

Baseball: Truly an All-American Sport

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THESIS

## **Abstract**

Baseball is recognized as an “All-American sport” specific to the United States, but in reality it's a transnational game that is imbedded into the cultures of several nations all over the world. It was used as a vehicle for Latinos in Cuba and the Dominican Republic to express nationalism and challenge their oppressors. It provided social mobility to the poor and middle class, broke down class barriers, established local attachments to the community, and fostered newfound nationalism in both countries that made baseball more than just a game. Although Latinos originally found the sport in the United States, they recreated it for themselves at home.

**Key Words:** *History, Sports History, Baseball, Cuba, Dominican Republic, the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean, New York Knickerbockers, Esteban Bellán, Habana Baseball Club, War of 1898, sports, colonialism, national identity, elitism, Honors Thesis.*

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, baseball became a transnational sport when the game spread from the United States to Latin America. Through the exchange of goods and the migration of peoples, it became embedded in the national identities of several Latin American nations and became just as much a part of their lives as it is a part of US culture. The popular belief that baseball is a sport solely connected to the United States is false. After baseball was introduced to several Latin American countries, it took on a greater role as more than just a sport. It symbolized the resistance to imperialism and cultivated the beginnings of democracy in the respective countries. In both the Dominican Republic and Cuba baseball served as a vessel for people to express their budding nationalism. By the 19th century when Latino ballplayers entered the US professional leagues, North American baseball players refused to recognize their claim to the game and employed methods of racial exclusiveness within the professional league in attempts to force Latinos out to protect what they thought of as a white sport.

### **The Beginnings of Baseball in the United States**

It was not until the mid-1800s when baseball grew in popularity that clubs began to form, the first being the New York Knickerbockers Base Ball Club in 1845.<sup>1</sup> However, this baseball club was not a group of men that engaged in rowdy games that slid into home plate and dumped ice buckets on their coach at the end of the ballgame. The Knickerbockers were a selective club made up of white collar workers who tried to restrict the game of baseball to their own social class.<sup>2</sup> In order to join, members had to be voted in, pay dues, buy the uniform and gear, and cover an excess of fees that might accrue over the course of the player's membership such as dinner after ball games.<sup>3</sup> The first organized baseball team in the United States embodied how

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Seymour, 25-31.

<sup>3</sup> Seymour, 24.

closely associated baseball and economics are with one another. From the formation of the sport, the two were inseparable. Players and the elite who controlled baseball club made it an exclusive game to those who could afford to participate.

Yet the Knickerbocker's attempt to keep baseball a upper class sport did not last very long. The popularity of the sport spread during the Civil War as the military traveled throughout the country and played the sport in their free time, teaching other soldiers the rules of the game.<sup>4</sup> Baseball became so popular that it transcended social and economic classes. In 1886, years after baseball successfully made its way from the North to the South, José Martí, a Cuban national hero, recalled during his time in the United States:

“In every neighborhood there is a baseball game. Children... in New York like ball and pistols more than they like books... They go into the streets and hide from the police to play baseball in the courtyards.”<sup>5</sup>

The amount that the community valued baseball so soon after its founding was remarkable. Martí was blown away by American's admiration for the up and coming sport. His first impression of the game is how many other Latinos experienced baseball when they traveled to the United States and witnessed the sport firsthand for the first time. Cubans like Martí approached the game with curiosity and many immediately sought to learn how to play themselves where the game was created. Latinos saw baseball as a way to connect with Americans since by the late 19th century, baseball was already considered a national pastime in the United States. Cubans viewed baseball as “a medium for North American culture” and

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<sup>4</sup> Adrian Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) 18.

<sup>5</sup> Louis A. Perez Jr., “Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868-1898,” *Journal of American History* 81, no. 2 (1994): 499.

learned the game to connect with their American neighbors on US soil. When Cubans brought baseball back home to Cuba, this began the process where they would shape baseball to no longer be a foreign sport to them, but a sport they called their own.

### **Baseball in Cuba**

Cuba was the first country in Latin America for baseball to take root. The sport was originally brought there in the 1860s by students returning home from American universities who were exposed to the sport abroad.<sup>6</sup> They joined together to form clubs upon their return partly to bring an entertaining activity back home, but as it grew in popularity it was later used as a political tool against their Spanish oppressors. Baseball was successful early on in Cuba primarily due to the nationalist sentiments it brought out in Cubans that viewed or took part in the game. The increased interaction between the United State and Cuba during the late 19th century not only brought baseball to Cuba and provided a means to express themselves, they found a trading partner that they could fall on during the transition from colonial rule to independence. Cubans looked towards the United States as a model for a future independent Cuban state.

By the 1880s, Cuba was dependent on the United States economically as 94% of Cuba's sugar production was exported to the United States.<sup>7</sup> This relationship led to an infusion of North American culture to Cuba beginning in the late 19th century. This caused tension on the island due to the fact that Cuba was still under Spanish rule. According to Louis A. Perez Jr., Cubans looked to cities like New York and Chicago with awe and wished to replicate that in Havana. Although Havana was the capital city of Cuba, it was in poor condition with unpaved streets, a

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Fraser Light, *The Cultural Encyclopedia of Baseball* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997), 93.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 496.

poor education system, and unsanitary conditions that frequently led to outbreak in disease.<sup>8</sup>

Although there were poor areas within North American cities, New York and Chicago were on the rise and hundreds of thousands of dollars flooded into its development as prominent centers for life in the United States. As the Spanish Empire systematically took advantage of the Cuban population with regressive taxes and the inability to meet the demands of production, there was a heightened desire for a new system and life.<sup>9</sup> The Spanish were not meeting the demands of their subjects and took advantage of the profitable market. Cubans began to envision a prosperous life in a clean city, with an organized economy, a life free from the colonial rule of the Spanish.<sup>10</sup> In reaction to their lifestyle at home, wealthy Cuban parents sent their children to school in the United States to get a private or university education which was not available to them on the island. Cubans who left home, like Esteban “Steve” Bellán, a founding member of the Habana Baseball Club in Cuba, went abroad and experienced a cultural revolution. Though in many cases some originally went on a mission to the United States to receive an education to help better their community, they returned home with baseball, the land of the free’s sport of choice. This was just the start of the interconnected relationship between Cuba and the United States that ultimately led to baseball’s success in the region. The elite Cubans learned from traveling to the United States and realized the system in place was more attractive than the colonial rule they were subjected to for hundreds of years.

In 1872, the first Cuban baseball club was formed, the Habana Baseball Club, and just two years later the first professional game of baseball on the island was played.<sup>11</sup> Esteban Bellán

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 496.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 496.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 497.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 500.

was one of the premier founders of the Habana Club. Bellán, like most of the early baseball players in Cuba, studied in the United States and returned with newfound knowledge of the game. Similar to the first ballplayers in the United States that made up teams like the New York Knickerbockers, Bellán was a member of the upper class and could afford to attend university in the United States and travel between the two nations. The migration between the two countries was key to his success as a ballplayer. His time in the United States gave him experience with the sport and American culture. Bellán studied at Fordham University in New York in 1864 and there he played on the school's team and after graduating university, where he jumped around from one team to another, most notably the Troy Haymakers.<sup>12</sup> Bellán was cited as the first Cuban to play US professional baseball but he is also directly linked to the rise in popularity of baseball in Cuba and its establishment as a professional sport in the region.<sup>13</sup> Through his success in America, he took his professional experience to clubs on the island and helped foster the growing baseball culture. Bellán laid the groundwork for all Latin American baseball players looking to travel to the United States and play in the professional league. After the establishment of the Habana Baseball Club, several other independent clubs followed and eventually the Liga General de Base Ball de la Isla de Cuba was established and the individual clubs formed an entire league.<sup>14</sup>

The growing popularity of baseball in Cuba contributed to the beginning of the end of the elitist hold on the sport on the island by the late 1880s. Julián del Casal, a journalist in Havana for *La Discusión* wrote in 1889 of the "enthusiasm of the youths who take flight from the

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<sup>12</sup> Burgos Jr., 21-22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Perez Jr., "On Baseball and Bullfighting," 494.

classrooms to go and practice baseball."<sup>15</sup> Similar to the words of José Martí commenting on the streets of New York City, baseball infiltrated the culture of Cuba by the late 1800s. During those years, small towns across Cuba, like Guara, organized at least one club while larger towns and cities like Remedios had up to three.<sup>16</sup> Men of all classes began to participate in the sport because the teams were no longer run by elitist figures but the towns that they lived in. Many of the clubs that formed were also “summer clubs” or *clubes de verano*. These were teams that were active during the summer months, which included the seasonal workers that were unemployed during the months after the sugar harvest.<sup>17</sup> This not only allowed increased participation in the sport, but it brought in a huge crowd of spectators looking for entertainment during their days off. The lower classes finally had a place both in the game and on the stands.

### **Baseball and the Fall of the Spanish Empire in Cuba**

In 1914, writer José Sixto de Sola claimed that baseball “was one of the factors that made Cubans feel free and obtain their liberty.”<sup>18</sup> Cuban discontent for Spanish rule stemmed from their inability to express their political interest in governance and the economy. Cubans lacked representation in Cuba where an outside power, the Spanish Empire, retained control on governance that they desired. This discontent Cubans experienced paired with the Spanish Empire’s decline and the assistance the United States provided after the First War of Cuban Independence led to outright revolt. By the late 19th century, Cubans demanded representation and the ability to regulate their own economic growth, much like patriots in the United States had done during the American Revolution when they revolted against the British Empire. A

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 502.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 502.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 502.

<sup>18</sup> Perez Jr., “On Baseball and Bullfighting,” 494.

series of insurrections began in 1868, which eventually led to the landing of mass amounts of American soldiers on the island to intervene on behalf of the Cuban population thirty years later. The United States government saw an opening to assert power in the Caribbean, as Spain's power on the island was challenged against the newly rising Cuban force. President McKinley claimed it was the US government's duty to go to Cuba and liberate the Cubans for "humanity's sake."<sup>19</sup>

Although the United States provided military support to help drive the Spanish Empire out of Cuba, Cubans were not helpless in their task to rid themselves of colonial rule. Before the War of 1898 began, many Cubans rejected Spanish traditions on the island through symbolic actions which impacted the effectiveness of the power of the colonial government. The way in which Cubans did this was through the rejection of bullfighting, which they viewed as backwards, violent, and barbaric.<sup>20</sup> The tradition is inherently linked to colonialism and empire, as the sport was primarily enjoyed by Spanish officials who brought it over from Spain. Cubans never really adopted the tradition as their own as it was seen as primarily a sport embraced by the elite Spanish classes.<sup>21</sup> By encouraging participation in the game of baseball, Cubans denied Spanish colonialism while forming their own national identity. Baseball was seen as the antithesis of bullfighting because it simply wasn't Spanish. It wasn't a violent activity and the sport blurred class lines. People of different socioeconomic backgrounds could co-exist on the ballfield and were able play the game together. This was a stark contrast compared to the spectators of bullfighting, who were largely upper class Spaniards.<sup>22</sup> Baseball served as a uniting

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<sup>19</sup> Louis A. Pérez Jr., *War of 1898 : The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 45.

<sup>20</sup> Pérez Jr., "On Baseball and Bullfighting," 506.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 506.

<sup>22</sup> Pérez Jr., "On Baseball and Bullfighting," 508.

force for Cubans despite their class differences. It also promoted a newfound nationalism through local attachments.<sup>23</sup> Rivalries between teams encouraged friendly competition between towns but it also promoted newfound patriotism in accordance to where one lived. Through these attachments, not only men became more involved with the sport, but women and children did as well. They developed a newfound love for baseball and Cuba. Baseball's contribution to the creation of a national identity cannot be stressed enough.

When the War of 1898 began, baseball was already cemented into the forming Cuban national identity. However, when American soldiers traveled to Cuba during the war, they adopted a false belief that they brought along baseball with civilization. American soldiers in their spare time played their own games of baseball on the island thus they believed they contributed to the success of the sport on the island. According to A.G. Spalding, the game is said to have "followed the flag...wherever a ship floating the Stars and Stripes finds anchorage to-day, somewhere on a nearby shore the American National Game is in progress."<sup>24</sup> However, the game had been present on the island for years before the arrival of US soldiers in Cuba. Cubans, not North Americans, introduced the game of baseball to the island back in the 1880s. The United States' egocentric view of oneself led to this fallacy. Baseball served as a marker for the shift in political power from the Spanish to the Cubans during the War of Independence. Although the Spanish colonial government had yet been dismantled on the island, it was clear that Cubans gained their own agency by the 1890s. When Spanish poet Manuel Curros Enriquez traveled to Cuba in 1895, he stated "The loss of Spanish sovereignty in Cuba does not date from 1898. It is much earlier... That is why the popularity of baseball made me realize, virtually upon

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<sup>23</sup> Perez Jr., "On Baseball and Bullfighting," 509.

<sup>24</sup> Burgos, 71.

landing in Cuba, that I found myself in a foreign country.”<sup>25</sup> The decline of the Spanish Empire coincided with the rise of baseball and by the time the Empire fell, the sport had already been recognized as a popular sport throughout the nation.

### **US Civilizing Mission in Cuba**

After the War of 1898, as Cuba’s ‘saviors,’ the US government proclaimed that their motive for entering the war was purely to help free Cubans from their Spanish oppressors on the basis on democracy.<sup>26</sup> The three-year long occupation of the island was accompanied by a civilizing mission led by North Americans who believed Cubans were uncivilized and inferior compared to citizens of the United States.<sup>27</sup> North Americans that traveled to Cuba during this period of time attempted to “Americanize” Cubans because they believed they were not capable of governing themselves.<sup>28</sup> Those who traveled to Cuba were individuals believed wholeheartedly in American racial and cultural superiority. Those who traveled to Cuba after the war to ‘civilize’ Cubans found that baseball was the perfect vehicle to teach Cubans about US culture and values. They believed that the sport could teach them the significance of teamwork, individual responsibility to the larger community, and core democratic values of the United States’ foundation, all of which would prepare them for their role as US citizens.<sup>29</sup> This attempt to ‘civilize’ proved that Americans viewed Latinos as inferior. This quest in attempt to civilize using baseball did not end in Cuba, in fact it spread quickly to other Caribbean nations like the Dominican Republic by the end of the 19th century as the United States continued to spread their influence in Latin America. Baseball “followed the flag” and Latino clubs began to compete

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<sup>25</sup> Louis A. Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 83.

<sup>26</sup> Pérez Jr., *War of 1898*, 50.

<sup>27</sup> Burgos, 72.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

across the islands.<sup>30</sup> In this way, baseball united nations in the Caribbean as the United States began their quest to cement their power in the region as Latinos united against their new oppressors. As the United States entered the Caribbean as a “liberator” or powerful economic force, the US assumed the role as another colonial power which led to sweeping discontent.<sup>31</sup>

Cuban ball players used the sport as a tool to challenge North American oppressors because they did not have the means to do so militarily. The US became an occupying force in Cuba and there was an increase in North American businesses that flooded to the island. Baseball stars from the United States travelled there to compete with Cuban baseball clubs and play during the off-season. Islands in the Caribbean were the perfect stage to practice during the off season due to its climate and its close proximity to the United States.<sup>32</sup> There was also no shortage of Latino players willing to compete with American teams. Already well versed in the game of baseball, Cuban players used the game as a tool to challenge American ballplayers since they could not combat American soldiers militarily. The baseball games gave Cubans the possibility of victory against their oppressors. By participating in competitive sport against the Americans like they had once done with the Spanish, Cubans showed them that they were an organized force that were willing to challenge the Americans even at the smallest of levels. The United States believed that through the participation of Cuban players in baseball games, their assimilation mission was in full effect. Instead, Cubans used the game of baseball as a tool to express their national identity against an occupying and oppressive force in order to rebel.<sup>33</sup> Most Cubans took immense pride at beating the US ball players at what North Americans claimed to

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<sup>30</sup> Samuel Regalado, *Viva Baseball!: Latin Major Leaguers and Their Special Hunger* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 13.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

be “their own game” because it proved that baseball was just as much a sport for Latinos as it was for North Americans.

US journalists took note of the assimilation mission in connection to Latinos learning baseball and competing with North American teams. They portrayed it as a great success for the United States as a rising world power. Since the country had just won the War of 1898, the territorial gain as well as the introduction of new people into their “empire” was presented as a remarkable feat for the nation. *Sporting Life* produced an article titled “Uncle Sam’s New People Learning the National Game” which referred to the Puerto Ricans who learned the sport after the United States invaded the island after the War of 1898. Journalists painted a picture for North Americans at home that these “new people” were now their possessions. The idea was that now that they were learning their traditions and culture, they could move up the social ladder from a position of inferiority. The United States emerged from the war as a world power and began an imperial conquest throughout Latin America.<sup>34</sup> The magazine’s referral to the Latin American community as “Uncle Sam’s New People” in the context of learning how to play baseball shows that their mission to civilize abroad was underway and successful. Not only did the United States advertise that they successfully dismantled the Spanish Empire and liberate the Cubans, North Americans then began to travel to other nations to civilize and liberate people they viewed as inferior.

### **Baseball in the Dominican Republic**

Similar to the case of Cuba, the US occupation of the Dominican Republic as well as the migration of peoples is what caused the rise in popularity of baseball on the island. The infusion

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<sup>34</sup> Perez Jr., *War of 1898*, 105.

of culture through the exchange of goods and movement of peoples is truly what caused the sport to cement itself in the national identity of Latinos. According to Historian Rob Ruck, two brothers, Ignacio and Ubaldo Alomá, fled Spanish oppression in Cuba, and founded baseball in the Dominican Republic.<sup>35</sup> They fled to Santo Domingo in 1880 and just 11 years thereafter formed *El Cauto* and *Cervecería*, the first two baseball clubs on the island.<sup>36</sup> The early years of baseball in the Dominican Republic paralleled the Knickerbockers club in the United States. It had elitist origins and membership was held mostly by wealthy families who studied in the United States.<sup>37</sup> They returned from North America with the urge to continue their participation in the game and spread their love of baseball to their respective communities. While baseball did not make its way to the Dominican Republic initially from the United States, the rise in popularity of the sport can certainly be attributed to North American influence. It was during the United States occupation of the Dominican Republic that baseball became most popular.<sup>38</sup> In 1916, the United States invaded the Dominican Republic leading to outrage over the occupation due Dominican loss of sovereignty but it also led to an increase in the adoration of baseball. Dominicans began to compete with US soldiers and sailors to prove themselves off the battlefield, which directly parallels the Cuban course of action when dealing with US oppressors. Dominicans harbored strong resentment towards the United States due to the occupation of the island and used the competitive nature of the sport to combat them. Not only did they win battles

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<sup>35</sup> Rob Ruck, *The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

on the baseball field, they gained a sense of nationalism by banding together as a team, united by a common purpose.<sup>39</sup>

### **United States Invasion of the Dominican Republic**

The US invasion of the Dominican Republic was a disorganized failure that led to Dominican mistrust of North Americans. The United States invaded the Dominican Republic primarily to restore order but also to keep the balance of power in its own favor.<sup>40</sup> The outbreak of World War I created a sense of nervousness on behalf of the United States government, so they wanted to protect their own interests abroad. During the occupation, the United States attempted to Americanize the Dominican economy and culture, using soft power, “power of a state deriving from economic and cultural influence, rather than coercion or military strength”, to influence the Dominicans.<sup>41</sup> The US government wanted to shift the Dominican Republic’s attention away from Germany towards the United States. Ultimately, the Dominicans rejected the United States’ attempts to Americanize the nation. The disorganization of the effort on behalf of the United States was apparent. The US did not come in with a long term plan for the occupation, the troops landed ill-prepared, and the best soldiers were sent to Europe to fight in the Great War.<sup>42</sup> The troops treated inhabitants of the Dominican Republic unfairly due to racial stereotypes and treated the land with great disrespect. Several incidents were recorded where soldiers approached possible, but unconfirmed guerrillas and ordered their immediate execution. One officer said when encountering a guerrilla, “Take the son of a bitch out and bump him off.”

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<sup>39</sup> Ruck, 25.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>41</sup> "Soft power, noun.". OED Online. March 2019. Oxford University Press.  
<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/183898?redirectedFrom=soft+power> (accessed May 15, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>43</sup> News spread of this quickly injustice throughout the island. Whether or not Dominicans supported the guerrillas, they developed a mistrust for the North American conquerors on the island.

Baseball games between Dominican teams and the U.S. Navy or United States Marine Corps were particularly frequent due to the soldiers and sailors layover time on the island before combat.<sup>44</sup> *Scientific American* noted that the marines played baseball so often, “Uncle Sam has created not only an army of soldiers, but an army of athletes.”<sup>45</sup> Although the North American soldiers presented themselves the picture of health and athleticism as enlisted men of the United States army, the Dominican teams actually proved to be more successful on the baseball field. Out of a nine-game baseball series, a Dominican team, *Licey*, and a group of rival ball players from another team named *Petrel*, banded together against a US team from the cruiser the *Washington*, and won the series 6-3.<sup>46</sup> Not only did the Dominican players win against their conquerors by a landslide, they assembled and put aside their rivalry in order to beat a power and collectively represented their nation. Dominican ball players wanted to prove through the sport that they could were just as strong as North Americans. The occupation humiliated Dominicans and baseball was a way to rekindle Dominican nationalism without the violence and bloodshed the guerrillas employed.<sup>47</sup> Although their approach was nonviolent compared to other groups moving against the North American occupiers, Dominican participation and love of baseball demonstrates that they were dissatisfied with US presence in the DR and they actively sought to prove themselves against their US occupiers.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 26.

## **Latino Ball Players in the United States**

### **The Color Line**

When Latino ball players traveled to the United States to join professional baseball leagues, clubs used players to their advantage. Although managers saw Latinos as inferior, their racism against African American ballplayers far exceeded that against Latinos. Latinos were used by professional baseball coaches to refuse other members from the league, namely black baseball players. By the beginning of the 20th century, as Latino clubs competed with North American players and teams as they travelled to the Caribbean, the general American public began to take notice of their success on the field. Scouts began to recruit Latino players to the United States to join major and minor league teams separate from their clubs at home in the Latin America. This would mean integrating them into North American society when they moved to the United States to play. However, in the beginning there was a question as to whether or not Latinos would be permitted to play in these leagues. Back in the 1880s, organized leagues refused to integrate black players onto professional teams.<sup>48</sup> When the question was asked as to whether or not Latino players would be allowed to join professional baseball teams in the major league, the answer was ambiguous. Organized baseball had racial motivations for barring black players from the game but since Latinos did not identify as black or white, originally they did not know whether or not to accept them into the leagues. Although North Americans viewed Latinos as non-white, they did not go as far to view them as black. Players like Esteban Bellán were originally drafted into a major league because North Americans labeled them as “Spaniards” rather than of Latino or Caribbean descent.<sup>49</sup> North Americans “Europeanized” these players to

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<sup>48</sup> Burgos, 73.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 66.

justify to themselves the inclusion of Latinos and the exclusion of black players in the game. The creation of a racial hierarchy in baseball and the ability for individual teams to categorize players based on their appearance justified segregation in the United States.<sup>50</sup> This ranking kept white Anglo-Americans and Europeans at the top, and African Americans at the bottom.<sup>51</sup> Filling in the color line in between white and black were Latinos (US and foreign-born), Native Americans, Asians and Asian-Americans.<sup>52</sup> All were extended the opportunity to play baseball except for African Americans who were immediately barred due to their race. The racial categorization reflected the racist beliefs of Americans during the Jim Crow era and period of racial segregation in the United States. White men who controlled the rules and regulations of the game of baseball in America used Latinos as well as other ethnic groups to suppress the African American population in the United States.

The racial line was drawn so that if a player's skin was too dark, they could be denied from the league. One player, Bud Fowler, told *Sporting Life* in 1895: "My skin is against me. If I had not been so black, I might have caught on as a Spaniard or something of that kind. The race prejudice is so strong that my black skin barred me."<sup>53</sup> Fowler was an African-American baseball player who had originally been prohibited from joining the major league. On several occasions his contracts were revoked before he even set foot on the field because his fellow teammates refused to play with an African American ball player. In one case, after Fowler had already signed a contract for a club in Lafayette, NY to fill the position of pitcher, his contract was revoked. The club voided his contract and claimed that they only took strawberry blondes for the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>53</sup> Burgos, 53.

position.<sup>54</sup> The pattern of inability to find work due to his skin color caused Fowler to travel west to find a team that would sign him. There, he had no problem finding a team to sign him once he displayed his talent for the game and hard working qualities. While traveling he played for the Santa Fe Ancients, Keokuk Indians from Iowa, Pueblo Pastimes from Colorado, all of which brought him fame and glory.<sup>55</sup> *Sporting Life* followed his career and stated “Those in the know say that there is no better second baseman in the country. If he had a white face, he would be playing with the best of them.”<sup>56</sup> Although he is cited as the first black professional baseball player, the color of his skin stunted his career. Bud Fowler believed that if the tone of his skin was a few shades lighter, he could have passed off as a Latino and have been accepted into the professional league, as did several of his fans that recognize his talents, which is illustrated through articles praising his athleticism. The professional baseball league in the United States tried to keep the league as “white” as possible. Although the racial hierarchy allowed Latinos into the league, players were still systematically discriminated against.

## **Conclusion**

The use of Latino ballplayers as pawns, as they were brought up from countries like Cuba and the Dominican Republic, illustrates the power Americans exerted over the nations and people. Americans used baseball to “civilize” Latinos in the Caribbean, and then when they were brought to the United States Americans employed a method of racial exclusiveness to another group, black ballplayers, who they also viewed as inferior, just more so than Latinos. This racial exclusivity in American baseball connects to elitism in the early foundations of the game as well.

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<sup>54</sup> Jeff Laing, “Bud Fowler in Santa Fe (1888): The Myth of the West for the 19th Century Baseball’s First African Baseballist,” *Base Ball* 5, no. 2 (2011): 52.

<sup>55</sup> Laing, 54-56.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

As the game became more integrated, the elite ballplayers were no longer the rich as it was in the beginning, but white ballplayers who exerted power over the small percentage of ballplayers of color in the league.

In the early days of baseball in Cuba, the game was used as tool by Latino ball players to prove themselves as equal to their colonial oppressors. It provided them the opportunity to foster a new national identity through forming a community through baseball, which included all aspects of society- the rich, poor, men, women, and children. It provided a symbol of progress towards change and a new away from colonialism.

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