play exhibition games during the spring. Along with the Tigers, the Boston Braves, Chicago White Sox, Cincinnati Reds, Cleveland Indians, New York Giants, New York Yankees, and Washington Senators all played exhibition games during the first two weeks of April. As teams passed through, the city and the ballpark received favorable press in northern newspapers as reporters commented on the modern field.<sup>131</sup>

Over the next few years, the Crackers routinely attracted around 10,000 to 15,000 spectators a game. For the 1924 season, 244,278 people attended games at Spiller Field. In 1925, the city witnessed another championship as Atlanta broke its own record from the season before as 284,611 people watched the Crackers' play. By the 1930 season, Atlanta had the highest culminative attendance of all the teams in the Southern Association since 1915. During that span, the team drew over 2.5 million spectators, thousands more than second-place Memphis. Still, attendance slightly declined from previous heights of the mid-1920s. In 1927, only 159,308 people attended games. While the number slightly rose in 1928 and 1929, they were still under the 200,000. For many in the business of baseball, attendance was how individuals produced profit. This included owners and managers of the team. In 1930, an audit was conducted of the team's finances and profit margins from the previous seven years (1922 to 1929). The audit uncovered that the average profit margin was \$58,345.69. For the early twentieth century, these were the team's most successful years. And these profits were expected to trickle down to

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<sup>131</sup> Paul Warwick, "Opening Win Dedicates New Field," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 30, 1924. "Bengals Fall Before Rally of Crackers," *The Detroit Free Press*, March 30, 1924. "Giants and White Sox Play at Spiller's Field Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1924. "Giants Beat Sox of Chicago," *New York Daily News*, April 4, 1924. "Red Sluggers Pound Three Tiger Pitchers," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 8, 1924. "Washington and Boston Play at Spiller's Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 10, 1924. Ralph McGill, "Crackers Gate for 15 Years League's Best," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 18, 1930.

employees of the club. After firing their previous manager for the 1929 season, Spiller made an offer to established manager Johnny Dobbs. In the telegram sent to Dobbs, Spiller offered him a three-year contract with a \$9,000 guaranteed salary to manage the Atlanta team. He also offered lucrative bonuses according to attendance. If the club attendance was 225,000, Dobbs received an extra \$10,000. For an attendance figure of 250,000, \$11,000 would be paid to the manager. 275,000 equaled a bonus of \$11,500 and 300,000 equaled \$12,500. Despite the allure of bonus money, the Crackers only attracted roughly 163,000 people for the 1930 season. Nevertheless, by the onset of the Great Depression, baseball had become a lucrative business for the city's elite business and baseball men.<sup>132</sup>

By the end of the decade, baseball had become too big of a business for one individual to sustain, as the normal ebbs-and-flows of business were more difficult for individuals to financially overcome. In August of 1929, Spiller announced that he planned to sell both the team and the stadium grounds. From the time the new park was built, the location had boomed in development. A large Sears-Roebuck department store had been built across the street from the stadium. A public swimming pool and park were also erected adjacent to the field. The new development, coupled with the expansion of local and counties government's power to tax, caused taxes on the team and ballpark to increase. When discussing selling the stadium, Spiller stated that the "purchaser can obtain the title to the land by carrying the grandstand away on his shoulders or by payment of \$1." Additionally, he sought younger talent to replace established

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<sup>132</sup> "Spiller Seeks New Site for Baseball Park," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 14, 1929. Roy E. White, "Spiller Plans Contract Offers to Five Students at Baseball School," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 23, 1929. "Home Team Bows to Invaders in Southern League Opener," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 17, 1929. Correspondence from Rell Spiller to Johnny Dobbs, October 28, 1929, MS-1067, Box 1, Folder 2, Atlanta Baseball Corporation documents, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

players who cost more. At the end of the 1929 season, Spiller offered numerous contracts to players out of high school and college.<sup>133</sup>

Still, baseball was extremely popular in the city. On opening day in 1929, headlines read “Atlanta Baseball-Mad” as it was speculated that 20,000 people would attend the first game of the season. That season, the team garnered over \$200,000 in revenue from ticket sales. Nevertheless, the Great Depression further complicated financial issues for Spiller. During the first years of the 1930s, sports were a low priority for many living in the city. While the game was still popular, ticket sales were down considerably. For the 1932 season, the Southern Association devised a plan to boost attendance by offering a trophy to the team with the highest attendance for their first home game. Atlanta had a monumental response to the challenge. City Mayor James Key issued a proclamation of a half-holiday for city employees. Businesses decided to close early for the game and neighboring towns and cities also pledged to help boost attendance at the game. In fact, the city received 21 telegrams from mayors pledging cooperation and support to supersede Nashville’s attendance of over 14,000 people. Prior to the Depression, crowds frequently topped over 18,000. Nonetheless, the Crackers well short of their goal of 20,000 as only 12,020 people attended the game. With mounting financial issues, Spiller found a buyer for the Crackers. In September of 1932, the Coca-Cola Company purchased the team and the stadium for a reported \$300,000 plus obligations of debt.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> “Spiller Seeks New Site for Baseball Park,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 14, 1929. Roy E. White, “Spiller Plans Contract Offers to Five Students at Baseball School,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 23, 1929. “Home Team Bows to Invaders in Southern League Opener,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 17, 1929. Ralph McGill, “Crackers Gate for 15 Years League’s Best,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 18, 1930.

<sup>134</sup> Ralph McGill, “Crackers Gate for 15 Years League’s Best,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 18, 1930. Jimmy Jones, “Atlanta to Play Nashville in Opening of Home Season; Record Crowd Anticipated,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 14, 1932. Jimmy Jones, “Rosenthal’s Home Run Wins Opening Game for Crackers,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 15, 1932. Ralph McGill, “Crackers Gate for 15 Years League’s Best,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 18, 1930. Ralph McGill, “Baseball Club Receivership to be Asked by Bondholders,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 19, 1932.

## **America's Game Meets America's Drink**

The alliance between Coca-Cola and baseball did not begin when the company bought the team in 1932. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the soft drink company was involved with the game in some fashion through company teams, advertisements, selling products at games, and, finally, purchasing the professional team. An Atlanta staple, the company began in 1886 when John Smith Pemberton created the first batches of the drink. As it grew, the company fulfilled many of the promises of the New South creed. While Henry Grady and his disciples never envisioned a company such as Coca-Cola, the company became a uniquely southern industry that helped Atlanta, and the South, prosper through non-agricultural industry. Even though the company was firmly based in Atlanta, very rarely was it ever seen as a southern company. Instead, through a series of successful marketing campaigns, Coca-Cola became the quintessential American company. Rosey-cheek Santa Claus, smiling American G.I., and action-shots of baseball players all became associated with Coca-Cola by the end of the 1930s. But the company and Atlanta grew side-by-side. As Atlanta grew to become the Jewel of the South, so too did the Coca-Cola Company become the jewel of American consumer colonialism after World War II. Behind much of the Americanization of a southern company was baseball. As the popularity of baseball grew in the city, so too did the investment the Coca-Cola company made in baseball both locally and nationally. In this way, the popularity of baseball in Atlanta helped to convince the company that baseball, along with other nationally recognized cultural entities, could be useful to make the soft drink national, instead of regional.

The purchase of the Crackers by Coca-Cola was not the first time that the company was involved with baseball. In fact, baseball has been part of the company culture since at least 1902.

While Pemberton created the drink, the company blossomed under the leadership Asa Candler who purchased the rights to the drink in 1892 and incorporated the company the same year. The company steadily grew through the last years of the nineteenth century. By the turn of the century, the company had become a crucial industry in Atlanta. Moreover, the drink had begun to take over the South through the establishment of bottling networks and the selling of franchises. Specifically in Atlanta, the company was becoming involved in the local culture. Like many other industries and companies throughout the United States, the Coca-Cola Company's first foray in baseball was through industrial leagues. While these leagues were often unorganized and rarely reported on, few records of players and games do exist. One such report states that, on July 27, 1902, the company team played a game against the furniture makers from the Chamberlain-Johnson-DuBose Company. The story of the game suggests that at least some of the teams was comprised of white-collar employees. The star of the game was Charles Rainwater. At the time of the game, the twenty-year-old was a bookkeeper for the company. He was a rising star in the company. By 1905, Rainwater was part-owner of several bottling plants and, in 1906, he became secretary-treasurer for the company. Rainwater rose through the company to become the company's vice president in 1933. By all accounts, Rainwater was an accomplished baseball player and golfer. His involvement in baseball was more than just playing. In 1915, Rainwater invested in the Atlanta Crackers and was a member of the board of directors for the team.<sup>135</sup>

Outside of the company team, Coca-Cola's early interactions with baseball in the city was at Atlanta Cracker games. As early as 1901, the product was sold at professional games.

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<sup>135</sup> "Coca-Cola Co. 16, C. J. Du B. Co. 11," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 27, 1902. "Advertisement," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 12, 1904. "Soft Drink Pioneer Rainwater Dies at 91," *Pensacola News Journal*, April 24, 1973.

Under the leadership of Abner Powell, the Crackers began selling concessions that included peanuts and the soft drink. As sole owner of the team, Powel handled contracts to sell the drink at the games. Selling Coca-Cola fit within Powell's objective of incorporating the Crackers into Atlanta culture as much as possible. Businessmen and women's associations were licensed to sell the soft drink at baseball games throughout the city. Not only were the drinks sold at professional games, but it also was a popular part of college baseball. During these games, young ladies donned red badges and roamed the grandstands peddling peanuts, popcorn, crackerjacks, and Coca-Cola. Outside of the financial benefits, the company saw very little positive publicity during the first decade of the twentieth century by selling their products at baseball games. Violent episodes at the ballpark often included glass Coca-Cola bottles being hurled at opposing players and umpires. One such episode occurred after a controversial decision cost the Crackers a game. Angry fans hurled empty Coca-Cola bottles at the umpire who made the call as he made his way through the crowd to the waiting streetcar. In response to the violence, the team was forced to provide umpires and visiting teams shelter from the "danger of Coca-Cola bottles." The reports of violence coincide with the company exploring other sports to invest. By the end of the decade, they aligned with the city's speedway. Automobile racing had become an important part of southern culture and stockcar racing had become lucrative for those who participated. In September 1909, the company became involved by awarding the Coca-Cola Trophy. Along with a cash prize of \$600 for first place, \$300 for second, and \$150 for third, a trophy bearing the company's logo was awarded to the winner of a two-hundred-mile stockcar race. In another race in November, the company offered another \$5,000 worth of prizes.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> "Tried to Mob Umpire Kelly," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 12, 1902. "Sporting Gossip," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 11, 1904. "Atlanta Team Reports Soon," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 4, 1905. "Yellow Jackets Play Georgia," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 22, 1909. "Big Prizes at Atlanta," *Cycle and Automobile Trade Journal*, 94.

Despite a slow start in the first decade of the twentieth century, the company reinforced its relationship with baseball in 1910. During the summer months, advertisements appeared in local newspapers that featured popular Major League players. The early adverts drew connections between the morality of baseball and the morality of the drink. The first of advertisements featured George Gibson of the World Series champion Pittsburgh Pirates. In the icon script, it stated that “[Gibson] writes us that he is enthusiastic about Coca-Cola. You, too, will like Coca-Cola because it relieves fatigue, refreshes, quenches the thirst and is *absolutely wholesome* [emphasis added].” Another advertisement that ran that summer featured Chicago Cubs’ player Frank Chance. “You may use my name as one of your many customers who have derived benefits from drinking Coca-Cola...[it] is delicious, refreshing, and wholesome.” The advertisement campaign coincided with the popularity of the Crackers. They appeared only months after the team won their second league championship in three years. Moreover, they appeared just a few years after Walthall Joyner demonstrated the usefulness of using baseball as advertisement during his successful mayoral campaign. By the end of the 1920s, the soft drink was a staple at Spiller Field. In both 1929 and 1930, Coca-Cola garnered over \$14,000 in sales for the Crackers’ home games, despite attendance numbers being lower than they were in years prior.<sup>137</sup>

Capitalizing on these trends, the Coca-Cola company infused notions of morality within their baseball advertisements. They appeared during at a time when the company faced backlash for both the amount of caffeine used in the drink, as well as the presence of cocaine. Within the South, and Progressive Era United States as well, both ingredients came to be considered

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<sup>137</sup> Coca-Cola Advertisement,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 8, 1910. “Coca-Cola Advertisement,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 15, 1910. Bartow J. Elmore, *Citizen Coke: The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism* (New York: Norton Press, 2015).

immoral and dangerous. Crusades against the drugs occurred alongside the prohibition movements that swept the South. In 1909, the company was charged by the federal government for false advertising and for containing banned stimulants: caffeine. The drug was viewed as dangerous, and the trial revolved around experts debated the properties and effects of caffeine. For many in the South, the surprising element of the trail was that an African American employee was mixing ingredients when the federal government inspected the company's operations. Such a flagrant violation of Jim Crow segregation was a public relations nightmare for the company. Appealing to consumer's love of baseball and reinforcing the game's supposed virtue coincided with attacks of immorality and violating segregation. Thus, the company further attached itself to baseball since the game had already been rhetorically established as being the bastion of morality.<sup>138</sup>

After surviving the accusations of the federal government, Coca-Cola expanded their advertisement campaigns in both Atlanta and throughout the United States. By the middle of the 1910s, advertisements featuring Major League baseball players in newspapers appeared in numerous locations. In Atlanta, the company made minor investments into the game. On opening day for the Crackers, Coca-Cola offered their employees free tickets and gave everyone a half-day holiday. The company team was still active. By 1922, the "Coca-Cola Diamond" was built at the company's headquarters. Like many other local industrial leagues, the company team competed on Saturday afternoons. The Coca-Cola team became a popular discussion during the summer of 1924. That year the team played against the Atlanta paper company, utilities companies, and construction companies. They also took part in the "Perrin League," one of four

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<sup>138</sup> Deborah Blum, *The Poison Squad: One Chemist's Single-Minded Crusade for Food Safety at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018) 224-315. Elmore, *Citizen Coke*.



city leagues that were comprised of amateur company teams. The Coca-Cola team was tied for first place with the Atlanta Paper Company. Coupled with the popularity of the Crackers, the excitement from the industrial leagues caused a boom for amateur baseball in the city. Until the purchase of the Crackers in 1932, the company actively fielded a competitive amateur baseball team. Having already ascribed to the belief that baseball provided players with a moral exercise, a company team fit within the conviction that company-sponsored baseball helped with moral, kept workers loyal, and provided city-dwelling industrial workers the opportunity to be outdoors.<sup>139</sup>

One of the casualties of the Great Depression was the industrial leagues and the Coca-Cola Company team. Locally, the game was failing. There was little money for amateur leagues to operate and companies had a difficult time investing in recreational activities such as baseball. Hardships also befell the local professional teams. Despite the love affair the city had with the Crackers in the 1920s, the club was on the cusp of bankruptcy. By the 1933 season, financial obligations were estimated to exceed \$500,000 and owners of the team simply could not fund the team. Despite the cries to grow local businesses, the South's biggest and most popular baseball team could not survive with only local investors. By the 1930s, the team relied on numerous investors and help from Coca-Cola company. Warning signs appeared in 1930 when Spiller's company, the Atlanta Baseball and Amusement Corporation, requested \$5,000 from shareholders. In need of additional capital to operate the team, the company also sought new investors. President of Spiller's Company, L. W. "Chip" Robert, sent letters to shareholders requesting them to "find the time to select ten friends of yours and write to them; it would be

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<sup>139</sup> "Prade League," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 17, 1922. "Perrin League," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 18, 1924. "Perrin League Tie to be Broken," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 9, 1924.

very helpful, and personally, I would urge that you do so.” At the time, shares cost \$12.50 a piece. Robert stated that “None of us can make any promise as to yield, but by past experiences it looks as if this stock will pay six percent.” The company also acquired loans from the Coca-Cola company. At the time of the sale in 1932, one of the team’s largest creditors was Coca-Cola.<sup>140</sup>

There was little sign of trouble in the papers. In public responses, the owners of the team were confident that they would survive and prosper through the season. In private, however, the team was in financial trouble throughout the 1930 season and felt that only an improvement on the field would help with the team’s finances. After a slow start, the team publicly noted that they were pleased with the players and, according to Roberts, “sink or swim” with the current group. “This was given out for the psychological effect on the baseball squad itself, because Johnny Dobbs [the team’s manager] felt that we had been making so many changes,” Robert noted. He concluded in a letter by stating that the team had no choice but to either improve the on-the-field performance or sell the team. This became a theme of the early years of the Great Depression. “If we are up in the race next year [during the 1931 season], there is no doubt that we will make from \$50,000 to \$100,000.” Unfortunately for the team, the memory of glory years could not shake the reality of the concurrent massive economic downturn.<sup>141</sup>

The Atlanta Baseball and Amusement Corporation began serious discussions about selling the team to Coca-Cola during the 1930 season. In a letter to L. F. Montgomery, Coca-Cola executive and future company president, Robert confided that “we have had several

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<sup>140</sup> Correspondence from Chip Robert to Frank G. North, February 19, 1930, MS-1067, Box 1, Folder 2, Atlanta Baseball Corporation documents, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia. Financial Statement, Sheet 1, 1932, MS-1067, Box 1, Folder 2, Atlanta Baseball Corporation documents, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>141</sup> Correspondence from Rell Spiller to L. W. Robert, July 23, 1930, MS-1067, Box 1, Folder 2, Atlanta Baseball Corporation documents, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia. Correspondence from Rell Spiller to L. W. Robert, November 10, 1930, MS-1067, Box 1, Folder 2, Atlanta Baseball Corporation documents, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

discussions with Mr. Spiller in regard to his making a proposition to our board whereby the purchase price of the baseball franchise is materially reduced.” In response, Montgomery requested that the team defer one more year before selling the team to the company in an attempt to clear up the debt that the team incurred. Despite being one of Atlanta’s most affluent individuals, Spiller’s wealth had dissipated. Moreover, for the 1930 season, the team had operated with a deficit of \$2,317.32. Yet, the Great Depression was not totally to blame. The business of baseball had grown in the city to a level previously unseen. The cost of operating had ballooned in 1930. The cost of the team incurred by the Atlanta Baseball and Amusement Corporation for 1929 was \$26,615. The sum had increased to \$58,744.82 in 1930. While revenue was down in 1930, the decrease was marginal. Concession sales decreased \$2,000 from 1929 to 1930 and ticket sales fell over \$5,000. Yet, the revenue generated from games played on the road was up over \$5,000. The biggest deficit was in player salaries. The team spent roughly \$10,000 more on player salaries in 1930 as opposed to 1929 and \$3,000 more for their manager. The team also owed \$270,888 in loans, much of which came from the Coca-Cola company.<sup>142</sup>

Rumors abounded over who would purchase the Crackers. Reporters speculated that executives from Warner Brothers were in town to discuss purchasing the team. It was noted that Major League teams were also interested, namely the New York Yankees and the Brooklyn Dodgers. Ultimately, the Coca-Cola company purchased the team in the fall of 1932. The deal had been more than two years in the making. For all intents and purposes, the company purchased the team by simply assuming its debt. Fourteen investors in the club each lost roughly

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<sup>142</sup> Financial Records, 1933, MS-1067, Box 1, Folder 2, Atlanta Baseball Corporation documents, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia. Financial Records, 1934, MS-1067, Box 1, Folder 2, Atlanta Baseball Corporation documents, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

\$50,000. “The investors made a commendable effort only to find it impossible of success,” noted Ralph McGill of the *Atlanta Constitution*. Coca-Cola established the Atlanta Baseball Corporation as the entity that operated the team. The company sought to “create an organization which not only would catch the public fancy, but inspire the public confidence.” Still, not all in the company were keen on purchasing the team. J. T. Lupton, a Coca-Cola stockholder, wrote a letter to the company hoping to dissuade them from buying the team. His letter suggests that the reasons the company purchased the team was to grow its business within baseball in Atlanta. “I am strongly inclined to think that the baseball park can’t get along without bottled Coca-Cola. But the main thought was that by giving all your time and thought to building up your own business in the old legitimate way will prosper more. I am inclined to think that the Atlanta Coca-Cola Co. have their hands full in looking after their own business.” Despite some hesitation, the sale of the team went through on October 19, 1932.<sup>143</sup>

The deal to purchase the Crackers had multifaceted benefits to the Coca-Cola Company. First and foremost were the prospects of increased profits. Prior to 1929, the team’s profit margins had been lucrative. Even though the company lost money the first couple years they operated the team, they had turned a profit of \$9,000 in 1935 and \$44,000 in 1936. Still, profit was not only reasoning behind the company’s decision to heavily invest in the team. By purchasing the Atlanta Crackers, the Coca-Cola company consummated the marriage between the soft drinks and baseball. By 1932, the company had been in business with Spiller and the owners of the Crackers for over five years. In addition to lending the team money and profiting

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<sup>143</sup> “Michalove and Bobby Discuss Golf Movies,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 13, 1932. Ralph McGill, “Baseball Club Receivership to be Asked by Bondholders,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 19, 1932. “Spiller Thanks Baseball Fans,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 21, 1932. Jimmy Jones, “Wilbert Robinson to Head Crackers for Next Season,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 27, 1932.

off the sale of their soft drinks at the game, the company spent much of their local advertisement budget on the Crackers and even sponsored the team's radio broadcasts.

Additionally, investing in the hometown team provided the global company with a more grandiose version of a company team. Since the end of Atlanta's industrial leagues prior to 1929, the company lacked a summertime leisure activity to provide to its employees. The Crackers afforded the company with an opportunity to present baseball and all the benefits that the game entailed, while still turning a profit. In years past, the company-sponsored team offered employees a chance to either play or watch baseball – something that was deemed a beneficial exercise for industrial urban workers. With the Crackers, the company often closed its plant on special gamedays and offered tickets to its employees, all the while turning a profit.<sup>144</sup>

Buying the Crackers, and overall investment of baseball, helped the company to maintain its national image despite being a southern company. Baseball allowed Coca-Cola to be a national brand as it attached itself with the national game. Owning the Crackers was simply another layer to the marketing campaign that focused on baseball. Regionally, the company promoted the fact that they had owned one of the Southern Associations' most storied franchise. Nationally, the Crackers offered the company with an opportunity to expand its presence in Major League cities in the North. During the 1920s, minor league baseball had changed to the point where teams like the Crackers were intimately intertwined with Major League teams. To secure the rights to players and managers, minor league teams owners negotiated with Major League teams. This provided Coca-Cola with an opportunity to expand its business to more of the nation as part of its baseball investment.

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<sup>144</sup> Riess, *Touching Base*, 29.

## Industrial Baseball in the Jewel of the South

Coca-Cola was not the only industrial company to involve itself in baseball during the first years of the twentieth century. Likewise, the Crackers were not the only baseball team in town. Before the rise of Coca-Cola, Atlanta was home to one of the South's largest cotton mills. While Coca-Cola became the quintessential New South business, the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill closely embodied Henry Grady's vision for the New South. Built in 1881, the company was one of the larger textile manufactures in the United States by the turn of the twentieth century. The mill was located on the west side of Oakland Cemetery on the former site of an antebellum slave market and was owned by Jacob Elsas. Despite boasting by local officials in the 1870 and 1880, industrialization in the city was still nowhere near the capacity of northern cities. Nevertheless, the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills laid the foundation for the city to rival industrial capacity in the early twentieth century. Born in Germany, Elsas immigrated to Cincinnati around 1860. The eighteen-year-old worked in factories and odd jobs until he traveled in Nashville in 1864 in an attempt to profit from wartime conditions in the city. From there, Elsas was drafted into the Union Army and was part of General William T. Sherman's supply line at Cartersville, Georgia which was only 50 miles outside of Atlanta. After a brief stay in the city after the war, Elsas moved to Atlanta in 1868. After three failed business ventures, he opened a general store in the city. It was from here that Elsas, along with two other associates, purchased the former slave market and began to produce paper bags. By the turn of the century, Elsas was one of the most wealthy and influential members of Atlanta's elite society and the mill was one of the South's most successful.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed, *Race, Class, and Community in Southern Labor History* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1994). Fink, *The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills Strike of 1914-1915*. Clifford M. Kuhn,

Historically, the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills was most widely known for the strike of 1914-1915. One of Atlanta's most infamous labor disputes, the dispute occurred over worker contracts that required one week's notice for quitting, wage increases, and failure by Elsas to recognize union representation. The strike occurred only three years after the company fielded its first baseball team. Ultimately, the strike fell out over issues of cohesion among workers. At the time, labor trade journals had theorized that baseball had the power to bring unions together and teach teamwork; thus, strengthening the union. Because of the immense popularity of professional baseball in the city, however, factory baseball was less likely to create bonds among workers in Atlanta. Since those who promoted baseball – such as local officials, newspaper reports, and business elites – often promoted the game as enriching and unifying the city around the Crackers, industrial baseball was far less important. Moreover, since the company started playing much later into the baseball boom, the company team lacked any tradition that allowed workers to gravitate to it. In the Carolina cotton mills, the lack competition from a local professional baseball team meant that factory teams were extremely popular. Additionally, in places like Tampa, where industrial baseball was an important part of working-class culture, the birth of the local minor league team often spelled doom from these industrial teams and leagues. A similar situation occurred in Atlanta. Hungry for recognition, Atlanta promoted its professional team while ignoring its amateur, working-class teams. While baseball was not the sole reason that the strike failed, it may have played a role in the lack of cohesion among workers.

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*Contesting the New South Order: The 1914-1915 Strike at Atlanta's Fulton Mills* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*.

Baseball at the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills occurred much later than industrial baseball in other southern cities. The first company-sponsored baseball activity was the building of a gymnasium in 1905. It was still not recognizable as an industrial baseball team. Located on Decatur Street, the facility was built for the company employees. It was part of a larger expansion that saw the company build 100 company-owned houses in response to the mill switching to 24-hour production. The gymnasium included spaces for gymnastics, a handball and basketball court, and an indoor baseball diamond. The inclusion of indoor baseball was a trend that had been developed in Chicago during the 1890s. The game featured a bigger ball and was played on a smaller field. In the North, indoor baseball was thought to supplement the colder months when the game could not be played. In the South, where winters were warmer and shorter, it was a way of introducing baseball while saving money on space and equipment. The building of the gymnasium and instituting baseball was part of a larger plan on the company's part to morally enrich employees. According to the company, the gymnasium offered "such a magnificent means of opportunity for reaching God's children, to uplift and help them."<sup>146</sup>

The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills formed their first official company baseball team during the spring of 1911. This was exceptionally late compared to other mills in the South. The formation of the team coincided with a peak in popularity of the Atlanta Crackers. Having finished in first place in 1907 and 1909, and coming off a strong showing during the 1910 season, the professional team was extremely popular coming into the 1911 season. The factory team played on Saturdays and competed against other teams representing local businesses. So-called home games were played on the company's baseball field, which was located near the

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<sup>146</sup> "Will Open Playground," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 20, 1905. "Home Settlement Work is Progressing Rapidly in the Mill Districts of Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 5, 1905. Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The People's Game* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 364-5.



factory. The 1911 factory team won the “Saturday Afternoon League” by defeating the Whittier Mills team by a score of 9 to 1. One of the stars of the game was Sam Barnes. The thirty-four-year-old was a laborer in the factory. While limited records exist, census data suggest that players on the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills team were employed by the factory.<sup>147</sup>

The company team was ready to once again compete in the Saturday Afternoon League prior to the summer of 1914. In April, a meeting was held to organize the summer league and six teams committed to play each other over the course of the season. The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills team played its first game of the summer on May 3, 1914. Despite losing to the Atlanta Exposition team by a score of 22-to-1, the team won its next games. Three days after a game in which Lakewood Mills failed to show, on the morning of May 20, 1914, workers walked out of the mill and immediately formed picket lines around the building. Workers had grown frustrated at the company’s management over the firing of workers who were unionists. Longstanding grievances over wages and contracts emboldened workers to walk off the job. Despite the ongoing strike, the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills team still played their scheduled game against the Scottdale Mills the next Saturday. It was extremely rare for a company to keep its factory team while workers were on strike. Nevertheless, on May 24, the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills lost their scheduled game by a score of 16-to-1. The next Saturday, May 31, the team lost to Whittier Mills, 12-to-2. And on June 7, the company team lost again to the Atlanta Exposition, 15-to-5. Following the game, the company abandoned its baseball team after losing by a combined score of 43-to-8. While it is impossible to suggest that losing by such a wide margin had anything to do with the strike, the fielded a similar lineup as they did in the 1913. That team

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<sup>147</sup> “Fulton Bag Wins First Contest,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 17, 1911. “With the Amateurs,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 24, 1911. United States Census, 1910 Population Report.

was competitive against the same teams that they faced in 1914. Moreover, during strikes, there was a tendency for minor occurrences to be opportunities for subversion. Baseball games that were sponsored by the company does provide this sort of prospect to subvert as the company team played poorly in order to make the company look bad in the press.<sup>148</sup>

The strike ultimately failed and was declared over in May of 1915. By June, the company team was back on the field with an entirely new lineup. One of their first games back, the team defeated the Atlanta Federals by a score of 17-to-1. “The features of the game were the heavy hitting of the entire Fulton team,” noted the *Constitution*. Throughout the end of the 1910s, the company team was more visible within the baseball culture of the city. In 1917, the team nearly won the newly formed city’s Amateur Baseball Championship. Despite their best efforts, the team lost to St. Paul of the Sunday School League. It was reported that 500 people were in attendance for the game. By 1919, a new city league was organized comprising of ten teams. The members of the league were blended between industrial teams and religious teams. Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills was joined by teams representing the Western Electric Company, Doss Tire and Rubber Company, the North Avenue Presbyterian church, Camp Jessup, Atlantic Steel Company, the Federal Prison, Federal Reserve Bank, and Atlanta Firefighters, and the Central Baptist church. During the 1914-1915 cotton mill strike, the mill was critical of the city’s religious entities who sympathized with the striking workers. By the end of the decade, however,

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<sup>148</sup> “Fulton Bag Romps,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 25, 1913. Carl Taylor, Carl Taylor, “The Constitution’s Amateur Page,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 3, 1914. Carl Taylor, “The Constitution’s Amateur Page,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 17, 1914. “The *Constitution’s Amateur Page*,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 24, 1914. Carl Taylor, “The *Constitution’s Amateur Page*,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 31, 1914. Carl Taylor, “The Constitution’s Amateur Page,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 7, 1914. Carl Taylor, “The *Constitution’s Amateur Page*,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 14, 1914. Frink, Workplace subversion sources

the city's businesses were helping to create a city league that actively encouraged religious participation.<sup>149</sup>

At the onset of the 1920s, baseball experienced a boom in the city. Led by the popularity of the Crackers, the city league expanded its ranks. Throughout the decade, the city league evolved into a live-action billboard for the city's businesses. Increasing popularity meant that more stories appeared in the local newspapers that discussed the businesses alongside the games. Moreover, the league offered businessmen the opportunity to give back to the city while spending very little. In 1921, it was announced that World War I veterans would have a club in that year's league: "Although wounded while in France fighting for their country, the rehabilitation students of the Atlanta Business college will put a baseball team on the field in the City League this year." To honor those who fought, the business leaders who organized the league offered the team a spot in the league. Outside donations of \$256 were made to cover the fee to join the league. Nicknamed the "Rehabs," it was speculated that the team would draw larger crowds to their game. The *Constitution* noted that "The entrance of this team will be a great boost to the league. The club will draw a large number of fans to their games as everybody likes to watch a bunch of boys that risked their lives for their country whether they are playing baseball or on a parade, especially if they are some of the unfortunate ones that stopped some of the German bullets with their bodies."<sup>150</sup>

As the 1920s progressed, Atlanta's amateur baseball scene expanded considerably. Along with the industrial city league, the city was home to over 50 teams that played in nine leagues by 1930. Still, despite the growth of amateur and industrial baseball team in the aftermath of the

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<sup>149</sup> "Meeting Held for Organization of Atlanta League," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 20, 1919.

<sup>150</sup> "New City League Plan is Launched," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 17, 1921. Lauren Clark, "Veterans to Have Club in City League," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 18, 1921

strike, the company team was never memorable for employees that worked at the factory. Atlanta was not the only location that housed cotton mills. Throughout North and South Carolina, former employees fondly remembered their company team and the experiences of attending baseball games in their factory towns. In Atlanta, however, factory teams rarely come up in memories about baseball in the city. Because of the urban environment, the mill was not dependent on factory housing as many employees opted out of living in houses owned by the factory. Public transportation also meant that workers were not obligated to live near the factory. Coupled with a strong professional team that attracted much more interest, industrial teams in Atlanta were much less popular than in other places throughout the South.<sup>151</sup>

### **Prison Baseball**

One of the perennial members of the city's amateur baseball community was teams that represented the Atlanta's Federal Penitentiary. Beginning in 1912, the prison was known throughout the city as being a hotbed for baseball. It hosted inter-prison leagues and participated in inter-city leagues throughout this era. The federal prison was commissioned in 1899 and received its first prisoners in 1902. After its opening, the prison had been the temporary home to gangster Al Capone, former presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs, who was imprisoned for speaking out against World War I, and Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey. Although part of the federal justice system, the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary was integrated into the city's community. Those who worked in the prison lived in the city. While outsiders were hired by the federal government to run the prison, they were welcomed to the city and became part of its larger culture. Thus, the prison was subjected to local cultural trends which took hold in the city. One

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<sup>151</sup> Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*.

of these trends was the popularity of baseball. Starting with the 1912 season, the game was in integral part of life in the prison. By the end of the 1910s, the prison had two teams. Nicknamed the Commodore Feds, the prison's white team was made up of amateur players. By 1916, this team challenged local clubs, including the Atlanta Crackers, to games at the prison. These games were often noted for their entertainment value: where good baseball met pomp and circumstances. The other club featured African American prisoners. Under the team-name of the "the Indians," the club also hosted games at the penitentiary, as well as traveled to challenge other Black teams throughout the city.

Not only did the popularity of the game reverberate from city-wide experiences, baseball in the prison also was part of the evolving way that Americans viewed incarceration during the Progressive Era. Throughout the United States, prison administrators believed that baseball assisted in rehabilitate the inmates. Moreover, Progressives argued that baseball provided prisoners with a sense of autonomy. By installing middle-class values in which baseball represented, it offered a chance for rehabilitation. On the other hand, baseball in prisons also prevented idleness among prisoners. Lastly, baseball was seen as a way to control behavior. The year before baseball was instituted at the federal penitentiary in Atlanta, C.W. James, superintendent of a prison in Oregon, told the American Prison Association "It has been my experiences that the more privileges we extend our men consistent with good discipline, the easier it is for us to maintain good discipline without any drastic measures." Nevertheless, because the Atlanta Penitentiary was located in the South, the prison followed the rule of Jim Crow. Before the African American team was organized, Black players were not allowed to play. As the rhetoric around the moral benefits of baseball developed, Black teams were introduced as

a way of controlling African American masculinity since baseball was believed to have civilizing powers.<sup>152</sup>

Baseball was a popular subject discussed in the prison. Ten years after the first prisoners arrived at the penitentiary, the initial issue of the “Good Word” was produced. This was the first prisoner-published paper published in the United States. Stories appeared regarding a proposed new laundry building, how prisoners were treated, and a section on religion. A major section of the paper was devoted to baseball. “Baseball fans who have been so unfortunate as to become inmates of the prison have their inning in a snappy article on the prospects of the coming season,” noted the *Constitution*. One month later, the prison announced that it would host its first prison baseball league. It was reported that eight teams comprised a league with very special rules. Each of the teams were managed by one of the guards and players were assigned to teams based on their jobs within the facilities. For example, the Athletics were comprised of prisoners that worked in the storerooms, kitchen, and dining rooms. Prisoners were invited to try out for the teams corresponding to their prison job. Games were played on Saturday and lasted only seven innings. Spectators included guards and prisoners. Interestingly, when the newspaper covered the games, they never used the players’ name. Instead, they used the inmate’s identification number. The games themselves were spectacles. To celebrate the first games of 1913, it was reported that the season opened with “great pomp and ceremony. There will be a

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<sup>152</sup> C.W. James, *Proceedings of the Annual Congress of the American Prison Association* (Indianapolis: W.M.B. Burford Printer, 1911) 89. Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events, 1880s-1930s* 421-423. Tim Hayburn, “Baseball Behind Bars: Prison Baseball at Eastern State Penitentiary in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Sport History* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2007) 253-270.

grand parade from the isolation building, where the morose prisoners are confined, to the ball grounds. The parade will be headed by the prison band playing one of Sousa's marches."<sup>153</sup>

Despite the fascination of an all-prisoner confederation of baseball teams, the prison league ended in 1914. Still, the penitentiary exhibited baseball games. Instead of having the prisoners themselves play, the team was comprised of non-prisoners and non-prison employees. By 1916, the prison had participated in the industrial leagues and competed against company teams throughout the city. Games were played both home games at the prison and away games at Brisbane Park. The prison team was one of the best amateur clubs in the city. Reports concerning the make-up of the team were ambiguous. The newspaper waffled between calling them amateur and semi-professional. Evidence suggest that the team was comprised of players that did not work at the penitentiary. The team was led by Melvin Tinsley who pitched every game of the 1916 season. In fact, the twenty-one-year-old was well known among Atlanta's amateur ranks. The previous season, the Atlanta native pitched for the Beck & Gregg company team. That year, the hardware store boosted one of the best teams in the city due to Tinsley's pitching. By 1916, he had moved on to pitch for the prison. While there is no record of Tinsley having actually worked at the prison, it is clear that he was not an inmate. Like Tinsley, none of the other players on the prison team are listed on the role of inmates for 1916. In 1917, Tinsley joined the United States Army and was shipped off to France. On his draft card, he listed Atlanta Gas Works as his employer.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> "Federal Prison Paper Makes Its Appearance," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 2, 1912. "Stonecutters Take Prison Championship from Laundrymen; Capture of Baseball Rag for 1912 is Celebrated in Verse," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 21, 1912. "Baseball to Begin at Federal Prison on Next Saturday," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1913.

<sup>154</sup> "Baseball to Begin at Federal Prison on Next Saturday," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1913. "Federal Prison 6, Sou Bell 4," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 3, 1916. "Federal Prison Nine's Record Enviably One," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 22, 1916. Georgia, U.S., U.S. Penitentiary Atlanta, Prisoner Index, 1880-1922. United States Census, 1910 Population Report.

As the 1920s saw a boom for baseball in the city, prison baseball became more entrenched within the city's baseball community. By this time, players were being brought in from other locations. For the 1923 team, two players were brought in from out-of-town. One player was brought to the team after playing for a northwestern team. Another was a former major league player who was part of the Baltimore Orioles a few years prior. The prison team also were the recipients of a player-sharing agreement with the Atlanta Crackers. Since the federal prison played games all year around, the Crackers could lend them players during their off-season. In this way, the prison team acted as a minor league team for the Crackers. In 1919, the Crackers acquired a player by the name of Frank DeHayney. The young catcher had little experience playing at the minor league level. Thus, the Cracker loaned him to the prison team in hopes the player would gain more experience before the season. Additionally, the relationship between the Crackers and the prison flourished in the 1920s. A spring-time tradition in the city was the annual exhibition game between the prison team and the Crackers. For these games, local spectators were invited to join the prisoners who were watching the game. These games were often exciting events for the teams and the city. The prison hosted a post-game banquet and dance for the team and the community. These games were also notable because they were played on a Sunday afternoon. Traditionally, Sunday games were banned in the city until the 1930s. Since these games open to the public and spectators were not charged for attendance, it was permissible to be played on the Sabbath. Throughout the years, the prison team would also host an annual game against the Georgia Tech university team.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> "Tenth Battalion Nine Will Play Commodore Feds," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 22, 1919. "Commodore Feds to Meet Tech's Reserves Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 29, 1919. J.C. Fife, JR. "Amateurs Look for Big Year," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 21, 1920. M.D. Gleason, "Notes on Baseball," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 17, 1923.



During its tenure on the city's baseball radar, the prison never charged for games and equipment was often donated. Unlike industrial baseball, these games were not put on to enrich the prison system. Instead, these exhibition games were more akin to a spectacle. With them, they offered the prison a chance to welcome guests to view the happenings in the prison. Thus, these exhibition and amateur games allowed the prison to become more a part of the community. For white, middle-class Atlantans, prison baseball helped to normalize the institution. Through baseball, news reporters, and their readers, were provided the opportunity examine what was happening behind the prison walls. A facet of Atlanta society in this era was a distrust of those outside of the community. A clear example of this was how early Cracker owner, Abner Powell, was viewed in the city. A federal prison, that housed criminals from all over the United States, ought to have given the community some hesitation. Instead, very little concern is ever written about in the papers. This, despite a few instances where prisoners actually successfully escaped.

### **African Americans in a “Baseball-Mad” City**

Like many parts of southern society, the prison baseball team was segregated between the races. While white teams played white professional and amateur teams, so too did Black prison teams face off against Black professional and amateur teams. Black baseball in the city can be traced to the Race Riots of 1906. In response to the deadly event, the city and the state strengthened its Jim Crow laws that governed the city African American population. In the Jim Crow South, criminal justice was inseparable from whites' urgent need to establish and maintain racial control. After all, southern white supremacy was predicated on the fear of Black crime. Through the first years of the twentieth century, changes in ways that the city governed, and incarcerated African Americans were part of the dual processes of urbanization and

industrialization. Despite the oppressiveness of Jim Crow, however, African American baseball in the city offered Black folks the opportunity to subvert racist stereotypes.<sup>156</sup>

In the lead-up to the Race Riots of 1906, Atlanta's newspaper reporters insisted that African American baseball was unusually violent. Reports of games were either ridiculed for violence that occurred on the field or surprise expressed when the games were not violent. Reporters continued to paint African American baseball in the same light following the race riots. While never commenting on games that featured African American teams, the *Constitution* reported violence that occurred at baseball games. Undoubtedly, Black baseball was unorganized during the early 1900s. Those who did attempt to organize were often faced with insurmountable hurdles that limited their access to baseball. In Atlanta's Pittsburgh neighborhood, African American leaders proposed building a baseball park. City commission approved the purchase of four acres of land and money was raised to build the grandstand. Residents of the neighborhood, however, were concerned that "such a park would cause lawless crowds to gather." Ultimately, the project was abandoned after the commission denied the proposal.<sup>157</sup> Despite setbacks, the condition of African American baseball in Atlanta improved over the course of the 1910s. In 1912, the first African American baseball game was permitted at Ponce de Leon park. The fraternal group, Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in America, helped to stage two games at the park. On September 13 and 14, two Black teams were assembled to face one another. General admission was priced at \$.25 and grandstand admission was \$.35.

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<sup>156</sup> Blair L. M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy V. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). William A. Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South: Race and Remembering in the Civil War's Aftermath* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998). Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). Amy Louise Wood and Natalie J. Ring, *Crime & Punishment in the Jim Crow South* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2019).

<sup>157</sup> "Negro Baseball Park Barred in Pittsburgh," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1912.

While African American teams were permitted to use the baseball park, Atlanta's modern ballpark was designed in such a way to promote the power and humiliation inherent in Jim Crow segregation. The opening of the stadium occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Atlanta Race Riots in September of 1906. The existing amusement park across from the stadium had been segregated between whites and Blacks since at least 1887. By the time that Ponce de Leon park opened, amusement park goers were greeted with signs that hung in the entrances proclaiming that African Americans were not legally allowed to enter the park. As for the baseball stadium, the owners, Georgia Railway and Electric Company, decided to enforce segregation and mark-off sections for Black spectators within the design of the park. The white and Black sections were anything but similar. "We used to call it the buzzard roost," remember Gabby Kemp – an African American resident of Atlanta that would attend games at the park in his youth. He remembered that "You had to go underneath the white stands to go all the way out to left field to sit out there." Another African American resident, Billie Harden, remembered the stigma of separate entrances for Black spectators. Segregation at the park even caused some spectators to skip games altogether. Catcher for Atlanta's negro team, James Greene, remembered that the separated seating and the stigma attached to segregation caused him to avoid Ponce de Leon. In an interview after his career, Greene remembered that "Because I was discriminated against, I didn't go to a ball game. I wouldn't spend my money; I wouldn't take my money down there and buy a ticket. I'd go over there on the railroad and look at it."<sup>158</sup>

Throughout the 1910s, African American baseball grew more accepted in the city. This approval culminated with the establishment of Atlanta's first professional Black team. The

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<sup>158</sup> "Colored Ball Teams Play at Ponce Park," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 12, 1912. Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*, 270-272.

Atlanta Cubs were born during the summer months of 1917. With America's involvement in the World War I, the immediate future of baseball in Atlanta was uncertain. While the white professional team played out the year, and won the 1917 Southern Association championship, the presence of amateur baseball was much smaller than in years past. Thus, more promotional space was given by the *Constitution* to African American baseball. Initially, the Cubs were a traveling team that played other African American ball clubs throughout the South. The games, however, were not held at Ponce de Leon park. Instead, they were played on the Morris Brown campus. As World War I came to a close, and amateur teams returned to the field, the city's African American team continued to play. The skill of the team was the reasons that the Cubs continued to be part of Atlanta's baseball culture. As demonstrated, Atlanta had difficulty accepting losing. The Cubs were successful on the field and were promoted as such in the newspaper. When winning, positive rhetoric replaced negative stories of violence. "The Cubs have toured Florida and in all have played nine games, losing one," the paper proudly announced.<sup>159</sup>

In 1920, the team changed their name to the Black Crackers and joined the Colored Southern League. The new league featured teams from eight southern cities. The championship prizes offered by the league were lucrative. The winning team for the first season received \$10,000. Even though the Atlanta did not win the pennant, they still garnered a significant amount of press the first season. A lot of that could be attributed to their association with the city's famed professional team. The name change was done to better associate themselves with the city. Coming off another Crackers championship in 1919, Atlanta was what one reported

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<sup>159</sup> "Colored Teams Play," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 9, 1917. "Atlanta Cubs to Play Alabama Giants Two Games on Labor Day," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 26, 1917. "Atlanta Cubs Play Morris Brown Boys," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 9, 1919.

called “baseball-mad.” The African American team had hoped to capitalize on this popularity. Nevertheless, it was clear that the league and the team were second-class. During the inaugural season, the team played their games on the campus of Morris Brown College, not at Ponce de Leon park. Although they did not share facilities with the white team, the Black Crackers were obligated to schedule their games when the white Crackers were playing on the road.<sup>160</sup>

Eventually, the Black Crackers were able to call Ponce de Leon park home. In 1921, the team was allowed to play their games in Atlanta’s famed ballpark. The president of the white Crackers, Frank Reynolds, saw financial opportunity in the new Negro League. Since it was mandated that the Black Crackers could only play home games on days that the white Crackers were away, it made sense to lease the ballpark to the Black team in order to generate extra income. For their part, the Black Crackers were run by Bill Shaw. An insurance man originally from Brunswick, Georgia, Shaw was involved with the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in America and promoted dances at the Odd Fellows Building and Auditorium. Both Shaw and the mutual-aid fraternity help to finance the team. Players were paid very little and were often associated with colleges throughout the state. Notwithstanding the support that the team received, the Black Crackers were severely underfunded. The white team assisted by providing used equipment to the team, even if they had hamstrung the Black Crackers by leasing out Ponce de Leon park. As a result, the Black Crackers found that playing the majority of their games on the road was more lucrative than playing at home. Because the team rarely played home games after the 1921 season, local interest waned.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> “The Colored League Will Open Thursday,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 29, 1920.

<sup>161</sup> “Black Crackers Get Second Straight Win Over Black Barons,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 July 1921. Allen E. Joyce, “Atlanta Black Crackers,” MA thesis, Auburn University, 1975, Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*.

The early 1920s also saw another African American team gain the attention of Atlanta's baseball enthusiast. Atlanta's Federal Penitentiary featured an all-Black prisoner team that travelled through the city to play both professional and amateur African American teams. The team's nickname was the Indians. One of the team's early games was against the Atlanta Cubs. On April 26, 1918, the two teams played at the prison's baseball field. While the Cubs won the game 4-to-0, the team of prisoners held their own against the professional club. The prison team was led by pitcher Japhus Brown. Originally from Savannah, Georgia, Brown was incarcerated for violating interstate commerce laws. Another accomplished player on the team was Nobel Tinker, a Washington, D.C. native who was serving time for robbery. Perhaps the best player from the prison team was Robert Poindexter. Born in 1898, he was one of the city's best pitchers, white or Black, during the 1920 season. Poindexter was originally from Washington D.C. and fought for the United States in World War I. Upon returning home, he was convicted of assault with intent to rob in October of 1919. According to the *Washington Post*, he paid \$12 dollars for a ride out of the city. When he was not taken to where he wanted to go, Poindexter became upset and pulled a gun, firing a warning shot which got the attention of the police. He was sentenced to ten years in federal prison and sent to Atlanta. For two years, he was talk of the African American baseball scene. So much so that, following a game against the Black Crackers, he was offered a contract upon his release. Similar to the Black Crackers, the Black prison team were newsworthy only when they were making Atlanta appear like they were producing winning teams. Poindexter was one of the most discussed players in 1920. Newspaper reports raved about his skills. In the realm of white supremacy, he was viewed more as spectacle than an accomplished athlete. While

addressed with the tone of wonder, it was a noteworthy that Poindexter represented a player that could not challenge the reputations white players since he was incarcerated.<sup>162</sup>

By the 1930s, African American baseball had declined in the city. With the financial pressures of the Great Depression, many teams found it difficult to field teams. Nonetheless, African American baseball was much more visible in the first decades of the twentieth century. As long as these teams appeared to play the game well, and they promoted the fortunes of the city, they were acceptable to whites. In fact, white Atlantans had a fascination with African American teams. In somewhat of a role reversal, white only sections were added to the grandstands so they could watch the Black teams. The progress, however, was slow and uneven. Teams were never fully supported financially, and local governments failed to concern themselves with the game.<sup>163</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, baseball in Atlanta was more of an idea than a reality. Writers, local officials, and journalist waxed poetic about what they thought baseball could mean to the city. In reality, baseball during the nineteenth century was unorganized, poorly funded, and lacked mainstream interest. While the game was clearly part of the New South creed, the prophecy was fulfilled in the first three decades of the twentieth century. During this time, baseball was highly organized to the point that it required one of the largest companies in the world to keep the city's professional team afloat. By the onset of the Great Depression,

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<sup>162</sup> "Atlanta Cubs Win Over Indians, 4-to-0," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 27, 1918. "Two Given Ten Years," *The Washington Post*, October 19, 1919. "Poindexter Holds Black Crackers to Single Safety," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 30, 1920.

<sup>163</sup> "Black Crackers and Indians Play at Poncey Friday," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 7, 1920.

professional baseball had become a half-a-million-dollar enterprise. Games and pennant chases captured the imagination of the city and the South. Just as Henry Grady had hoped, Atlanta was at the capital of southern baseball by the 1930s.

The popularity of the game had a trickle-down effect on amateur baseball. On any summer Saturday in 1930, some fifty adult amateur teams played games against one another. While the growth of Atlanta's amateur baseball was a byproduct of the Crackers' popularity, it was thought to be useful tool for local companies. After all, every major city in the United States had industrial baseball leagues. Despite the lack of memorability, the growth of company teams coincided with one of Atlanta's biggest labor disputes. In the aftermath of the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills Strike of 1914-1915, the company invested more time and money in baseball. Yet, the game offered a rare chance for striking workers to exact a small amount of revenge by losing games. As New South disciples prophesized about the industrial might of Atlanta, the trajectory of industrial baseball in the city highlight how the processes of urbanization and industrialization were fraught with complications. Along the same lines, African American baseball in the city also highlighted the complicated nature of white supremacy in the first years of the twentieth century. Following the Race Riots of 1906, Black baseball grew in the city. Baseball was so popular in Atlanta that Black teams were occasionally embraced, even by white fans. However, this embrace was limited and always shaped by demands of Jim Crow.



## Chapter Three

### Carolina: Baseball and Labor in the Piedmont, 1900-1933

One of the most famous players to originate in the industrial Carolinas was “Shoeless” Joe Jackson. While the slugger is best known for the so-called Black Sox gambling scandal in 1919 (and the 1989 Kevin Costner film *Field of Dreams*), Jackson was first a star in his hometown of Greenville, South Carolina. In many ways, he exemplifies the experiences that textile mill workers had with baseball in the Piedmont region of North and South Carolina. Born in rural Pickens County in or around 1889 to a family of sharecroppers, Jackson’s family moved to Greenville in search of industrial work.<sup>164</sup> Rather than attend school, Jackson began to do chores at the mill where his father worked at the age of thirteen. In a later interview, Jackson stated that he made \$1.25 working a 12-hour-day. As the eldest of eight children, Jackson had little choice but to work in the mill and finically help his family.

Yet, Jackson’s early life did not consist of only working in the mill. Like many turn-of-the-century youths, Jackson played a lot of baseball as a child. His play on the dirt fields of Greenville caught the eye of mill organizers and he was asked to join the factory’s team as a teenager. He ultimately become a star for the textile leagues which were sponsored by the cotton mills. Jackson began as a pitcher but soon moved to the catcher’s position. After a collision at home plate and at the urging of his mother, Jackson was moved to a less impactful position in the outfield since the money that he made was still relied on by the family. Jackson found that he

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<sup>164</sup> There is debate surrounding Jackson’s birth year. His death certificate, issued by the state of South Carolina lists his birthday at July 16, 1889. When he died in 1951, newspaper obituaries listed his age as 63, meaning that he would have been born in 1888. Jackson’s World War I draft card lists his birth year as 1887. “‘Shoeless’ Joe Jackson, One of Great Hitters, Dies,” *The Daily Tribune*, December 6, 1951, 12. “Joe Jackson Dead; Hit .356 In Major Career,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 6, 1951, 3.

earned more money playing baseball than just working in the factory. Jackson recalled that “The first money I earned playing ball was \$3.50. I got it for winning a fifteen-inning game.” As his fame rose, local spectators labeled him the “Saturday Special” and raved about his hitting and throwing power. Jackson moved on to the semi-professional Carolina League in 1907, playing for the local Greenville club. Eventually, Jackson caught the eye of scouts in the North and signed with the Philadelphia Athletics.<sup>165</sup>

Jackson’s experiences playing baseball in Greenville helps to highlight the social balance between a rural and industrial identity that baseball helped to foster in textile mill villages and towns of the Piedmont region. In fact, this duality was the objective of baseball’s promotion. From the turn of the century until World War II, textile mill owners invested a significant amount of capital and resources in subsidizing baseball. These mill owners, along with civic leaders, supported and funded baseball as part of a larger mission to create a loyal workforce whose members were both efficient industrial workers and moral, rural citizens. Elite anxieties regarding the migration of poor farmers to burgeoning towns and cities in search of work forced community leaders to seek leisure activities which bridged the gap between these two identities. They saw baseball as a game that taught modern industrial efficiency while also being tied to a moral, wholesome past. On one hand, social commentators argued that baseball taught players and spectators to be efficient industrial workers. On the other hand, these same commentators contended that the imagined rural beginnings of the game meant that baseball had a moral influence on those who both played and spectated.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Jackson was nicknamed “Saturday Special” because games were often played on Saturdays. Furman Bisher, “This is the Truth,” *Sports Magazine*, October 1949. J. A. Fitzgerald, “Joe Jackson, Cleveland Slugger, Gets His Spring Practice in Father’s Butcher Shop,” *The Washington Herald*, August 11, 1912. W. R. Hoefler, “Heroes of the World’s Series,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 26, 1917, 14.

<sup>166</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et al., *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987). Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the*

Not only did baseball have a social significance, but the game also furthered the burgeoning alliance between local governments and businesses. Baseball in the Piedmont region did not occur in a vacuum. The very nature of mill leagues, which originated after the turn of the twentieth century, meant that textile mill owners relied on the support of local civic leaders. Mill leagues were often centered around one of the larger metropolitan cities such as Greenville, Charlotte, and Greensboro. To organize these games and leagues, textile mill organizers had the support and influence from those city's businesses, civic, and social elites. As leagues became better organized through the twentieth century, league organizers leaned on local investments to help fund the games. Moreover, the leagues also depended on local public spaces to stage the games. More often than not, these civic elites sought the same things from baseball as did the textile mill owners. They too believed that baseball could be beneficial in creating a workforce of loyal and moral citizens.

For geographical purposes, the Piedmont region can be defined as a cluster of industrial towns and cities between Greenville, SC through Charlotte, NC, then into Greensboro and to the Virginia boarder. This was an area that saw tremendous industrial growth in the aftermath of the Civil War as both commercial farming and the expansion of the textile industry changed the ways that people lived. Because of the growth of commercial farming, many small-scale independent farmers were unable to compete with the large corporations. At the same time, Northern capitalists began to move away from the traditional locations of the textile industry. Prior to the Civil War, the Northeast was the home to the industrial processing of cotton for use in textiles. After the war, as part of the capitalistic investments promoted by the New South

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*Progressive Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983). G. Edward White, *Creating the National Pastime Baseball Transforms Itself 1903-1953* (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1996).

creed, the textile industry migrated South to the Piedmont region. In North and South Carolina, industrialist found both an abundance of space and cheap labor. In search of work, families affected by corporate farming were forced to leave their traditional homesteads and travel to new towns and villages that were built around the emerging textile industry. This creation of a new, white working-class was a byproduct of industrialization in the New South. While much of the South still remained largely agrarian, parts of the Carolinas saw the emergence of a new society that took shape due to the developments of industrialization and urbanization. This was part of the process to introduce a more mechanized society within the rural South.<sup>167</sup>

Concurrent to the growth of large-scale farming, industrialists invested massive amounts of capital and resources into the textile industries throughout the Piedmont region. This investment was a joint enterprise between Northern and Southern businessmen. Traditionally, textile mills had been located in New England. As part of the New South creed and its investment into industrialization, cotton and textile mills emerged in the Piedmont region of the Carolinas following the Civil War. A byproduct of industrialization was the emergence of a new, white workings-class as well as the establishment and growth of urban centers throughout the regions. Therefore, the Piedmont is distinctive for the creation of new towns that grew around the textile industry. These new towns offered elites, the local governments, and factory owners a clean slate to shape their local society as they saw fit. Throughout the early years of the twentieth century, cities such as Greensboro, Charlotte, Spartanburg, and Greenville all grew from small, backwater towns to important locations in the trade and manufacturing of cotton products.

Additionally, smaller cities such as Burlington, Reidsville, and Cooleemee were all established

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<sup>167</sup> For the purpose of this study, the difference between rural and urban concerns the concept of working life. Rural would thus be defined as working as a farmer and urban as someone who works as a wage-earner. Hall et al., *Like a Family*.

to meet the needs of a growing industry and a new work force. For many Carolinians in the Piedmont, the arrival of textile mills fundamentally changed the traditional agrarian lifestyle of the region. To adapt to these changes, the traditional agrarian family structure was replaced with a structure that revolved around the community and the factory. In this way, many elites saw these villages as a positive good, heralding them as a way of uplifting this part of the South from its legacy of poverty. Therefore, living in mill towns became the norm for thousands of North Carolina working men and women and their families.

A staple in these burgeoning communities and the shifting communal structure of Carolinian society was the game of baseball. In planning and shaping these communities that revolved around the mill, owners financed stores, schools, and recreational activities such as baseball. From the start, the game was central to this project. Starting around 1900, mill owners sponsored teams and leagues throughout the region. During the summer months, games were played on Saturday in factory-owned parks which were heralded as bastions of modernity. These parks were often among the limited number of local amenities to feature electricity and modern facilities that benefited the spectators. Mill teams traveled throughout the region, competing against workers from other mills. Owners provided funds to pay for uniforms, equipment, and travel expenses. Some owners saw these teams as so vital, in fact, that they directed managers to hire workers that were better on the field than they were on the shop floor. Still, baseball was not always applied in a similar way throughout the region. In larger, existing cities of Greenville, Charlotte, and Greensboro, the promotion of baseball was a collaboration between civic leaders and mill owners. In fact, many of the civic leaders who promoted baseball often held financial

stakes in the local cotton mills. In the newer, smaller towns of Burlington, Reidsville, and Cooleemee, baseball was solely the responsibility of the factory owner.<sup>168</sup>

Scholars have argued that textile mills throughout the South helped to reconstruct and rehabilitate the region in the aftermath of the war. Yet, the Piedmont region is distinctive because of the development of mill towns. Historians have argued that mill owners actively shaped every aspect of everyday life within towns that were centered around the factory. The mill workers lived in company housing, purchased items from company stores, worshiped inside company churches, and played and watched baseball games inside company parks. Within these towns, mill owners sought to enhance the traditional rural family structure with a patriarchal society where the mill was akin with the father as the head of the family. This quasi-family structure allowed the mills even greater control over their workers. Managers who needed to recruit, train, and discipline the new labor force found the family-labor system useful. While scholars have acknowledged that baseball was an important part of these towns, they have done little to investigate why the game was so popular, and why businesses invested so heavily in baseball.<sup>169</sup>

Despite the all-encompassing environment of the mill towns, the workers did not fully capitulate to the company-imposed subjugation. Instead, textile workers actively created kinships and communities that were outside of the company structure. Here again, baseball helped to facilitate these relationships. Saturday afternoon baseball games were not only for sporting enthusiasts. Workers often noted how mill league games would be a community event, where

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<sup>168</sup> Cone Mills Collections, University of North Carolina Special Collections. George R. Shue, Oral Interview, June 20, 1979.

<sup>169</sup> For more on the textile industry in the Piedmont region, see: David Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). Beth English, *A Common Thread: Labor, Politics, and Capital Mobility in the Textile Industry* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2006). Hall, *Like a Family*. G. C. Waldrep, *Southern Workers and the Search for Community: Spartanburg County, South Carolina* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

everyone would come out and support what they came to see as their team, not the company's team. While owners had hoped that it would breed loyalty to the mills, the games helped to form these communal bonds within the local towns. By the beginning of the Great Depression, these communal bonds helped to change how the game of baseball was presented in the Piedmont. By the 1920s, workers began to use these communal structures to organize for better working conditions in the mills. On the heels of the labor turmoil of post-World War I era, working-class agitation caused owners to move away from financing mill teams. In their place, mill owners and civic leaders organized semi-professional minor leagues to replace the longstanding, professional mill leagues. In this wave of strikes and labor agitation, the semi-professional minor leagues helped to foster a stronger relationship between the larger cities and the factories on their outskirts.<sup>170</sup>

With the help of these familial structures existing in the workplace, there was relatively peaceful labor relations between workers and owners. This all changed in the 1920s and 1930s. Following World War I, interactions between the workers and the mill owners transformed. Scholars have argued that new technologies and new sets of owners and managers led to renewed efforts to streamline factory life. This was a process that was symbolized by speedups requiring greater production from their employees. In this context, a second generation of mill workers – altered by new ethos of working-class popular culture – proved unable or unwilling to preserve the social harmony established by the earlier generation. These transformations resulted in series of work stoppages and labor strikes that paralyzed the mill communities. Armed with local and state support in the form of strikebreakers, anti-strike legislation, and business-leaning judges, owners could freely repress the labor organization in the mills. At the same time, the

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<sup>170</sup> Hall et al., *Like a Family*.

meaning of baseball also changed. Toward the end of the 1930s, more baseball leagues expanded throughout the region. College teams and women's softball leagues joined the already crowded scene that included mill leagues and semi-professional city and regional leagues. Moreover, greater tensions between labor and capital meant that baseball was a tool used by ownership to define labor struggles.<sup>171</sup>

### **Financing Baseball in the Piedmont**

From 1900 until the onset of World War II, baseball was extremely popular in the Piedmont region. Similar to other portions of the South, early games were often unorganized exhibitions between towns and factories. As the textile industry grew after the turn of the century, so did the game of baseball. By 1910, factory sponsored games were commonplace and widely popular throughout North and South Carolina. Following the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing economic depression, factories began to limit their financial participation in baseball. These years saw the rise of city and regional leagues which were sponsored by local municipalities. The financial hardship of the Depression did not completely end factory games as they continued into the 1930s. By World War II, professional minor leagues – with allegiance with northern major leagues – would dominate the baseball landscapes.

In these burgeoning towns, which were designed and molded by the textile mill, baseball was part of a large financial mission to shape the community. When establishing mill towns, the factory owners would often invest capital in the building of modern conveniences such as department stores, public schools, and leisure parks. This was a concentrated effort by mills to invest – and at the same time profit – from creating a society for their workers. Baseball was

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<sup>171</sup> Hall et al., *Like a Family*. Albert Sanders, Oral Interview, May 30, 1980.



central to this investment as textile mills would completely finance the expenses of the baseball team. This included the purchase of equipment, uniforms, bats, and baseballs. In 1935, the Converse Mill Co. spent around \$15 a week on baseballs and another \$10 a month on bats. For the same season, Clifton Mills Manufacturing Co. spent \$165 for pants, striping, belts, shirts, lettering, and numbering for the team's ten players. The total also included warm-up pants and warm-up coats with felt numbering and lettering. The company would pay another \$60 for baseman's glove for the nine players. The company would also have to purchase ball caps, socks, and shoes for their players. In addition, the company paid another \$50 a season in travel expenses for the team. The purchase of equipment was often outside of the mill town. Two large sporting goods providers in Charlotte, NC., Lowe & Campbell Athletic Goods and Carolina Sporting Goods Co., often supplied the region with the equipment needed. While companies did see some return on their investment, baseball was never a direct money-making venture.<sup>172</sup>

On top of the investment in equipment, there was a direct link between baseball and employment in the mills. On one hand, textile mills often paid their players directly for their participation in mill league games. Players in the leagues worked for the mill. However, workers who played the games were paid extra to play baseball. These players often earned more than they did in the mill jobs. Joe Jackson stated in an interview that, as a 13-year-old pitcher, he made \$3.50 playing for the Brandon Mills team. After he left Brandon Mill for another mill in Greenville, he was able to negotiate a higher wage. Originally, the mill in Greenville offered him \$65 a week to play on their mill team. Ultimately, Jackson was able to negotiate a salary of \$75 weeks. Other players also remembered being payed to play baseball for the factory. In 1911, Baxter Splawn began working as a weaver at the Danville Mill near Burlington, NC. In addition

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<sup>172</sup> Financial Records, Clifton Manufacturing Company, Clemson Special Collection, Box 5 Folder 42.

to his job inside the factory, Splawn was a pitcher for the mill's baseball team. He remembered that he was allowed time off of work to pitch. Moreover, he remembered that he made more money pitching a couple games for the mill team than he did a week of work in the weaver room.<sup>173</sup>

While not all textile mills directly paid to play baseball, many that did sponsor teams were cognizant of an employee's skill on the diamond. This often meant that the hiring of ball players was based more on their on-the-field skills rather than their workshop prowess. Ralph Austin was a supervisor for a mill in Charlotte, North Carolina in the 1920s. He was tasked with hiring mill workers. On occasions, Austin was told by his supervisors to recruit good ball players to work in the Mill. When asked whether mills recruited players, Austin recalled that "Sure they did. I was told get a good ball player, send him away and give him a Job." He also stated this initiative implied stealing player from other mills. Others remembered that factories would scout and recruit workers that they thought would be helpful on the baseball field. Howard Glenn, who worked for the Burlington Textile Mill, remembered how the factory would hire workers who had played for the local high school. Textile mills would recruit players from local college teams. During the summer months, companies in North Carolina would reach out to players from the University of North Carolina, Duke University, and Elon College. These college players would be offered both a job and a place on the baseball team.<sup>174</sup>

Once the mill found a player that they thought would help them succeed on the field, they were offered perks within the factory. Skilled players were offered less-strenuous jobs for higher

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<sup>173</sup> J. A. Fitzgerald, "Joe Jackson, Cleveland Slugger, Gets His Spring Practice in Father's Butcher Shop," *The Washington Herald*, August 11, 1912. V. Baxter Splawn, Oral Interview, February 19, 1980. "Shoeless Wonder of South Carolina Sure to Stick When He Goes to Majors," *Charlotte Observer*, March 2, 1911.

<sup>174</sup> Ralph Austin, Oral Interview, June 14, 1979. H.G Meacham, Oral Interview, July 26, 1977.

pay then their fellow workers. G.H. Meacham began working and playing for the Plaid Mill Co. near Burlington, NC around 1918 as a young child. He started for the mill's baseball team and, in 1936, Meacham turned down a chance to play professional baseball. In reflecting on the relationship between the mill and baseball, he stated that "As a baseball player, [we] had no trouble getting a job." After he turned down the opportunity to play major league ball, he was recruited by a textile mill in Asheboro, NC while still employed with the Burlington Industry Co. The offer was based on his prowess on the baseball field. He stated that, as part of the job offer, he was offered a higher wage and his wife was also extended a good job. Before he could accept, another mill in Burlington made a bid, which Meacham accepted. He was offered a salary of \$960 a year to work at the May Mills in Burlington. This is an extremely high salary for a mill worker during the Great Depression. Other workers from the same general region reported that they made about a dollar a day, or approximately \$350 a year. Meacham's salary was nearly tripled because he was a good ball player.<sup>175</sup>

Despite the large investment to furnish baseball to their employees, the game was an important factor in providing the mill with an extra source of income. Factories did make some money back on league games with ticket sales and food prices, but these factories did not make enough to offset the costs of the games. Although it came from several years later, an itemized expense sheet from three baseball games involving the Clifton Mills team in 1947 emphasizes the investments made by mills. For the three games, the company paid \$361 to the players, \$25 to each of the grounds keepers and bat boys, \$320 to the umpires, and \$198 for transportation. This was in addition to \$593 for equipment and other expenses.<sup>176</sup> In return for their investments the

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<sup>175</sup> In his interview, Shuping stated that "During the Great Depression, we made \$1 a day." H.G. Meacham, Oral Interview, July 26, 1977. Orlin Shuping, Oral Interview, June 15, 1975.

<sup>176</sup> These other expenses include \$148 paid to McGaha's Barber Shop for what is itemized as "Shower Baths"

team collected \$681: \$646 in tickets and another \$35 in food and ice cream sales. At the end of the three games, the company paid out \$593 more than they received from the games.<sup>177</sup>

One reason for this massive investment in baseball was to advertise the mill towns. For many of the mills in the Piedmont region, land and housing were some of their most valuable assets and rent payments would provide them with substantial income. For example, in a monthly financial review for February 1933, the Cone Mill Co. in Reidsville, NC listed the assets of their company town as \$1.5 million dollars. These assets provided the company with an extra source of income. In 1930, the Martel Mills Inc., located nears Columbia, SC, listed non-cotton income as \$64,294. This included income such as housing rent and money made at the company store. With the popularity of baseball in the Piedmont, baseball was a selling point to attract resident-workers to the burgeoning towns.<sup>178</sup>

In fact, the game became part of the template in establishing a successful town that was centered around the textile mill. In 1922, the National Association of Cotton Manufactures gave a lengthy presentation on successfully establishing mill towns which listed baseball as part of the process. Reprinted in the trade paper *The Textile World*, the piece is part history lesson and part how-to for setting up mill villages. After a sort of state-of-the-union address from the association's president, a section written by H. C. Meserve traces the development of the mill town in Lowell, Massachusetts in the nineteenth century. Meserve notes how owners of the Lowell mills studied the textile industry in England to garner ideas about machinery and society. Once that history was discussed, Meserve then argues that the role of the mill was to provide for everything in the town. This includes welfare, social and educational clubs, and recreation.

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<sup>177</sup> Clifton Mills Collections, Clemson University Special Collections.

<sup>178</sup> Cone Mill Collection, University of North Carolina Special Collections. John Hammond Moore, *Columbia and Richland County: A South Carolina Community, 1740-1990* (Columbia: South Carolina University Press, 1993).

Meserve then goes to specifically name baseball as something that was quintessential for a mill town. Thus, in order to keep residents happily paying rent, Meserve argues that providing for employees improves the mill's economics.<sup>179</sup>

As baseball became a founding principle in mill villages, the game was used to by the region's civic and business leaders when the working conditions in the mills were under attack by the federal government. In a speech on the Senate floor in January of 1907, Indiana senator Albert Beveridge called for the passing of a federal child labor law. He had argued that the law would end child labor in the cotton mills of North and South Carolina. Beveridge was an influential leader of the Progressive movement and extolled the power of the federal government in both foreign and domestic affairs. As he pressed for American expansion in the Caribbean and the Far East, Beveridge also promoted the notion that the national government could bring about change in the lives of everyday Americans. In this speech on child labor, Beveridge argued that industries throughout the United State had employed children in slave-like condition. He further argued that southern cotton mills were run by "infant factory slaves" who could "never develop into men and women." Following his remarks, and subsequent cries for investigations into child labor, the Secretary of Commerce and Labor set out to investigate and report the condition of woman and child workers in the South. The investigation, led by Thomas Robinson Dawley, was published in 1912 under the title *The Child that Toileth Not*. Dawley argued that child labor in the South was much more complicated than Beveridge had suggested in his earlier speech. In interviews and observations throughout the Piedmont region, Dawley demonstrates how poor whites relied on the work of children to supplement family income. He also notes that child

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<sup>179</sup> "H.C Meserve, "Papers and Address at N.A.C.M. Convention," *Textile World*, 1922. Cone Mills Collection, University of North Carolina Special Collections. V. Baxter Splawn, Oral Interview, February 2, 1980.

laborers were often required to attend school in the evening to learn to read and write. Yet, the conditions described by Dawley certainly highlighted the destitution of cotton mill workers. Ultimately, Dawley's main argument was that, by being forced to work, child laborers were not able to have the same childhood as other American children. He contends that "as [child laborers] were forced to toil incessantly, the word play became lost to their vocabulary."<sup>180</sup>

Dawley does not focus much on baseball. Throughout his narrative, there are only a few passing mentions of baseball. When observing the Gaston Mills village, he notes some doffer boys in a grove enjoying some leisure time.<sup>181</sup> While some were "lying on their stomachs with their chins in their hands" others in the adjacent field were playing baseball. The only other mention of baseball infers that the game could support the social mobility of children through adulthood. Toward the end of the report, Dawley examines the effects of child labor on adulthood. In his travels near Greenville, Dawley interviewed Dick O'Steen. Along with his three male children, O'Steen worked at the Brandon Mill. He stated that, after working in the mill as children, his oldest son was superintendent of Poe Mills and his middle son was superintendent of Brandon Mills. Each son made \$4,000 dollars a year. O'Steen stated that his youngest son was a professional baseball player who was "getting more than the governor of the state [of South Carolina]." Dawley further explains that "as for the baseball player, you may find him down in the Great North State, or South Carolina, perhaps, at the head of the 'Hornets', walloping the duff out of the learned college teams that have the boldness to contest the field

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<sup>180</sup> Daniel Levin, "The Social Philosophy of Albert J. Beveridge," *Indiana Magazine of History* 58, No. 2 (June, 1962), 101-116. Thomas Robinson Dawley, *The Child That Toileth Not: The Story of a Government Investigation* (Garcia Publishing Company: New York, 1912), 5. "The Child That Toileth Not': Sensational Book on the Condition of Unemployed in the Mill Villages of the Country," *The Greenville Evening Index*, December 12, 1912.

<sup>181</sup> In the cotton mills, doffers were those tasked at replacing the spun fibers of cotton or wool from the spinning frame. They would then quickly place an empty spool onto the machine. Traditionally, these jobs would be employed by children.

with him.” Although Dawley does not mention the team, he infers that the youngest O’Steen plays for the Charlotte Hornets, a minor league team in the Carolina Baseball League.

Nevertheless, Dawley make the argument here that child labor could lead to social mobility both in the factory and on the baseball field.<sup>182</sup>

The reaction to Dawley’s arguments were mixed in the Piedmont region. Some newspapers praised the book for demonstrating that conditions in the mills were far better than Beveridge had stated in his rhetoric against child labor. *The Gastonia Gazette* praised the book since “Mr. Dawley’s investigation did not lead him to the same conclusion that his co-workers arrived at on this subject.” They continued by stating that the book “presents some interesting phases of the ever-present problem of child labor.” Other newspapers in the Piedmont, however, took issue with the book. A number of the attacks on the book, and child labor laws in general, contended that the mill’s investment in baseball helped to mitigate the argument that child who worked in the mills did not participate in leisure or play. Following the publication of the book in 1912, *The Greenville News* ran an editorial lambasting the book. The author of the editorial argues that the perception of child labor in the mills in the work of “professional labor agitators.” Moreover, the author defends child labor by noting that these children have opportunities to play baseball. They state that “the labor in a cotton mill is not heavy but the hours are long. The doffer boys do not work all the time. They are frequently found outside the mill playing baseball.” In fact, investments into baseball became a sort of justification for opposing child labor laws. In another editorial in *The Gastonia Gazette*, the newspaper spoke out against these

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<sup>182</sup> Dawley, *The Child That Toileth Not*, 416-464.

laws by arguing that mills invest in education and leisure – including baseball – as a way of providing for the children they employed.<sup>183</sup>

Mills and local governments often found usefulness in including women in their investment of baseball. In fact, throughout the first years of the twentieth century, mills and local city throughout the Piedmont region often sponsored women's games. One earliest exhibitions of women's baseball were in 1913. Heralded as "the champion women baseball team of the world," the Bloomer Girls traveled to Raleigh, NC to face a men's team of amateurs. The team was made up of college women who traveled the country playing both men's and women's teams. On May 24, 1913, nearly 500 spectators came out to see the game. The star of the women's team that day was "Fatty" Bessie Smith. Despite the score of 9 to 3 in favor of the men's team, the *News and Observer* noted the quality of the game, which was close until the last inning.<sup>184</sup>

Baseball was not the only team sport that the textile mills sponsored. Throughout the Piedmont region, mills sponsored basketball teams and tournaments through the winter months when baseball could not be played. While not replacing the popularity of baseball, mills sought to capitalize on the games popularity by staging a number of tournaments that pitted teams representing mills from all over the region. In 1921, the first of these tournaments was held February 24, 2, and 26 at the Textile Hall in Greenville, SC. The event was sponsored by the Southern Textile Athletic Association (STAA) which "promoted amateur sports" throughout the Piedmont. Along with the basketball tournament, the event also offered musical performances and other entertainment programs. The event did not receive a lot of attention in Greenville.

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<sup>183</sup> "Cotton Mill Men to Oppose Program," *Asheville Gazette-News*, December 31, 1912. "Author of 'The Child That Toileth Not' Spends Day in Gastonia – Report on Child Labor Conditions," *The Gastonia Gazette*, May 28, 1915, 2. "Conditions Different from Those of the North and Child Labor an Advantage," *The Greenville News*, December 15, 1912, 13. "The Child Labor Law," *The Gastonia Gazette*, February 11, 1913, 1-4.

<sup>184</sup> "Bloomer Today," *News and Observer*, May 24, 1913. "Raleigh Amateurs Beat Bloomer Girls," *News and Observer*, May 25, 1913.



While there is a story on the event on the Monday prior to the games, the local newspaper did not report the scores or happening of the tournament. Instead, only small advertisements appeared for this first event. The tournament proved to be more costly to the STAA than they had anticipated. In the days following the event, the head of the Textile Hall wrote a letter to the STAA complaining that the floors of the hall needed to be replaced because “paint had been used on the floor of Textile Hall, which is something we have never done before and we are now having great difficulty in removing it.” They also found nails in the floor that had to be removed. Despite the inauspicious debut of the tournament, the event prospered over the next eight years. By 1929, the tournament was broadcast by local radio through the Crosley Radio Corporation.<sup>185</sup>

While not directly funded by one mill, the Southern Textile Athletic Association was headed by men who were associated with mills around the region. In 1921, the association was headed by W. V. Martin. He was invested in both industry and sport throughout the Carolinas and was also the head of South Carolina’s industrial branch of the YMCA. For their tournament, the expenses included renting the Textile Hall in Greenville. By 1929, the STAA paid \$100 a night to rent the hall. They were also responsible for supplying the concessions for the building. Yet, their expenses would have been somewhat limited since the tournament was limited to amateur players. This does not mean that mills did not sponsor their own teams. Clifton Mills regularly invested in both a team and a local basketball hall. To send a team to the STAA’s tournament, on February 12, 1926, Clifton Mills paid out \$49.25 for “Expense basketball team to Greenville Tournament including meals, hotel, and roundtrip train transportation. Other times, they furnished funds for their local basketball gym. In 1937, The mill paid \$6 a month to

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<sup>185</sup> “Arrange Program for Tournament,” *The Greenville News*, February 21, 1921. University of Clemson Special Collection, Textile Hall Corporation Records, Box 1.

maintain and clean the local basketball hall. While the investment was not nearly on the scale of baseball, the investment in basketball demonstrates that mills were interested in financing a sport for those winter months when baseball was unable to be played.<sup>186</sup>

Despite the investment to present baseball, the popularity of the game was quite subjective. Leagues, both those run by the mill and the minor professional leagues that originated in the region, were yearly propositions with no guarantee they would survive to the next year. Throughout the first years of the twentieth century, baseball league would often disappear in a year or two. Both mill and minor league teams were established on a year-by-year basis. Moreover, mill leagues throughout the region needed to be renewed after the end of the season and there were times where a league would disband for an entire year. As far as how many people attended these games, mills did not keep records of attendance nor did they keep track of how many tickets were sold.

Elites often blamed the tenuous popularity of mill and minor league teams on a lack of professionalism. Since the beginning of professional baseball in 1869, the relationship between baseball and professionalism was debated throughout American society. As more of these professional teams appeared, the more elites bemoaned the lack of professionalism. For many of these towns and cities, baseball was still popular in the 1920s and 1930s. What had lost its popularity was the act of watching baseball at the ballpark. New sports such as basketball, cycling, and golf allowed workers the change to participate in cheap leisure that was away from the baseball park. Additionally, workers were influenced by the Progressive Era drive to be outdoors and increase physical activity. Elites often bemoaned that baseball's popularity was

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<sup>186</sup> Clifton Mills Collection, Textile Hall Collection. "Glen Lowry to Have Banquet," *The Index-Journal*, December 21, 1921, 5.

affected by new participatory sports. In 1918, the *Charlotte News* noted that “small communities which supported minor league baseball clubs began to lose interest in the game...that was blamed on golf. It was contended that so many men were learning to play their own game that they had no time to sit in a grandstand and let eighteen other men do their exercising.”<sup>187</sup>

Through the early years of the twentieth century, textile mill owners invested significant amounts of money and energy to promote a simple game played among workers. They built ballparks, furnish equipment and uniforms, and paid extra money to the players. While there were some mills that did not play baseball, the majority of textile mills in the Piedmont regions played games against each other.<sup>188</sup> This phenomenon was wholly unique to the textile mills. The region’s tobacco industry did not participate in any of the mill leagues nor did they fund baseball of any kind. When asked about whether baseball was sponsored in the tobacco mill where he worked, Richard Tice said “The factory wasn’t involved too much in that. It was just work.” While other tobacco factories throughout the South eventually participated in organized baseball, the tobacco industry of Eastern North Carolina did not sponsor factory teams.<sup>189</sup>

### **The Blended Rural-Urban City**

Within the Piedmont region, textile mills were anything but just work. At the turn-of-the-twentieth century, the mills became the center of everyday life. People would work at the mill, shop at factory stores, attend factory-supports schools, and play or watch factory sponsored

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<sup>187</sup> “Baseball May Suffer From New Rival Games,” *The Charlotte News*, December 16, 1918.

<sup>188</sup> When Alice Evitt was asked whether there was baseball at the Highland Park Mills in Charlotte, NC, she said “we didn’t have none.” Alice P. Evitt, Oral Interview, July 18, 1979. The most famous baseball player to come out the tobacco industry in North Carolina was Gaylord Perry in the 1950s. David Vaught, “From Tobacco Patch to Pitcher’s Mound: Gaylord Perry, The Spitter, and Farm Life in Eastern North Carolina,” *The Journal of Southern History* 77 no 2, (November 2011), 865-894.

<sup>189</sup> Richard Tice, Oral Interview, March 1, 1979.

baseball. These villages would have many of the conveniences found in other modern American cities. Yet, the villages also featured vestiges from the traditional rural homesteads. Mill workers raised chicken and other livestock and planted crops. Streets in these cities were often unpaved dirt roads. Unlike other contemporary cities, houses often contained outdoor space for cooking and laundry. This blended existence of both rural and urban life was a staple of mill villages in the Piedmont region. Because the process of industrialization occurred rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century, mill owners had to teach their workers life in an industrial city. This new working-class was unfamiliar and unprepared for the urban life. Mill owners, as part of their overall paternalistic endeavor, sought to show their employees how to elevate their standard of living in a modern city. At the same time, these owners also wanted to keep some of the rural traditions that had been a staple of rural Southern society. In this way, they could ease new workers into their new urban life with remnants of rural life which were familiar. Baseball fit within this process because promoters believed that the game could represent urban realities and rural vestiges. On one hand, baseball was a modern urban sport that was played in accordance with industrial values such as teamwork and structures of rules. On the other hand, baseball was seen as part of America's yeoman's past that allowed for people to spend time outdoors.<sup>190</sup>

Unlike their former life in a rural setting, people were placed in close contact with their new neighbors. Even though mill housing featured a bit of separation from their neighbors, these houses were still closer than rural homesteads. Prior to moving to the mill towns, neighbors would likely mingle in churches and general stores once a week. As this new class of workers moved closer to the mills, they came in contact with neighbors and townspeople daily. This

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<sup>190</sup> William H. Philips, "Southern Textile Mill Villages on the Eve of World War II: The Courtenay Mill of South Carolina," *The Journal of Economic History* 45, no.2 (June 1985), 269-275.

caused a shift in social realities, which were predicated on modern conveniences and public places. Therefore, mill owners encouraged this shift by building department stores, public schools, and leisure parks. The public nature of baseball was an important part of building these communal relationships. As workers would go to the ballpark to cheer the local team representing either the city or factory, owners hoped that they would foster relationships that would ultimately benefit the factories.

Economic and social changes brought about by industrialization in the South created a cultural upheaval. As these towns were created to meet the needs of the mill's workforce, owners established municipalities that were a mix of urban modernity and pastoral living. In fact, there was an ever-present tension between urban and rural landscapes in the Piedmont's mill towns. Roaming live animals and unpaved dirt streets were common features in places such as Cooleemee, Burlington, and Bladenboro. One worker from a cotton mill in Charlotte remembered that "Most everybody had a hog or two hogs, and maybe every three or four. They'd have a horse or a cow. And everybody had chickens around on the loose...[and] people had their own garden." Yards were used for cooking and cleaning laundry, housing live animals, and growing crops. Mill families also remembered produced household necessities such as lye soap and home-churned butter. The homes of workers also often did without modern conveniences of indoor plumbing and electricity. Since the game of baseball and its discourse operated in both urban and rural realms, it further fit within the blended urban and rural landscapes.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Cooleemee Heritage Collection, University of North Carolina Special Collection. Colin Fisher, *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). Paula Lupkin, *Manhood Factories: YMCA Architecture and the Making of Modern Urban Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Robert F. Durden, "Electrifying the Piedmont Carolinas: The Beginning of the Duke Power Company, 1904-1925: Part 2" *The North Carolina Historical Review*, 76, No. 4 (January 200), 54-89.

Many of the workers were conscious of the fact that these mill towns were a blend of rural and urban. George Shue, who was a mill worker in Burlington, North Carolina, who had moved to town in 1919, noted the blended urban and rural setting. He recalled that “It was farming country too but still there was cotton mills there.” Similar to others, his family also raised animals and grew their own produce. Before he went to work at the mill, he was responsible for tending to the animals and the farming chores. During his leisure time, Shue also played baseball. When discussing the game, he contrasted his experiences with chores that were common in rural settings and working in the mill. For Shue, as for many in the Piedmont, baseball was common part of a typical day. He remembered that “We’d go to work at six and get off at six, it’s beginning to get dark. And they had to get out and work the garden. And those of us [that] played baseball, we had to go out and practice, we wouldn’t get back home ‘till dark.”<sup>192</sup>

During the first years of the twentieth century, the meaning of baseball functioned within the discourses of industrial modernity. In other regions throughout the United States, baseball was most often popular in industrial cities. In this way, baseball became a modern urban phenomenon. Many contemporaries who commented on baseball noted how the game was used to instill values of teamwork and industrial work ethic. For many elites in the piedmont, the game helped to impart a sense of loyalty to both the community and the factory. Because of these two discursive spheres of baseball, promoting the game to the working-class of North Carolina helped to constitute subjects that were tied to the morality of a rural past while also being modern, productive, and loyal industrial workers.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> George R. Shue, Oral Interview, June 20, 1979.

<sup>193</sup> Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base*.

Baseball also helped to mitigate fears that abounded regarding the perceived evils of urban settings. Many elites in the Piedmont worried that environments of modern cities would corrupt this new class of workers. These elites felt that baseball could be a remedy for this malaise since baseball was linked to rural morality. One of the more vocal leaders of linking baseball with morality was sportswriter Hugh Fullerton. He was the reporter who wrote the expose that led to the famous Black Sox scandal in 1919. In an article printed in newspapers throughout North Carolina, Fullerton argued that more virtuous youth players were produced on the farm than in cities. In “Farm Boys Who Have Made Good in the Realm of Baseball,” Fullerton explained that “the chances of the player falling victim to the temptations of baseball are fewer [for players that began playing on rural fields]. They come larger, stronger, live cleaner, and think more clearly than city boys do.” Moreover, he stressed that players that come from the farm are more likely to spend their earnings wisely, observing “They want to get money enough to buy a farm and retire to it.” Although the goal for the player was post-career rural prosperity, Fullerton saw rural participation as a key for his crusade against alcohol. He attests that 65 percent of ball players drank. Notwithstanding the validity of his claim, he argued that the presence of rural player lowered the number from 95 percent. Fullerton understood that baseball was played everywhere; however, his article demonstrated that there existed a certain rhetoric that placed the morality of rural baseball over its urban counterpart.<sup>194</sup>

The wholesome value of baseball fits with discussions surrounding the importance of community. Prior to industrialization, rural farmers were reliant on the family structure. In the Piedmont’s urban towns, the traditional family structure of the rural South was radically altered,

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<sup>194</sup> Hugh S. Fullerton, “Farm Boys Who Have Made Good in the Realm of Baseball,” *The Charlotte News*, May 2, 1915. Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base*.

since workers were more reliant on the mill and their unrelated neighbors, instead of large families. Baseball helped to mitigate the changes between family community and neighborhood communities by encouraging loyalty and creating a community. In certain key respects, the migration of poor white farmers to mill villages was akin to the large-scale foreign immigration that was happening concurrently in places such as New York, Chicago, and Tampa. Ethnic immigrants, many of them from rural southern and eastern Europe, often struggled to adapt to their new industrial urban settings. People felt that they chose to sequester themselves in immigrant neighborhoods and spend time at ethnic mutual-aid societies. To combat these struggles, American elites promoted baseball to ethnic communities as a way of crafting loyalty to a neighborhood, city, or factory. Instead of being confined to their own ethnic society, baseball provided an opportunity for migrants to be part of a larger community. Rooting for the Brooklyn baseball team meant that the fan was part of the larger community that included the other spectators at the ballpark. A similar process occurred in mill villages in the Piedmont region. Concerned with securing the loyalty of their workers, mill owners saw baseball as a way to craft a community that centered around the mill. These migrants and their families would have typically had little allegiance to their neighborhood, towns, or mills. Baseball, however, offered owners with a potential channel for winning the allegiances of workers. By providing baseball, mill owners strove to create relationship of mutual friendliness between themselves and their workers. Ultimately, they hoped that this relationship would persuade workers to remain in their mill for longer periods of service. Workers often transferred from one mill to the next. Owners had hoped that loyalty to a baseball team and local players would help to curtail this turnover.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993). K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina



When reflecting on past jobs, workers frequently linked the quality of life in their mill town to the mill's team. One said that "But the cotton mill village, it's a wonderful life to live, it was. We had our baseball teams; we had our sports." This 'wonderful life' came about through the factories providing baseball to workers. For those few hours on Saturday, the mill stopped working. These games would be sponsored by the mills and played on days in which the mills were closed. Mill worker Alfred Adams of Boone, North Carolina also noted that: "Saturday evening a lot of times the baseball players of the community would get together and play baseball and the community would watch it." Adams recalls baseball in terms of community. In his case, the community, not the family, came out to see baseball. Games that featured mill workers became an important social function for the entire town and, since they all had a shared rooting interest, it fostered notions of civic pride for their place of work and their new mill towns.<sup>196</sup>

### **The Early Years of the Mill Leagues, 1900 to 1919**

Those numerous factories that did participate in baseball often did so in organized mill leagues. These leagues were often located in a specific region around one of the larger urban hubs of Greenville, Spartanburg, Charlotte, or Greensboro. Prior to the 1900, these baseball games were often loosely organized exhibition between mills. One of the earliest games reported in the Piedmont region which featured workers representing their mill was in 1890s. In the Spring of 1896, the Pilot Cotton Mill sought to organize a baseball team to challenge other mills and clubs. They held tryouts of workers on May 28, 1896 and, a few day later, the mill team

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Press, 2014). Tore C. Olsson, *Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Remaking of the US and Mexican Countryside* (Princeton: University Press, 2017).

<sup>196</sup> Alfred Adams, Oral Interview. Cone Mills Collections, University of North Carolina Special Collections.

battled the Raleigh Baseball Club. These early baseball games were often played on Saturdays and included picnic for the entire family. This tradition of festive, weekend baseball would be a common theme as these exhibitions gave way to a more organized leagues which were spawned throughout the Piedmont. These leagues allowed mill owners to capitalize on the usefulness of baseball in the region. On one hand, they had hoped that the game would produce loyal and moral mill-citizens. On the other hand, baseball provided to be an opportunity to further the budding relationship between the mills and other civic and business interests. Throughout the first years of the twentieth century, mill leagues were organized by the mills, the local governments, and non-textile businesses.<sup>197</sup>

One of the earliest leagues to feature mill teams was founded in the Spring of 1908. That summer, the mills around Greenwood, SC organized a league which would play eleven games over the summer months. Four mills were represented: Ware Shoals Mills, Grendel Mills, Williamston Mills, and Belton Mills. In announcing the league, *The Evening Index* in Greenwood stated that the league would offer “some battling good baseball to be played here this summer.”<sup>198</sup> For that summer, the Ware Shoals Mills won the pennant. The league was made up of mostly mill workers. Lea Ivester played for the Ware Shoals Mills team and worked in the mill tending to the carding machines.<sup>199</sup> Yet, not all involved in the league were textile mill workers. Wells Riley was the manager for the Grendel Mills team – which was located in Greenwood. An avid baseball player at the turn of the century, Riley was part of the city’s leisure class. His father was a successful hotel owner and at the age twenty-five, the younger Riley

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<sup>197</sup> This is the earliest known reference to a mill team being organized in the Piedmont region. “Baseball Challenge,” *News and Observer*, May 28, 1896. “Baseball To-Day,” *News and Observer*, May 30, 1896.

<sup>198</sup> “Mill Baseball League,” *The Evening Index*, April 9, 1908.

<sup>199</sup> United State Census, 1910 Population Report.

purchased and refurbished the local baseball field. He was also known as an enthusiastic cyclist as well as a talented baseball player. At the time of the 1908 league, Riley was past his playing career. Despite no known ties to the Grendel Mill, he was influential in establishing and managing the team. Riley served on Greenwood's Chamber of Commerce while still involved in the local mill league. His political career would apex with an appointment in South Carolina's Department of Agriculture. He eventually served as the Athletic director of the University of South Carolina until his death in 1921.<sup>200</sup>

Despite the relatively small nature of the 1908 league, it began two trends in Piedmont baseball. First, mills throughout the region began to organize in leagues that were centered around one of the major metropolitan areas. Second, the 1908 league highlights the growing trend of baseball being a joint venture between the textile industry and civic elites. These trends manifested themselves in Greenville's mill league, which was established in 1913. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, representatives of local cotton mills met in Belton, SC to organize a new mill league. The purpose of this meeting was to "give the people of this part of the state some good baseball during the coming season." At this meeting, the representatives from three local mills – Pelzer Mill, Williamston Mill, and Belton Mill – elected the officers for the upcoming baseball season, including anointing John A. Hudgens as president of the new league. Hudgens resided in the mill village of Pelzer, which was located just outside of Greenville, and was president of the Chicora Bank. Although he did not have any ties to the mill, two of his young daughters – fifteen-year-old Bessie and fourteen-year-old Bertha – worked as spinners at the Pelzer Mill. The vice

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<sup>200</sup> "Mill Baseball League," *The Evening Index*, April 9, 1908. "To Control Batted Balls," *The Evening Index*, July 14, 1910. "Talking of Baseball Here Plans for Six-Town League," *The Evening Index*, February 16, 1911. "New Hotel Management," *The Evening Index*, September 4, 1913. "Mr. Wells Riley Appointed," *The Evening Index*, September 18, 1917. "Wells A. Riley Died Early This Morning," *The Index-Journal*, January 22, 1921.

president of the league was W.M. Sherard. Representing the Williamston Mill, Sherard was superintendent of the cotton mill located near Greenville. Other members of the league's executive committee were C. C. Cobb, owner of a brokerage business that was part of the cotton exchange, C.H. Strickland, Benton Mills superintendent and local organizer for the Democratic party, and C. W. Parrott, superintendent of Fairmont Mills in Spartanburg and president of the YMCA in Greenville. While the 1913 mill league focused on teams that represented the cotton mills, the league was organized by both representatives of the mill and local businessmen.<sup>201</sup>

This mill league, that centered around Greenville, successfully played out over the summer months. Between April 26 and August 30, six mill teams played 20 games. The first games played were a success and the local newspaper noted the exemplary manner in which players and spectators conducted themselves during these games. Nevertheless, the league was not without controversy. At the end of the season, the Brandon Mill and Mills Mill teams were both tied with the same number of wins. However, the league's championship was held up due to each team using an ineligible player. The bylaws of the league stated that a player must work at the mill for 16 days before they can legally take part in a mill game. The work history of the players was to be documented to the rest of the league. The managers of the Brandon Mill team failed to submit information for one of their players and he was deemed ineligible by the league. The player, a Mr. Rollins, was not employed in the mill and the team had to forfeit the games they won in which he played. However, the Mills Mill team also used an ineligible player. A player by the name of Epting had only worked at the mill for twelve days prior to playing for the

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<sup>201</sup> "Statement of the Condition of The Chicora Bank" *The Greenville News*, January 22, 1913. "South Williamston," *The Anderson Intelligencer*, March 24, 1914. "Gossett Reports on Cotton Probe Trip to Europe," *The Intelligencer*, May 5, 1914. "Convention at Belton," *The Abbeville Press and Banner*, May 1, 1912. "Local and Personal," *The Pickens Sentinel*, September 25, 1913. "Mill League is Organized," *The Greenville News*, March 3, 1913.

Mills Mill team. The two teams played a few exhibition games, but nothing was really decided to who won the league's pennant. Those individuals who ran the league were cavalier as to who won the pennant. They decided that the public could decide whether the Brandon or the Mills team had any claim to the pennant. This controversy surrounding the league highlights the relative indifference of championships in the Piedmont region. For the local mills that invested in the game, the spectacle was more important than actual winning and losing. While both Brandon Mill and Mills Mill fielded good teams, the best of the two teams was inconsequential.<sup>202</sup>

During the 1910s, newspapers played a pivotal role in promoting and establishing mill leagues. Throughout this time, summer sports pages were littered with details about local games, statistics, and standings. Those who ran newspapers were often behind the leagues as well. In 1915, the Spartanburg Mill League was organized. Charles Hearon was elected president of the league and David Tillinghast was appointed the mill league's secretary. Both men were also editors of the *Spartanburg Herald*. The 1917 Greenville mill league furthered the trend. In the Spring of that year, J. Carter Latimer was elected president of the league. His full-time job was editor of *The Greenville News*. In January of 1917, Latimer wrote an opinion story where he argued that the mill leagues should be similar to professional leagues. He made the point that baseball was akin to both a spectacle and enterprise. Thus, in order to furnish the area with "high class amateur baseball," he advocated for changes in the ways that players were paid. Once elected president of the league, he abolished the earlier rule that players had to work at the mill for a specific amount of time. On April 3, 1917, the representatives of the mills and civic leaders elected Latimer president of the league. They also adopted Latimer's changes to the rules

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<sup>202</sup> "Brandon vs Mills Mill," *The Greenville News*, September 14, 1913. "Brandon Manager Claims Mill Pennant," *The Greenville News*, September 14, 1913.

governing the player's pay. The decreed that any class of men could be allowed to play for the teams. Moreover, the eliminated the rule that capped player's salaries which allowed clubs to pay any salary that they cared to pay. By fundamentally changing the Greenville mill league, Latimer demonstrated his influence despite not being professionally associated with the mills.<sup>203</sup>

The 1917 Greenville mill league was unique in a way that was rarely seen in American sports at the turn of the century. In the meeting following the initial organizational gathering, Latimer announced that the six mills which were represented in the league would be judged on who had the highest attendance for the summer. Instead of the outcome of the games solely determining the winners and losers of the league, the number of individuals who paid to attend the games played a factor in who had a successful season. This declaration helped to blur the line between baseball as entertainment that fostered civic pride and baseball as enterprise. In the January 1917 opinion story, Latimer strongly advocated that the mill owners should sell tickets to offset the costs of operating the league. In years past, the league struggled with costs. In order to rectify this issue, Latimer advocated a more capitalistic approach to financing the league. Even in the story accompanying the announcement of the new rule, Latimer noted the great financial sacrifice the mills endured to put on these games. Along with the attendance honors, the new rules governing salaries dictated that the 1917 league would be based on a laissez-faire approach to the game. The free market, with little intervention from the league's governing board, determined which teams could be successful on the field. With the rule that there would be no cap in player salaries, the larger mills with more financial resources could pay more for players than the smaller mills. Furthermore, by awarding the team with the highest attendance, the play

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<sup>203</sup> "Spartanburg Mill League Organized," *The Charlotte Observer*, April 8, 1915. J. C. Latimer, "Intro-City Ball League Proposed," *The Greenville News*, January 22, 1917, 5. "Greenville Mill League Organized," *The Greenville News*, April 3, 1917.

on the field became somewhat inconsequential. In announcing the new award, the Greenville newspaper attempted to frame the attendance honor as continuing the on-the-field rivalry that had already existed between the teams. The notion of rivalry conjures a sort of quasi-coerciveness that furthers the loyalty to a mill and its town through attending the game in order to defeat the rival in attendance. Although spectators had some autonomy in the winners and losers of the attendance honors, any profits associated with tickets and concession sales still went to the mills and leagues.<sup>204</sup>

Attendance was not the only way that civic and business leaders appealed to private businesses and the public to offset costs associated with baseball. In 1911, mills and towns near Winston-Salem, NC attempted to organize a baseball league that would include both mill teams and teams that represented a local city. Called the Piedmont Baseball League, organizers had hoped to begin play in June. However, one of the main sponsors, the city of Gastonia, pulled out of the league and it eventually failed to materialize. In publishing the story that the league would not play that summer, local organizers appealed to the electric company for an electric car line that would link the city's baseball field with the working-class neighborhoods. The only place to stage the games was the Loray Park ball grounds. The *Gastonia Gazette* noted that the park was "the only available place for playing, [but] is so far from the main part of town that it is necessary for the large majority of would-be spectators to hire conveyances to take them to the ball ground." The concluded that the fee to travel to the stadium, in addition to ticket prices, would be too much for the spectators. The low attendance would not help to offset the cost of organizing a baseball team. Thus, the organizers of the team called for an electric car line in

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<sup>204</sup> Latimer, "Intro-City Ball League Proposed," 5. "Independent League Open This Afternoon," *The Greenville News*, April 21, 1917, 5.

order transfer people to the ballpark the following summer. Arguing that there was support for the team and baseball in the city, the organizers appealed to the city and the electric company that a car line was the only thing stopping Gastonia from participating in the Piedmont Baseball League.<sup>205</sup>

Teams and leagues also made appeals directly to the public for additional financial support. In 1912, the Piedmont Baseball league was able to become an established league for the summer months. One of the cities that participated in the league was High Point, NC. Home to a high number of textile mills, the High Point team decided to hire Charles Doak. A former minor league baseball player, Doak had become a respected coach and manager in both baseball and basketball. Following his stint with the High Point team, Doak went on to coach the University of North Carolina's basketball team in 1914. His fame and success, however, proved financially costly to the High Point baseball team. In an attempt to help with the cost, the team announced that "As the extra expense will have to be met by the volunteer contributions for our citizens, it is urged that those of our public-spirited citizens will respond promptly to the call for aid which is to put us in the front rank with a winning team." It is debatable whether the volunteer drive was successful, but throughout the season, there were pleas from the team for people to come out and watch the team. At the end of the season, the hiring of Doak was a success on the field, as the High Point team played in the championship series at the end of the summer.<sup>206</sup>

Throughout the region, newspapers and mill league promoters were concerned with attendance and found ways to entice residents to the ballparks. They had hoped to accomplish

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<sup>205</sup> "Gastonia Took 'Cold Feet,'" *The Gastonia Gazette*, June 16, 1911, 6.

<sup>206</sup> "Secures Coach Doak," *The High Point Enterprise*, June 14, 1912, 1. "Base Ball Notes," *The High Point Enterprise*, July 8, 1912, 4. "High Point vs. Winston," *Greensboro Daily News*, September 1, 1912, 16. "Ex-State Coach Chick Doak Dies," *The Sunday Star-News*, April 22, 1956, 4.



this by promoting the game through the lens of both upper-class notions of artistry and industrial ingenuity. Promoters found ways to describe the game which appeal to upper-class readers. This was often done through newspapers. They often argued that baseball, featuring mill workers, was only worthwhile if the game was well-played. For many of the newspaper writers in the Piedmont, “fast baseball” was the words used to describe these well-played games. While certainly speed is part of the skill of baseball, newspapers do not use the word “fast” to describe a team or player. Instead, they use the word as an adjective to describe the whole league and the style of play. In announcing a mill league in Durham, NC in 1919, the *Durham Morning News* stated that “the representatives present last night were certain they could have fast baseball.” The paper went on to state that [league President Prexy Bugg] was certain of the best cooperation from the public in the effort to give the fans of Durham fast amateur baseball during the summer months.” Most often, the term “fast baseball” applied to the quality of the game. Headlines throughout the region proclaimed fast baseball in association with the mill leagues. In a call for attendance for the Anderson, SC mill league titled “Fast Baseball Today in the Mill League,” *The Intelligencer* argued that people should support the league because of the “splendid baseball” that was being played throughout the circuit. Even well-played African American baseball was termed as fast. The concept of “fast baseball” conjures notions of an efficient game, the same of industrial workers who completed their work quickly and efficiently.<sup>207</sup>

While winning and losing was important to those that invested in the game, representing the factory in a respectable way also was of the utmost importance. For many observers, how

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<sup>207</sup> “Fast Baseball Today in the Mill League,” *The Intelligencer*, June 20, 1914, 2. “Bugg to Head City League,” *The Durham Morning Herald*, June 7, 1919, 7. “Fast Negro Baseball Game was Captured by A. and T.,” *The Greensboro Daily News*, April 2, 1918. Noam Maggor, *Brahmin Capitalism: Frontiers of Wealth and Populism in America’s First Gilded Age* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 2017), 127-157.

many of the workers were in attendance and the quality of the games were almost as important as the results on the field. Newspapers tended to be more concerned with the quality of play and overlooked winners and losers. When announcing the Greenville mill league in 1913, the local newspaper noted that the purpose of the league was not to crown the best ball club of the region. Instead, its purpose was to provide those living in the region with good baseball. Even rivalries between mills were deemphasized, despite the “friendly rivalries between the mills which compose this league.” When reporting on the games, the newspapers often used flowery language to convey the happenings. For the first game of the 1913 season, the *Greenville News* stated that the “large crowd of spectators witness one of the prettiest [games] ever seen here.” These factory teams were seen as an extension of the company. Thus, similar to sloppy work was looked down upon in the factory, a sloppy game reflected poorly on the mill.<sup>208</sup>

These games also helped to strengthen an alliance between the textile mills and other local businesses, thus helping to create a class of businesses elites who controlled and funded organized baseball. This alliance, however, did not mean that players did not see opportunity in the mill leagues. There were times where players saw the mill leagues as an opportunity to be discovered by Major League baseball teams in the North. This led one player to reach out to the mills to advocate for themselves to be part of the league. In October of 1926, a player in Washington, DC reached out to the Converse Cotton Mill to ask for a spot on their baseball team in the coming Spring. “Babe” Clapper had heard through a friend about the mill “supporting a team.” In a letter addressed to the mill, Clapper stated that had played at both the collegiate and professional levels as a pitcher. But he fails to mention any of his work experiences.

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<sup>208</sup> For more on the crisis of manliness at the turn of the twentieth century, see: Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in The United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University Press, 1995). “Mill League Opens,” *The Greenville News*, April 27, 1913, 2.

Nevertheless, Clapper's letter is both him stumping for a job and a position on the team. He states the date of when he would like to start working and the tone of the letter implies that he was looking for a job. However, he was only concerned with providing baseball references. "I can send you recommendations from my coaches and managers of teams I have played with," Clapper said in his letter. Located in Spartanburg, SC, Converse Mills was part of the Clifton Mill Company. By the mid- to late-1920s, the mill leagues had produced players who would eventually move on to a higher level of professional ball. For some ball players like Clapper, the mill league represented a dual opportunity. On one hand, they received a paying job. On the other, they were afforded an opportunity to play baseball with a chance to be discovered by the burgeoning scouting staffs of Major League baseball teams in the North.<sup>209</sup>

By the end of the 1910s, mill and business elites had established baseball leagues and associations that furthered strengthened business interests in the larger cities and in the satellite mill towns throughout the Piedmont region. Many had theorized that baseball and the mill league would flourish in the 1920s in the aftermath of World War I. "Now that the Hun has been properly spanked, the baseball fans of Charlotte are already dreaming of the balmy days of springtime," noted the *Charlotte Observer* in the days following the armistice which ended the war. Notwithstanding the optimism following the war, baseball changed significantly in the next two decades. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, mills began to consolidate their businesses and streamline productions. Moreover, these mills also sought to strengthen their relationships with local governments. These two trends profoundly changed the ways in which baseball was played in the Piedmont.

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<sup>209</sup> Correspondence from Clapper to the Converse Cotton Mill, University of Clemson Library, Clifton Manufacturing Company Collection, Box 5.

## **Baseball, Government, and Labor Issues: 1920s to 1930s**

Baseball in the Piedmont region went through many changes during the 1920s and 1930s. Prior to World War I, investments in baseball were part of a larger paternalistic relationship between businesses and labor. After the war, however, the purpose of baseball investments changed on three fronts. First, the game became an important alternative to labor agitation. The immediate post-war period saw an increase in labor agitation throughout the United States. Many in North and South Carolina saw baseball as a moral alternative to labor organizing and political activism. With the coming of the Great Depression in the 1930s, baseball further grew into an important distraction for workers. Second, baseball in the region became an important factor in the growth of the larger metropolitan areas. A growing alliance between government and business was aided by government involvement in baseball. Throughout the two decades, local governmental officials became more involved in the planning and execution of the game. Moreover, these cities invested in new ballparks and updated infrastructure in attempts to further the popularity of baseball. By the 1930s, these two changes led to an end of the mill teams, which were replaced by minor league teams that had ties to northern Major League teams. Teams such as the Cooleemee Cardinals, Durham Bulls, and Charlotte Hornets proved to be more popular and profitable than the individual mill teams. Finally, an external class of full-time players replaced local mill workers as players. While the mill leagues existed past the 1940s, their popularity would not reach the same heights seen in 1900 and 1910.<sup>210</sup>

During World War I, baseball was still played in the Piedmont. Throughout the United States, Americans were debating the role of the game in wartime. During the summer of 1917,

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<sup>210</sup> Hall et al., *Like a Family*.

Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of Defense, Newton Baker, decreed that "baseball is non-productive and non-essential industry. Ball players are [therefore] hit by the 'work or fight' order." While professional players throughout the country would enter jobs in the war-industry (or drafted into the army), mill teams were still able to play in their leagues since they worked in factories that helped to make clothing for the war effort. Through the summer of 1918, mill teams played in local leagues. They also staged games against military camps that were stationed in the Carolinas. One of the first games of the season was played between the champions of the Greenville mill league, Brandon Mills, against the 105<sup>th</sup> Engineers from Camp Sevier in Greenville. These games eventually led to the formation of a two-week league within the camp. By the end of the two weeks, the 118<sup>th</sup> Infantry baseball team claimed the local championship by defeating the 117<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

During the summer months, mill teams were formed throughout the region. Despite the war, mills located in such places as Gastonia, NC, Concord, NC, and Lancaster, SC, formed mill teams and participated in mill leagues during the summer months. These teams, however, were not unaffected by the war effort. During the season, mills and local promoters had to participate in the baseball war tax. Passed by the federal government in late-1917, the baseball war tax called for 10% of ticket prices to be paid to the government. Mills often presented the tax as part of the mill's patriotic duty to fund the war effort. Much like other businesses throughout the United States, cotton mills in the Piedmont promoted the concept of volunteer-driven charity as a patriotic duty. The Salisbury Cotton Mill was an example of this. In June of 1918, the mill bragged that 100% of their employees donated a day's wage to the American Red Cross. The

baseball war tax fits within this trend of coercive volunteerism. Despite all this, the game served as a needed distraction throughout the war years.<sup>211</sup>

In the days that followed the end to the conflict in Europe, attention anxiously returned to baseball in the Carolinas. Despite some concern that attendance number would diminish due to the war, elites began to plan of the 1919 season days after the armistice was signed. The optimism of November and December 1918 turned to angst in the following months as many in the Piedmont found it difficult to adjust to the new post-war world. This led many to reimagine the role of baseball in their society.<sup>212</sup>

### **Baseball and Labor Organization**

World War I marked an important turning point for businesses and baseball in the Piedmont region. Wartime demands stimulated business which helped to increased profits and wages. The prosperity of the wartime economy quickly ended when the war concluded. In the months following the armistice, the Piedmont's economy worsened as businesses were suddenly overextended. Other external factors such as the decline of foreign markets and changes in popular fashion also contributed to changes in the Piedmont's economy. Subsequent cuts to wages and operation hours severely hampered the relationship between capital and labor.<sup>213</sup> In February 24, 1919, the employees at the Highland Park Mills near Charlotte went on strike.

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<sup>211</sup> "Baseball is Non-Essential," *Durham Morning Herald*, July 20, 1918. "Brandon Mill Team Meet Sevier Nine," *The Greenville News*, March 23, 1918. "Sumter Guards Leading Train," *The Greenville News*, March 27, 1918. "118<sup>th</sup> Infantry Team Claims Championship by Defeating 117<sup>th</sup>," *The Greenville News* April 3, 1918. "1,000,000 for U.S. As Baseball War Tax," *Jackson County Journal*, January 4, 1918. "Salisbury Cotton Mill Employees Make 100 Per Cent Record in Red Cross Drive," *The Charlotte Observer*, June 2, 1918. For more on baseball during World War I, see: Jim Leeke, *From the Dugouts to the Trenches: Baseball During the Great War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

<sup>212</sup> "Baseball Fans are Stirring," *The Charlotte News*, December 27, 1918.

<sup>213</sup> Hall, *Like a Family*, 183-236.

Workers were distraught when the mill reduced wages by 35 percent for all workers. Because the strike began in the winter months, the baseball season was not immediately affected. The Highland Park Mills baseball team had been quite successful throughout the years. Like many mills and towns across the Carolinas, there was hope for a successful summer baseball season. As the season approached, the strike grew. Initially, 150 workers had gone on strike to protest the wage cuts. By the first week of March, however, 900 employees were on strike. Despite the strike, there seemed to be hope among the mill's proprietors that there would be a mill team that summer. On March 16, a meeting of Charlotte's business elites centered on the prospects of a city league in Charlotte. The strike did not upend the prospects of Highland Park Mill's baseball team as they were "mentioned as probably entrants in the league." In the subsequent meeting a week later, however, the strike had hampered Highland Park Mills from entering the city league. As the strike turned violent in the month of May, a resolution was brokered between North Carolina's reformist governor, Thomas W. Bickett, and the strikers. While baseball may not have played a part in the negotiations, the game was part of the post-strike celebration. Since the conflict ended after the start of the season, the Highland Park Mill team could not enter any of the local mill leagues. However, in celebration of the Fourth of July, Highland Park played three games against three different mills. In recapping the three games, the decidedly anti-union *Charlotte Observer* noted that "the Highland Park boys show enthusiasm and ability and play the sport like true men."<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>214</sup>"Strike at Mill No. Three," *The Charlotte News*, February 25, 1919, 2. "Highland Park Will Try For Championship Over Gastonia," *The Charlotte News*, July 6, 1907, 7. "Conciliator At Work Here," *The Charlotte News*, March 4, 1919. "City League For 1919 is Formed," *The Charlotte Observer*, March 29, 1919, 9. "Highland Park Ball Team of Rock Hill Makes Good Record," *The Charlotte Observer*, August 3, 1919, 42.

During the height of the Highland Park Mills strike, newspapers played an important role of shaping the narrative against the strike and unionism. And once again, baseball and the discourse of its moral past was used against those textile workers who favored unionism. Business and civic elites in the Piedmont were concerned about workers who were drawn to radical and foreign political and labor ideology. This fear was not exclusive to the Piedmont region. In the summer of 1919, the United States was in the midst of the first Red Scare as ideologies of communism and bolshevism became the antithesis to what was being developed as Americanism. This radical rhetoric, and the fear it caused, originated in industrial, urban spaces. In the Piedmont region, elites believed that they could combat the threat of communism with the morality of baseball. In an article that appeared in the *Salisbury Evening Post* announcing the return of baseball in the region proclaimed the game's purity, the paper argued that the game "ought to be of peculiar value to a community in the trying days of restlessness and general protuberance through which the country is passing." The argument was made that baseball had the power to tame radical thought, that was caused by idealness. The newspaper went on to say that:

When men spend a couple hours at a baseball game instead of in idleness, their minds are for that length at least taken away from imaginary evils, and they are thinking wholesome thoughts. Bolshevism flourished on street corners and around the meccas of do-nothingness. When men are not engaged in work, their imaginations are active and vain things appear as very real and tangible to them. Our notion is that baseball just at this specific moment will have a decided tendency to correct the errors that are creeping into the actions of men because it will occupy the mind.

These social theorists believed that yeoman farmers lacked the time necessary for taking part in radical, revolutionary thought. Theoretically, the move to the city – with all its modern amenities



– now provided workers with the time to be exposed to radical thought. Baseball became a cure for labor radicalism in the Piedmont.<sup>215</sup>

Despite the fears that the event caused, the Highland Park Mill strike was seen by many observers as a win for textile workers and the union that represented them: The United Textile Workers of America (UTW). Beginning in 1901, the UTW represented textile workers in both the North and the South. By the 1919 Highland Park Mill strike, UTW had established a strong southern base and produced a widely circulated news journal. *The Textile Worker* was a once-a-year publication that advertised jobs, analyzed national and international business trends and news, and promoted union loyalty. First published in 1912, the journal was never concerned with baseball. This changed in 1919 as the union became more powerful and issues began to arise throughout the United States. The first appearance of the game came in the form of an inspirational story about confidence of a batter to hit a difficult pitch. The story served as an allegory to the plight of workers during a labor strike. By the following year, baseball had become a talking point for the union. During the 1920 national meeting, the union's president remarked in reference to businesses reluctance to allow unionization: "We have there what we call or rather, what the manufacturer calls 'The American Plan.' I call it the most damnable thing on earth – insurance, baseball, tennis, and everything but organized labor." By 1920, the textile labor organization saw organized baseball as a company sponsored distraction to labor organizing.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> "Baseball Alive Again," *Salisbury Evening Post*, May 23, 1919. Erica J. Ryan, *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

<sup>216</sup> "Straightening Out the Fade Away," *The Textile Worker*, 7, no. 1 (1919), 272. "Final Report of the Committee on Organization," *The Textile Worker* 10, no.1 (1922), 121.

At the time, many workers thought that the 1919 Highland Park Mills strike was a turning point for unionism in the Southern textile industry. Nationally, labor unions had gained a level of acceptance during World War I. With the end of the war, and with the success of the 1919 strike, union leaders canvased the Carolinas in an attempt to promote the usefulness of unions. At the same time, throughout the United States, there began a sharp rebuke of industrial unionism that lasted throughout the 1920s.<sup>217</sup> These tensions between pro- and anti-unionism played out in the during the summer of 1920. As the region became more unionized, civic and business leaders responded with the promise of a higher level of baseball. In Anderson, SC, mill owners promised a “larger mill league” for the summer of 1920. The league’s organizers expanded the schedule of the local mill league. Instead of scheduling one game a week, the 1920 league would feature three games a week over a 60-day period. Traditionally, mill games were exclusively held on Saturday. This new league tripled the amount of games that were available to workers. Moreover, the organizers also altered the start time of the games to better accommodate workers. In a letter publicizing these changes, the secretary of the Anderson mill league noted that “the games were to be called at 5:15 or 5:30 pm, after mill hours.” He further states that the league would be “an excellent source of wholesome entertainment to the people” while also “financially profitable.” The final change to the 1920 Anderson mill league was incorporating support from the local chamber of commerce who helped to organize the mills that were to participate in the league.<sup>218</sup>

Other leagues throughout the Piedmont region altered the mill leagues in the wake of the unionization trend in the post-World War I era. After a hiatus of a few years, mill owners in

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<sup>217</sup> Hall et al., *Like a Family*, 190. Cletus E. Daniel, *Culture of Misfortune: An Interpretive History of Textile Unionism in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 4-5.

<sup>218</sup> “Propose A Larger Mill League,” *The Index-Journal*, February 15, 1920.

Gastonia, NC, organized an expanded mill league in 1920. Instead of the traditional handful of teams, this league consisted of 12 different mill teams. In announcing the first meeting for the league, *The Gastonia Gazette* theorized that there was as many as 25 cotton mill teams in the county that could participate in the league which was based on the principles of amateurism – meaning that players would not be paid to play. The newspaper argued that an amateur league of this size “would eliminate a lot of wasted time and energy” among workers throughout the county. Eventually, league organizers selected 12 teams that represented mill communities in the area around Gastonia. Within the bilaws of the new league, amateurism was defined as “one who participates for pleasure only.” In Anderson, SC, the mill league that was formed in 1920 barred paying players that worked outside of the factory. During the league’s formation meeting, the teams were deemed to be “made up altogether from the employees of the mill whose name it bears.” The leaders of the league further declared that there would be no hired players allowed to play for the mill teams.<sup>219</sup>

During the nineteenth century, amateurism was upheld as the purest form of sport throughout the United States. The concept revolved around the notion that players played their sport for the so-called love of the game, instead of financial gain. In the case of the Gastonia and Anderson County mill leagues, the notion of amateurism was an attempt to return to a more amateur, and thus wholesome, form of baseball in the face of increased union activity. In the decade past, there were instances where leagues openly discussed paying players and encouraged mills to pay their players. Yet, in the face of labor issues, the Gastonia league returned to the notion of amateurism in order to facilitate the notion that baseball provided a moral

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<sup>219</sup> “League of Mill Teams May Be Organized,” *The Gastonia Gazette*, May 18, 1920. “Gaston County Baseball League is Formed,” *The Gastonia Gazette*, May 28, 1920. “Mill Baseball League Formed at Anderson,” *The Greenville News*, March 26, 1920.

distraction.<sup>220</sup> These trends of promoting amateur baseball fit within other cost-saving efforts that mills undertook during the 1920s. Throughout the decade, textile mills in the Piedmont found ways to modernize in order eliminate cost.<sup>221</sup>

By not paying players, the textile mills were able to somewhat lessen the financial investment into the games. Yet, the language that was used by the organizers of the leagues suggests that workers who participated in the leagues without pay were somehow more virtuous than those who were paid. This supposed virtuousness was often understood to be at odds with labor organization. Newspapers of the time often commented on the depravity of labor organization in the mill towns and urban environments of the Piedmont. Moreover, social commentators throughout the United States noted that there existed a complicated relationship between morality and labor unions. In 1917, economist James Laurence Laughlin noted this perception of labor unions being immoral. He argued that the mere existence of labor unions was not immoral. Instead, Laughlin claimed that “the morality of a union...depends solely on what use it is put to by those that control it.” He further argues that violence during labor unrests determines the morality of unionism. Other specifically questioned the morality of unionism and the act of striking. In 1921, Rev. Donald McLean argued that union activity and labor agitation were inherently immoral. In *The Morality of the Strikes*, McLean argued that strikes were immoral since they affected the general population which had no control over the situation. Ultimately, McLean argues for federal legislation against strikes that had crippled communities

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<sup>220</sup> For more on amateurism in sports see: Matthew P. Llewellyn and John Gleaves, *The Rise and Fall of Olympic Amateurism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2016). S.W. Pope, *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876-1926* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

<sup>221</sup> “League of Mill Teams May Be Organized,” *The Gastonia Gazette*, May 18, 1920. “Gaston County Baseball League is Formed,” *The Gastonia Gazette*, May 28, 1920. “Mill Baseball League Formed at Anderson,” *The Greenville News*, March 26, 1920.

at the end of World War I. While these discussions concerning strikes were embedded in American discourse, mill owners in the Piedmont region reinvested in amateur baseball as, once again, a moral distraction for its workers.<sup>222</sup>

While battles between labor and capital dominated national discourse throughout the decade of the 1920s, the age-old regional divide between the North and the South was also affected by the labor question. By end of the decade, some in the Piedmont noted that the rash of labor agitation could be blamed on the North. In an editorial from the *Greenville News*, the newspapers argued that “Russia’s efforts to plant communism in China is no more of a failure than a Northern effort to plant Communism or even powerful labor unionism in the South.”<sup>223</sup> While the some in the Piedmont blamed the North for the labor issues in the region, Northern observers noted that the promotion of cheap labor was at the root of unionism. In an article that was widely published in the North, Everett P. Partridge, editor of the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* and part of the Department of Engineering Research at the University of Michigan, argued that the concept of cheap labor would be detrimental to social and industrial progress in the Piedmont region. Partridge argued that the way in which Southern industrialists handled their employees would bring about more wars between labor and capital in the region. He argued that “in attempting to maintain cheap labor costs, the industrials will permit the same cycle of labor conflicts that will lasts for the next quarter-century.” His solution for these issues was more baseball. Later in his speech, Partridge stated that “possibly the best means of

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<sup>222</sup> John Martin, “The Social Value of Trade Unionism,” *International Journals of Ethics* 12 (1902): 437-450. James Laurence Laughlin, *Latter-Day Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1917) 25-69. Donald Alexander McLean, *The Morality of the Strike* (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1921).

<sup>223</sup> Arthur Brisbane, “Today,” *The Greenville News*, September 17, 1929.

counteracting radical labor agitation lies not in the riot guns, but in attractive sanitary industrial villages supplied with baseball diamonds.”<sup>224</sup>

The United Textile Workers of America and the American Federation of Labor took opposition to Partridge’s remarks and marks the moment when the unions took the stance that company-sponsored baseball was a waste of financial resources. In an article that appeared in 1930 edition of the UTW’s *The Textile Worker*, the union argued that instead of investing in baseball, companies ought to redirect the fund to the workers. In the article, Paul J. Smith, the chairman of the southerner organization campaign of the AFL, argued that baseball provided little benefits to the textile workers of the South. In rebuke of Partridge’s remarks, Smith noted that, “Give the worker a living wage, wherein he can maintain his self-respect and the American standard of living and the employers will not have to bother about the baseball diamond.” He further stated that “a man with wages too small to provide for his family and educate his children is not interested in the baseball diamond. You can’t eat or wear them.” Smith also argued that, with higher wages, workers could then be responsible for their own leisure.<sup>225</sup>

These growing tensions between labor and capital altered the ways in which baseball was played in the Piedmont. Since the early years of the twentieth century, baseball in the Piedmont was a local endeavor where textile mills sponsored teams and leagues that represented the mill. These leagues were a cross between recreation and professional leagues were individual mills sponsored teams to play against other factory teams. Outside of youth games, the local mill team

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<sup>224</sup> “Cheap Labor in South is Fatal To Its Progress,” *The Daily Notes*, May 6, 1930. The University of Michigan, *The President's Report to the Board of Regents for the Academic Year* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1929) 21.

<sup>225</sup> *The Textile Worker: Official Journal of the United Textile Workers of America, Volumes 18-19* (New York: United Textile Workers of America, 1930-31) 97-99.

were often the only adult baseball team in town. This began to change in the aftermath of World War I and during the rush to organize labor.

Larger towns throughout the Piedmont began to invest in minor league teams which were largely independent from the textile mills. The first minor league was the Piedmont League, which began operations in the winter of 1919. Based in North Carolina, the league's teams represented local cities and played other teams in a region. Each town in the Piedmont League had to invest \$1000 to be rewarded the opportunity to participate in the league. Boosters in six cities – Raleigh, Danville, High Point, Winston-Salem, Durham, and Greensboro – raised the funds necessary to participate in the league. The investment in the league, however, was often higher than the money to join. For example, in Durham, five wealthy citizens paid a total of \$50,000 to secure and fund the city's franchise. The founders of the league decided that the cost of admission would be set at fifty cents. This required an investment by spectators. The majority of textile leagues were free to attend. With the new Piedmont League, even the local newspapers noted the financial spike in attending games. In announcing the new admission prices, one paper noted that “the fans will feel the effects of the high cost of living at baseball games as well as in other lines of business.”<sup>226</sup>

Not all cities in the league were eager to invest the money into the league. The team in Raleigh, NC had issues in finding a source of funding to put up the \$10,000 to participate in the league and fund the ball club. Most teams were able to secure funding in the days after the founding of the league in November of 1919. Raleigh, however, lagged behind the other teams and the league's organizers threatened to leave them out of the 1920 schedule. Eventually, the

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<sup>226</sup> “Mid-Winter Press Meet Announced,” *The High Point Review*, November 13, 1919. “Col. Cox to Head New Ball Club,” *News and Observer*, January 3, 1920.

Raleigh team was able to secure the funding. This funding was secured the same day in which the Governor of North Carolina, Thomas Bickett, helped to broker a settlement between striking workers and owners at Pilot Mill in Raleigh. With the help of the government, the owners of the mill issued an ultimatum to the striking workers threatening them with eviction if they did not return to work. The three-month-strike ended with the ultimatum. In the news article announcing the end of the Pilot Mill strike, *The Charlotte Observer* also announced that Raleigh had secured the funding for the 1920 Piedmont League. While not explicitly stating that the two events are completely linked, the fact that both were announced in the same article associated the end of the strike with the coming of the new baseball league.<sup>227</sup>

The league represented a quasi-association between local, non-textile businesses and local government. The first president of the Piedmont League was W. G. Bramham. His involvement in baseball was far-reaching. His involvement can be dated to the mill leagues of the post-World War I era. Moreover, Bramham was influential in drafting the rules for player movement from the minor leagues to the major leagues. While not an elected official himself, Bramham was active in North Carolina politics. He was influential in North Carolina's Republican Party. An attorney by trade, Bramham was chairman of the party's executive committee in Durham County and served as a delegate to the national Republican convention throughout the 1920s. Bramham's duties included being a "referee in the dispensing of federal patronage" after the election of Republican Warren G. Harding in 1920. While certainly in the political minority in the South, Bramham was also influential in business interests in Durham. He was also president of in the city's Chamber of Commerce and active in the Progressive

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<sup>227</sup> "Governor Steps In, Ends Raleigh Textile Strike," *The Charlotte Observer*, January 3, 1920. "Raleigh Comes in the Forfeiture," *Durham Morning Herald*, January 5, 1920.



Salesmanship Club. Other officials in the league were part of North Carolina's business elites. Official of the 1920 Piedmont League included Marcus Rushton (car dealership owner), Victor Moore (manufacturing), and W.B. Drake (bank president). The president of the Raleigh club was Albert Cox who was the head of the North Carolina National Guard. It is important to note that that none of those involved with the Piedmont League were directly involved with the textile industry.<sup>228</sup>

The Piedmont League survived and prospered throughout the 1920s; however, the league does not immediately replace the mill leagues. Despite diminishing popularity and numbers, the mill leagues continued until the mid-1940s. The Piedmont League does represent the beginning of the end of those mill leagues. By the stock market crash of 1929, mills began to limit investment in the mill leagues due to financial concerns and labor agitation brought about by the Great Depression. Moreover, this is a time where a new generation of workers began arriving at the mills. These workers were the sons and daughters of migrants who moved to these towns in the early years of the cotton industry. Many of whom lived in the mill villages their entire lives, meaning that they were familiar with the elements of the factory towns in which owners sought to convey. Thus, the same principles governing the usefulness of baseball with the prior generation of workers were no longer important to textile mill owners.

## **Conclusion**

The arrival of textile mills at the turn of the twentieth century fundamentally changed the traditional agrarian lifestyle of the Piedmont region. To adapt to these changes, owners of these factories

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<sup>228</sup> "Fifty New Members Additions to Club," *The Durham Morning News*, April 11, 1917. "New Chairman Makes Answer," *The Durham Morning Herald*, September 11, 1918. "Classified Directory," *The Durham Morning Herald*, July 27, 1919

hoped to supplement the traditional agrarian family structure with a structure that revolved around the community and the factory. Along with building houses for newly migrated workers, business elites invested in general stores, libraries, schools, parks, and other recreational activities such as baseball. In fact, baseball helped to reorient the shifting communal structure of Carolinian society within these burgeoning communities. Some owners saw these teams as so vital, in fact, that they directed managers to hire workers that were better on the field than they were on the shop floor. Along with civic leaders in the larger, more established cities, mill owner supported and funded baseball as part of a larger mission to create a loyal workforce whose members were both efficient industrial workers and moral, rural citizens. The elite of the region held anxieties regarding the migration of poor farmers to burgeoning towns and cities. In discussing the usefulness of baseball, community leaders sought leisure activities which offered to bridge the gap between the dual identities of urban and rural. Baseball in the regional also furthered the burgeoning alliance between local governments and businesses. Mill leagues were established around one of the larger metropolitan cities such as Greenville, Charlotte, and Greensboro. To organize these games and leagues, textile mills required the support and influence from those city's businesses, civic, and social elites.

Until the 1920s, this community structure which featured the mill at the center began to crack. With the labor turmoil of post-World War I era, working-class agitation caused owners to move away from financing mill teams. In their place, mill owners and civic leaders organized semi-professional minor leagues to replace the longstanding, professional mill leagues. In this wave of strikes and labor agitation, owners hoped that new semi-professional minor leagues, that placed more focus on the city than the factory, could foster a stronger relationship between cities and the factories on their outskirts. These leagues were heralded as providing the region with a higher level of baseball than had been previously played. While providing spectators with good baseball, there were also

subtle links between providing workers baseball and limiting the number of strikes. As with the 1920 Piedmont League, elites provided baseball as long as there was peace in the workplace.

#### Chapter Four:

##### Tampa: Baseball, Ethnicity, and Labor in a New South City, 1899-1930

The summer of 1915 was long remembered for one of the most exciting pennant races in the history of the city. The two-team Cigar City League captured the imagination of the city's working-class immigrant population as well as the attention of its white-collar businessmen. Over the course of four months, the Ybor City Redtoppers and the West Tampa Mackmen played 30 times at Plant Field – the half-way point between the two neighborhoods. The games were extremely spirited and attracted large crowds since the attendance was free for the city's cigar factory workers. At the end of the season, each team won 15 and lost 15 games. The league overseers declared that a three-game-playoff be played to determine that summer's pennant winner. On October 18, 1915, Ybor City won first game of the series 3-0. They were led by the pitching of Ronald Barze, the Kissimmee Cowboy, who pitched a shutout and struck out twelve of West Tampa's batters. Three days later, West Tampa defeated Ybor City by the same score, 3-0. "The Dade City Cracker," Bryant Bowden, allowed only two hits while scoring the winning run that forced a third and deciding game.

With the series tied, the final game to determine the champions of the Cigar City was held on Monday, October 25, 1915. Anxiously anticipated, the Tampa Tribune spent all weekend

speculating on the lineups and what pitchers the teams would use. On the morning of the game, the newspaper noted that, “hundreds are expected to lay aside business cares and see the championship battle.” Bowden again pitched for the Mackmen while the Redtoppers employed the services of a young high school pitcher. After all of the hype, the game began at 8:15 p.m., about one hour after sunset. Before lights were installed at Plant Field, games usually started in the afternoon. On this day, the organizers decided to start the game later in the day so that workers could watch the championship game. Ybor City jumped out to an early lead by scoring a run in the bottom of the first inning. The score stood until the top of the fourth when West Tampa scored four unearned runs and added four more runs in subsequent innings, all scored due to Ybor City’s sloppy defensive play. The Redtoppers attempted to rally in the bottom of the ninth. Yet, because of the time of day at which the game was played, darkness engulfed the stadium making it difficult to see the ball. The West Tampa Mackmen held on and won the City Pennant much to the protest of the Ybor City team.<sup>229</sup>

In the first years of the twentieth century, no other southern city was as synonymous with baseball as Tampa. Throughout the first years of the twentieth century, street corners, recreational parks, and local stadiums all became sites of baseball. Mutual-aid societies, cigar factories, and city neighborhoods all established teams and leagues. Baseball was part of the immigrant and working-class experience in the city. Its growth in popularity paralleled the city’s industrial development. As the cigar factories grew, so did the importance of baseball in the city. The excitement of the 1915 Cigar City League highlights the importance of baseball in Tampa’s

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<sup>229</sup> “Free Baseball,” *Tampa Tribune*, October 5, 1914. “Crowd sees Ybor City Win” *Tampa Tribune*, October 19, 1915. “Bowden, In Form, Blanks Yborites” *Tampa Tribune*, October 22, 1915. “Today Will Decide Winner of Cigar League Race,” *Tampa Tribune*, October 25, 1915. “Today Will Decide Winner of Cigar League Race,” *Tampa Tribune*, October 25, 1915. “Mackmen Win Title in Fray Marred by Errors,” *Tampa Tribune*, October 26, 1915.

working-class communities during the first years of the twentieth century. Yet, organized professional baseball was predominantly the domain of white-collar businessmen. Beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, local professional baseball was controlled by players and organizers that were explicitly not cigar makers. Despite changes in their approaches, professional baseball in Tampa generally functioned as a tool for elites to control workers and limit the fermentation of strikes. Led by the skilled labor of the cigar makers, Tampa was one of the most politically radical cities in the United States, while also being one of the most ethnically diverse. The city's business and governmental leaders assumed that baseball played at a high level could provide an alternative for ethnic workers who spent their leisure time reading radical literature and holding secret meetings. These elites sought to promote spectatorship of the local game to an immigrant working-class that was becoming politically radicalized and participated in numerous, violent labor strikes.

Beginning in 1899, local leaders established quasi-professional teams which represented local neighborhoods. These teams were promoted as the being some of the best teams within the city and showcased some of the best baseball in the South. By 1915, the local city league was extremely popular with cigar workers, as was evident in the turn out for the championship game. Moreover, the city also experimented with bringing northern major league teams as a way of fostering a singular Tampa community. First in 1913, these teams were brought in by the city's business interests as a way of strengthening Tampa's non-cigar economy by promoting retail and tourism. This, in turn, lessened the power of the cigar makers. As the city grew and moved away from the cigar industry, local professional city leagues were replaced with a single professional team that represented the entire city.

Traditionally, Tampa is not discussed as part of the New South creed. Yet, the city experienced similar growth in the aftermath of the Civil War as other urban locations in the South. Moreover, the region was certainly partaking in the same economic, political, social, and cultural discourses as other locations that were promoting the virtues of the New South creed. By the turn of the twentieth century, Tampa had experienced tremendous industrial and population growth. With its proximity to tobacco grown in Cuba and its location on the Gulf of Mexico, the city was one of the largest producers of cigars in the United States. Industrial growth led to population growth, from just over 5,000 people in 1890 to over 100,000 by 1930. Despite its similarities with other cities of the New South, the city was unique in that it became a major hub for foreign immigration and migration. Tampa was closer in ethnic make-up to many northern cities than most southern cities. During the 1890s and through the 1920s, thousands of Cuban, Afro-Cuban, Spanish, and Italian immigrants passed through the town in search of work in the city's cigar industry. This migration began when Vicente Martinez Ybor moved his cigar business to Tampa in 1885. As more cigar companies found Tampa to be hospitable to the making and shipping of cigars, more immigrant workers were needed to fill skillful jobs. As these immigrants arrived in the city, they created two immigrant enclaves: Ybor City and West Tampa. This mass migration created tensions with a growing white business class that adhered to the virtues of the New South creed. Influenced by the conditions that many of these immigrants found in their new home, Tampa was a hotbed for labor radicalism. Socialists, anarchists, and communists dominated the political landscapes in immigrant communities. Not only did they discuss radical ideology, but they also implemented many of their ideas into action. Throughout

the first years of the twentieth century, Tampa was home to numerous labor strikes that often turned violent.<sup>230</sup>

Alongside this sort of New South sensibility and immigrant radicalism, baseball flourished in the city. The game became the most popular form of recreation. City leagues that featured quasi-professional teams that represented immigrant neighborhoods were created by local businessmen who hoped to use the game to quell radicalism. For the city's immigrant population, however, playing in these higher-level games meant specifically not being part of the city's cigar making workforce. For the most part, these teams were comprised of non-cigar working players. White-collar individuals were more likely to play on these teams. On the occasion where players were associated with the cigar industry, they held unskilled positions. A janitor in a cigar factory was more likely to play on one of the city leagues teams than someone who rolled cigars. Despite being placed on the sidelines for the professional games, this does not mean that local workers, African Americans, and immigrants did not participate in the city's lively baseball scene. The city's working-class communities played in other games which featured teams that represented different factories and mutual-aid societies. Ethnic skilled laborers found other opportunities to participate within leagues created by the city's mutual aid societies. Additionally, Tampa's small but influential African American and Afro-Cuban communities also were able to play the game. In fact, Tampa's African American team, the Tampa Giants, was one of the era's most successful and well-respected all-Black teams in the

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<sup>230</sup> Adrian Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (Berkeley, C.A., University of California Press, 2007). Robert P. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South Tampa, 1882-1936* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1988). Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

South. On the whole, African Americans found Tampa much more hospitable to baseball participation than many places throughout the South.

In recent years, scholars have examined the relationship between culture and radicalism in working class communities. They have argued radical ideology and action were responses to the conditions found by immigrants when they migrated.<sup>231</sup> Instead of finding an idyllic life of wealth and leisure, workers that came to the United States often found conditions that were less than ideal. Many of these immigrants often turned to radical literature and lectures as ways of dealing with conditions in industrial cities. This was true in Tampa as, throughout Ybor City and West Tampa, migrant anarchists, socialists, and communists formed numerous study groups and debate clubs, built small libraries of radical literature, and produced radical newspapers in native languages. Mutual-aid societies hosted famous labor radicals from all over the United States as well as foreign agitators to spread the word of unionization and radical labor ideologies. These radicals were blamed for labor strikes in 1899, 1901, 1910, 1916, and 1920. The bourgeois of Tampa vehemently opposed these radicals – often through violent means – and sought ways to divert the attention of the workers from radical ideology. In this vein, baseball was thought to be an antidote for radicalism in Tampa.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> For discussions pertaining to radical responses to conditions in the United States, see: Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880-1914* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007). Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Racialism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Donna T. Haverty-Stacke, *America's Forgotten Holliday: May Day and Nationalism, 1867-1960* (New York: New York University Press, 2009). Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994). Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>232</sup> Armando Mendez, *Ciudad De Cigars: West Tampa* (Tampa: Florida Historical Society Press, 1994). Jose Rivero Muniz, *The Ybor City Story (1885-1954)*, Trans by Eustasio Fernandez and Henry Beltran (Tampa: University of Tampa, 1976). For more on the cigar industry as a whole, see: Patricia Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1900-1919* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987).



From the first general labor strike in 1899 until the last major strike in 1931, high-profile baseball quickly followed the resolutions of local strikes. In the aftermath of these strikes, local elites established new leagues, promoted games that accompanied celebrations, and welcomed Major League teams for spring training. Similar to the cotton mills in the Carolinas, it was hoped that baseball could be used as a way of controlling the actions of labor in the city's cigar factories. In the working environment of Tampa – where political activism, unionism, and radicalism was more apparent than anywhere else in the South – baseball was imagined as a sort of opium for the masses. During these years, Tampa's numerous labor strikes crippled the city's businesses, both the cigar industry and other local businesses. Local civic and business leaders were all desperate to end labor tensions. Thus, in response to these strikes, they leaned on baseball in hopes of distracting workers. Moreover, promotion of the game was also an exercise in Americanize the immigrant population. This was an era where any challenges to Capitalism was labeled as foreign. City leaders, therefore, blamed many of the strikes on the foreignness of the workers. The Americanizing power of baseball had been promoted throughout the country, and those in Tampa believed in the dual power of the game to distract and reform.<sup>233</sup>

While the elites hoped to quell tensions with baseball, city leagues were specific on who could play. Within these leagues, cigar workers were excluded from playing on these teams as owners employed players from white-collar occupations. Only following the infamous and violent Seven Month Strike of 1910-1911 were cigar workers permitted to play in the city league. The following summer, baseball returned to the domain of white-collar individuals.

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<sup>233</sup> Ronald Briley, "Baseball and American Cultural Values," *OAH Magazine of History* 7, no. 1 (Summer, 1992), 61-66. Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983). Steven A. Riess, *Sport in Industrial America 1850-1920* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1995).

Professional teams in Tampa regularly consisted of men who worked white-collared occupations – such as storeowners, insurance men, and cattle ranchers – and excluded ethnic, working-class laborers. Additionally, instead of sponsoring teams from individual factories or places of work, organizers encouraged teams that represented sections of the city or neighborhoods or the city at-large. By the 1920s, there was a movement within the city to unite the population under the city, instead of the neighborhood. This included welcoming professional Northern teams to train in the city. When discussing these teams, local elites took ownership in hopes of promoting civic unity.

One thing that upper-class businessmen and working-class cigar makers could agree on was that baseball was beneficial to their communities. Cigar manufacturers and Tampa's businessmen saw baseball as something that could distract workers from labor agitation and radical ideologies. In 1914, while announcing the upcoming season of the Cigar City League, *The Tobacco Leaf* noted that the league would do just that. The trade paper stated that, "Cigar manufacturers as a rule favor the [league] with enthusiasm, as they say free baseball would so interest cigar workers as to keep their minds away from discussing imaginary labor troubles and fomenting strikes." The idea of cigar manufacturers providing baseball to radical cigar workers was a recurring theme throughout the early twentieth century.<sup>234</sup>

Nevertheless, elite control of professional baseball never ended labor organization or violence. Being shut out of playing on professional teams meant that immigrant workers were often relegated to amateur baseball hosted by the city's mutual aid societies. In the neighborhoods of West Tampa and Ybor City, five mutual aid societies existed: El Centro Español (Spanish), L'Unione Italiana (Italian), Centro Asturiano (specifically immigrants from

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<sup>234</sup> "Tampans May Have Free Baseball," *The Tobacco Leaf*, April 1914

Asturias, Spain), El Circulo Cubano de Tampa (Cuban), and La Union Marti-Maceo (Afro-Cuban). These societies provided assistance to those immigrants arriving in the city. They offered financial assistance, health care, educational opportunities, a place to gather and hold meetings, and cultural functions such as dances, concerts, and other events. Each of the mutual aid societies also had baseball teams comprised of local immigrants and played each other through the summer months. While baseball helped to create community amongst the specific group of immigrants, it helped to fuel rivalries between the different ethnicities. Games were often contentious, and it was not uncommon for fights to break out between teams.

On the other hand, workers in Tampa were also able to use the game as a means of establishing a collective community while challenging the city's bourgeoisie. Cigarmakers took meaning from the game and applied it to labor agitation. In the June 15, 1920 edition of the "Cigar Makers' Official Journal," the top story was about a strike that was occurring in Tampa. The journal called it one of the "biggest strikes the International Union has ever had." Following a discussion about the need for unity within Tampa's cigar union, the editor of the journal makes the clear analogy between unionization and baseball. "Teamwork is as essential in the trades union movement as it is on the baseball diamond. If the game is to be won, it is up to each of us to play our position to the very best of our ability," stated the journal. Not only does the article illustrate the need for teamwork and unity within labor unions, but it also argues that baseball could be the device that imparts these attributes upon workers. In addition to the usefulness of the game in labor organization, baseball also was viewed as a reward for agitation. In the April

1886 edition, the *Palladium of Labor* speculated that the opportunity to attend more baseball games would be achieved by winning the fight for the eight-hour working day.<sup>235</sup>

## **Strikes and Baseball**

Unlike other cities in the South such as Atlanta, there exists no grand narrative of the first baseball game played in Tampa. The earliest record of an organized team in the city was the 1884 Tampa Baseball Club. The team was formed in the year before Vicente Martinez Ybor relocated his cigar business in 1885. Tampa's first recorded baseball team was led by star pitcher W. A. Legate and won the year's state championship. Considering that the team formed in the years prior to the mass migration of Cuban, Spanish, and Italian immigrants, this team was comprised of young, Caucasian white-collar professionals. Despite not having a specific origin story, baseball in Tampa held specific meaning from its onset. In 1888, the city debated building a new park that would house a grandstand for the Tampa Baseball Club. The game's meaning was linked to traditional values such as morality and physical fitness, while providing the small city with exposure. "There are many reasons why baseball should be played here," said an unnamed advocate of the game, "It's the national game and...there is nothing degrading about it unless made so. It develops the body, toughens the muscles, and sinews the person playing and exerts a moral influence." The advocate then turned their attention to the spectators, stating that the game was profitable for the spectator as well since it "banishes all thoughts and cares" and provides "hours in fresh air in company with wife, mother, sister, or sweetheart." According to the advocate, the game also helped with fermenting interest in the small city. In this way, he tied

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<sup>235</sup> G.W. Perkins, "Challenge and Acceptance," *Cigar Makers' Official Journal* 54, no. 6 (June 15, 1920), 2-3. Riess, *Touching Base*, 38.

the game with future tourist ventures and business investments. “[Baseball] will help to show outside people that we are keeping abreast with the age and can offer visitors amusement as well as investments.”<sup>236</sup>

Throughout the 1890s, baseball’s importance in the city rose. Despite becoming more popular, the city lacked any infrastructure such as organized associations and was not part of any regional leagues. Still, as the city grew with the first waves of immigrant cigar workers, neighborhoods such as Ybor City and West Tampa began to field teams. These teams were often unorganized. A game from 1892 featured teams from Ybor City and Tampa proper with the former defeating the latter by a score of 18 to 6. Other times, teams would issue challenges to Tampa’s baseball club. In 1895, the captain of the Ellinger City Baseball club reserved space in the local newspaper in order to challenge Tampa’s club. The game was amateur in nature, and gate receipts were split among the teams to cover expenses.<sup>237</sup> In other instances, the city hosted local and state tournaments in hopes of attracting visitors to the city. In 1896, the president of the Tampa board of trade arranged to have a state baseball tournament. The proposal included a partnership between the city and the railroad company of usher spectators to and from the city. It was estimated that 3,000 out-of-towners would come from all over Florida and spend an estimated \$6,000 while in Tampa. Thus, even in the early days of baseball, the game was linked to business growth – either through the cigar industry or by way of attracting visitors to the city.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> “On the Diamond,” *The Tampa Journal*, November 29, 1888. “City News,” *The Tampa Journal*, July 25, 1889. “Tampa Baseball Club of 1884-85,” *The Tampa Times*, November 12, 1924.

<sup>237</sup> Ellinger City referred to the mill village that surrounded the Julius Ellinger & Co. factory in West Tampa. The factory was the first brick factory built in West Tampa. In 1909, the factory was sold to J.W. Roberts. Arsenio M. Sanchez, “A Street Car Ride in 1908 Through West Tampa,” *Sunland Tribune* 13 no.9 (1987) 4.

<sup>238</sup> “Tampa Topics,” *The Tampa Tribune*, April 27, 1892. “To the Tampa Base Ball Club,” *The Tampa Tribune*, September 13, 1895. “Curbstone Chit Chat,” *The Weekly Tribune*, August 27, 1896.

The link between baseball and the cigar industry began to solidify in 1899 with one of the city's first labor disputes. In the aftermath of the strike, professional baseball emerged as a way to respond to labor strikes. Known in Tampa as the *La Huelga de la Pesa*, the strike began on April 14, 1899, when 350 cigar workers employed at the Ybor, Manrara & Co. factory walked off the job. Initially, the workers struck over the introduction of the weight scale – a tool that would regulate the amount of tobacco in a cigar. The implementation of these scales was considered an insult to the skill of the cigar makers. Workers from Arguelles, Lopez & Bro. soon joined the workers from the Ybor factory. By the middle of May, workers from the four largest factories in Tampa were on strike. With the assistance of Tampa's Mayor, Frank C. Bowyer, who pledged police protection to the factory owners, twelve warrants were issued for the arrest of the alleged labor agitators on July 13. Nevertheless, the arrests did not impede the strike as it incapacitated the entire cigar industry in Tampa. Eventually, the factories conceded to the demands of the workers on August 14 and the strike was over. To make matters worse for business and factory owners, a general strike was declared in Havana, Cuba, days after the end of the strike in Tampa.<sup>239</sup>

The 1899 strike had a galvanizing effect on cigar makers and a disturbing effect on factory owners. In essence, the strike of 1899 created the culture of labor agitation that would last well into the 1930s. This was the first organized strike – one that united workers from different factories – since Vincente Martinez Ybor moved his factory to Tampa in 1885. Prior to moving his factory to Tampa, Ybor's factory in both Key West and Havana, Cuba were subjected to frequent strikes. The spring before moving to Tampa, his factory in Key West was

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<sup>239</sup> "Another Strike," *Tampa Tribune*, May 5, 1899. "All Are Out," *Tampa Tribune*, September 27, 1899. Gary R. Mormino, "Tampa and the New Urban South: The Weight Strike of 1899," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (Jan., 1982), 337-356.

burned out by striking Cuban workers. When issues arose regarding labor in Tampa, Ybor was known to invite some of the workers to his home to address the issues himself. By the 1899 strike, however, the paternal figure had passed away and the cigar makers organized against the factory owners for the first time. Because the strike consisted of workers from multiple factories, organization was very important. The cigar makers became united throughout the city, and were heard chanting, “We will never give in. We are making a stand now for our rights and we’ll starve before our surrender.” They also effectively boycotted businesses that were unsympathetic to their demands. In fact, local merchants who supported the cigar makers targeted their ad campaigns in newspapers at the strikers. Finally, when the cigar manufacturers were willing to negotiate, the workers elected a committee to transmit their demands to management.<sup>240</sup>

While the cigar makers lost an estimated \$60,000 in wages, the strike financially crippled the cigar industry and deeply affected the psyches of merchants and other businesses. The fear of the strike and the radical language associated with it can be seen in the editorials from the conservative *Tampa Tribune*. Initially, the paper speculated that the strike would be over within a few days. As the strike lingered and the workers became more radicalized, the paper struck back with scathing condemnation of the strike. When assessing blame for the strike, the paper noted that it “must rest on one particular element...[blame] should fall upon the anarchistic leaders who have urged the strike into this defiance and its results.” They blasted what they called “professional agitators” and argued “Tampa can afford to lose cigar makers. Tampa cannot afford to lose cigar factories.” Furthermore, the fact that the cigar makers received everything they demanded was also upsetting for businessmen and cigar manufacturers. This trepidation

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<sup>240</sup> *Tampa Tribune*, July 11, 1899. “Cigarmakers’ Differences at Tampa, FLA.,” *The Tabaco Leaf*, February 5, 1887. Mormino, “Tampa and the New Urban South: The Weight Strike of 1899,” 337-356. Louis A. Perez Jr., “Cubans in Tampa: From Exiles to Immigrants, 1892-1901,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (Oct., 1978), 129-140.

galvanized factory owners who united across the city, sought ways to control the workers, and responded to future agitation much more harshly. Ultimately, this would be the only victory the cigar makers would enjoy.<sup>241</sup>

The summer following the 1899 strike saw the first professional baseball game played in the city in eight years. With the trauma of the past summer's strike still fresh in their minds, civic leaders organized a game as part of the city's entertainment celebrating the Fourth of July holiday. The game pitted affluent members of the community against one another, and the teams were labeled "East-Siders" and "West-Siders." The players were paid up to 30 cents to play the one game, and the team captains were in charge of signing players. The captain of the West-Siders was catcher Kurt Gunby, a former Major League ball player and wealthy proprietor of Tampa's oldest insurance firm. Charlie Grable, a Tampa business owner who sold office furniture, headed the East-Siders and was the "famous home run hitter and high-flyer stopper." Other players also came from successful, white-collar careers outside of professional baseball. Paul Glenn, the right fielder for the West-Siders, was a banker, and East-Sider Henry Cohen was a young up-and-coming lawyer. Serving as umpires for the game were newly elected Tampa Mayor Frank L. Wing and City Council President A. C. Moore. The game itself ended in a tie, 6-6 after eight innings, when the two captains decided that the game should end this way. Despite the score, the game was deemed a success both on and off the field of play. Organizers were pleased with the number of tickets sold, the bets that were placed, and spectator responses.

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<sup>241</sup> "Another Strike," *Tampa Tribune*, May 5, 1899. Meeting of Idle Men: Both Sides Remain Firm in Labor Troubles," *Tampa Tribune*, July 30, 1899. Mormino, "Tampa and the New Urban South: The Weight Strike of 1899."



Players enjoyed the game so much that additional contests were scheduled throughout the year.<sup>242</sup>

Exposure of baseball increased following the Fourth of July game, and its popularity increased among both white- and blue-collar workers. Following the game, the *Tampa Tribune* focused more of its energy on baseball. Almost immediately following the game, the newspaper began to print Major League scores from the northeast, as well as scores and standings from regional leagues. In addition, more teams consisting of white-collar players formed and traveled throughout the city of Tampa and the state of Florida. These teams often played for money and could be considered semi-professional. Players of these traveling teams were required to subsidize their own money to play other teams, and the winners received the combined funds.<sup>243</sup>

Following the 1899 strike, minor skirmishes continued to occur between the cigar manufacturers and the cigar makers. There was a minor strike in Ybor City in November 1900 and again in August 1901. In May 1901, cigar makers in West Tampa walked off their jobs to protest the closure of the Fortune Street Bridge; the only bridge that crossed the Hillsborough River and was in need of repairs. Cigar makers in West Tampa again walked off the job in November 1902. This was due to the abduction of the West Tampa Mayor and *El Lector* Francisco Milian.<sup>244</sup> On November 1, 1902, Milian was abducted by the Tampa police chief and told that the reasons being deported was because of his labor agitation and dangerous character.

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<sup>242</sup> "Epitome of Local Events," *Tampa Tribune*, May 14, 1899. "Play Ball is the Cry," *Tampa Tribune*, June 30, 1900.

"Many Sports on the Fourth," *Tampa Tribune*, July 6, 1900. Charlie Grable's Stock," *Tampa Tribune*, April 6, 1904. "Tampa Agency Change," *Tampa Tribune*, November 6, 1908. "Banking Institute Chapter Entertains at Dance Party," *Tampa Tribune*, December 14, 1931.

<sup>243</sup> "Many Sports on the Fourth," *Tampa Tribune*, July 6, 1900.

<sup>244</sup> Employed by the workers, an *El Lector* read material chosen by the cigar makers and was often blamed for inciting labor agitation. Along with reading classics such as Don Quixote, Uncle Tom's Cabin, and Das Kapital, El Lector also read the play-by-play of local and national baseball games. Araceli Tinajero, *El Lector: A History of the Cigar Factory Reader* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010), 113-126.

Milian then was stripped and beaten, taken to Port Tampa, and placed on a steamer destined for Cuba. The avowed Marxist found his way to Key West where he was able to contact the workers in West Tampa. He returned to West Tampa on November 12 and served as mayor until his death in 1909.<sup>245</sup>

While no major labor strikes occurred until 1910, these numerous minor conflicts made the threat of debilitating strikes omnipresent. Throughout these episodes, baseball occurred in the city but was never overly popular. Until 1908, there was only one professional team that played in Tampa. Known as the Greys, the team traveled the state, playing on a semi-professional basis. Finally, in 1908, the first professional city league was established. The league consisted of four teams that represented geographical regions of Tampa and were owned by local businessmen who bought stock in the teams. Eligible players were limited to the four locations: Tampa proper, Ybor City, Port Tampa, and West Tampa. To accommodate the league, renovations were made to the Tampa Bay Grounds – an old horseracing track near the Florida State Fairgrounds. Despite the fact that the players were paid, the *Tampa Tribune* stated that the goal of the league was, “To avoid all professionalism, but to develop good amateur teams...It is the purpose of those interested to conduct all the games on the same basis in the leagues regularly organized. No rowdyism is to be allowed, a special provision being made in the constitution and by-laws for the punishment and expulsion from games of players who will not abide the decisions of the umpire.” Many of the same players who participated in the 1900 game were either players or officials in the 1908 league. After the league failed the next summer, the players returned to their traveling teams, bankrolling the games.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Armando Mendez, *Ciudad De Cigars: West Tampa*, 93-94.

<sup>246</sup> “City Baseball League Now Permanently Organized,” *Tampa Tribune*, March 24, 1908.

It was not completely unheard of for a cigar worker to play on the traveling or city league teams. In fact, one of the most talented players in Tampa was Henry J. Fromherz – a packer of cigars at the Sanchez & Haya factory. During his tenure on a traveling team, the daily newspaper lauded his performances on the baseball diamond, “No player ever seen in Florida could cover left-field like Fromherz. At least one star play in every game is his record.” He was so talented that a manager pursued Fromherz to be part of an all-Cuban traveling team with scheduled games throughout the United States. Eventually, Fromherz would be part of the Ybor City team that competed in the 1908 city league. Here, talent trumped socioeconomic class. Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite working in the cigar factory, Fromherz was not a cigar maker. In the city, it was specifically cigar rollers – those who actually made the cigars – that local elites considered as open to radical ideology. Since Fromherz was both talented and worked in a capacity other than cigar roller, he was deemed safe to play on the professional team.<sup>247</sup>

The failure of the city league marked the 1909 baseball season; however, the 1910 season was rocked by a violent labor strike that once again crippled Tampa. Known as the Seven Month Strike, the incident began in June when some 12,000-cigar workers walked out in protest of the dismissing of workers who had been members of the Cigarmakers International Union. Instead of passively standing by, as they did in 1899, cigar manufacturers brought in strikebreakers. Throughout the summer, violent clashes erupted between the striking laborers and the strikebreakers. The strike again brought the ethnic community closer together. As a cigar worker remembered, “you can thank the Italian people that had the business [sic] – grocery stores, wholesale house – they used to give the food to the people. And then, when the strike settled

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<sup>247</sup> “Tampa’s Fine Baseball Talent: Players if the Season of 1902,” Tampa Tribune, October 19, 1902. “Fromherz is Wanted,” *Tampa Tribune*, March 15, 1908.

down, a lot of them paid back what they owe, a lot of them didn't. But we got along fine during that strike." Unfortunately, not everyone was so lucky. On September 20, two men, Castange Ficarrota & Angelo Albano, were lynched in West Tampa on the corner of Howard Avenue and Grand Central (later Kennedy Boulevard) after being charged with murder. There was no evidence that incriminated the two individuals. To civic and manufacturing leaders, the symbolism of their deaths was more important than guilt. As their bodies "swung in the moonlight," the notes on their feet read, "BEWARE Others take notice or go the same way. We know seven more. We are watching you."<sup>248</sup>

As the city dealt with the labor strike, another disaster crippled the city. On October 18, 1910, Tampa was brushed by a late-season hurricane. After devastating the western part of Cuba, the hurricane made landfall south of Tampa and traveled North toward the city. While the effects were relatively minimal, the railroads that connected the city with the rest of Florida were unusable and the winds from the storm damaged the city's telegraph wires. In the chaos that developed in the aftermath of the storm, an armed vigilante group of three hundred people were deputized and policed the ethnic neighborhoods of Ybor City and West Tampa. Moreover, under the guise of the dual emergencies – the hurricane and the labor strike – Tampa mayor Donald McKay issued a proclamation stating that:

Believing it to be my duty as mayor of the city of Tampa to prevent all unlawful assemblies in the city under the present existing condition, I hereby prohibit all assemblages within the city limits, whether upon the streets, public, or other places in said city. I hereby give notice that the police department of this city has been instructed to summarily disperse all such assemblies. And I further hereby call upon all law-abiding citizens to aid enforcing of the law and keeping of the law and keeping of the peace of this city.

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<sup>248</sup> "More Cigarmakers Released by Employers," *Tampa Tribune*, July 31, 1910. "Two Men Taken from Officers and Hanged," *Tampa Tribune*, September 21, 1910. Joe Maniscalco Oral History, interviewed by Gary Mormino, April 3, 1980. Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*.

Thus, the emergency of the hurricane helped to exacerbate the ethnic and class divide between the city's Anglo business and government elites and the ethnic cigar workers. Out of the order, the Citizens' Committee was created as a vigilante group to help with labor agitation and the 1910 strike. Two of the city's labor organizers were arrested by the vigilante group and charged with conspiracy. The stated purpose of the committee was to liberate the cigarmakers from the influence of their despotic leadership and allow them to return safely to the to the factories. With the massive show of force, the Citizens' Committee oppressed the ethnic neighborhoods of Tampa.<sup>249</sup>

Both employers and workers suffered because of the long strike. At the heart of the strike was the worker's right to organize. Entrenched and united since the 1899 strike, cigar manufactures were amalgamated in their fight against unionism. Throughout the strike, civic and business leaders sought to place limits on workers' ability to organize inside and outside of the workshop. In the days following the lynching in West Tampa, 2000 marched to protest the killings. In response, Tampa mayor Donald McKay issued a proclamation that prohibited all public assembly within the city. Headed by the editor of the *Tampa Tribune*, W.F. Stovall, and Hugh MacFarlane, the Committee marched on the local mutual-aid societies, broke up meetings of cigar makers, and drove unionist out of town by force. Yet, the rhetoric of the striking workers involved representations of asserting their American freedoms. One striker was quoted as saying

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<sup>249</sup> "Storm King Rages Along Gulf Coast," *Tampa Tribune*, October 18, 1910. "Labor Agitators Are Placed Under Arrest," *Tampa Tribune*, October 18, 1910. "Proclamation by Mayor," *Tampa Tribune*, October 18, 1910. "Making It Easy for Workers," *Tampa Tribune*, November 24, 1910. Joe Scaglinoe, "City in Turmoil: Tampa and the Strike of 1910," *Sunland Tribune* 18 no.6 (1992).  
<https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1239&context=sunlandtribune>

that “the very streets that we paved and paid for do not belong to us. We, the sovereign American citizens, after election are called a *mob* and ordered like stray dogs off the streets.”<sup>250</sup>

When resolution finally came in January 1911, the city of Tampa had reportedly lost millions of dollars and the cigar industry was crippled. Prior to the strike, 1910 was shaping up to be the best year the industry had ever seen. However, due to the strike, cigar manufactures produced 65 million less cigars in 1910 than they did in 1909. This impact was felt mostly during the holiday season. In November 1909, Tampa’s manufactures produced over 27 million cigars. Because of the strike, only four million cigars were produced in November of 1910. The strike also caused smaller factories throughout the city to close. On the other hand, cigar workers conceded on many of their demands. All told, the industry claimed to have lost 15 million dollars’ worth of orders for the year. Moreover, workers claimed to have lost a quarter of a million dollars in pay roll. Workers also loss more than their financial employment. Juan Perez was one of the first cigar workers to break the strike. Walking from one of the factories, Perez was confronted by two striking cigar workers. A fight ensued and Perez shot one of the striking workers. Loss of wages, coupled with the threat of violence caused many Tampa cigar makers to leave the city.<sup>251</sup>

The 1910-1911 strikes demonstrate a clear pattern: new baseball league closely followed the end of labor disputes. In the wake of the violent and destructive strike, a new baseball league was formed for the summer of 1913. Although it took a couple of years for relationships between workers and employers to be stabilized, on May 31, the Cigar City League (CCL) was born. This

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<sup>250</sup> *The Tobacco Worker*, February 1911. Durward Long, “Labor Relations in the Tampa Cigar Industry, 1885-1911,” *Labor History* 12, No. 4 (Fall 1971), 555-557.

<sup>251</sup> “Cost of the Tampa Strike,” *The Tobacco Leaf*, January 31, 1911. “Perez is Held by Justice T.I. James on Two Charges,” *Tampa Tribune*, January 31, 1911.

league was drastically different than the previous leagues. First, despite the fact that admission was charged to watch the games, the players were not paid. Second, the league abandoned teams that centered on neighborhoods. Instead, these teams were to represent businesses. The seven teams consisted of cigar companies Cuesta-Rey, Sanchez and Haya, Knight and Wall, and the Tampa-Cuba Cigar Co. The CCL also included the Transportation Companies, Tampa Gas, and the Police Department. Compared to the chaos and violence of 1910, the first games of the Cigar City League were, as the newspaper dubbed them, “fancy.” Over twelve hundred people, including women from “the best families,” turned out to watch the games. Similar to the strike of 1899, one of the responses to radical labor agitation in 1910 was baseball. However, instead of providing games for spectatorship, cigar makers were encouraged to participate in the 1913 CCL against white-collar players.<sup>252</sup>

One of the most striking differences between former leagues and the CCL was the abandonment of teams representing neighborhoods or the city of Tampa. Being a team game, baseball has always helped to promote civic and social boosterism and believed to instill pride in one’s community. As was often the case, spectators who watched the games tended cheered for the teams and not necessarily the individual players. Therefore, the sport created a sense of pride in one’s hometowns, nationalities, social clubs, or factories of the game’s spectators and participants. However, baseball in Tampa enforced differences within the community. During previous leagues, teams were named after neighborhoods such as Ybor City and West Tampa. These team would have represented a wide range of ethnicities such Spaniards, Cubans, and Italians. A factory team represented a more minute fanbase.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> “Cigar City League is Born and Will Begin Season on June 12,” *Tampa Tribune*, May 31, 1913. “Over A Thousand Cigar City League Open With Fine Baseball,” *Tampa Tribune*, June 13, 1913.

<sup>253</sup> Reiss, *Touching Base*.

Inter-social games – comprised of members of the mutual-aid societies in West Tampa and Ybor City – also were popular in Tampa throughout the early years of the twentieth century. These games often reinforced ethnic boundaries within the community. When talking about interactions with people from other ethnic communities while growing up, Al Lopez, a Major League Hall of Famer and a great source of pride to a generation of Tampa Latinos, stated that, “we got along all right. Once in a while you'd have a battle: you know, you'd have a fight, or you start throwing stones or rocks at each other, one group against the other, but nothing vicious.” Lopez, who played on the inter-social teams as a teenager, recalled fights breaking out during games, clashes concerning player eligibility (importing players from Cuba or Key West), and whether players were being paid – in theory the inter-social players were not paid to play. While baseball had the power to unite communities, it did not repair ethnic tensions and strengthened the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality, which was a mainstay among the immigrant community in Tampa.<sup>254</sup>

By recruiting players from businesses and cigar factories, the 1913 Cigar City League cultivated teams that consisted of working-class players. Employees of the cigar factories that sponsored teams played an important role in the league. Yet, this was the only organized league in the first years of the twentieth century that was neither professional – players were paid to play – nor semi-professional – players played for a combined cash prize. The fact that the players were not paid to play for their factories was unique to Tampa’s cigar industry. Rube Marquard, a Major League pitcher who grew up in urban Cleveland and was a second-generation German immigrant, was often paid to pitch for the ice cream company for which he worked as a teenager.

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<sup>254</sup> Al Lopez oral history, interviewed by Gary Mormino, April 24, 1980. Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*.



Additionally, in Springfield, Missouri, a semi-professional team named the Leader Cigar Baseball Club was owned and managed by a cigar maker in the 1890s. However, in Tampa, the CCL was the only opportunity for cigar workers to participate in the city league. Still, when the cigar makers were afforded the opportunity to play for their factories, they were not paid. Nevertheless, the inclusion of cigar makers in the CCL was a moment when the class barrier was broken. With the 1910 violent strike still fresh in the consciousness of Tampan society, the cigar workers in the factories were granted access to white-collared, organized baseball; however, the league was cautious not to allow the working-class players to be paid. So much so that, in November of 1913, two men were arrested and charged with receiving a hundred dollars a month to play in the league.<sup>255</sup>

The 1913 baseball season was certainly an anomaly as the cigar workers were invited to participate in the city league. This change, however, was short lived. As quickly as baseball changed in Tampa with the inclusion of working-class cigar makers representing their factories in 1913, the Cigar City League of 1914 reverted back to a professional league in which teams represented portions of the city. The four teams that participated in the 1914 CCL represented West Tampa, Fort Dade, Ybor City, and Tampa. The games themselves were played either at Plant Field or Macfarlane Park. Moreover, players were paid for their services – they received fifty dollars per month for the three-month league. Although players were paid, admission into the games was free. Organizers were not shy in expressing the reasons why they provided free baseball. The trade publication *The Tobacco Leaf* was openly frank when it stated that the free

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<sup>255</sup> “Cuesta-Rey’s Uniforms Arrive – They’re Beauts,” *Tampa Tribune*, June 11, 1913. “Local Men Swear that Ramsdel and Coarsey Were Not Paid to Play Ball,” *Tampa Tribune*, November 20, 1913. Rusty D. Aton, *Baseball in Springfield (MO)* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Press, 2005), 10. Rube Marquard, “Rube Marquard,” in *The Glory of Their Times: The Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told by the Men Who Played It*, ed. Lawrence S. Ritter (New York: Macmillan and Company Inc., 1966), 1-19.

baseball would occupy cigar workers away from radical ideology and starting labor strikes. The *Tampa Tribune* was subtler when promoting the CCL. In addressing benefits of free baseball, the newspaper stated:

Do you realize that the one great remedy for [the malaise of Florida summers] is something that will liven up the mind and the body; something that will occupy the thoughts of everybody when they are not talking business and something that will be fighting for supremacy in the mind even when business is the subject...The promise of a day off up until last summer brought but little satisfaction to the clerk, the cigar maker or the laborer. Last summer it was different, thanks to the Cigar City League, and this summer will be far different...Your employee will look forward to his day off. He will have a place at which he may spend the idle moments and enjoy them. It will be an added incentive for him to keep up with his work that he may take full advantage of the leave of absence...Summing it all up, Colonel Macfarlane's plan will provide an outlet for the surplus energy which might otherwise be devoted to discussion of topics detrimental to Tampa's interests.<sup>256</sup>

The fact that both major strikes in the city's history occurred in the summer was not lost on the newspaper. Summer was often a downtime for cigar makers as orders decreased in these months. The busiest time of year was after baseball season as orders increased around Christmas time. Because of the malaise of the summer months, organizers saw free baseball as providing workers with an opportunity to be preoccupied with something other than radicalism and agitation. Therefore, Tampa businessmen and civic leaders adopted the CCL as a way to combat the radicalism that led to debilitating strikes. By 1914, owners believed that most non-sports outdoor leisure activities – such as music, dances, picnics, and parades – had been radicalized by anarchist, communist, and socialist cigar makers. Baseball was one of the only popular forms of leisure that was not radicalized in Tampa. Businessmen and civic leaders thought that baseball would occupy workers in the otherwise down season.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> "Tampa and Free Baseball," *Tampa Tribune*, April 6, 1914.

<sup>257</sup> Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*.

Some of the player who played on teams in 1913 also played during the years of free baseball. They were joined by additional professional players that were brought to Tampa from other cities to play in the Cigar City League. By 1915, a large majority of the players were white-collar businessmen or a class of professional ballplayers who traveled throughout the state playing professionally. One of the stars of the league was Ybor City's pitcher Ronald Barze, the "Kissimmee Cowboy." Barze was a banker and entered the United States Army just prior to America's entrance into World War I. He was stationed in Kissimmee, which was where he acquired his nickname. His wedding garnered front-page coverage in the *Winter Park Post*. He eventually played minor league baseball in Alabama. Similar to Barze, the "Dade City Cracker," Bryant Bowden, West Tampa's pitcher, was part of a growing class of professional, traveling ball players. Not only did Bowden make his living in baseball, but he also eventually became a successful manager throughout the South.<sup>258</sup>

These two players were essential to their respective teams during the 1915 Cigar City League championship. The series of games played between Ybor City and West Tampa was one of the most popular recreational events in the city's history. It would also be the final series played in this incarnation of the CCL. The following year would see a shift in the way that the game was promoted to workers. Although these local games were popular, civic and business leaders began to abandon the promotion of neighborhood teams. Instead, manufactures, businessmen, and civil leaders all turned to promoting teams that came to represent all of the city

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<sup>258</sup> "Free Baseball," *Tampa Tribune*, October 5, 1914. "Crowd sees Ybor City Win" *Tampa Tribune*, October 19, 1915. "Bowden, In Form, Blanks Yborites" *Tampa Tribune*, October 22, 1915. "Today Will Decide Winner of Cigar League Race," *Tampa Tribune*, October 25, 1915. "Today Will Decide Winner of Cigar League Race," *Tampa Tribune*, October 25, 1915. "Mackmen Win Title in Fray Marred by Errors," *Tampa Tribune*, October 26, 1915. United States Census, 1910 Population Report, <https://genealogybank.com/#>.

of Tampa. Further influenced by a new wave of strikes in 1916, city leaders looked to professional leagues, that were outside of the city, as ways of uniting the city's workers.<sup>259</sup>

The arrival of the Tampa Smokers and the Florida State League marked the beginning of the end of local professional baseball that represented neighborhoods within the city. In 1919, city and business leaders embraced changes in the way that professional baseball was presented in the city. This was not the first time that cities in the states sought to organize a group of professional teams that would be located in Florida. In the Spring of 1917, a Florida state league was to be organized; however, American entry into World War I delayed the establishment of the league. Talk of a league resurfaced in the spring of 1919. According to the *Tampa Tribune*, the city was enthusiastically anticipating being part of the league. The league was planned to have a salary cap of \$1200 for the season. Four teams would play in the inaugural season with larger cities hosting games on the summer holidays of the Fourth of July and Labor Day.<sup>260</sup>

The appeal of the new Florida State League was that it would be associated with a growing minor league system that had developed since the turn of the century. Unlike teams in the Cigar City League, the entire city would benefit socially and financially from one single team. More specifically, Tampa business and civic leaders could now profit on players that advanced into higher levels of national baseball. While local cities leagues provided a social benefit for elites, they failed to financially profit from these teams in leagues such as the CCL. Minor league baseball allowed boosters to profit from local, talented baseball players. In announcing the league, the newspaper noted that “unorganized baseball develops scores of

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<sup>259</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*.

<sup>260</sup> “Plans Under Way For A State Baseball League As Was Planned in 1917,” *Tampa Tribune*, April 25, 1919.

players who go into Class C and higher leagues and the towns that develop them get nothing from them.” Teams in large markets, who selected players from smaller minor league teams, had to pay around \$5000 to acquire the player. Therefore, minor league baseball was financially gainful for local teams.<sup>261</sup>

Tampa’s entry into the league, eventually nicknamed the Smokers, marked the transition from baseball being a social function to a business venture. Support for Tampa’s team was similar to a corporation as local investors bought 300 shares of the team for \$10 each. Promoters believed that fan interest in the team would increase since many were also financially involved. This also meant that the team was run more like a business and players were treated as employees. As the team prepared to play, players were considered based on their experience as ball players.<sup>262</sup>

Although the business side of baseball changed in Tampa, promotion of the league still revolved around notions of social morality. Advertisement campaigns for league games were aimed at both men and women. Since women would be involved in the game as spectators, advertisers were quick to point out that morality of the game. During the first years of the twentieth century, white women were a protected class in the South. Traditionally, women’s sphere of influence dealt with private morality while male sphere was considered public leisure. For women to cross into the male sphere of a baseball, the game had to be promoted as a moral endeavor. Thus, gambling would not be tolerated, and the game would “be clean from every angle.” In these advertisements, the new minor league was contrasted with the old Cigar City League and other amateur leagues that had been played throughout the city. These promotions

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<sup>261</sup> “Plans Under Way For A State Baseball League As Was Planned in 1917,” *Tampa Tribune*, April 25, 1919.

<sup>262</sup> “Organizing Tampa Club For League,” *Tampa Tribune*, June 3, 1919. “Officer Seek Good Material,” *Tampa Tribune*, June 14, 1919.

stated that “Organized baseball is not to be considered along with the unorganized independent brand of sport.”<sup>263</sup>

Tampa’s entry into the Florida State league marks the moment when cigar manufacturers and civic leaders abandoned the hope that baseball would curtail radicalism and strikes. These decisions were compounded by another strike occurred in 1920. After twenty years of labor radicalism, it was clear that locally funded cities leagues were not something that led workers away from radicalism. Within two years of the strike, Tampa’s cigar manufacturers were no longer promoting the game to their workers. In fact, they now dreaded baseball season because workers would leave their benches early to attend games. The removal of baseball coincided with the removal of the *El Lector*. Instead, the Cuesta, Rey & Co factory installed a radio with an amplifier to broadcast the play-by-play of game to the cigar workers. Moreover, the announcers would report on players both locally and nationally. By 1927, electric lights were installed at Plant Field, thus allowing the minor league games to be played after work hours. Minor league baseball, with a focus on the whole city, along with technological advancements such as radio and electric lights changed the way in which cigar workers experienced baseball.<sup>264</sup>

For civic leaders and cigar manufactures, baseball in Tampa failed to limit radicalism among cigar makers. Because of the Progressive Era discourses that surrounded the game, Tampan elites believed baseball could be commissioned to instill Americanized values while reinforcing capitalistic ideology. After major labor strikes between 1899 and 1920, baseball was implemented and promoted to the cigar workers as something that would occupy their

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<sup>263</sup> “Of Interest to Women,” *Tampa Times*, July 3, 1919.

<sup>264</sup> “Lights to Permit Practice at Plant Field,” *Tampa Tribune*, September 30, 1927. Tinajero. *El Lector: A History of the Cigar Factory Reader*.

time away from the factories. One of the failures of baseball was the exclusion of the working class from the ranks of players. While cigar workers played for inter-social teams, white-collar workers, who represented the minority of people living in Tampa, often populated professional baseball. By the 1920s, civic leaders and cigar manufacturers abandoned the notion that baseball could be a useful tool to combat radicalism.

### **Major League Baseball Comes to Tampa**

As part of moving away from local city league, Tampa's business and civic elites sought out Major League to train in the city during the summer months. Initially, these teams were adopted by the city in hopes of uniting its citizens around Tampa, and not their ethnic enclaves. Since the 1880s, the Spring migration of northern Major League teams to train in the South marks the beginning of the baseball season. Although Florida was not the first choice of teams, by the turn of the twentieth century, many found the warm weather to be suitable for training. However, the northern teams found that training in the South meant a large expense that included travel and housing players. Scholars have argued that the migration South concerned more of how Gilded Age Americans understood nature, medicine, the science of athletic training, and human behavior, as well as their wishes to expand the sport's revenue.<sup>265</sup> Particularly in Tampa, the benefits were threefold. Financially, Tampa experienced financial windfall since they were on the receiving end of the spending from northern teams. As the city was still reeling from the 1910-1911 strike, in which the city lost millions of dollars in production, the arrival of northern teams helped to recover some capital. Moreover, spring training allowed city officials and elites

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<sup>265</sup> For more on spring training in the south, see: Robert Bauer, "Gilded Age Gladiators: Hot Springs and the First Major League Baseball Spring Training," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 77, no.1 (Spring 2018) 1-20. Kevin M. McCarthy, *Baseball in Florida* (Sarasota, Fl.: Pineapple Press, 1996).

to help with defining the place of the city's immigrant workforce within Tampa's society. Spring training also provided another avenue to sway workers away from having time to ferment strikes. Establishing grounds that were suitable for spring training meant more than just a baseball field. It included public places that were dedicated to physical fitness that could be used the other 11-months when not in use. Rhetorically, northern teams could be adopted to strengthen civic boosterism. Instead of feeling connected through a neighborhood team (or an ethnic-based mutual-aid team), Tampa workers could root for the Cubs in the spring and the Smokers in the summer months.

The first team to train in Tampa during the spring months was the 1899 Cincinnati Reds. It was announced that the team would spend the months of January and February training in both Tampa and Havana, Cuba. In the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, the training of major league teams was often linked to the Americanization process of the country's newly acquired colonies and freshly independent Cuba. Instead of playing other National League teams, the Reds instead played local amateur teams. Their first game was to be played on January 14, 1899, but rain and travel issues hampered the events. In fact, the game was more of an afterthought as it was part of the event tied to the first day of horse racing. Similar to the 1899 Fourth of July game, the Reds playing in Tampa was part of an elite sporting class event of horse racing. For all intents and purposes, the Reds coming to Tampa was more as a stop-over to Havana, in order to play the talented Cuban clubs. Still, even though the Reds were a bit of an afterthought, it was still understood that these games could provide the city with amusement. With travel delays, the Reds were finally able to arrive in the city a few weeks later and there was considerably more excitement than when it was first announced that they would training in Tampa. "The *Tribune*



stands ready to do its share” the morning newspaper stated in regard to the success of the Reds.<sup>266</sup>

While there was some excitement for the arrival of the Cincinnati Reds in 1899, the city did not necessarily cultivate any sort of meaning around their presence. However, with the team traveling to territories associated with the Spanish-American War, there began a rhetoric around the idea that baseball could be useful in the cultural assimilation of the young American empire. In reference to the Reds traveling to Caribbean territories, the *Tribune* stated that “Judging from the baseball stories coming from Cuba and Porto Rico (sic), the leaven of Americanism is at work in those islands.” In fact, the use of baseball as a way of imparting Americanism onto foreign lands. By the time of the Spanish-American War, there existed a set of beliefs pertaining to the ways in which sports, and specifically baseball, imparted certain cultural values upon both competitors and spectators. As the United States embarked on a mission of colonization and globalization during the nineteenth and twentieth century, baseball was understood as something that could convey American values to foreigners. The 1888-1889 Spalding World Baseball Tour exemplified these discourses. Teams comprised of professionals played forty-four games across ten nations, including the United States. Sporting-goods mogul Albert Spalding expressed hope that the “All-American” teams could help to spread American values of the free market and the cultural ordering of social classes and races. Concurrently, during the *La Huelga de la Pesa* strike of 1899, elites of Tampa were experimenting with the belief baseball’s Americanizing effects on people outside of the United States by using baseball as a way of limiting agitation.

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<sup>266</sup> “Baseball,” *Tampa Tribune*, January 6, 1899. “The Flyers: All in Readiness for the Inaugural Races Today,” *Tampa Tribune*, January 14, 1899. Adrian Burgos Jr., *Playing America’s Game: Baseball*. Robert F. Burk, *Never Just a Game: Players, Owners, and American Baseball to 1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

After the Reds left town for Cincinnati, these ideas were put into practice during the first general strike in the city in 1899 by the city's cigar workers which crippled the city by providing the city with professional baseball in the summer months. Since business leaders blamed the strike on labor agitation and radical ideology and the financial wellbeing of Tampa was threatened, introducing baseball as an alternative to radical speeches and dances held by anarchist and socialist parties made sense since it was common practice in overseas territories.<sup>267</sup>

It took over ten years for Tampa to host another Major League team during the spring months. The city flirted with a few different clubs throughout that span; however, serious discussions never materialized publicly. By the winter of 1912, a public campaign began to bring a major league team to the city. "Big league baseball clubs are overlooking the best place in the country for spring training: Tampa," noted the morning newspaper alluding to the warm, sunny spring weather found in the city. In another article that appeared in the summer of 1912, the newspaper reiterated the appeal of the city. The article began by noting that "Tampa has everything to offer" a major league team. Nevertheless, there was a call to improve the training grounds. In their case for better facilities, it was pointed out that "before making a serious proposition to any big-league club, it will be necessary for the city to put the present baseball park in shape for such purpose." Not only did they advocate better ball field, it was the off-the-field training facilities that also needed updated. Once built, the facilities would be used all year around after the major league team returned North and be useful for workers and elites alike. Another call went out in the fall, again calling for the city to invest into training facilities. "Good

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<sup>267</sup> "Tampa Morning Tribune," *Tampa Tribune*, March 12, 1899. For more on the links between baseball and the Americanization of overseas territories, see: Thomas W. Zeiler, *Ambassadors in Pinstripes: The Spalding World Baseball Tour and the Birth of the American Empire* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, Inc., 2006).

Things Lost” reported the paper concerning the city’s inactivity. They lamented that the city lost a chance to host a major league club which instead trained in Miami.<sup>268</sup>

Despite the criticism, Mayor Donald McKay was in favor of expanding the training facilities at the city’s fairgrounds and the city council followed suit in their support. With the promise to update the facilities, it was reported that the Cincinnati Reds were considering returning to Tampa, as were the Boston Red Sox and the Chicago Cubs. The effort to bring a team to the city was spearheaded by H. M. Stanford. As manager of the Tampa Bay Hotel (now known as the Plant Hotel), Stanford’s intentions are pretty clear. The hotel would profit from a northern team since they would have the hotel booked for a month or so. Eventually, the Chicago Cubs announced that they would train in Tampa in the spring of 1913 as long as the city updated their training facilities. In a letter to the city, the president of the Cubs, Charles Murphy, echoed the concerns of paper: “We would prefer Tampa to any other place I know of because we can get better hotel accommodations. Its climatic conditions are already well known to us. But our players are used to the best of accommodations when traveling and they should them in the spring also.” In response to competition from St. Petersburg, Jacksonville, and Miami, Stanford pledge to help the city with expanding the city’s training facilities.<sup>269</sup>

Major League baseball came once again to Tampa on February 17, 1913 when the Chicago Cubs first arrived in the city. The deal that brought the team to the city helped to showcase the power of Tampa businessmen. The Cubs arrival in Tampa was fostered by the city’s business community. After visiting the city in December, the team announced their

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<sup>268</sup> “City News,” *Tampa Tribune*, January 11, 1912. Baseball Training Camp, *Tampa Tribune*, August 29, 1912. “Two Good Things Lost,” *Tampa Tribune*, October 3, 1912.

<sup>269</sup> “Invite Red Sox to Come to This City,” *Tampa Tribune*, October 4, 1912. “Cincinnati Nationals May Train in Tampa – Stanford and City After ‘em,” *Tampa Times*, October 4, 1912. “Want Red Sox’s Camp,” *Tampa Times*, October 10, 1912. “Cubs to Train in City Next Spring,” *Tampa Tribune*, November 25, 1912.

decision on January 1, 1913. Not only did the business elites of Tampa offer to finance improvements to the baseball facilities, but they also provided the Cubs with over \$5,000 to pay for room and board, as well as other expenses. The investment in spring training was headed by what was known as The Boosters and Baseball committee of the Tampa Retail Dealers Association. The meeting for the money was called by Mayor McKay; however, the city did not invest any money. “Too much credit can not be given the soliciting committee which has made this wonderful exhibition of Tampa’s business stability possible,” noted the *Tribune*. As part of the agreement, the Cubs sent their own ground crew to work on the field at Plant Field. Interestingly, part of selling the city on spring training was reiterating that professional players were morally wholesome. During the early years of major league baseball, there was a perception that players had a propensity for drinking and being rowdy. But Cubs’ president Charles Murphy argued that “As to [the players’] conduct, I want to assure you gentlemen that there is not a man on the team whom you will not be able to feel perfectly safe to take to you home and introduce to your wife and daughter. Each is a thorough gentleman, and if I find one that isn’t, he won’t last long with the Cubs, nor with any big-league club for that matter.”<sup>270</sup>

When the Cubs announced that they would training in Tampa, the city had the better part of a year to address the issues that arose with the training facilities. Still, by the end of the year, city officials were generally unenthusiastic toward the venture. The city was still reeling from the 1910-11 labor strike that had finically crippled the city and furthered the ethnic and class divide. To remedy this, spring training baseball was seen as something that could both financially uplift the city while also promoting some sort of reconciliation. When it was announced that the

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<sup>270</sup> “Cubs Will Train at Tampa,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 1, 1913. “Cubs Sign Up To Train in Tampa,” *Tampa Tribune*, January 1, 1913. “Convicts Assist at Tampa Camp,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 13, 1913.

Chicago Cubs were looking at having Tampa hosts their spring training, the *Tribune* stated that “The coming of this any other big-league team would mean much to Tampa in the way of advertising as well as direct money returns.” It was speculated that a major league team expected to generate considerable amount of money since players, coaches, managers, trainers, and newspaper men often followed the team as they traveled. “The sum of money they leave in a city is by no means inconsiderable,” noted the paper. Notably, the discussions of the benefit of spring training centered around helping white, non-cigar businesses. During the months of the strike, Tampa received less-than favorable publicity in the northern press as many locations face cigar shortages or increased prices. In some cases, northern newspapers were just as critical of Tampa as they were of the labor unions. Thus, showcasing the city during the spring gave Tampa the opportunity to mask class tensions that still existed after the strike. Additionally, travel was becoming easier, and the city was more accessible to winter tourists that sought to escape winter weather in the North. With that in mind, the *Tampa Tribune* noted that “[spring training baseball was] a source of amusement for the winter visitors and Tampa’s name will be carried in Associated Press and special dispatched every day.” It was even speculated that spring training baseball could help to unite the city in the aftermath of the strike by having Tampa’s immigrant community attend the games. In the letter to the city announcing the arrival of the Cubs, Murphy noted that “A fast Cuban nine could be brought over and a series of games played which would draw practically every male Latin in the city besides a thousand or so Americans.” Even if the city was slow to do the financial work of bringing in a major league team, the newspaper and

those associated with the endeavor were willing to rhetorically frame spring training baseball as beneficial to the city.<sup>271</sup>

When framing the meaning of the arrival of the Cubs, it was also clear that they were considered Tampa's Anglo-American team. In defining the cultural meaning behind the Cubs choosing Tampa to train, the team helped to erase years of baseball history that was tinged with the cigar industry and beloved by ethnic workers. The Cubs represented what the *Tampa Tribune* called "good baseball." In fact, even though the city had some thrilling baseball summers with local teams that included good teams from Ybor City and West Tampa, "Tampa has been dead for years when it comes to the great American sport" and "Tampa is, for its size, the most sound asleep place in the country when it comes to the sport." Furthermore, the Cubs meant that "the office boy or the grocery clerk who work all day...[gets] to see some good baseball."<sup>272</sup>

The excitement for the Cubs came largely from Tampa's business elites. An association of local retail and cigar factory owners was established to help prepare the city for the Cubs. The Association included the son of Vicente Martinez Ybor, Ralph Ybor. Still, the credit for the Cubs belonged to the city's merchants. Even in 1913, much of the United States linked Tampa with cigar making. While this was true, the arrival of the Cubs helped to diversify the city's image in the press. On the day of the announcement, it was noted that "Every large newspaper in American has an article today on the public spirit of Tampa merchants, Tampa progressiveness, Tampa climate, Tampa hospitality." For the retail businesses of the city, the publicity was

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<sup>271</sup> "Choice Cigars Scarce as Result of Strike," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 15, 1910. "Union Man Flees on Citizens' Hint," *The Chicago Tribune*, November 26, 1910. "Tampa Angry With Gompers," *New York Tribune*, November 28, 1910. "Cincinnati Nationals May Train in Tampa – Stanford and City After 'em," *Tampa Times*, October 4, 1912. "Cubs to Train in City Next Spring," *Tampa Tribune*, November 25, 1912. "Cubs Coming Means Much," *Tampa Tribune*, February 6, 1913.

<sup>272</sup> "Cubs Coming Means Much," *Tampa Tribune*, February 6, 1913.

certainly important. Nevertheless, the idea that Tampa was more than a cigar town meant that the city was less economically vulnerable to massive strikes such as the one that occurred in 1910-1911. When financial reports came at the end of 1910, city merchants reported better than expected profits. The newspaper reminded readers that “Tampa has other foundations than the cigar industry.” Throughout 1911, the newspaper ran stories that highlighted the good relationship between merchants and their employees. On the first day of 1911, merchants provided their employees with a half-holiday. “The New Year will open tomorrow with a splendid demonstration by the liberal minded wholesale and retail merchants of Tampa,” noted the *Tribune*. The story continued: “With their usual liberality, the large number of Tampa’s successful merchants again demonstrated their eagerness to help their employees by acquiescing readily in the general plan to create a holiday on the first day of 1911.” The promotion of the Cubs by the city’s retail businesses coincided with a movement to diversify the city’s economy. The publicity in northern newspapers from the arrival of the Chicago baseball team offered the city a chance to rehabilitate its image away from a city of violent strikes.<sup>273</sup>

The city’s merchants, many of whom invested in bringing the Cubs to town, expressed the idea that recreation was something that was beneficial to their employees and business. With the 1910-11 cigar strike still unsettled, merchants echoed these sentiments in the newspaper. Henry Giddens, who owned a clothing company, stated that “Our store will be closed at noon on Monday (January 1). We have had a very busy holiday season and all of our boys have cooperated with us. They have worked very hard, and we are glad the opportunity to grant them a little additional time for recreation.” The owner of Ball Grocery, Fred Ball, echoed similar

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<sup>273</sup> “City News,” *Tampa Tribune*, November 22, 1910. “Stores to Close on New Year Day,” *Tampa Tribune*, January 1, 1911.

sentiments: “I think it is a good move to provide the clerks with a little additional recreation time.” Robert Keller, of the Keller Clothing Co., stated: “It is good policy to give the help plenty of time for play because then they will be able to work much better when play time is over.” In expressing support for recreation, they waged a public relation campaign in which the goal was to highlight labor relations within their businesses. In contrast to the cigar industry, merchants promoted themselves as benevolent businessmen who genuinely held the best interest of their employees in the shadow of a violent cigar-workers strike. A year later, the same group of merchants allied to bring the Cubs to town for the spring.<sup>274</sup>

The merchant association that oversaw the Cubs’ arrival planned a celebration for the team once they arrived in the city. The association paid for advertisements for the training games, helped to secure a team from Cuba to play against the Cubs, and coordinated events such as lectures on the role of baseball in American society. They also planned excursions for the players and managers to visit local points of interest. Despite Mayor McKay being part of the meetings, the merchant association and city government clashed over financing improvements to Plant Field. To be ready for the Cubs, the association had to pay for upgrades to grandstands and bathroom facilities. At an association meeting in February, a heated argument broke out between members and McKay over who was responsible for financing the project. McKay motioned that the city be reimbursed for any money spent on the project, which drew the ire of association members who felt that the city ought to help with the project. In the end, the association paid for the majority of the project. When the Cubs arrived in the city, they were met by the merchant

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<sup>274</sup> “City News,” *Tampa Tribune*, November 22, 1910. “Fans Will Form an Association,” *Tampa Times*, January 3, 1913. “Retail Merchants Didi Much in the Old Year,” *Tampa Tribune*, January 5, 1913.



association and ushered to the Tampa Hotel. The welcoming party all wore buttons that said: "Cubs Take Tampa and the Rag." The latter part referred to the National League Pennant.<sup>275</sup>

Based on the Cubs' first exhibition game, Tampa's merchant association did well to invest in spring training. A crowd of 6,000 people came out to see the Cubs battle the Cuban Athletics. After defeating the Cuban team, the Cubs went on to play other regional professional teams. During this time, Tampa had what could be classified as "Cubs Fever." This was prevalent in local advertisements. "Alcazar and Bonita Co., "Tampa's popular photoplay theater" that offered vaudevillian shows, announced to their customers that they were the city's "Cubs headquarters." Ball's Snow-White grocery store had "Bouillon cubes (Not Cubs) for 30 cents." Even the cigar company helped to promote the Cubs. Val Maestro Antuono, one of Tampa's most successful cigar company owners, told his costumers that his company C.H.S meant "Cubs Have Smoked!" Even Tampa's eye doctors referred to the Cubs in their advertisements. Dr. H. E. Lough told the readers of the *Tribune* "With "KRYPTOK" Lenses, you can read your score card and watch the longest fly with the same degree of accuracy and comfort. Try this at the next 'Cub' exhibition."<sup>276</sup>

The final game of the 1913 spring training schedule occurred on March 17, 1913. On the morning of the game, the local paper mused about the month that the Cubs spent in the city. They recapped players stats and performances of the players. They also called on the citizens of Tampa to attend the final game. The paper pleaded that "As a matter of civic pride, every loyal

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<sup>275</sup> Despite all the planning, Charles Murphy, Cubs' president, forgot to make reservations at the Tampa Bay Hotel for the team and the managers. "Plans for Cubs Reception Made," *Tampa Tribune*, February 7, 1913. "Getting Ready for Chicagoans," *Tampa Times*, February 7, 1913. "Cubs' Arrival a Week Away," *Tampa Tribune*, February 10, 1913. "Cubs Arrive 36 Strong, Will Begin Training Today," *Tampa Tribune*, February 18, 1913.

<sup>276</sup> H.E. Lough, "Advertisement," *Tampa Tribune*, February 28, 1913. Alcazar and Bonita Co., "Advertisement," *Tampa Tribune*, March 5, 1913. Ball's Snow-White Store, "Advertisement," *Tampa Tribune*, March 6, 1913. C.H.S., "Advertisement," *Tampa Tribune*, March 6, 1913.

citizen of Tampa should attend the game tomorrow, and give the Cubs a farewell that will live in their memory through the entire season” The concept of “loyal citizen” is striking considering the game took place in the wake of the 1910-1911 cigar strike. In fact, the phrase “loyal citizen” was bantered often during and after the strike. When discussing the armed vigilantes that were deputized to keep the peace during the strike, the paper referred to the 300 men “loyal citizens.” In November of 1910, an editorial by the *Tribune* stated that “In the face of this awful condition [the strike], it is the duty of every Christian and every loyal citizen of Tampa to do what he can to subdue the evil and make the city clean.” A few days after this editorial, a headline read “Loyal Tampa Citizens Meet in Monster Gathering to Protest.” The phrase continued to be used after the strike was over, often appealing to whites for business, donation, or to put pressure on the city. An editorial on city improvements stated: “Every loyal citizen of Tampa feels that the time has arrived for improvements in a civic way.” When reporting on a civic “clean-up” association, the paper stated that “We believe that Tampa should be first, and that every opportunity offered for her upbuilding should be improved by every local citizen.” Moreover, when discussing white businessmen, they were quite often referred to as “loyal citizens.” Even by the time the Cubs committed to the city, the concept of loyal citizens was still being used by the paper. A few days after the team announced their intentions, it was noted that “Enterprising and loyal citizens are the city’s best asset.” The use of the phrase clearly referred to non-radicalized, whites. The use of the phrase when discussing the Cubs further highlights how even spring training baseball emphasized who and what ideology belonged.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> “Labor Agitators Are Placed Under Arrest,” *The Weekly Tribune*, October 20, 1910. “Drake Analyzes the Social Evil,” *Tampa Tribune*, November 21, 1910. “Gompers’ Wildcat Charges Denounced,” *Tampa Tribune*, November 30, 1910. “Crocer Has Plan for Beautifying,” *Tampa Tribune*, March 19, 1911. “Glimpses of Growth,” *The Tampa Times*, January 3, 1913. “The Irish vs The Dutch,” *Tampa Tribune*, March 17, 1913.

Charles Murphy, Cubs' president, called the 1913 spring the best training camp experience the team ever had. He stated that was pleased with the training grounds, the hotel accommodations, and the climate, even if the spring was wetter than usual. In turn, Tampa's businessmen were seemingly pleased with the experience. Despite incurring a deficit, H. M. Stanford negotiated a five-year deal for the Cubs to return to the city. Over the next year, the retail association (renamed Mid-winter Baseball Association) clashed with the city over the use of the field. The association wanted to continue the deal with the city whereas Tampa wanted to provide the city's railroad company with part of the land that housed Plant Field. As the 1914 spring approached, there was much less fanfare than the previous year. For the next two years, reports of the Cubs arrival shifted from front page news to back page reminders. By 1916, the association was over \$2000 in debt. Thus, there began a campaign to strengthen the bond between the team and the city. The local paper began to refer to the team as "Our Cubs." In announcing the arrival of the team, the paper said that "The Chicago National Baseball Club, locally known as 'Our Cubs,' will arrive this morning for the spring training season." The paper further linked the ball club with the town by promoting the shape of its grounds and its "superior band of weather." The paper urged that "the public should turn out in large numbers for every game. This Spring baseball season is a great thing for Tampa, and we ought to show our appreciation of the enterprise of those citizens who have made it possible by giving patronage in their efforts to make it a self-sustaining proposition."<sup>278</sup>

After "Our Cubs" returned to the Chicago for the 1916 Major League season, the city once again faced the prospects of another strike. Throughout the summer, rumors of strikes and

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<sup>278</sup> "Cubs Given Grounds for Five -Year Term," *Tampa Tribune*, March 19, 1913. "Our Cubs Here Today," *Tampa Tribune*, March 7, 1916.

angst were rampant in the city. Finally, in the fall months, cigar makers from numerous factories participated in a strike for higher wages. Most notable to this strike was the inclusion of strippers. These were female employees who protested for an increase in wages. The workers were supported by the Cigar Manufacturers' Association. This marked the end of relative labor peace in Tampa. Around the same time, the Chicago Cubs decided to find a new spring home. Although they were contracted for another two years, the Cubs requested to move to Pasadena, California. When commenting on the move, the Chicago's new owner, Charles Weeghman, stated that "I have no objections to Tampa...but there was not enough enthusiasm shown down there. The fans did not come out last spring." In fact, Weeghman sought to end the agreement in the winter of 1915 but was unsuccessful due to the contract that the former club president signed with the Mid-winter Baseball Association in 1913. Nevertheless, local support for the Cubs waned for numerous reasons. The threats of abandoning the city left ill-feeling towards the team. Moreover, local cigar workers did not support the Cubs as they did their local neighborhood teams. Since their first arrival in the city, the Cubs were promoted at Tampa's unofficial Anglo-Saxon team. Lastly, another cigar worker strike in 1916 and the subsequent end to the Cigar City League hurt the city's baseball reputation.<sup>279</sup>

The Cubs leaving was part of a larger trend of the declining popularity of baseball in the city. Rocked by violent strikes, World War I, the influenza pandemic, baseball was not a priority for many in the city. The departure of the Cubs also signaled more involvement from the city government, and less involvement from local business owners. In January of 1917, the Brooklyn Dodgers announced that they were considering Tampa to be their new spring home. In the

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<sup>279</sup> "Looks Like Cubs Will Pass Tampa," *Tampa Tribune*, January 9, 1916. "Cubs Will Arrive Here On March 7<sup>th</sup>," *Tampa Tribune*, January 13, 1916.

negotiations, the city played a much larger role. While most of the Cubs' expenses were paid by the city's Mid-Winter Baseball Association, the Dodgers were only offered use of the training facilities. The city requested that the team pay for their hotel, travel, and any other expenses that they incurred while in town. The Dodgers decided to train at Hot Springs, Arkansas.<sup>280</sup>

Tampa did not have another Major League team until 1919. By then, the Mid-Winter Baseball Association was dissolved, and the city handled the deal to bring a new club to the city. With the help from the Tampa Bay Hotel and the *Tribune*, the city was able to secure the Boston Red Sox. The 1918 World Series champions were given free-of-charge exclusive use of Plant Field but had to pay all other expenses. While their arrival was noted in the press, there was very little fanfare. Moreover, the local ownership centered around the Red Sox was much less apparent. They were not considered "Our" Red Sox nor were they part of any advertisement campaign. Some of the mundaneness of the spring was the fact that Red Sox star pitcher, Babe Ruth, was absent from the first days of the camp due to a contractual dispute with the team. Ruth eventually joined the Red Sox and on April 4, hit the longest home run ever recorded: 587 feet from home plate. The record hit made headlines throughout the east and helped to change the course of Ruth's career as he was converted from a pitcher who hit every few days to a slugging outfielder. In the *Tampa Tribune*, the monumental homerun received just a passing note buried in the story of the game: "It was Ruth's day to get the longest hit of his career and the longest seen at Plant Park." As baseball was used less as an amusement for the working-classes and moved more toward creating financial gains for the city, its popularity lessened. The failure to employ

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<sup>280</sup> "Dodgers May Train Here – Ebbetts Asks for Tampa's Offer" *Tampa Tribune*, January 5, 1917. "Only Four Clubs Shift Training Camp," *Tampa Tribune*, January 22, 1917.

baseball to stop radicalism in Tampa meant that the game became more transactional, both within the local league and the city's dealings with northern Major League teams.<sup>281</sup>

### **Race in Tampa's Baseball Scene**

When they agreed to come to Tampa in the winter of 1913, there was talk about a Cuban team coming to play the Cubs. In the weeks leading to the club's arrival, different Cuban teams were discussed. Both professional and amateur teams were considered. Eventually, with the assistance of Cuban consulate Ralph Ybor, the Cuban Athletics were chosen to play the Cubs. A purely amateur team, the Athletics were reportedly "on par with the nine representing the highest institutions of learning in American, such as Yale, Princeton, and Harvard." The first game was set for February 24, 1913, a day that was celebrated in Cuba and Tampa's Cuban neighborhood as the island's Independence Day. Members of the retail association that lured the Cubs to Tampa theorized that the game could be part of a larger celebration and attract a large number of spectators. They were correct as the game caused the entire city to shut down. In front of 5,500 fans, the Cubs defeated the Cubans by a score of 4 to 2. In the lead-up to the game, however, Cubs president Charles Murphy made one request in order to give his blessing for the game to transpire. He asked the retail association that the Cuba Athletics be made up of "pure white Cubans." The *Tribune* reported that as "the questions of negro was raised by the Cubs, those present were assured that the entire team would be composed of pure white Cubans."<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> "Dodgers May Train Here," *Tampa Tribune*, January 5, 1917. "Red Sox Will Train in Tampa," *Tampa Tribune*, January 19, 1919. "Great Crows Watched Boston Defeat Giants in Fast Game," *Tampa Times*, April 5, 1919. "Babe Answers Question – Were'd You Play Ruth?," *Boston Herald*, April 5, 1919.

<sup>282</sup> "Tampa Will Have Baseball Club," *Tampa Tribune*, January 23, 1913. "Athletics to Play Chicago," *Tampa Times*, January 25, 1913. "Plans For Cubs Reception Made," *Tampa Tribune*, February 7, 1913. "Cubs and Cuba Will Open 1913 Baseball Season," *Tampa Tribune*, February 24, 1913. "Cubs and Cubans will Play Today, J. Pluv. Being Willing," *The Tampa Tribune*, February 26, 1913. "Murphy's Giant Killers Down Pride of Cuba," *The Tampa Tribune*, February 27, 1913.

Located on the edges of the former Confederacy and the emerging New South, Tampa's white population held similar racial beliefs as their southern neighbors in the Carolinas, Atlanta, and elsewhere. Segregation was common and the same racial discourse around Black masculinity was omnipresent in the city. Considering Tampa's ethnic communities, race was not simply limited to a stringent white-Black binary as it was in other southern cities. Likewise, segregated baseball was not only confined to northern Major League teams. The Cubs and the teams that trained in the South had long proclaimed a so-called "gentleman's agreement" which solidified racial segregation in both the profession and armature games. Enacted in the 1880's, ensured that professional baseball was to be played between only whites and was strictly followed wherever baseball was played. In the Tampa region, however, the color line in local baseball was complicated due to the varying ethnicities that inhabited the city. Cubans, Spaniards, and Italians carved out urban, public spaces, which helped to reinforce their different ethnic cultures. Although on the margins of society, Tampa's African American and Afro-Cuban communities also sought to carve out space within Tampa society. Here, baseball helped to define and reinforce the borders of ethnic Tampa. Similar to the ways that baseball was employed to reinforce white political, economic, and cultural values, it helped to define who belonged to the different racial and ethnic groups in the city.<sup>283</sup>

The historical concept of race within Tampa was quite a bit more complicated than in other southern cities. While only a small percent of the total population, African Americans occupied tenuous spaces within the city. Being a time of Jim Crow laws, Black residents that lived in neighborhoods that are close to what is now downtown were segregated from the white population. Moreover, Blacks were also not technically part of the immigrant enclaves of Ybor

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<sup>283</sup> Gary Mormino and George Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*.

City and West Tampa. Even within Tampa's African American community, there were different ethnicities. Numerous Afro-Cubans had immigrated to the city during and after the fight for Cuban independence. As Spanish speaking immigrants and defined by southern society as Black, Afro-Cuban traversed between the city's African American community and Latin community. As the same time, Tampa's ethnic Cuban, Spanish, and Italian communities also faced racial prejudice as being not-quite-white and not-quite-Black.

There was one thing, however, that Tampa's immigrants and whites had in common with African Americans: baseball. Beginning around 1895, African Americans and Afro-Cubans both participated in baseball games both in Tampa and throughout the state of Florida. As a marker of the turn of the century, these games were segregated, and Black teams never played against white teams. Notwithstanding the strict segregation of whites and Blacks, ethnic immigration complicated traditional structures of Jim Crow. From 1890 to 1920, Tampa hosted inter-racial games between different ethnicities and immigrant athletes were able to play on local professional teams under certain circumstances. Specific conditions upon which these players could interact with white teams dictated who could play who.<sup>284</sup>

A major theme of ethnic and Black baseball was the process of delegitimization. As the game grew popular among these groups, whites sought to rhetorically place the games on the margins of the overall baseball scene in the city. Thus, limitations were placed on these games. They were depicted as violent, contained racial mixing that was deemed some sort of cheating, or were called a sideshow not on par with white baseball. Even when well-skilled players and teams appeared, they were often treated as an abnormality. Rhetorically delegitimizing non-white baseball had two functions. First, even if the games were less-than white baseball, they

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<sup>284</sup> Susan D. Greenbaum, *More Than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).



were still opportunities to expose cigar workers, immigrants, and African Americans to the supposed middle-class values that whites assumed baseball provided. At the same time, rhetorically limiting ethnic and Black baseball reinforced these values amongst Tampa's white men, which allowed them to promote the manly activity of baseball as a noble game.<sup>285</sup>

One of the first recorded instances of an African American teams to be organized in the city was in 1895. In May, a Black state baseball association was organized in the city. The Tampa team was led by W. M. Morris. The teams were to be made up of "colored people chock full of base-ball enthusiasm, and the nation game is likely to be as popular among the colored people of Florida this year as football ever was with Yale students." Despite games being scheduled for June, there are no records to whether they were actually played. Nonetheless, African American baseball received a boost thanks to the Spanish-American War. As a result of the closeness to Cuba, a large number of African American soldiers were stationed in the city of Tampa. Baseball proved to be a popular recreation for soldiers awaiting deployment to Cuba. In reports of African American baseball games involving soldiers, the *Tampa Tribune* promoted the entertainment of the ball games and the effects on the soldier's morale. In one such story, on June 2, 1898, the newspaper noted how teams from Lakeland and Bartow played to a large crowd of soldiers stationed in Tampa. Despite the harmony on the ball field, the game took place at a time when racial tensions in the city were amplified. Four days after this ballgame, a significant race riot occurred. On the night of June 6, 1898, drunken white soldiers from Ohio decided to use a two-year-old African American boy for target practice. Outraged, African American soldiers from the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth regiments rioted and took over the city's streets. In reporting on the story, the *Tampa Tribune*

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<sup>285</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

was cautious in their writing. Because of the war, the paper did not cite or commenting on the racial tensions.<sup>286</sup>

Following the war, ethnic and class tension in the city escalated. While baseball was seen as something that could heal the fractured immigrant communities, African American baseball was treated as unusual in the local newspaper. The *Tampa Tribune* often glorified the threat of chaos and inconvenience caused by these games. In the summer of 1900, the newspaper warned of the “imminent danger to windows and pedestrians” due to the fascination of baseball in the African American community. Thus, the language of the baseball games changed in the paper. Games that were being promoted often told of the aggression between the two teams. In that same summer, the newspaper reported that there was a proposal for baseball games between an African American team and a team of Chinese immigrants. The article stated the aggression they expected in the game. To “control” the players, two white, upper-class businessmen – a government official and an insurance brokers – arranged to be in responsible for the two teams. Although no record of the game can be found, the two businessmen were in charge of managing the teams off the field in order to control their aggression.<sup>287</sup>

The language used by the *Tampa Tribune*, particularly the word “aggression,” to define African American baseball also found its way into describing games with Cuban teams. Promoting a charity game featuring a team from Tampa and a Latin team, *La Norma*, in 1900, the newspaper referred the Latin team as being aggressive. The article also promoted their “heavyweight” hitter, taking the lexicon from another aggressive sport, associated with African

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<sup>286</sup> Documentation for the riot can be found in numerous texts located in: “USF Department of Anthropology African Americans in Florida Project,” The University of South Florida Special Collections, University of South Florida Library. “State Baseball Association,” *The Weekly Tribune*, May 23, 1895. “Lakeland Camps,” *Tampa Tribune*, June 2, 1898. “Inhuman Brutes,” *Tampa Tribune* June 8, 1889.

<sup>287</sup> “Interesting Statement,” *Tampa Tribune*, August 23, 1900

Americans and Latinos: boxing. In 1902, a game featuring West Tampa's Cuban team and the Tampa Green Stockings, one of the city's main amateur teams, the headline stated that the white team "slaughtered" the Cubans. In games featuring African Americans or Latino immigrants, the white press often described the games in terms of violence or making references to death or slaughter. In turn, when discussing games that featured only white teams, the language was often more flowery and sounded more like a noble exercise than an instance of war.<sup>288</sup>

The 1903 expulsion of the three Afro-Cuban players from the Cuban traveling team in Jacksonville and Tampa added another layer to Black baseball: on-the-field profiting from segregation. In May of 1903, an "all-Cuban" baseball team was set to play a white, Jacksonville ball club. These games were common practices, as traveling "all-Cuban" teams were a popular amongst Cuban immigrants who had fled the island during Cuba's war of independence from Spain. Prior to the game, the Jacksonville city government forced the Cuban team to drop three players from their roster. Citing Jim Crow segregation laws, the city threatened to ban the team if they did not remove the players they deemed to be "Black." The *Tampa Tribune* reported that the suspension of the African players was "A surprising thing [considering] that Tampa played the colored men, and with some of the players in the Tampa nine who have stood well in the baseball circles of the state heretofore." In other words, these "colored" Cubans had played against white Tampa teams in the recent past. The Cuban team had games scheduled all over the state without any issues until the color line was invoked in Jacksonville. In order to play the game, the three players were dropped from the team. Following these actions, northern and

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<sup>288</sup> "Brief Bits of Local News," *Tampa Tribune*, June 2, 1900. "Novel Game Booked Today," *Tampa Tribune*, August 22, 1900 "Play Ball To-Day," *Tampa Tribune*, August 19, 1902

central Florida towns insisted that teams use only “white” players when playing other white teams. While certainly the concern of segregation led to the expulsion, the Cuban teams were strong clubs, with or without the Afro-Cuban players. Using the double standard allowed white teams an advantage over the Cuban teams.<sup>289</sup>

The notion of using “white” players spread to Tampa rather quickly as, two days later, a headline appeared asserting: “Cut Out of Baseball Game: Lily Whites Today.” Tampa teams and civic leaders followed the example of Jacksonville and other towns by expelling the three players on the Cuban team. While the color line was undoubtedly an important factor in the decision, and racism played a role in the disqualification of these players, there was another important distinction that the newspaper noticed. The reporter noted that: “The absence of the colored men will weaken the All-Cubans considerably as two of them, the pitcher and shortstop, were among the most effective players.” Thus, not only did expelling the players conform to the color line and Jim Crow segregation, but it also gave an advantage to the white team. This advantage was not simply a sporting edge. The paper stated that the replacements “will furnish a much more edifying spectacle to the people of Tampa as a whole. Betting last night was brisk, still favoring the All-Cubans, at odds of 2 to 1.” Here, segregation was profitable because it disqualified the best players on the Cuban team; thus, giving an advantage to those who bet on the white Tampa team.<sup>290</sup>

After this episode, the language surrounding African Americans in baseball changed in the city. The paper lessened the rhetoric of violence, aggression, and unsportsmanlike play while underscoring the gambling aspect and the betting lines of these games. After the expulsion of the

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<sup>289</sup> “May Not Play All-Cubans,” *Tampa Tribune*, May 8, 1903.

<sup>290</sup> “Cut Out of Baseball Game: Lily Whites Today,” *Tampa Tribune*, May 10, 1903.

Afro-Cubans players in 1903, the *Tampa Tribune* inferred that, with two of the best players unable to play, the white Tampa team had a better chance of winning even if the betting odds did not change. If Tampa won the game, those who bet on the team would have won more money. Thus, betting was an important factor in African American baseball, even if the game was rigged. In fact, deciding who won the bets could cause controversy. A game between a Tampa African American team and the Cuban Giants was controversially called because of the field condition with the Tampa team in the lead. The focus of the controversy was over the fact that the umpire called “All Bets Off.” With Tampa leading the game, those who bet on the African American team argued that they ought to collect on their bet. In organizing white, professional baseball, gambling was often discouraged. In the formation of the City League in 1909, it was noted that vices such as gambling was forbidden. However, when describing African American games, the paper would promote the betting lines, while ignoring the action of the game.<sup>291</sup>

Despite the rhetoric, both Tampa’s Afro-Cuban and African American communities found ways to participate within the city’s baseball scene. Beginning in 1914, the all-African American Tampa Giants were formed. The team began in a three-team league that featured the Giants, a Black team located in nearby Plant City, and the “All Colored Cuban” team. The Giants consisted of an existing traveling team that had recently toured the state. They were managed by R. S. Donaldson. A local African American entrepreneur and once called “one of Florida’s most progressive Afro-American capitalists,” Donaldson was a business partner of African American vaudeville promoter Pat Chappelle. In 1901, Donaldson and Chappelle opened the Buckingham Theater. Located near the Fort Brooke neighborhood, the theater hosted comedy vaudeville acts. One of the features of the theater was that it had an inter-racial audience.

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<sup>291</sup> “All Bets Off,” *Tampa Tribune*, April 19, 1904.

“Everyone is invited,” announced the *Tribune*, “Everybody is invited, as you all know that this popular place of amusement has always been run orderly and decent.” This carried over into Donaldson’s baseball promotion. When announcing the formation of the Giants, it was noted that the games were expected to be orderly and “special reservations are made for the white people in the grandstands and the promoters of the league invite them to be present and see the games.” Taking inspiration from his time as a vaudevillian promoter, Donaldson sought to legitimize the league by inviting Tampa’s white population.<sup>292</sup>

Although actual figures were not announced, the paper reported that the Tampa Giants’ first game attracted a large crowd. It should be noted that 1914 was also the first year that the city league was not charging for attendance. Despite a slow start on the field in 1914, the team was very successful both on the field and off and the team won numerous championships within the state of Florida. Playing their home games at Plant Field, the Giants often drew hundreds of fans. On June 28, 1915, the team drew 900 spectators to Plant Field to witness their game against the African American team from Key West. They also attracted world-class competition from both Cuba and the United States. The following summer, the Cuban Stars played the Tampa Giants. The “white” Cuban team was called “the strongest negro nine in the United States.” The game made headlines in the newspaper and 1000 people were in attendance to watch the Cuban team defeat the Giants. In October of 1915, the champions of the national Negro League, the A. B. C. (All-Black Cuban) Club traveled to Plant Field to play the Giants. Attendance was

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<sup>292</sup> “Buckingham Theater,” *Tampa Tribune*, December 24, 1901. “Negro Teams Organize League, Play in Tampa,” *Tampa Tribune*, August 30, 1914. Lynn Abbot and Doug Seroff, *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, “Coon Songs,” and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2007) 250-257.

expected to be comparable to the 1915 Cigar City League championship game a few days prior to the Giants game.<sup>293</sup>

Throughout the 1914 season, the Giants had a positive response by those who commented on the games. Summaries appeared for each of the league's games. Win or lose, the rhetoric was mundane compared to how other cities reported on African American baseball. Nonetheless, the promotion of the games was conditional. During the reporting of the games, it was often noted the festive atmosphere that accompanied the games. "Plenty of good music by a big brass band keeps things livened up at every game," noted the *Tribune*. Moreover, the Giants actively sought whites to attend the games. Prior to an important game between Tampa and Plant City, it was reported that "The Negroes ask their white friends not to forget that they are offering them the very best accommodations in the grandstands, are anxious for them to attend these games and hope to see a good number of them out to witness the game." The trend continued into 1915 when, during a game between Key West and the Giants, "special arrangements" were made for the comfort of white spectators. "Chairs have been placed in boxes and a squad of five policemen is on hand every afternoon to maintain order." The team went as far as installing extra umpires on the field. For local games, it was customary that there would be one or two umpires during a game. Hoping to keep order on the field, the Giants' games often featured five umpires. Still, into the 1920, the Giants were one of Tampa's most successful and long-last teams that played the game. Notwithstanding the appearance that the games were what whites deemed "safe," the Tampa Giants were one of the most successful and popular African American

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<sup>293</sup> "Plant City Negroes Defeat Tampa Nine," *Tampa Tribune*, September 1, 1914. "Key Westers Put One Over on Tampa Giants," *Tampa Tribune*, June 29, 1915. "Cuban Stars Beat Local Negro Nine," *Tampa Tribune*, September 15, 1915. "Tampa Giants Lose to A. B. C. Club, 14-0," *Tampa Tribune*, October 28, 1915. "Cuban Stars take First Game Here," *Tampa Tribune*, April 11, 1916. "Cuban Stars take First Game Here," *Tampa Tribune*, April 11, 1916.

baseball teams in the nation. With the help from the promoters of the team, who had a background in African American stage shows, the team was presented as upholding middle-class, white values. With the appearance and promotion that Black baseball was free from violence and rowdiness, the Tampa Giants were an accepted part of the city's baseball landscape.<sup>294</sup>

Even though Tampa, much like the rest of the United States, segregated baseball, ethnicity was not necessarily a barrier for playing on professional teams in Tampa. Henry J. Fromherz, the cigar factory worker who played on professional clubs in the first decade of the twentieth century, is but one example of an ethnic player. In the late nineteenth century, Florentino Gonzales was lauded for his pitching and hitting skills for the Tampa Greys traveling team. Gonzales' mother was Chinese while his father was Cuban. Another well-known ethnic player was Casare Alvarez. Throughout his career, Alvarez was a popular but rambunctious player in Tampa. A game once was stopped because the third baseman/pitcher instigated a fistfight with an opposing player. Eventually, he played for the famed Tampa Smokers in the 1920s. Alvarez was a Spanish immigrant, paving the way for other Latinos. His inclusion in the Cigar City League and the Florida State League allowed other players, such as the great Al Lopez, to follow in his footsteps. Yet, like Fromherz, Alvarez was not a cigar maker. Instead, he was a new class of professional baseball players who made a living playing the game for the local community.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> "Giants and Favorites Monday," *Tampa Tribune*, September 20, 1914. "Tampa Giants Even Up Series with Key West," *Tampa Tribune*, June 30, 1915. "Tampa Giants Won," *Tampa Tribune*, July 28, 1915. "Cuban Stars Here to Meet Tampa Giants," *Tampa Tribune*, September 13, 1915.

<sup>295</sup> Wes Singletary, *Al Lopez: The Life of Baseball's El Senor* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co. Publishers, 1999). 23-33.



Nationally, Latinos were racially ambiguous individuals within the professional game. As the financial importance of winning heightened in the first years of the twentieth century, Latin minorities were slowly assimilated into the game. In the era of the infamous “color line” – a gentlemen’s agreement between Major League owners that prohibited African Americans from playing on their teams – many local and national owners saw the burgeoning Caribbean leagues as viable talent pools. Not quite “Black,” Latinos were accepted within the Major Leagues because owners and newspaper writers focused on their heritage and not the color of their skin; skirting the Jim Crow era color line. In Tampa, a city with an ethnic majority, class barriers often trumped ethnic barriers. Still, racial barriers certainly were present. African Americans and Afro-Cubans did not participate in professional baseball and, similar to the rest of the United States, they were consigned to segregated teams that played against each other.<sup>296</sup>

Just because cigar workers were shut out of Tampa’s professional baseball teams, does not mean that they did not have opportunities to play baseball. Beginning as early as the 1910, Tampa’s mutual-aid societies hosted baseball games and baseball leagues. In fact, the game was a fundamental and founding part of these societies. Founded in 1894, Ybor City’s L’Unione Italiana was built for the city’s Italian immigrants. These mutual aid societies assisted those immigrants with the basic human needs, financial support for those in need, and health insurance for their ethnic community. They also hosted dances, music concerts, and baseball games. In fact, baseball was part of the founding of L’Unione. In June of 1912, as the society sought to raise money for the erection of the building that would house L’Unione, baseball was prominently featured in the fundraising. During the summer, the mutual aid’s baseball team was

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<sup>296</sup> “Tampa’s Fine Baseball Talent: Players if the Season of 1902,” Tampa Tribune, October 19, 1902. Greenbaum, *More Than Black*, 191-198. Adrian Burgos Jr., *Playing America’s Game*.

part of an excursion to Fort Dade where they played a Cuban army team. While dancing and music was also included, baseball was a big part of the draw. The game was also featured in celebrations. During the 1912 celebration of Cuban independence, El Círculo Cubano, the Cuban mutual aid club, host a highly anticipated baseball game between Cuban sailors and veterans of the Spanish-American War. When dignitaries from their homeland visited Tampa, baseball was often a featured event of the celebration. These games were competitive but featured amateur players.<sup>297</sup>

Into the 1920s, Sunday afternoon baseball became an important part of immigrant life in Tampa. Beginning in the 1920s, Tampa's ethnic clubs created a joint venture called Liga Inter-Social De Baseball. The players were not to be paid for these games. This allowed younger players, such as Al Lopez, to play on the teams. These games took place on Sundays – the day that cigar makers did not work – at Cuscaden Park. The league charged adults 25 cents to enter the ballpark for the day, while children were allowed in for free. Yet, the goal of this was not to make money, it was to foster communal relationship within and between the ethnic communities. Nevertheless, just because these games resembled recreational league does not mean that they were not taken seriously in the community. When remembering playing, and watching the inter-social games, Tampa's first baseball star, Al Lopez remarked: "You Should have seen the crowds on Sundays. Oh Lord, have mercy. It was good I tell you, we enjoyed it." Martinez also remembered going to these games as a child: "There were about five or six teams there that would play ball on Sundays and they were very competitive. I mean, we would take tin buckets to make noise with, bang on the tin...we used to have a lot of fun, and it was every Sunday. But

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<sup>297</sup> "'Italia' Society to Have Fine Excursion," *Tampa Tribune*, June 8, 1912. "Cuban Gunboat Will Be Here on Feb. 22," *Tampa Tribune*, November 1, 1912.

they always had a good crowd, about a thousand people there on Sunday, because all these clubs are playing ball to see who would be the champion” These games were often contentious on the field. While the societies wanted local, ethnic players on their team, the lure of winning was often too great. Players would transfer from club to club, despite their ethnicity. Lopez remembered that “There were some Cuban fellows that were playing for the Italian Club because they didn’t have enough Italian ball players. The Centro Asturiano had a pitcher who was an Italian boy that was good.” This intermingling of players often led to tension on and off the playing field. Lopez further recalled fights concerning a player’s eligibility (over players who were imported from Cuba or Key West) and whether players were being paid – in theory the inter-social players were not paid to play.<sup>298</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In many ways, baseball in Tampa mimicked other cities throughout the South. It was used as a way of reinforcing notions of identity in working class, racial, and ethnic communities. As large numbers of white, Black, Spanish, Cuban, Afro-Cuban, and Italian immigrants migrated to Tampa, each sought to carve out space within the developing urban environment. As these groups settled into their own enclaves, baseball became popular. As elites became more powerful at the end of the Gilded Age, professional baseball became a tool to reinforce white, middle class values upon a workforce that had grown increasingly more powerful and more radical. As local cigar makers participated in labor strikes, these elites responded by establishing local leagues. Professional in nature, city leagues were instituted in hopes of distracting workers and limiting

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<sup>298</sup> Augustine “Marty” Martinez, interview by Catherine Cottle, August 16, 2008. Steven F. Lawson, “Ybor City and Baseball: An Interview with Al Lopez,” *Tampa Bay History: A Centennial History of Ybor City* 7 no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1985), 59-76.

strikes. When these leagues failed, elites moved to promoting better organized baseball teams such as being Major League teams to town for Spring Training and promoting the minor league Tampa Smokers. By the end of the 1920s, immigrant workers' enjoyment of the game gave these same elites pause about using baseball to quell labor agitation. Despite being barred from the city leagues, local immigrants found ways to organize and some even argued that baseball could help with strikes. African Americans also used baseball to gain a sense of acceptance that simply was not available to other Black teams in the South. One of the most popular and successful African American teams in the region, the Tampa Giants used sense of security to gain the favor of white commentators and spectators.

Baseball in the city changed with the coming of the Great Depression and the end of the cigar industry in the city. As second and third generation immigrants fully Americanized, baseball's popularity as a sport and as part of creating social identity began to wane. The City Leagues representing different neighborhoods were replaced with the Tampa Smokers. Mutual aid society baseball was replaced with high school and little league teams. And African American teams almost disappeared completely. Along with the increased popularity of other sports, baseball's discursive meaning faded as well. Still, Tampa's golden age of baseball occurred out of growing pains caused by its place within the New South and its growing status as an immigrant enclave.

## Epilogue

In the aftermath of World War II, baseball underwent significant changes in the South. Most notably, the color line was broken when Negro League star Nathaniel Peeples was signed by the Atlanta Crackers in 1954. Only seven years earlier, the color line had been crossed in Major League baseball when Jackie Robinson played his first game for the Brooklyn Dodgers. In a reversal of years earlier, the *Atlanta Constitution* initially commended the presence of the team's first African American player. Furman Bisher, the paper's sports editor, stated that "Frankly, nobody ever expected to see Peeples in Atlanta playing for the Crackers. Now that he has made it, the boy can take the full credit himself. He made it strictly on merit." Peeples saw his promotion to the Crackers as advancing his baseball career, and steered clear of the social impacts which were inherent in his position on the team. "I'd like to play in Atlanta...because it's Double-A and I've been down in Class-B," Peeples told reporters. In response, Bisher noted that "Nat Peeples is coming to Atlanta to play baseball. Any sociological emphasis attached to the event will not have his endorsement." By the newspapers' account, Peeples was the teams' best player in their spring training games prior to the 1954 regular season. He hit six of the club's 13 home runs and had a batting average close to .350. As the beginning of the season approached, apprehensions appeared around Peeples crossing the color line. Prior to the first regular season game, Bisher noted that "Nat Peeples probably isn't ready for this class of play yet." He played two regular season games for the Crackers before being sent back to the Class-B team in Jacksonville. It was reported that other teams in the Southern Association were uneasy with sharing the field with an African American player. Despite being the Crackers' best player

during the exhibition season, Bisher argued that “Peeples was sent out because he wasn’t ready for Double-A. He got a full trial and lost [the] battle.”<sup>299</sup>

By the time the Braves arrived in Atlanta in 1966, the South and southern baseball had undergone monumental changes. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s had begun to dismantle the regime of Jim Crow throughout the South, allowing professional major leagues to consider playing in the region. At the same time, the cities of Atlanta, Charlotte, and Tampa all saw tremendous growth as even more manufacturing industries migrated to the so-called sunbelt region. In the realm of sports, Atlanta was the beneficiary of this growth. By 1972, the NFL’s Falcons, the NBA’s Hawks, and the NHL’s Flames all joined the Braves to call Atlanta home. These franchises helped Atlanta become the center of southern sports culture while highlighting the social progressiveness of the city. Certainly, the same prejudices of an earlier era persisted. However, the existence of African American and ethnic players challenged existing structures of white supremacy. Here, baseball led the way, as the Braves were guided by Henry Aaron. He was one of the greatest African American players ever to play baseball. On April 8, 1974, Aaron broke baseball’s most sacred records when hit his 714<sup>th</sup> homerun, breaking Babe Ruth’s famed record. Still, his chase was tarnished by death threats he received.

Baseball in the South changed considerably since the end of the Great Depression. While it was at the center of southern sports culture at the turn of the twentieth century, the popularity of the semi-professional game had declined considerably by the arrival of the Braves. Saturday college football and Sunday professional football replaced the tradition of playing or watching Saturday mill baseball. Minor league teams – owned primarily by Major League clubs – replaced

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<sup>299</sup> Furman Bisher, “The Peeples’ Choice,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 25, 1954. Jesse Outlar, “Nat Peeples Listed as Cracker Starter,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 7, 1954. Furman Bisher, “Give Crax the Aaron Test,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 19, 1954.

locally owned teams and youth baseball replaced recreation games. With all these options, the social significance of local baseball waned considerably in the South after World War II.<sup>300</sup>

Nevertheless, baseball had been a staple of the South since the end of Reconstruction. The game hovered over issues of economic expansion, racial tensions, and labor conditions and helped to expand the region in the aftermath of Civil War. It was an undeniably important part of southern life and of southern urban and industrial expansion, as well as helping to shape society and community identity. Within a few years of the Civil War, the populations of southern cities exploded. These migrants were met with the new and modern game of baseball which became just as popular in the South as it was in the North. In the nineteenth century, the game was unorganized but revered. Newspapers treated it as an elite social event and tended to discuss its meaning and usefulness. By the turn of the century, southern baseball became more organized and began to fulfill its promises alongside the growth of the New South. The game became more democratic open to everyone, even if elites continued to wield ultimate control. By the Great Depression, baseball had become so professionalized that it was indistinguishable from the northern game. The advent of night baseball and the radio had made the game more accessible. Yet, civic leaders and elites began to lose control as they were being replaced by major companies and corporations.

During this period, there was never one overarching reason that southerners adopted baseball. Instead, the game was chosen to meet the rhetorical and practical needs of individuals in specific situations. Civic elites saw the game as a way of building civic boosterism. By rooting

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<sup>300</sup> Andrew McIlwaine Bell, *The Origins of Southern College Football: How an Ivy League Game Became a Dixie Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2020). Brian M. Ingrassia, *The Rise of Gridiron University: Higher Education's Uneasy Alliance with Big-Time Football* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2014).

for the local team, new migrants created a bond with the city or the factory that sponsored the game. Industrial elites used baseball to create modern, efficient worker citizens. City governments used baseball as a way of expanding their power. Concurrently, baseball became a part of the New South creed. Baseball was promoted alongside the vision of the New South by some of the creed's most vocal proponents. Those who believed in this vision of the New South were some of the most significant promoters of southern baseball – this was not a coincidence. Yet, alongside these elites, workers, African Americans, and immigrants crafted spaces within organized baseball to define meanings of belonging within their ethnic and racial groups, as well as within southern society. Inclusion was often limited for minorities as elites controlled the game of baseball. Still, baseball was embraced by all in the South, even if it was played with a southern accent.



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