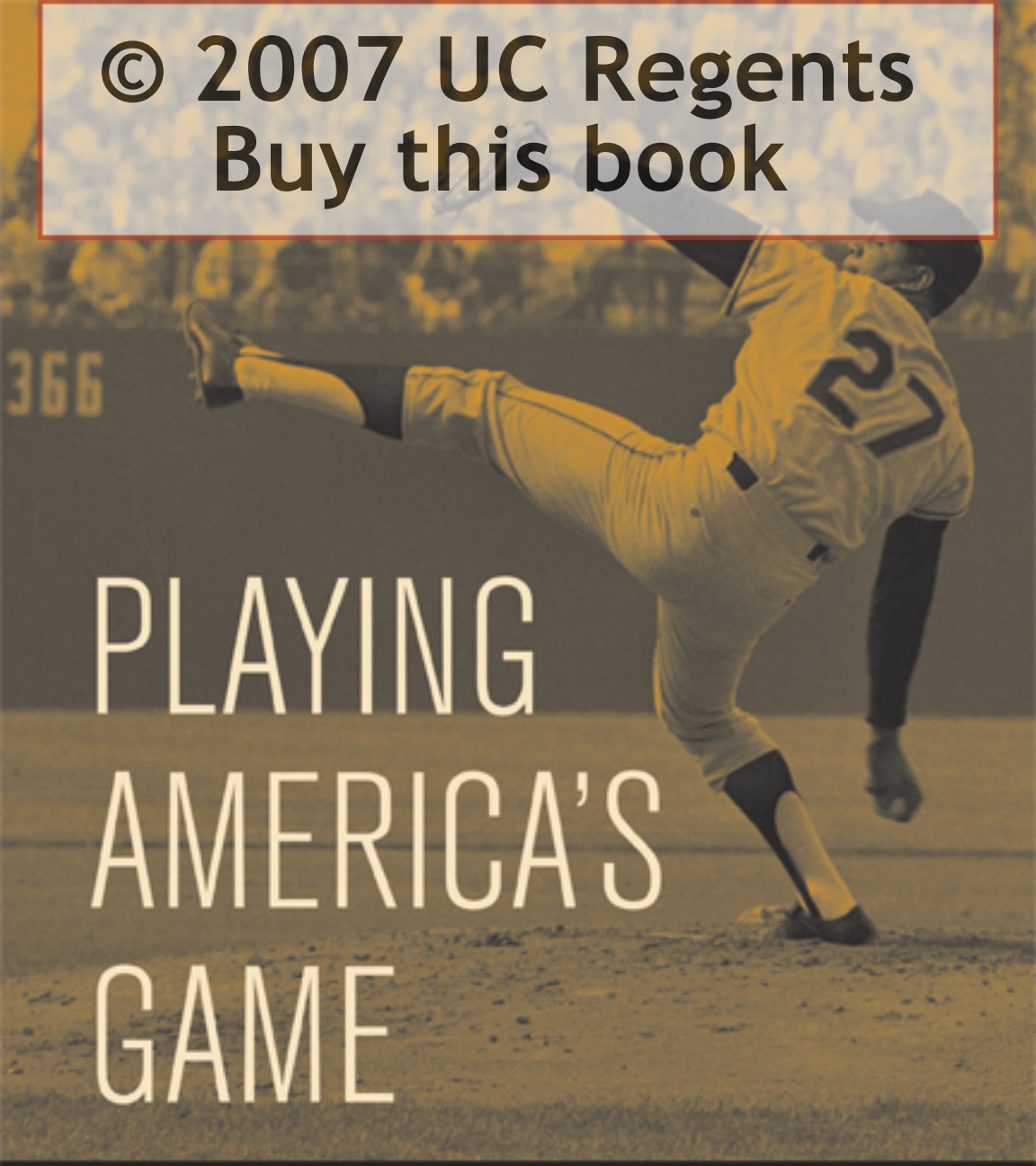

PLAYING AMERICA'S GAME

BASEBALL, LATINOS, AND THE COLOR LINE

ADRIAN BURGOS, JR.

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> Baseball . . . requires the possession of muscular strength, great agility, quickness of eye, readiness of hand, and many other faculties of mind and body that mark a man of nerve. . . . Suffice it to say that it is a recreation that anyone may be proud to excel in, as in order to do so, he must possess the characteristics of true manhood to a considerable degree.
>
> Henry Chadwick, *Beadle's Dime Base-Ball Player* (1860)

A CUBAN IN AMERICA'S GAME

Little fanfare surrounded eighteen-year-old Esteban Bellán's decision to leave Rose Hill College in 1868 after completing just three years of grammar preparation classes (the equivalent of high school). A member of the Rose Hill varsity baseball club for those three years, the Cuban native aspired to turn his talent on the diamond into a career in professional baseball. This ambition, however, meant joining a profession that was still experiencing growing pains and had yet to establish a stable economic footing.

The professionalization of baseball had undergone uneven development by the time Bellán embarked on his professional journey. Although newspaper coverage attested to the improving levels of skill and performance on its diamonds, professional baseball remained loosely organized. A strong national league had yet to emerge, and professional teams had yet to begin conducting national tours. Players took advantage of the weak organizational structure by "revolving"—jumping from one team to another in spite of established contractual agreements. This and other practices sullied the

[To view this image, refer to the print version of this title.]

1. Esteban Bellán *(standing, far right)* with the 1869 Troy Haymakers. The first Latino in the major leagues, the Cuban native appeared with the Haymakers in the National Association from 1869 to 1871, after attending Fordham University (then Rose Hill College) from 1864 to 1868. The Cuban teenager was part of a wave of Cuban children sent to the United States to receive their education as anti-Spanish sentiment grew among the Cuban elite in the mid- to late 1860s. (National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.)

game's reputation and prompted calls for the formation of a stronger league that would ensure the respectability of the professional game.

Into this profession ventured Esteban Bellán, whose Cuban elite parents sent him to New York initially to study at the Rose Hill campus of St. John's College (present-day Fordham University). The Cuban established a reputation as a solid player within two years of his 1868 professional debut. The *New York Clipper,* in its 1870 season preview, praised him as "an efficient and faithful guardian" of third base and "one of the pluckiest of base players."[1] His most productive season came as a member of the Troy Haymakers in 1872, when he compiled a .278 batting average. The following year Bellán returned to Cuba, where he participated in the formation of the island's first baseball club, the Habana Base Ball Club, and helped lay the foundation for baseball's emergence as Cuba's national game.

Baseball had arrived in Cuba a decade before Bellán's return, at about the time the sport started to flourish in the United States. During the Civil War the military had served as a catalyst for baseball's spread to different regions of the United States. Away from the battlefront, soldiers from both sides played the game at recreation and prison camps.[2] After the war, soldiers returning home transported the game throughout the land. In the case of baseball's spread to Cuba, political strife and economic instability on the Spanish-controlled island produced waves of emigration during the last half of the nineteenth century that set the conditions for the game's introduction there.

Geographical proximity enabled Cuban émigrés to move easily between the States and Cuba to escape labor strife or political conflict, find better economic opportunities, or reunite their families.[3] Nearby cities in Florida such as Key West, Tampa, and Jacksonville developed into popular destinations. New York City, Philadelphia, and New Orleans also became destinations as port cities connected to Cuba by steamer lines.

Wherever they settled, Cuban émigrés formed a variety of organizations. Mutual aid societies helped them adjust to their new surroundings. In New York, Tampa, and Philadelphia, they established political organizations such as Partido Revolucionario de Cuba y Puerto Rico that pushed for Cuban independence or for the creation of an Antillean nation.[4] Many Cubans also embraced baseball, forming their own clubs and local leagues.

Migration during Cuba's Ten Years War (1868–78) worked to facilitate baseball's assimilation into Cuban national culture as part of a broader shift in the cultural orientation and attitudes of the Cuban elite. During the Ten Years War, Spanish colonial authorities grew increasingly intolerant of anti-Spanish protests among university students, imprisoning the many whom they viewed as the most egregious offenders.[5] Frustrated with Spanish colonial domination and worried about their children's future, disenchanted members of the Cuban elite either emigrated or sent their children to be educated in the United States.

The elite's decision to send their children to the United States was an extension of the battle to claim independence from Spain. Cubans chose to enroll their students in religious schools, among them Springhill College, St. John's College, and Georgetown University. This enabled Cubans to adhere to their religious beliefs, but on their own terms, thus maintaining cultural continuity. Other members of the Cuban elite sent their offspring to U.S. military academies—a decision that further revealed a desire to place the next generation beyond the purview of Spanish colo-

nial authority, and to possibly prepare future leaders of the anti-colonial struggle.

Scores of Cubans who figured prominently in the game's development on the island received their baseball indoctrination as émigrés or students in the United States. Nemesio Guilló, credited by some chroniclers as the "father" of Cuban baseball, attended Springhill College in Mobile, Alabama, for six years, returning to Cuba at the age of seventeen in 1864. Reportedly included among his possessions were a bat and a baseball, "the first to be seen in Cuba," according to a 1924 account in *Diario de la Marina*.[6] Throughout the late nineteenth century countless Cubans returned from their North American sojourns with similar cultural artifacts. In transporting the game to different parts of the island, this generation acted as the vanguard of Cuban baseball, teaching others how to play the game and forming baseball clubs that laid the foundation for the game's development.[7]

When Cuban teenager Esteban Bellán arrived to attend Rose Hill in 1864, a Spanish-speaking enclave was already forming in New York City. Starting in the 1820s, Cuban émigrés fleeing political persecution and seeking improved economic opportunities chose to relocate in New York City.[8] By the 1860s, Cuban émigrés, from common laborers in the cigar-making sector to nationalist leaders such as José Martí and Rafael Serra, joined Puerto Ricans and others to form a Spanish-speaking enclave centered on barbershops, restaurants, cigar stores, and other storefront businesses.[9]

New York City had also developed into a baseball hotbed, and the Rose Hill campus was no exception with students and faculty regularly playing on campus.[10] Organized in September 1859, the Rose Hill Base Ball club was the school's first club. Two years later, the first Spanish-surnamed student appeared with the Rose Hills: Uladislaus Vallejo, a native of Sonoma, California. Among Spanish-surnamed students, who ranged between 15 and 25 percent of the student body from the 1860s through the 1880s, several partook in the baseball scene.[11] A number of Cubans who helped form baseball clubs and served as league officials in Cuba studied at the Bronx-based school. This group included the Zaldo brothers, Carlos and Teodoro, who studied at Fordham from 1875 to 1877 and later formed the Almendares Baseball Club, one of Cuba's most storied teams.[12] But it was Esteban Bellán who left the biggest mark. The first Cuban to play in U.S. professional baseball, his entry into the profession created little stir as baseball management and the sporting press focused their attention on building up the professional game and creating a stronger organization.

PROFESSIONALIZATION AND MAKING THE LINE

Like many of his professional peers, Esteban Bellán took advantage of professional baseball's weak organizational structure.[13] After he left Fordham, the young Cuban performed for different teams in each of his first three seasons. Players exercised this mobility because most professional teams and leagues lacked the power to enforce their contracts. Turbulent conditions abounded: Players jumped contracts. Clubs raided one another's rosters. Unable to maintain a stable pool of talent, teams and leagues regularly folded.

Commentators and journalists noted that the unenforceability of contracts threatened professional baseball's economic stability. Baseball management operated at a disadvantage since its capital investment in grounds, infrastructure, and local communities was immobilizing. By contrast, players enjoyed the ability to ply their skills wherever they could find a good contract. This created a peculiar dilemma for management. "On the one hand," baseball historian Warren Goldstein has written, "as relatively immobile sources of capital, clubs wanted players to be free to move to them. On the other hand, these same clubs wanted to have some way of keeping players from revolving away from them as easily as they had come."[14] Baseball management attempted to solve this problem by creating a contractual system that bound players to an organization and by continuously expanding its search for new talent.

Earnest attempts to build national associations to counteract the practice of revolving started in the late 1860s. The first association to develop a national membership, the National Association of Base Ball Players (NABBP), was formed in 1857 "to promote the standardization of playing rules, to regulate interclub competition and to encourage the growth of baseball." Initially composed of amateur clubs from New York, the NABBP's membership grew and extended as far west as Oregon and south as Virginia.[15] This expansion forced the association's membership to consider two significant issues: the color line and the professionalization of baseball.

Baseball lacked a uniform policy regarding race-based segregation. The question of the color line was viewed as a local matter for individual associations and professional teams to consider for themselves. Importantly, the issue was not limited to teams and associations in the South, but was debated primarily in the Northeast and Midwest, where the majority of amateur and professional teams and associations were based.

At the second annual convention of the NABBP following the Civil

War, the association's nominating committee summarily rejected the application of the Philadelphia Pythians, a team of African American players. The committee's report described its stance regarding applications for new membership: "It is not presumed by your committee that any club who have applied are composed of persons of color, or any portion of them; and the recommendation of your committee in this report are based upon this view, and they unanimously report against any club which may be composed of one or more colored persons."[16] Baseball's first national association thus adopted a color line. The nominating committee's decision not to consider these applications was widely trumpeted. Sportswriter Henry Chadwick, for one, agreed with the spirit of keeping any subject that had a "political bearing" out of the convention.[17]

Three years after NABBP's decision, delegates at the annual meeting of the New York State Base Ball Association took up the same question. Delegates unanimously adopted a resolution that called for the rejection of all applications by clubs that included "colored men." The Troy Haymakers' delegate voted for the exclusionary measure even though that team employed Cuban native Esteban Bellán. The association's decision drew a few vocal critics. Chadwick, for one, objected to the exclusionary resolution on the grounds that it introduced "a political question . . . as a bone of contention in the council of the fraternity.[18] Chadwick's position did not emanate from empathy for African American players; the baseball "fraternity" was not interracial.

Formal consideration of the racial question bothered Chadwick and others, for it brought into the open what others had accomplished covertly. Passage of these formal bans along with gentlemen's agreements to exclude "colored" players in other associations asserted lines of racial separation and created race-based privilege for white men.[19] These efforts at the start of Reconstruction illustrate local responses to the demographic shifts and legal changes whereby African American males had begun to attain full citizenship status protected by constitutional amendments.

MAKING PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL RESPECTABLE WORK

Professional clubs and associations encountered a series of challenges in transforming the amateur game into a professional business. In addition to gaining control of finances and personnel, organizers had to convince baseball aficionados that the professional game was both compelling entertainment and respectable work. Altering public perceptions posed a major hurdle. Since the late 1850s many had viewed baseball, sporting-

goods mogul Albert Spalding noted, as little more than a pastime "to be played in times of leisure, and by gentlemen, for exercise, and only incidentally for the entertainment of the public." Spalding, a former professional player who starred in this early era, explained that this view represented the majority, who feared that baseball "would suffer by professionalism." Specifically, they worried that professionalization would open the sport to any man "who could play the game skillfully, without regard to his race, color, or previous condition of servitude." They also feared "the introduction of rowdies, drunkards, and dead-beats" into the stands during games. The potential change in the composition of on-field participants and spectators contributed to the concern that "the game would lose in character if it departed from its original program."[20]

Baseball management thus had to convince a skeptical audience that professional baseball was an appropriate evolution of the popular pastime and that amateur and professional baseball differed qualitatively. Advocates offered that professionals demonstrated greater mastery in their athletic performance due to their regular practice in preparation for league exhibitions. Amateurs performed a weaker brand of baseball since they played the game only as a leisure pursuit.

Distinguishing between the rough-and-tumble play of boys and the work of professional men required the regulation of behavior. The sporting press and baseball management cooperated formally and informally to ensure social control by disciplining labor for actions that could impugn the game's standing. Sportswriters openly discussed the ideal qualities in a model player. In the first edition of *Beadle's Dime Base-Ball Player* (1860) author Henry Chadwick listed a series of offenses for which clubs should levy fines, among them players using profane language either in club meetings or on the field, disputing the umpire's decision, not obeying the team captain, and being absent without excuse from the club's business meetings. Clubs soon amended their constitutions and bylaws to include player codes of conduct. Historian Warren Goldstein found that disciplinary action taken by clubs typically focused on the four transgressions outlined by Chadwick. Common to these offenses was the player's loss of self-control as evident in behavior unbecoming a gentleman.[21]

Class- and gender-based discourses used to cast the sport as respectable work best performed by gentlemen reflected nineteenth-century tensions "between the culture of respectability and the culture of the street." As professional men, players on the field were expected to demonstrate self-control, mastery over their emotions. This ability separated the men

from the boys, the professionals from the amateurs. The boundary between the construction of boys and men within baseball was less chronological than conceptual, one "more concerned with the 'manly' or 'boyish' behavior of adults than with the activities of boys."[22]

The task of turning potential consumers into paying spectators hinged partly on whether professional baseball was respectable work. Rather than a game any boy or rowdy man could learn to play with proficiency, organizers redefined the athletic performance involved in professional baseball as highly skilled work of respectable men. Numerous commentaries from this era, Goldstein notes, "employed almost exclusively the language of work: discipline, training, skill, and specialization." The sporting press regularly participated in this discourse. "When they praised or criticized particular players or clubs," Goldstein explains, "they appealed not to a concept or realm of leisure and play but rather to the standards of the workplace—a workplace in which craftsmen still exercised considerable collective autonomy over the pace and organization of their labor."[23]

Efforts to affirm the game's respectability focused on attracting the right type of spectators and celebrated a game that both men and women could attend. In this era of Victorian class and gender sensibilities, women spectatorship bolstered the claim that professional baseball was respectable work, not mere "boys' play." Women provided a form of social policing, since they "personified standards of behavior that could, theoretically, keep men's behavior within certain boundaries."[24] Their spectatorship did not necessarily challenge gender norms nor dissuade those who profited from their attendance from believing that the limits on women's involvement within the national pastime should remain. "Neither our wives, our sisters, our daughters, our sweethearts, may play Base Ball on the field," Spalding wrote in his 1912 history of baseball; "they may play Basket Ball, and achieve laurels; they may play Golf, and receive trophies; but Base Ball is too strenuous for womankind, except as she may take part in grandstands, with applause for the brilliant play, with waving kerchief to the hero of the three-bagger."[25]

Dissociation from gambling and alcohol was also considered necessary to establishing the professional game's respectability. In *America's National Game* Spalding identified the influence of the "gambling element" as a significant barrier to the advancement of professional baseball. A former player who had joined forces with management, Spalding worried that the presence of "gamblers, rowdies, and their natural associates" would deter "honest men or decent women" from attending

professional games. The sale of liquor at the ballpark particularly concerned him, for it increased the likelihood of drunkenness and the presence of "rowdies." Henry Chadwick lambasted those who attended games to indulge in gambling: "the class of fellows who patronize the game simply to pick up dollars by it, indulge in the vilest abuse and profanity in their comments on those errors of the play which damage the chance of winning their bets or pools."[26]

Public scrutiny of player behavior contributed to the broadening of management's disciplinary power. Chadwick called for the suspension and even expulsion of players who repeatedly broke team rules and codes of professional behavior. The call for discipline reflected tensions between the middle and working classes within professional baseball circles. Middle-class members of baseball clubs, Goldstein notes, "brought to their baseball playing and socializing the characteristic Victorian fear of unregulated passion and concern for self-control."[27] The opening up of the playing field to athletes from working-class backgrounds exacerbated this concern as middle-class sports writers and editors, players, managers, and executives wrestled for control over the game's future.

AN ASSOCIATION FOR PROFESSIONALS

The NABBP's amateur members watched uneasily as the balance of power within the association shifted toward its professional members. The association's rule against professional players was, Henry Chadwick admitted in the 1867 *DeWitt Base Ball Guide,* ineffectual. "Though ostensibly all were amateurs," Chadwick observed, "it is well known nearly all the leading clubs . . . employed professional players." Even many of the amateur clubs engaged in practices—such as charging gate fees—that further commercialized the game. This shift prompted a reconsideration of membership rules. In its annual meeting following the 1868 season, NABBP membership approved a new classification of players, amateur and professional. The altered balance of power within NABBP was demonstrated the following year when the professional clubs repealed the dual player classification system, "effectively banishing the amateurs" from the association.[28]

By the late 1860s, gambling scandals had wrecked the reputation of the National Association of Base Ball Players and brought its collapse. Players guilty of throwing games to the benefit of gamblers were expelled, but the damage had been done. Public confidence in game results as free from the influence of gamblers and dishonest players had been lost. Even

players "lost faith" and "began to lose hope in the future of the pastime itself."[29]

The gambling scandals pitted advocates of amateurism against supporters of professionalization. Amateur clubs in the NABBP viewed professionalization as the corruptive influence. Professional clubs held that the lack of a strong central organization capable of controlling labor and protecting the game's reputation was the greatest obstacle to baseball's development. The two factions split the NABBP, and in March 1871 the professional clubs formed the National Association of *Professional* Base Ball Players. Known simply as the National Association, the new organization aspired to become the nation's premier professional league. To bring stability to the professional game, organizers agreed to charge clubs a ten-dollar entry fee to join the league, enacted governing rules that penalized players who attempted to jump their contracts, and barred league clubs from raiding each other's rosters.

The National Association lasted for five seasons of haphazard operations. Its ten-dollar entry fee allowed teams from smaller markets to join the circuit and resulted in fluctuating numbers of teams participating each season. Industrial boomtowns such as Troy, New York, and Fort Wayne, Indiana, ultimately proved less capable of sustaining a professional franchise than Boston, Chicago, New York City, and Philadelphia.

Unstable operating conditions convinced baseball entrepreneurs that additional reforms were needed to better capitalize on the game's commercial possibilities. Albert Spalding contended that "the system in vogue for the business management of the sport was defective." For him, the National Association's economic instability demonstrated the need for professional baseball to operate "like every other form of business enterprise."[30] He called for a new system that "separated the control of the executive management from the players and the playing of the game."

The crisis in professional baseball was a familiar one to entrepreneurs, Spalding claimed. "It was, in fact, the irrepressible conflict between Labor and Capital asserting itself under a new guise."[31] To his mind, in professional baseball's evolution, players had retained too much power. When baseball clubs had first started to venture beyond their local circles in search of competition in the 1860s, team captains had been both laborer and manager at once. While performing as one of the starting nine players, captains also scheduled games, signed new talent, commanded players on the field, and made in-game management decisions. With a strong captain at the helm, a team of players offered a package

whose operational responsibilities were squarely in their own hands. This was an unhealthy mixture for Spalding. The former professional player argued that "no ball player, in my recollection, ever made a success of any other business while he was building up his reputation as an artist on the diamond. The two branches are entirely unlike in their demands. One calls for the exercise of functions differing altogether from those which are required in the other."[32]

The solution to professional baseball's operational problems and lack of institutional control, Spalding believed, was the formation of a new national league. The new league would embrace a management system that diminished the team captain's role. A team would operate with a manager, a general/business manager, and executive officers responsible for the oversight of everyday operations to a group of investors. The new management system placed all players squarely in the realm of labor; all a player now offered the market was his individual skill (a commodity), effectively weakening the players' collective bargaining position.

A TRULY NATIONAL LEAGUE

Planned covertly by Spalding and William Hulbert, the National League was formed by disenchanted owners who pulled out of the National Association. Spalding explained the founders' motivation: "The National League was organized in 1876 . . . to rescue the game from its slough of corruption and disgrace, and take it from the hands of the ball players who controlled and dominated the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players."[33] The new league transformed the role of baseball clubs. Their new function "would be to manage Base Ball *Teams*. Clubs would form leagues, secure grounds, erect grandstands, lease and own property, make schedules, fix dates, pay salaries, assess fines, discipline players, make contracts, control the sport in all relations to the public." In so doing, baseball clubs would relieve players "of all care and responsibility for the legitimate function of management, [and] require of them the very best performance of which they were capable, in the entertainment of the public, for which service they receive commensurate pay."[34]

The National League founders created an exclusive organization and enacted a multipronged approach to maximize profits through domination of labor and cultivation of new markets. The league now dealt with players as "club subordinates" and adopted a new contract that "pro-

vided a penalty of expulsion for any player violating his contract, and anyone thus expelled was to be forever ineligible to reinstatement in any League club."[35] The reserve system and the National Agreement would prove management's most enduring tools in limiting labor costs. These two innovations represented the cornerstone of William Hulbert's plan to give baseball a coherent structure and institute a level of cooperation that solidified its foundation.[36]

Over the first five years of the National League's operation, William Hulbert, part owner of the Chicago White Stockings, urged team officials from other professional leagues who desired protection from player raids to join the National Agreement.[37] A cooperative effort among several leagues, the Agreement established a process to sign and transfer players that directly confronted the problem of player raids and contract jumping. The hierarchy created through the National Agreement ensured that talent flowed upward within what was later known as organized baseball. A revised agreement signed by the National League, American Association, and Northwestern League in 1883, the Tri-Partite Agreement set the financial parameters for the transfer of contracts between major and minor leagues, established a formal ranking system for the minor leagues, and set a salary scale for players according to the league in which they performed.[38]

National League teams relied heavily on the minor leagues in acquiring new talent. Until the advent of the National Agreement, big-league teams were not required to compensate minor-league teams for signing away their players. The Agreement thus extended an important protection to minor leagues that joined—a structured process that required a team interested in signing a minor-league player to purchase his contract at a scheduled transfer or option fee. Teams operating outside the Agreement, however, were still susceptible to raids.

Heeding a further lesson learned from the missteps of their predecessors, National League organizers created a strong central authority to supervise league operations. Unlike the National Association, the National League established strict requirements whereby franchises desiring to join the circuit could be screened and the number of member clubs limited. For example, clubs had to be based in cities with population greater than 75,000, ensuring a market large enough to sustain a league franchise. The upstart circuit also empowered league officials to actively supervise operations to ensure, among other goals, that teams fulfilled their required allotment of league games. League officials were thus commissioned to protect the game's reputation, assuring consumers that the

circuit was not under the influence of gamblers and that the league itself would deliver a competitive and complete schedule.

PROFESSIONAL MEN OR CHATTEL PROPERTY?

Introduced in 1879, the reserve system proved management's most effective weapon in controlling escalation of player salaries and limiting player mobility. Assured by owners that the reserve clause enhanced the league's viability, National League players agreed to its insertion into the standard player contract. Initially set for National League teams to reserve four players each, the reserve system was unilaterally extended over the next eight seasons to cover the entire team roster. This decision by baseball management produced labor strife.

The reserve system drastically reduced labor's ability to engage the market as free agents. In the pre–National League era, ballplayers enjoyed mobility within a weak league structure, changing teams with relative ease. They lacked the collective power, however, to control the operations and structure of the professional game.[39]

Early on under the reserve system, players exercised inordinate influence in determining who was hired as their teammates. In other words, they controlled access to the game's "shop floor." A combination of factors positioned players to contest management's attempts to introduce nonwhite labor competition without their consent. First, National Leaguers initially cooperated with management in the creation of the reserve system. This provided players in organized baseball economic security, though less salary escalation than what they might have garnered in a free-agent system. Second, labor also collaborated with management in shaping popular perceptions by engaging in class- and gender-based discourses that presented the professional game as respectable work performed by gentlemen.

Discourses about masculinity and respectability also contributed to justifying the exclusion of colored players. By collaborating with management in the formation of a color line, players wielded influence in determining who could participate in organized baseball. The color line boosted the status of white players as professionals while also creating an artificial scarcity of available talent. Indeed, the reserve system and the color line were interdependent factors in empowering white professional players in their struggles with baseball management. Players knew that management risked a major upheaval among the rank and file should it unilaterally introduce nonwhite labor competition. Moreover, there was

materially little for white players to gain collectively from racially integrated leagues. To the contrary, these players risked losing gains in salary or even jobs if the artificial scarcity of talent, and whatever collective bargaining advantage they held, were eliminated.

The reserve system radically altered labor relations by binding a player to an organization for his entire professional career. The system's enduring impact compels us to ponder the status of professional players. Were they labor or organizational property? Outspoken players complained of being treated like chattel, mere property to be bought and sold by team owners. Treatment as property at a time not far removed from the era of slavery imposed on ballplayers a condition associated with blackness. Concerned players sought to avoid the subordinated status of "colored" Americans, who had been excluded from organized baseball.

Management's collaboration with players in implementing a color line created a dilemma. The color line limited management's quest to find markets for new talent that could serve as labor competition and help them control labor costs. Whatever new talent management attempted to introduce needed to pass a series of litmus tests, among them acceptance by their professional peers as either fellow whites or acceptable nonblacks. Thus management often weighed the possible reactions of current players in determining the racial eligibility of new talent from different ethnic or national backgrounds.

BARNSTORMING THE AMERICAS

Word-of-mouth recommendations from established professional players, team officials, or sportswriters provided big-league teams with valuable information about players who performed in semiprofessional and sandlot leagues. Typically scheduled for the off-season, barnstorming tours involved traveling through a region (such as the West or the Caribbean) to play local semipro and professional teams, exposing players to new talent. Barnstorming teams were composed of either intact teams from the regular season or squads formed specifically for the tour. Big-league players participated in these tours to supplement their regular-season income as attendance revenues were split between the traveling and local teams based on a predetermined percentage, usually 60–40 for the winner.

Although not always profitable, barnstorming trips into new territory permitted teams to capitalize on the direct exposure to local talent or on the scouting reports provided by barnstormers. In the 1870s California

was the new territory in which to barnstorm and locate promising talent. At the end of the decade, Cuba emerged as another option as barnstorming teams sought out new markets to tour and as players searched for additional employment opportunities in the island's newly formed professional circuit.

The Hop Bitters team from Rochester, New York, arrived in Havana in December 1879 to help launch the Cuban professional league's inaugural season.[40] Formation of Cuba's professional league a year after the end of the island's Ten Years War signaled a new beginning. Given the fragile peace after the war, Spanish rulers closely monitored the economic and cultural exchange between the United States and the island colony.[41] Baseball's popularity among Cubans, particularly among nationalist sympathizers, worried Spanish rulers, who maneuvered to minimize public engagement with the sport.

Trouble surfaced as soon as the Hop Bitters contingent docked in Havana. The Cuban promoter-businessman who arranged the tour greeted them with bad news: their previous arrangement, which guaranteed the Hop Bitters $2,000 plus half of gross receipts, was null and void. According to Hop Bitters manager Frank Bancroft, Cuba's governor-general had "issued special orders that the Spanish government would levy a tax of 50 per cent on the gross receipts during the club's sojourn there, or else they would not be permitted to charge any admission."[42] The first North American barnstorming tour of Cuba almost ended before a single pitch had been thrown.

The new tax made charging admission unfeasible, effectively preventing the Hop Bitters from playing their scheduled slate of games. Undeterred, Bancroft located a North American entrepreneur in Havana to bankroll the Hop Bitters' stay on the island. Under a new arrangement, the team would play Sunday games through the rest of December, and no admission would be charged, thereby circumventing the tax.

Colonial authorities closely monitored the activities of Bancroft and his club. When Bancroft's publicity campaign, which involved distributing U.S. flags with "hop bitters" printed on them throughout Havana to spark attendance, caught the attention of the Spanish government, police officers took the manager into custody and interrogated him. Authorities released him on condition that he not distribute any more American flags, because "it would encourage the Cubans to rebellion."[43]

The Spanish were rightly concerned about the impact of more liberalized exchanges between Cuba and the United States. Politicians and capitalists in the United States had long taken an interest in the political

and economic climate in the Spanish possession. As historian Felix Masud-Piloto notes, on at least four occasions the United States approached Spain about purchasing Cuba, in 1869 (while the Ten Years War raged) offering $100 million for the island. Moreover, enclaves of Cuban nationalists and entrepreneurs in the United States served as vital links with the network of nationalists in Cuba, raising funds, stockpiling arms, and recruiting soldiers to fight for a free Cuba.[44]

The first professional venture in Cuba was not a financial success for the North American tourists. Despite the lack of competition—the Hop Bitters handily defeated the Cubans in the two games they played—and though unprofitable, the tour "paved the way and made other visits there of American teams profitable."[45]

The Hop Bitters' visit helped Cubans celebrate the launch of their new league and marked the beginning of a continuous North-South exchange of talent, information, and technical expertise. The inaugural Cuban season saw not only the participation of Cubans who had learned the game while studying in the United States but also the signing of North American professionals to perform in the Cuban league. Cubans enlisted the support of U.S. sporting papers in this effort. A September 1879 *New York Clipper* column announced the Havana team's interest in "importing a first-class pitcher" for the 1879–80 campaign.[46] Although Havana failed to sign a North American player, their starting line-up featured Esteban Bellán, Nemesio Guilló, and Emilio Sabourin, all of whom had attended U.S. schools. Colón, another Cuban league team, did sign two future major leaguers, Warren "Hick" Carpenter and Jimmy Macullar. The two later told the *Chicago Tribune* they had been "highly pleased with Havana and its players."[47] Other big leaguers who followed, such as Billy Taylor, Billy Earle, and John Cullen, agreed that the circuit made North American professionals feel welcome.[48]

A contentious debate arose over the inclusion of North Americans. Some Cubans worried that the North American influence would corrupt the Cuban game, privileging playing for pay over virtuous competition. Others such as player Wenceslao Galvez decried the unfair advantage that hiring North American players gave clubs since Cuban professional baseball was still in its infancy. Despite this debate, Cubans continued to organize barnstorming tours and use their contacts to solicit applications and hire North American players. The Cuban league thus initiated the recruitment of U.S.-born players decades before organized baseball would begin to scout Cuba for talent.

The increased number of exchanges with Cuba would prompt orga-

nized baseball's management to formulate policies about the incorporation of Latino talent. Among other issues, team officials would consider how to protect their property in the reserved players who participated in Cuba and elsewhere, preserve the reputation of their leagues and member clubs, and incorporate Latino talent without drawing charges that they were circumventing the color line. The end of Spanish colonial rule in 1898 would make these concerns even more immediate as barnstorming became an annual occurrence and Cuban talent only improved.

Organized baseball's expanded search for new markets and talent underscored the need to establish a firm strong organization in the face of contract jumping, gambling scandals, and league failures. Management's goal of controlling salaries and labor mobility prompted the creation of the reserve system. The quest for greater economic stability also resulted in the National Agreement, which established a hierarchy for organized baseball. Professional baseball's economic reorganization pitted the players' desire for economic security against their concerns about being treated like chattel. The reserve clause created in players a sense of lost independence and threatened racial status, apprehensions heightened by the rhetoric about respectability and masculinity used to defend racial exclusivity in organized baseball.

The geographic expansion of baseball and the development of links with Cuba in the 1870s exposed those in organized baseball to the different racial regimes that existed in the South, the frontier West, and the Spanish-speaking Americas. Expansion forced professional teams and leagues to consider signing individuals from these regions and to ponder the meaning of racial and ethnic difference. The issue of whether to incorporate African American players was simplified by the constancy of the color line that barred blacks. More difficult for management was figuring out how to categorize individuals of "Spanish extraction" and whether some or all were racially eligible to enter organized baseball. Management also had to gauge the reaction of the league's players and fans and the press: would they accept a "Spanish" player into their midst?