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THE ROLE OF THE PITTSBURGH CRAWFORDS AS A MEANS OF SELF-HELP
IN INNER CITY PITTSBURGH, 1931-1937.

By

Kevin C. Kaufmann

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF THE PITTSBURGH CRAWFORDS AS A MEANS OF SELF-HELP IN INNER CITY PITTSBURGH, 1931-1937

By

Kevin C. Kaufmann

In the scholarly discussion of Black self-help and Black community building much has been done regarding the role of civil rights groups and social welfare organizations. However, a key component to community building has been largely ignored by those who study the phenomenon of self-help and community building in the Black community: Entertainment.

By using many primary sources, such as newspapers and interviews, the thesis provides a detailed look at Black Pittsburgh during the 1930s. Also a survey of self-help literature about community building in other urban centers will be used to develop a strong definition of community self-help.

The main purpose of this thesis is to illustrate the importance of entertainment, especially sports by using a Negro League baseball team, the Pittsburgh Crawfords, as a model. The thesis will show that not only did the Crawfords provide a moral and spiritual lift to the Black community of

Pittsburgh, but the team provided economic stimulus, but charity benefits, and benefits to the entire nation.

This work is dedicated to my mother and father, and to God,
with out all three, none of this would have been possible.

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I would like to express my thanks to all those who helped me with this project, especially Dr. Harry Reed for his guidance throughout, to Richard Thomas who gave me the idea for this project, to Bill Wilson and Bob Eubanks for keeping me sane. Also none of this would have been possible without the love and support of my family, Brian and Denise, and my parents, Charles and Joan. Finally, to all the players who made up the Negro Leagues, especially Maurice Petross, I hope in some small way this thesis tells your story.

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Introduction

By the summer of 1932 the United States was in the midst of the worst depression in its 150 year history. Jobs and economic security were scarce and a new president was saying all we had to fear was fear itself. For most Americans, not aristocrats from New York, fear was an everyday companion.

While this fear effected everyone during the depression, it especially got hold of those who had not really experienced the fruits of the American dream in the 1920s. Those marginalized by American society were hard hit by hard times. As Langston Hughes wrote "The depression brought everybody down a peg or two, and the Negro had but few pegs to fall."¹

Even though people were taken by fear and faced with uncertainty, they gathered together in an effort to cope with the hostile world about them. One of the main ways of coping was through entertainment. By going to a show, or catching a baseball game and even gathering at the barber shop, people could get away from everyday life and find some relief. By focusing on entertainment, it also gave people something else to talk about beside their troubles.

In Black America this was especially important because of the segregation that still was rampant in American society. Not only were they hardest hit by the depression,

¹Osofsky, Gilbert. *Harlem: the Making of a Ghetto. Negro New York 1890-1930.* p.187, quoting Hughes, Langston. *The Big Sea.* p.247, Harper and Row, New York, 1963.

society. Not only were they hardest hit by the depression, but they had to deal with the institutional racism of the day as well. Social interaction and entertainment became an even more important means of self-help in Black urban America.

The goal of this paper is to illustrate the influence of entertainment on the community self-help process. Most models offered of the community self-help process focus upon political organizations, like the NAACP, social welfare organizations, like the Urban League, or business associations, like the Negro Business League. These are all formal, institutional, community sanctioned activities, but they neglect another element of community life: entertainment.

Entertainment is a strong component of the community self-help process that cannot be overlooked. While the socially active organizations help build a community, entertainment is an important, but neglected source of community definition and the self-help process. Entertainment illustrates what the people are doing and who they are. People and their activities are needed to fully appreciate community self-help as Edgar Wideman, native of Pittsburgh, wrote in his *Homewood Trilogy*:

Tell me if you could ever look through your daddy and the rest of them. Tell me if you could see through them or if they were solid. Brother didn't even have skin but he stopped peoples eyes. He was solid, real, like all of them. They made Homewood. Walking around doing

things they had to do. Homewood wasn't bricks and boards. Homewood was them singing and loving and getting were they need to get. They made these streets. That's why Homewood was real. Cause they were real.²

While a literary source, this passage illustrates the importance of people, and their activities, including entertainment activities, in the process of constructing a community. Also Maurice Petross, Pittsburgh native and former Negro League baseball player expounds on the special relationship of people in a community:

Neighbors depended on each other. Now, you say hey Joe in the driveway, and then you're gone. Then, the women were at home. So the women tied the back fences together. The women tied the front porches together. Our neighborhood was mixed and it was understood that times were hard. So if you made spaghetti and there was some left, you gave some to Evita. You had kids criss-crossing the block with food so everybody was living off each other. It wasn't survival of the fittest. It was community or block survival thing, an interdependence. The neighborhood checking out the neighborhood, that's what you don't have now.³

It is the people who make the community and a very good measure of what makes a community real is what people were doing in their time away from work, politics, and religion.

²Edgar Wideman, *Homewood Trilogy*. (New York: Avon Books, 1985), p.522.

³Mr. Maurice Petross, interview by author, tape recording, Lansing Michigan, 4 September 1994.

It is equally important to investigate what people were doing in the home.

For this project I will be focusing on the city of Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh is an excellent city to examine the Black self-help process. There is a wealth of resources, many of them primary, detailing the large Black population as a result of the great migration during and after World War One. Also it was a midwestern city hard hit by the Depression, and yet the Black community was able to produce a first class baseball operation, The Pittsburgh Crawfords, and other baseball institutions that benefited the entire nation.

The team was unique, it was a special collection that was not only great on the field, but legends off the field as well. Finally I will show how this Pittsburgh team helped blacks on the national level through their stellar performance and their success against white teams at that time. Through the paper I will illustrate how the Pittsburgh Crawfords were a means of community self-help in urban Pittsburgh from 1931-1937.

Self-Help Defined

The idea of community self-help has been discussed for decades by scholars and yet no generally accepted definition of self-help exists. As Joe Darden says about defining scholarly terms:

It is characteristic of any discipline that its members are not always able to unanimously agree on the nature of the phenomena they examine. This

lack of agreement is especially reflected in the formation of concepts and definitions.⁴

This is the case with self-help and those who examine it. The literature about ghetto formation and community building by Allen Spear, Joe Trotter, Kenneth Kusmer, and Gilbert Osafsky mentions self-help, but no one really attempts to define it. While the authors use the term, it is much more like a theme, not a process that needs to be examined.⁵

Richard W. Thomas is one of the first to think of self-help in of itself as something to be studied and defines it thus:

The sum total of historical efforts of black individuals, institutions, and organizations to survive and progress as a people and to create and sustain a genuine and creative communal presence.⁶

However by stating that self-help is a sum total of historical efforts, it implies that self-help can only be seen after the fact and that it is an amalgamation of parts that later can be observed as a whole. Thomas' definition does not look at self-help as a process but rather as a result of the equation. While results are important, the process must be looked at in order to understand those results. Without knowing what makes up the equation, the

⁴Joe Darden, Editor, *The Ghetto: Readings with Interpretations*. (Port Washington NY: Kennikat Press, 1981), p.5.

⁵Spear, Allen. *Black Chicago*. Trotter, Joe. *Black Milwaukee*. Kusmer, Kenneth. *A ghetto Takes Shape: Ghetto Formation in Cleveland*.

⁶Richard W. Thomas, *Life for us is What We Make It*, (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), p.xi.

results, the answer, the sum total is not nearly as significant. Also more goes into community self-help than Thomas' definition, but it is a good place to start. A careful reading of the works on the black community building process illustrates what is meant by community self-help.

Community self-help is the process of constructing, maintaining, and improving the institutions and organizations that form a community, sustain it, and improve the lives of those that live there. Furthermore the attitudes and actions of the people in the community are equally important to the self-help process. Entertainment and time away from work fit this definition very well. Both are important factors in the process of building a community.

While much has been done on the black business and political aspects of self-help, entertainment has been neglected. Allen Spear states why this bias exists "the doctrine of self-help, although prominent...was above all a business philosophy."⁷ However, the process of self-help is more than a business philosophy, it is a process that goes beyond business interests and is part of the whole community building process. Much of this bias in favor of business and political institution can be attributed to W.E.B. Dubois and his espousal of certain "good" things for the black community.⁸ Baseball, however, is a business and it provided much to the community.

⁷Spear, p.117.

⁸W.E.B. Dubois, *The Philadelphia Negro*. (New York: Scholar Books, 1899), p.394.

Many of the later authors focused on political elements, the Urban League, the NAACP, business associations, and exclude or downplay entertainment in the community building process. While all of these groups are important, they are not the only forms that construct a neighborhood. What people do outside of politics, business, and religion are just as important as these carefully studied areas. The most important time a society comes together is in their leisure time, its entertainment hours. The chats on the stoop, the talks on the corner, the night at the club are all places where the community can come together to forget about the worries of the day, or discuss them with a kindred soul. These chats often revolved around sport as Edgar Wideman, native of Pittsburgh, shared in his interview with Rob Ruck in his book, *Sandlot Seasons*:

When I grew up, all the talk was about sports. Nobody ever said "here, now, we're going to discuss the possibilities of manhood and realize ourselves in this culture." But that was the sub-theme, that was the hidden agenda...What they talked about was not deals on the market or jobs or selling cars, they talked about hitting a home run or stealing a base. That was entree.⁹

These chats were also enjoyed by all classes of people in the community. While largeley a working class neighborhood,

⁹Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p.xi.

Black Pittsburgh had a variety of classes that mixed when the discussion moved to sports and baseball.

While Allen Spear mentions entertainment as important, he stays focused on the business and political aspects of black Chicago.¹⁰ Also Thomas briefly looks at entertainment, but his research was primarily on the business and church leaders attitude toward entertainment, not what the entertainment was, what those who provided the entertainment were like, or who participated in the entertainment.¹¹

Entertainment had, and still has, an important function in a community. It creates a common ground, a language all its own that people can use to get to know one another , relate to and come together. It forms a bond that can bring identity to community. As August Wilson, playwright and native of Pittsburgh, states in another Ruck interview:

If you are all together standing outside the doors of white American society and you cannot participate in this society, then there is a certain strengthening in who you are as a people. If you take black baseball, the owners were black, the community had something to do on Saturday or Sunday afternoon...You see all these economic things belonging to the people. More importantly though, you had your own thing and it gave you a sense of belonging.¹²

While blacks were struggling to survive to live in Harlem, it became known for its social scene.¹³this aspect of

¹⁰Spear, p.117.

¹¹Thomas, p.116.

¹²Ruck, p.xii

¹³Osafsky, p.179.

community culture needs to be brought into the discussion of self-help. If community self-help is the process of constructing, maintaining, and improvement of institutions and organizations that form a community and the attitudes of those who live there, then the jazz clubs, speakeasies, and ball clubs can no longer be brushed aside. These types of places played just as important a role in the community building process as the NAACP, and they need to be investigated. Maurice Petross offers some insight into the role of sport, especially baseball:

That's all there was. Had the hard jobs, all jobs were hard because blacks weren't in any position, economically or academically to hold other positions so you're on the low end of the totem pole and what you had was your own recreation. That was families with other families, you know a network of entertainment and you had the church. The only thing you could actively do as a group, men, were ball games. The women didn't even have that. The women became spectators. What made baseball such an obvious thing was all the plant jobs had company teams. That was it and out of the company teams came very informal leagues. Rivalries set up between companies, rivalries between neighborhoods and neighborhood teams.¹⁴

Maurice further illustrates sport as a pillar of the community while talking about the church:

¹⁴Maurice Petross, 9/4/94

Baseball was the biggest because all the kids played it. Baseball was something you could play everywhere and everyone could play it and not get hurt and miss work. In the winter you reverted back to the family and church.¹⁵

Some of the bias against, and lack of investigation into entertainment as a part of the self-help process comes from the fact that these places were also the sites of criminal activity. Maurcie Petross offers some observations as to why this bias existed in the black community:

The church community looked down on us. "These are low lives because decent people go to bed at night and go to work. These people sleep all day and they are carousing late at night. Therefore you are people of the night...nobody wanted their daughters associating with musicians, "don't hang out with drummers and saxophone players or ball players!"¹⁶

Many of the clubs, taverns, and baseball clubs were run by people with less than sterling characters. However, these people still kept their resources inside the black community. While they did make their money from the numbers playing in the neighborhood, they often reinvested this money in the community through their night clubs, which offered entertainment to the residents. They also supported many other causes with their money. Gus Greenlee, the owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, was such a man.

¹⁵ibid.

¹⁶ibid.

Gus, Pittsburgh, and the Crawfords

Gus Greenlee was a number's runner, a club owner, and a political schemer. While never convicted, Mr. Greenlee was accused of illegally securing tax receipts for voting records, racketeering, and illegal gambling with slot machines.¹⁷ However, Gus was also a family man, and his wife is often referred to in news stories about her husband.¹⁸ Judy Johnson, former Negro League baseball star and third basemen for the Pittsburgh Crawfords said of Gus:

Gus sincerely cared about the community and he didn't like the protection¹⁹ stuff at all. I guess he saw himself as the community's protection. Anyway those guys were never around.²⁰

Maurice Petross remembered Gus Greenlee in this way:

He was everything to me. He came to see me play sandlot ball...If you can think of a guy like Broderrick Crawford, the Godfather. Basically, that's what he was. Everybody knew Gus, everybody liked Gus. Gus was everything. Gus was the one who funded entertainers who were in Pittsburgh, and maybe the crowds didn't show or the gig was shortened. They went to Gus to get road money. Gus kept everybody going on their way from Chicago and New York. He was known as a sportsman. All the numbers barons were known

¹⁷Pittsburgh Courier, 3/10/34, 10/15/32, 3/18/33

¹⁸ibid. 4/2/32

¹⁹protection is a term used for extortion in organized crime circles.

²⁰Jim Bankes, *The Pittsburgh Crawfords: The Lives and Times of Black Baseball's Most Exciting Team*, (Dubuque IA: Wm. C. Brown, 1991), p.94.

as sportsman. He'd be called a philanthropist now.²¹

Also Gus was well thought of by the contemporary press, the Pittsburgh Courier, calling him "well known businessman"²² and illustrating his concern for the working man by stating that he catered to their needs.²³ A columnist from the Courier even went so far as to defend Greenlee's gambling activities:

Gambling keeps money circulating in the community. Owners use it in the community, winners spread it around. It is a healthy influence for Avenue (Wylie Ave) business. Reformers have no business to insist that gambling be eliminated unless they substitute another condition that would guarantee the circulation of money as does gambling.²⁴

Mr. Petross echoes these same sentiments about the numbers money and the community:

The money spun into sports for the community. It got into the ball players hands. Well, ball player's gotta eat, so it spun into restaurants; spun into clothing stores, barber shops. That money stayed in the community, it recirculated. And those who made the most money, played the numbers the hardest. It kept everything going.²⁵

²¹Maurice Petross, 9/4/94

²²Pittsburgh Courier, 3/28/25.

²³ibid. 3/27/26.

²⁴ibid. 5/14/27.

²⁵Maurice Petross, 9/4/94

Gus exemplified the self-help philosophy.²⁶ He migrated north in 1916. In 1917 he served in World War I and came back to run his own cab in Pittsburgh. By 1925 he opened his first night club , The Paramount, and from there was able to open other places, including a booking agency, a pool hall, and the Crawford Grill.

The Crawford Grill was the center for Gus' number activity. It was a gathering place "for many conversations tinged with illegality."²⁷ Clarence Clark from the Courier, ball players, the black elite, and working men could all be found at the Grill.²⁸ And while most of the Gus' money did come from the numbers, it did find its way back to the community.

Gus was seen as a sportsman in the community, not an exploiter.²⁹ He was seen as a person who could be turned to in a time of need. As Judy Johnson said "Gus kept \$100 bills in every pocket, anyone who needed money just had to ask Gus."³⁰ Clarence Clark further stated "Gus was a sucker for do-gooder causes."³¹ Maurice Petross was one of those do-gooder causes:

²⁶ this idea of self-help is one I would call personal self-help which varies from communal self-help. It is the idea of being self-made. While it is not for everybody, it does exist.

²⁷Ruck, p.146.

²⁸ibid. p.139.

²⁹ibid.

³⁰ M. Santa Maria, "King of the Hill." *American Visions*. June 1990. p.20.

³¹Ruck, p.151.

I went to school five days a week. Friday afternoon, there would either be a cab or one of Gus' men waiting for me and drive me out to the airport or game in town. He'd also let me do homework in the Grill, waitresses used to help me. I was the waitresses pet.³²

Rob Ruck gives another vivid picture of Greenlee's activities in his book, *Sandlot Seasons*:

After the sudden collapse of the Steel City Bank in 1925 black Pittsburgh was without a bank of its own- except for the numbers bank. Greenlee was black Pittsburgh banker. When loaning money Gus did not ask for collateral, and most intimates agreed that very few loans were every repaid. The money wagered on the numbers continued to find its way back to the black community.³³

This money was also used to support college tuition's, musicians, black nurses, start ups for businesses, political contributions, and sporting causes.³⁴

Greenlee's actions, while tinged with illegality, illustrate the communal self-help process in exemplary fashion. First, by his own efforts he constructed many successful businesses in the Hill district. These included The Paramount, The Crawford Grill, The Sunset Cafe(a bohemian hang out)and the Working Man's Pool Hall. He maintained these places, albeit with his numbers money, but these places did stay in the Hill district and did attract people of all

³²Maurice Petross, 9/4/94

³³Ruck, p.150.

³⁴ibid. p.150-151.

classes and backgrounds to Wylie Avenue. Also Gus continually gave money to the community. This can definitely be seen as maintaining those organizations and institutions that helped to keep the community thriving. Even during the Depression, Gus ran a soup kitchen across from the Crawford Grill. Many of the services that Greenlee provided were not that different from what a good councilman would provide.³⁵ Also by supporting so many political causes Greenlee was viewed as a race man. He was taking care of blacks in Pittsburgh, and the people knew it. Gus helped to shape the attitudes of blacks by his philanthropic efforts and by providing so much business to the community, he kept blacks on the map as far as many were concerned.³⁶ Gus was far from perfect, but he was well liked and as Jim Bankes states in his book on the Crawfords about number runners, "some were saints, and some were sinners, while most including Gus, stood someplace in between."³⁷

One of the main ways that Gus Greenlee helped to shape the attitude and self-image of black Pittsburgh was through his support of sports in the city. His main contribution to the black sporting world was the Crawfords.

The Crawfords and many other teams from the Negro Leagues were supported by the numbers racket. It was in short, where the money was to be had. Gus was seen as the

³⁵ibid.

³⁶ibid.

³⁷Bankes, p64.

"Jesus of Negro Sport" because of his athletic contributions to Pittsburgh.³⁸ It was his presence in baseball that first catapulted him to the position of savior. Even the contemporary press recognized his accomplishments:

If there is to be a prize given of a vote polled for the person who made the greatest contribution to baseball or sports in general during 1932, Gus Greenlee of Pittsburgh would be the unanimous choice of the nation. Despite pessimism on every hand, discouraged by the last few years of "ol' man depression" and the uncertainty of when its end would be, a sufficient number of men still were to be found who were optimistic enough to organize two leagues at the beginning of the season...³⁹

From his financial base in the numbers Gus was able to gain clout in the community. He also knew how to stay in the good graces of the community. He did not look for a team outside of the community, but rather purchased the rights to the favorite sandlot club of the Hill district, the Crawfords.

The Crawfords: From Sandlot to All-Stars.

While this is a bit of a departure from the discussion of Gus Greenlee and his contributions to the community, it will illustrate the importance of Greenlee's decision to buy the Crawfords, instead of designing his own team. While the team from its genesis, as a local sandlot club, to its

³⁸ *ibid.* p.151.

³⁹ Pittsburgh Courier, 12/31/32

beginnings of professional play did not greatly resemble one another, Gus did manage to keep that local support for his all-star team.

In 1926 two young boys, Bill and Teenie Harris (no relation) did not think of becoming one of the greatest baseball teams in history, they wanted to form their own team composed of "Black dudes" from the neighborhoods in Pittsburgh.⁴⁰ They got a sponsor, the Crawford Bathhouse, located on Wylie Avenue. It was from this bath house that the team got its nickname, the Crawfords. That 1926 season the Crawfords won the city league championship, and with it the support of the entire Hill district. This collection of local boys gathered the support from the Pittsburgh Courier as well. An emotional plea by Clarence Clark for financial support illustrates the strong feelings the community had for these boys:

Twilight games played by youngsters furnishes a thrill to parents that is absent in professional exhibitions. The participants are closer to us. We are interested in their every movement--they are ours.⁴¹

A month later when no financial assistance came, Clark leveled the readers by calling them cheapskates, loafers, not caring about their youngsters.⁴²

⁴⁰Ruck, p.46.

⁴¹Pittsburgh Courier, 5/15/26

⁴²ibid. 6/5/26

By 1927 the Crawfords were a solid sandlot team. The Courier was routinely giving them front(sport) page coverage. They were also being referred to as the Hill's team,⁴³ and after their 25th straight win they were being compared to and called the "little Homestead Grays",⁴⁴ the prominent professional team owned by Cum Posey in nearby Homestead. Unlike the Grays, the Crawfords were a local phenomenon, not imported to the community, and they did not leave the Hill to play their games to play on a white field, Forbes Field. Even though they were an amateur team they were becoming a major draw in Black Pittsburgh, drawing as many a few thousand every home game they played. However, even though they gained huge numbers in attendance, they did not see it in the receipts. Many people did not pay to see the games and this kept the team poor. This is largely due to the fact that the Crawfords were still playing at Washington Park, a public facility, and they were not regarded as a professional team. Many who attended the games did not sit in the bleachers provided but rather looked on from all areas of the field. There was no gate to prevent people looking on from the outfield and no way to make people pay to see the game.

By 1931 they were outgrowing the Pittsburgh only circuit, and were ready to take on the rest of the country as this article in the Courier illustrates:

⁴³ibid. 7/2/27

⁴⁴ibid. 7/30/27.

The Crawford Giants of Pittsburgh are seeking a place in the national sun. A letter to this desk from Harry Beale, the manager, brings out some heavy facts. This team played 114 games in 1930 and won 95 of them. Most of their opponents, Beale says, were leading white independent teams in and around Western Pennsylvania...Beale would like to hear from any good eastern outfit which is contemplating a trip through the tri-state district...⁴⁵

Their game versus the Homestead Grays, the first of many in this great rivalry, was to be the first step in the Crawfords history to make them a national phenomenon. It was a classic game, the young and talented Crawfords versus the old and experienced Grays. The game was played at Forbes Field, the National League facility in Pittsburgh, because Grays owner Cum Posey had an arrangement with the Pirates to allow the Grays to play there while they were away. As anticipated, a huge crowd was on hand to see a close game won by the Grays in the Bottom of the ninth.

This game was also the beginning of a rivalry between the clubs that would be revisited many times throughout the history of the Crawfords. The games were always thrilling and produced many heroes for Grays and Crawfords alike.⁴⁶ Maurice Petross recalls what the city was like during those match-ups:

⁴⁵Pittsburgh Courier, 3/28/31

⁴⁶ibid. 7/25/31, 6/20/31, 8/8/31

The town was divided. One side of the river against the other. Where you worked against where they worked. all the police were in force. It was that big of thing.

Even though the Crawfords lost that first contest it solidified their reputation as a great ball team that could compete on the professional level. By 1931 even Cum Posey was recognizing the talent of the Crawfords by awarding two players from the 1931 squad to his All-American roster (the pitchers Satchel Paige and Sam Streeter, the duo that beat him that year.)⁴⁷ Also because it was a professional game, the teams got to split the gate receipts.⁴⁸ This gave the young Crawfords a taste of what it was like to be paid to play ball. A feeling that was to perpetuate their move from the sandlot to pro, and to the ownership of Gus Greenlee.

Gus bought the team for two reasons, one to give people in the Hill district their own team, and to keep himself in the spotlight. It was never forgotten whose team it was. As Cool Papa Bell remembered "We were called Gus Greenlee's Pittsburgh Crawfords."⁴⁹

Greenlee never did anything half-baked. First, he used \$100,000 of his own money to construct Greenlee Field, a 7,000 seat arena to be used not only for baseball, but for a

⁴⁷ *ibid.* 10/10/31

⁴⁸ However Cum Posey was not about to give a semi-pro club an even split of the gate. While no record exists for this particular game the split was usually 70-30.

⁴⁹ William Brashler, *Josh Gibson: A Life In the Negro Leagues*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p.178.

multitude of sporting events. This park and its construction was important for many reasons. Gus offered his own reasons for building the park in a letter to the Courier:

Having seen good colored teams visit Pittsburgh, following the Homestead Grays to Forbes Field and out of town points we inquired about the percentage to be divided at Forbes Field. We also noticed as the years past, the number of colored patrons increased. And above all we reckoned with the location of Forbes Field and relative disadvantage which our people had to undergo in reaching it. With these facts constantly before us, It followed quite naturally that a park more centrally located among Negroes would have better patronage.⁵⁰

It was the first park to be built by and owned by a black man, in a black neighborhood, for a black audience. As William G. Nunn also noted while giving some of the particulars of the field:

Pittsburgh has a new ball park, erected by a Negro, for Negroes, and with Negroes as participating factors. It is one of the finest independent ball parks in the country. With a left field longer than that at Forbes Field, and a right field which has yet to succumb to a home run wallop. It has a seating capacity of close to 7,000 people, it stands as a monument to progress.⁵¹

⁵⁰Pittsburgh Courier, 2/27/32

⁵¹ibid. 5/21/32

No longer did the Crawfords have to play at the poor fields offered to them by the city of Pittsburgh, and they did not, like many Negro league teams, have to rely on the white major league teams to get playing space. Also the accommodations at Greenlee Field were equal to that of the major league parks. This also included hiring blacks for the field in professions dominated by whites:

A report coming from headquarters of the Pittsburgh Crawfords carries the news that at least one colored umpire will be on duty at Greenlee Park for all home games. If no serious objections are raised they might employ two. It is also intimated that race umpires will be employed for road games.

This is welcome news to many players who have been forced out of the line up on account of age or ailment. It is encouraging also to fans who contend that Negro umpires are no worse than white umpires. It already had a tendency to stimulate interest in games where this policy is carried out.⁵²

Most of the white parks, including Forbes where the Grays played, would not allow blacks to dress in their locker rooms. The players had to get dressed across town and then travel to the park. Not so in Greenlee's field. Home and visitors alike had locker rooms equal to whites. Also by keeping the field right in the Hill it kept that local flavor to the team even though Greenlee was importing players from

⁵²ibid. 2/6/32

St. Louis to New York in order to make his Crawfords the best team in the nation.

The opening of Greenlee field was a gala event with the first pitch being thrown by Robert C. Vann, Pittsburgh attorney and founder of The Pittsburgh Courier as Chester L. Washington recounts:

All the color, glamour and picturesqueness that usually attends the opening of a big league ball park was in evidence as Goodsen's New York Black Yankees helped the popular Pittsburgh Crawfords dedicate the attractive Greenlee Park here Friday. Photos of both teams were taken...the band played...an impressive dedicatory speech was made by Attorney R.L. Vann, during which the spectators stood to pay homage to Gus Greenlee, builder of the park...⁵³

Also the park was immediately used for other sporting events, with a boxing match being scheduled for June first that year.⁵⁴ The park was also used for football and soccer, providing entertainment for another 27,000 people.⁵⁵ Finally, the park and its happenings in the community spawned a newspaper column, "Gleanings From Greenlee Field." The writers mission statement follows:

The column will comment on the happenings at Greenlee Park. With keen interest in the future of baseball in Pittsburgh, the editor intends to

⁵³ *ibid.* 5/7/32

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.* 4/15/33

criticize when that is deemed expedient and to commend when that appears proper.⁵⁶

By the beginning of the 1933 season, Greenlee field was "Pittsburgh's Sporting Center"⁵⁷ and by the opening of the 1934 season, Greenlee and the Crawfords had gained enough popularity that the first pitch was thrown out by the mayor of Pittsburgh.⁵⁸ This especially illustrates the broad class appeal of baseball. From dignitaries like Robert L. Vann and the Mayor, to the fans filling the bleachers, baseball was enjoyed by all.

Gus' next move was to make sure his team was the classiest team in the nation. He made sure that his team would travel in style. He bought a new Mack bus, custom painted with the teams name on the side, for all of their travel. While touring the country in a bus does not sound luxurious by today's standards, compared to other Negro teams, and some white minor league teams, it was the best way to travel. Most Negro teams had to travel by car from place to place, cramped together with other players and equipment. The Crawfords got plenty of room, and were even able to spread out and sleep on the bus. Also with the bus the team rolled into towns as a team, not in a collection of cars, an impressive sight for a Negro league team.

All that was left was for Gus Greenlee to do was to assemble a more competitive team. The sandlot team was

⁵⁶ibid. 6/11/32

⁵⁷ibid. 4/15/33

⁵⁸ibid. 5/19/34

great, but Gus wanted the best that the Negro Leagues had to offer. He raided almost every Negro league team in order to bring together one of the greatest teams of all time. The team was to be a who's who of black baseball. It would include five future Hall of Famers and many others deserving of that honor. Gus' first move was to get one of the greatest pitchers of all time, Leroy "Satchel" Paige in 1931.⁵⁹ Next he went across town to get the great Oscar Charleston as player-manager.⁶⁰ Also from the Grays he got power hitter extrodinare, Josh Gibson,⁶¹ and in 1933, the great third baseman, Judy Johnson. Gus next went to Detroit to get two of their greatest stars, James Cool Papa Bell for center field and Jimmy Crutchfield to round out his all-star outfield.⁶² The rest of the team was filled out with some of the locals from the sandlot days and greats like Ted Page and Sam Bankhead. Though the team would last only a short time, its exploits would become legend and its impact on the community would be remembered forever. While the team did not resemble the sandlot team it always had a link to its past even as late as 1934, as noted in the Courier, "The connecting link between the sandlot Crawfords and the present edition is found in Harry Beale. He will serve as road

⁵⁹ *ibid.* 8/8/31

⁶⁰ *ibid.* 1/23/32

⁶¹ *ibid.* 2/6/32

⁶² *ibid.* 3/18/33

secretary, which means that we should be well informed of what takes place while the champs are away from home."⁶³

By assembling such a great team, Gus Greenlee gave something to the community that only a great sports team could give. It gave the Hill a great feeling of pride. These men, who were the community's, went all over the country winning games in spectacular fashion. It brought a great measure of self esteem to the community to know that it was their team that was the greatest.

It was during this time that the Crawfords became famous across the country for their rough and gambling style of play. While all of the Negro league teams played a faster more exciting game than the white majors, the Crawfords were the best at it. As Brashler stated "Greenlee's Crawfords weren't the major leagues, but the baseball they exhibited rivaled the big time, and blacks everywhere knew it."⁶⁴ It was during this period that Josh Gibson hit a homer that some say went out of Yankee Stadium. It was during this time that Satchel Paige pitched no-hitters, sometimes without his fielders in the ninth inning. It is because of these incredible feats that the Crawfords had such an impact upon the community.

A Community to Themselves: The Team

Before looking at how the Crawfords helped the community and the nation in constructing and maintaining institutions

⁶³ *ibid.* 3/31/34

⁶⁴ Brashler, p.69.

and attitudes, it is important to illustrate how the team itself helped one another. How they themselves became a community. The long time spent on the bus going from town to town was time spent with each other. They played cards, talked ball, and generally cut up. Maurice Petross remembers times on the road and on the bus:

there were no trainers, your roommate was your trainer, your roommate was your doctor. You rubbed him, he rubbed you. Big old Coke bottles, everybody had one, rubbed each other. We used Sloan's liniment and Johnson's Baby Oil, one to relieve the pain the other for friction. You took care of each other. Again the neighborhood thing, you depended on each other, all you got is each other and our house, the bus!⁶⁵

Also Mr. Petross gives some insight as to how the legends of Negro League were passed on and remembered while traveling:

We got our information when we were at the back of the bus. Young guys back of the bus, keep your mouth shut, and try to learn something. We were allowed to sing, when there was singing, if you were in tune. Other than that sit down and shut up. We would hear them talk about these guys (like Judy Johnson) They talked about these players like they could have blown my head off if I'd seen them play.⁶⁶

When the Crawfords were at home in Pittsburgh, the wives and the players got together and had dinner with each other.

⁶⁵Maurice Petross, 9/4/94

⁶⁶ibid.

The families would get together for southern food and high times. This kind of activity created a sort of fraternity that was to last even after the team was broken up by trades and retirements and folding teams.⁶⁷

When Cool Papa Bell was asked about his career, it was the story of the Crawfords that remained the freshest in his mind.⁶⁸ Also during the existence of the team, the Crawford players lived and stayed in Pittsburgh, many in the Hill district where they played. They could be seen in Gus' Crawford Grill and with other black celebrities. They were strongly linked to musicians and boxers.⁶⁹ One interesting anecdote illustrating this strong link deals with the irrepressible Satchel Paige. Satch would at times get on stage with musicians at the Grill, and once decided to step into the ring with one of Gus' boxers. In less than one round the always moving Satch Paige was stilled. Maurice Petross also spoke of celebrity and being part of the community:

Hero. Hero was your identity. But your identity was worth more if you were closer to your baseball office than if you were, say shopping. Your out of character, out of place. People wanted to come to where your identified with, like the Crawford Grill. You are more accepted when you're where you are supposed to be. Teams back then, you were a homeboy usually. Chances

⁶⁷Brashler, 169-170.

⁶⁸Brashler, p.154

⁶⁹Bankes, p.104-105

were you'd marry a girl from where you played.
 So now your allegiance was there. "You're not
 taking my daughter..." loyalty is not there
 anymore.⁷⁰

The Crawfords also felt a responsibility like musicians and other entertainers to be people worthy of admiration. They were individuals that W.E.B. Dubois would have appreciated. As he stated blacks should be responsible, clean cut, church going, and hard working.⁷¹ With the exception of church going, the Crawfords fit the model. The players knew that they not only represented the community of Pittsburgh, but their race as well. By looking at their backgrounds, lives with and after the Crawfords, it will illustrate that even athletes are worthy of our admiration and that entertainment can be responsible to a race. The first man to be shown is the one with flying feet.

James Bell was born in Mississippi and when he was eight years old he and his family moved to St. Louis. By the time he was seventeen there was no doubt that he was a great ball player. In 1920 Rube Foster made him a part of his Chicago American Giants, and from there he continued to play baseball until he retired in 1944. It was in 1931 that he became a part of Greenlee's Crawfords, and even when he was finished with the game and settled back in St. Louis, it was the Crawfords he remembered most.⁷²

⁷⁰Maurice Petross, 9/4/94

⁷¹Dubois, p.394

⁷²Brashler, p.170

Cool Papa, the name which Rube Foster gave him and kept till his death in 1988, was the consummate professional. He always worked hard on the diamond, even though he made it look easy, and off the diamond he was a very good man. Unlike many of the Crawfords, he did not spend much time in bars, and even went to church. He also talked about how he would never refuse an autograph, and until demands got to be too great, he never refused an interview about his career and the Negro Leagues. When researching his book on Josh Gibson and the Negro leagues, William Brashler interviewed Cool Papa in his St. Louis home.⁷³ He did not have a harsh word to say about anybody, and when discussing his contemporaries he was full of praise. Even in the case of Satchel Paige, who he admitted was hard to deal with at times, Bell expressed a debt of gratitude for Paige and what he did for the Negro leagues. He stated that the leagues would not have been as successful without Satchel. Also during the Brashler interview, Bell described how he helped others in his community with financial loans and his time.

The touchy question of resentment toward white America for refusing him the right to play was handled with the same style he illustrated when stealing a base. While he wished that he could have played against and with whites, especially that Crawford team, he also said he did not hold a grudge against the majors and even after his induction to the Hall of Fame, he attended the induction ceremonies each year after

⁷³ *ibid.*

his induction stating that it was his responsibility and duty to the Hall to be there. The quiet, classy man called Cool Papa only be contrasted by the fire baller from Arkansas, Satchel Paige.

While some debate remains on when Satchel Paige was born, it is agreed upon that he was born and raised in Arkansas. Unlike many Negro league participants, Satch never migrated north in his younger days. He did not begin to move in the northern circles until he began playing baseball for the Kansas City Monarchs. He, like most players bounced around from team to team, looking for the best offer, and in Paige's case, the biggest spotlight.

The role that Satchel Paige played in the Negro leagues cannot be underestimated. This best illustrated by the article in the Courier that stated "Satchel Has Been 'Babe' to Colored Baseball."⁷⁴ He was a showman both on and off the field. Wherever he went, the excitement was sure to follow. His presence more than any other player insured that Gus Greenlee's Crawfords would be a hit. Satchel was outspoken about his talent and made sure all knew who the best pitcher in the league was. Even if the win-loss record did not show it, people poured out to see Paige pitch and to be Satchel Paige.

Satchel was the only Crawford to survive the rigors of baseball long enough to see time, though limited, in the major leagues. He pitched only a few years, but was still a

⁷⁴ Pittsburgh Courier, 1/12/35

ticket draw and was an important part of the 1948 Cleveland Indians World Championship.

However, what made Satch a great example and role model for the black community was that he exhibited a great amount of race pride. After his induction to the Hall of Fame, Paige commented on the fact that he did not get to play in the majors until the end of his career. He stated that if he, along with other great pitchers and players from the Negro leagues were allowed to play in the Majors many of the great white players, like Ruth, Gerhig, and Cobb would not have had as great statistics. Also pitchers like Matthewson, Alexander, and Feller would have been less impressive against such greats as Bell, Gibson, and Charleston. Satchel was always outspoken about prejudice, and like his playing days, he made a statement about it wherever he went until he passed away in 1986. The best way to remember Satchel Paige is the way Maurice Petross remembers him, "Satch was the best, case closed. I've seen them all from Satch on down to Nolan Ryan. Satch, period, case closed. Rack that one up."⁷⁵

The final player profile I would like to present that illustrates the best and worst of the Negro leagues is that of Josh Gibson. Josh emulated the idea of self-help by providing such a great role model of black Americans on and off the field during his playing days. He excelled abroad, became a national hero in Puerto Rico, but his life was

⁷⁵Maurice Petross, 9/4/94

tragic after baseball and from this tragedy the injustice of the racism in the major leagues can be seen more fully.

Josh Gibson was born in Georgia and like Cool Papa Bell and Gus Greenlee, he made the move north during the great migration. He and his family settled in Pittsburgh and like other Negro league stars he began playing baseball at an early age. By the time he was twenty-one he was playing professionally for the Homestead Grays. Being a local hero from the time he was a teen, Josh insured ticket sales whenever he played in Pittsburgh. That was why in 1931 Gus Greenlee worked hard to get Josh on his newly formed Crawford team. Josh complied and became the second half of one of the greatest batteries in history, Gibson and Paige. Unlike the flamboyant Paige, Josh was quiet, reserved, and let his great bat do his talking. That was enough to catapult him to legend. The stories of Josh Gibson's home run drives are bountiful. It was by this quiet manner and big stick that he became a national hero to the black community throughout the United States. People not only believed, but saw with their own eyes that this man was as great as Babe Ruth, and probably one of the greatest catchers of all time. This was especially evident in the case of Puerto Rico, where he became a celebrity. The people there adored him as a champion and in 1938 he was the Puerto Rican MVP and batting champion.

However all the accolades south of the border could never satisfy Josh. While he loved to play in the South

American leagues, he always felt cheated that he did not get to play in the major leagues. Some stories say that this resentment led to his increased drinking that led to his early death at the age of 43. While the stories of his death state that he died of a broken heart because he saw Joe Gargiola catch, it is true that the life he led after baseball, which was short, led to his death. Finally a player of his caliber would have never died penniless, a victim of a segregated society.

The Crawfords on the Field

In the 1932 season Greenlee could not gain admission to the Cum Posey controlled East-West League. Cum was upset by Greenlee moving in on his market and by stealing such players as Oscar Charleston and Josh Gibson. In regards to the East-West snub, Gus had this to say in an open letter to The Courier:

It is probably unfortunate that all of my conversations about the league were with Mr. Posey, who is now chairman of the league...as far as I know not a single offer(to join the league) was made in writing...First of all Posey wanted me to sign a five year contract with the league. In this contract he or his brother would manage the Crawfords. During that period the Crawfords were to have one or two high salaried players, while the remainder of the team was to be made up of inexperienced youngsters. In return our club would become an associate member of the league. Forty games was

the allotment for the Crawfords with colored teams...but Posey was not willing to even compare schedules. By refusing to open up and make it clear as to whether these games were on Mondays or Saturdays, he forced me to believe I was about to enter a trap from which there would be no escape...These are the main reasons why The Crawfords are not members of the East-West League. The idea as conceived by Mr. Posey was to never intended to include The Crawfords as league members. I am moving along, but I have a few scruples about means and methods. I could feel comfortable by having lies published that might gain an edge-which will be worth more in July than February. My understanding is that no money is involved in the East-West League. It is an understanding between a group of men, which is of course, all right if it ends right. I am willing to take the same chance that they are taking.⁷⁶

Instead of bowing to Cum Posey's demands, Greenlee took his team on the barnstorming circuit, and was very successful. The rivalry between Gus and Cum would continue, and would be as interesting as the games between the Grays and Crawfords. Maurice Petross lends some insight to both of these men and why they were often opposed to one another:

Cum could have been at West Point. Gus was like "Hey! let's party!" Two different worlds. One was blue collar, grind it out, take care of business, Kaboom. Bottom line, profit/loss, win/lose, what did we do? Gus was like "hey let's get it tomorrow." Two different worlds,

⁷⁶ibid. 2/27/32

the artist vs. the mill worker, the entrepreneur vs. the mill worker. They couldn't have gotten along together in heaven. And the ball clubs were the exact same way. The Crawfords were a bunch of rabble rousers, like the Oakland Raiders, as opposed to the Yankees. With the Grays that was the whole image, that was Cum. We are IBM, we are Wall Street, and they played that way, built on the image of Yankee power. The Crawfords were like the Cardinals, the Gas House Gang, wide open style.⁷⁷

The team also knew, for lack of a better word, they were great. Cool Papa Bell stated that:

There were many teams, The Crawfords were the best. I don't think there was a team better than the Crawfords. We could have played with any body. I just wish we had been given the chance.⁷⁸

The numbers, baseball's standard, bear this statement out. The 1932 season was especially impressive. By August, the starting pitching staff had assembled 34-6-2 record and the team had a .300 batting average.⁷⁹ The final statistics for the 1932 edition of the Crawfords is even more impressive. The team boasted eleven players over .300 in batting including Oscar Charleston's .363, Josh Gibson clouted 34 home runs in only 123 games⁸⁰. These are impressive statistics for any league.

⁷⁷Maurice Petross, 9/4/94

⁷⁸Bankes, p.3

⁷⁹Pittsburgh Courier, 8/23/32

⁸⁰ibid. 1/21/33

By 1933, the team was in the national spot light as R. Earl Johnson detailed in his brief history of the Crawfords stating that "the Pittsburgh Crawfords baseball club today is one of the leading colored teams in the country."⁸¹ The team championships of 1933 and 1935 were well documented as were many great individual performances including Satchel Paige's no-hitters, and the players exploits during the winter months in California and Puerto Rico.⁸² They knew that they were the cream of the crop and there was a great deal of pressure to be role models for the black community.⁸³ Unlike Charles Barkley, they did not shrink away from this duty. They knew that wherever they went they represented their team, their race and their community.

The Crawfords and the Community of Pittsburgh.

As stated Gus Greenlee was a great benefactor of the Hill and by giving the Crawfords the opportunity to go pro, it helped to give the neighborhood a much needed lift in the Depression. This was first a spiritual or self-esteem boost. With the construction of Greenlee Field the community saw top rated play in a top rated facility that was located within their own neighborhood. It was another illustration to black folk that black institutions could be equal to those of whites and remain in their own community. It helped to affirm the idea that this magnificent team belonged to the

⁸¹ *ibid.* 9/23/33

⁸² *ibid.* 9/28/35, 3/31/34, 7/7/34

⁸² Bankes, p.101.

community. Also in an economic sense the Crawfords helped by being affordable entertainment. This gave the people an important outlet from everyday life as Rob Ruck illustrates in his *Sandlot Seasons*:

Baseball provided the sort of entertainment that could transcend the social setting. Spectacular feats on the diamond, or even a close, well played game could temporarily transport the players and fans from the racial and economic realities of Pittsburgh to a place where what was happening before their eyes was all that mattered.⁸⁴

This reinforces the importance of the value of entertainment to community self-help. Not only did it let the people forget their hardships, it gave them a way to communicate. Even outside the stadium people could talk about a Satchel Paige fastball, a towering Gibson home run, or a Bell stolen base. These discussions of baseball were seen as important to John Clark as well:

Between the periods devoted to boxing, Avenue fans will discuss baseball, They have very little interest in basketball or soccer, but baseball is almost a part of their lives. Before the Crawfords are organized for 1933 there will be differing opinions about the outstanding players on last years team.⁸⁵

A community comes together through the feats of their heroes. By looking at the Pittsburgh Courier during these summer

⁸³ Ruck, p.59.

⁸⁵ Pittsburgh Courier, 12/12/31

months, it is strongly evident that this team was important to the community.⁸⁶ As Clarence Clark stated about the sandlot team, it was even more evident in the professional Crawfords "We watch every movement--they are ours." Further in bringing the community together, it helped to reduce class tensions:

through identification with teams and players, sport fostered a sense of pride in black Pittsburgh that often transcended divisions of migrant Pittsburgh and those of a different social class.⁸⁷

Sport was the great equalizer. Finally, as far as enhancing the attitude and pride of community, a look at contemporary cities offers a great example of this notion. As a sports team, especially baseball, becomes more successful the city itself is seen as more successful. The best example is the recent success of the Minnesota Twins and Atlanta Braves. While both teams were at their pinnacle, the national media expounded on the fact that the cities themselves were enjoying a great deal of success as well. It is not to say that Chicago will see a great rebound in 1993 because of all the Bull championships and White Sox success, but when a community has that pride, it internalizes it and makes their city a champion as well as their sports team.

What is important about the Crawfords being in the community is that it promoted economic activity in the

⁸⁶ibid, 9/15/34, 9/8/34

⁸⁷Ruck, p.3

district during game days. The Hill was bustling with activity when the Crawfords were in town, and this kind of stimulus was important. What should be remembered is that in their entire existence the Crawfords never made a profit for Gus Greenlee. This team was for publicity, but also it was for the community as well. The Crawfords gave back to the community not just as a business stimuli or spiritual means, but in concrete ways like playing benefits:

Gus Greenlee's fast-stepping Crawfords are going to give their patrons a real treat and at the same time help sweet charity, soon. On next Saturday evening, July 25, the lads who have stepped top the fore in big time baseball circles, will lock horns with the North Side Buicks in a benefit game for the Livingstone Memorial Hospital. Proceeds of the game will go to the Ladies Auxiliary of the hospital group, who are working diligently to raise funds.⁸⁸

Another benefit game was held for poorer citizens:

The Triangle Club, a group of Scottish Rite Masons are sponsoring a charity ball game at Greenlee Park...There are other hundreds of both men and women who have wished, but never had the opportunity to see professional ball teams play, who now have the chance of having their wish becoming reality.⁸⁹

Other examples of the Crawfords and Gus Greenlee helping out the community include novelty games between the 3rd and 5th

⁸⁸ibid. 7/18/31

⁸⁹ibid. 8/13/32

voting wards of Pittsburgh(Gus pitching in some of those)⁹⁰, community sings held at Greenlee Park⁹¹. The Crawfords even helped other communities, like a charity game they played against the Bacharach Giants in Columbus to help the NAACP defense fund.⁹² Gus also tried to get more women and young boys to attend games by giving them free admission on certain days of the week.⁹³ The players also took the time to care for the community:

Satchel Paige played hero in another way last Saturday, when one of those "fools" struck a small boy -and continued on his way. No Satchel did not attempt to overtake the driver, but he did rush the youngster to Passavant Hospital.⁹⁴

Looking at the community self-help model once again, the Crawfords were an institution that helped to improve the lives of the people that lived in that community. While the Crawfords were not making statements at City Hall, they were making statements on the diamond. More people could identify with those statements and the world of entertainment was just as important as the world of politics, not just in Pittsburgh, but in the nation as well.

An important part of self-help that came from Pittsburgh on a national level was the Crawfords themselves. As stated before this team knew that they were an extraordinary

⁹⁰ibid.

⁹¹ibid. 8/6/32

⁹²ibid. 7/21/34

⁹³ibid. 2/24/34

⁹⁴ibid. 10/27/34

collection of talent and they carried themselves in that manner. William Brashler stated "The Crawfords meant black pride long before it became cliché..."⁹⁵ Also as a white southerner stated "when the Crawfords came to town you knew it was an event, not just some monkeys to play, but the Crawfords."⁹⁶ Rolling up in that great Mack bus, dressed in coats and ties, the Crawfords looked like a major league team and what ever community they visited, they gave the black of that town a reason to be proud. The community knew that the Crawfords were as good as any team, especially a white team, and it gave blacks a sense of equality. However the Crawfords were only a small contribution made by Gus Greenlee to the national Negro baseball scene. His largest contributions were to begin in 1933 with the foundation of a new league and All-Star game.

The League and the All-Stars

While this paper focuses mainly on the Crawfords and their role in the community of Pittsburgh, the story would be incomplete if the teams impact on the nation and the actions of its owner, Gus Greenlee, were not included. By the end of the 1932 season, Gus knew that he had the best black baseball team in the country, perhaps the best team of any color. However the rest of the country's Negro league teams were not faring as well. 1932 saw the demise of the East-West League

⁹⁵ Brashler, p.154

⁹⁶ *ibid.* p.155

that Cum Posey controlled. Also, while the barnstorming circuit was good for some, like the Crawfords, it was dismal for others. If Negro baseball was going to be recognized and respected, it needed a stable league to present its great athletes. Again Greenlee stepped up to the plate to help, not just for Black Pittsburgh, but the entire American black community as well.

Greenlee was not motivated by pure altruism. He knew that any league he entered the Crawfords in would be dominated by the team and would be a showcase for him and his team. Also Gus Greenlee, Mr. Big, could not pass up the opportunity to bask in the national spotlight. However, like Rube Foster⁹⁷ before him, Gus knew the more stable the black leagues could become, the better the chance that white teams would recognize them, and hopefully accept them on their teams. The new Negro National League (NNL) consisted of six teams from Chicago, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Nashville, Detroit, and Columbus.⁹⁸ While the league would expand and shift throughout its existence, it would stabilize black baseball as no other Negro league had before. As Ruck states:

the new NNL broke new ground for black professional sport, achieving a measure of financial stability and public presence unprecedented for a black sporting venture, thanks mainly to its chief architect, prime

⁹⁷Rube Foster was the founder of the first Negro National League in 1920.

⁹⁸Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970), p.270.

innovator, and president the first five seasons, Gus Greenlee.⁹⁹

In the early part of 1933, Gus Greenlee got started on forming the new league as W. Rollo Wilson wrote:

I have before me a letter from Gus Greenlee advising that a meeting will be held in Chicago, Tuesday morning.

The purpose of this meeting is to sound out club owners, officials and fans on the subject of baseball in general and a baseball league in particular. I do not know who is going to be there, but I suppose that all of the owners East and West have been invited to attend.

If there is to be a league or an association- or more than one of them- then it must be constructed on a sane foundation and not reared on such a sandy bottom as that which could not support the weight of the East-West loop of 1932.

Negro baseball is at a low ebb and both owners and players must make sacrifices and more sacrifices to maintain it until such a time that the fans are again in funds and able to storm the ballyard ramparts they were wont to do in the yesteryears.¹⁰⁰

The idea for a new league was met with great, but guarded enthusiasm because of the trouble of past leagues. Also some of the remedies to assure success were seen as drastic.¹⁰¹ However, by February of that year Gus has gotten

⁹⁹Ruck, p.134

¹⁰⁰Pittsburgh Courier, 1/7/33

¹⁰¹ibid. 1/14/33

a core of western teams, including Indianapolis and Chicago, and was trying to move East:

Mr. Greenlee, who is determined to save the game, had gone East to see just what preliminary steps might be taken prior to the next meeting of league heads on February 15. The big-bodied man from Pittsburgh laid his cards on the table. The men in the West want the East as part of their loop, but in a manageable way. No every day league ball. No repeat long trips, No hard and fast salary rules. Mutual protection on territory, bookings, and players. That the West will do everything in its power to help the East get on its feet was indicated by Greenlee.¹⁰²

Much anticipation about the February 15th meeting was generated and writers from Pittsburgh wondered what Gus would do about key issues like umpires, managers, and most importantly the idea of a commissioner.¹⁰³

The February meeting was a success and by unanimous consent Gus Greenlee was named the first chairman of the new league. Also a constitution, another new item for league foundation, was adopted.¹⁰⁴ All was not peaches and cream for Gus' new project. Before play even got started, the league secretary, Bill "Dizzy" Radcliffe resigned.¹⁰⁵ This problem was solved quickly by Greenlee. He installed one of his henchmen, John L. Clark, Editor and writer for The

¹⁰² *ibid* 2/11/33

¹⁰³ *ibid*.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*. 2/25/33

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*. 3/18/33

Courier, for the job of league secretary.¹⁰⁶ This move solidified Pittsburgh, especially Gus' area of influence in Pittsburgh, as the center for organized Negro baseball.

However more problems would arise. The Indianapolis team folded before the half-way point of the season.¹⁰⁷ By the end of the season only three teams who originally met in January would finish the league schedule.¹⁰⁸

However, the biggest disappointment of that first year was in July when cross town rival, Cum Posey and his Homestead Grays, were expelled from the league.¹⁰⁹ Cum was caught trying to steal players from other teams. The decision to suspend the Grays only intensified the rivalry between Greenlee and Posey.

Immediately after the July ruling Posey insisted that "independent baseball was the only hope for survival"¹¹⁰ for his team and Negro baseball in general. He cited that he also had an obligation to independent teams around Pittsburgh and that the league was having trouble as his reasons for "leaving" the league. Posey was obviously bolting the league he helped to form in January because he had lost faith in the league.

John L. Clark, League and Pittsburgh Crawford Secretary, fired back that Posey was irresponsible and really only

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.* 7/15/33

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.* 5/20/33

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* 10/1/33

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* 7/8/33

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

wanted the control he enjoyed in the East-West League of 1932.¹¹¹ He concluded by stating that Posey was "incapable of cooperating" with the league.

Cum, not to be out dueled offered many more articles in the Pittsburgh Courier stating his case and attacking Greenlee, John Clark, and the league. He stated that the "Stars of yesteryear eclipse present day stars"¹¹² asserting that the new league and its players could not compete with the older leagues of the Rube Foster era. On July 29 Posey attacked Clark and said as long as Greenlee had men like him around the league, The Crawfords, Greenlee Field, and the league would suffer.¹¹³ Finally he said of Clark:

Also I have been asked who is Clark? Frankly, I do not know anything about Clark except he has been perfectly honest in my financial dealings with him, but I have come to this conclusion: He doesn't know anything, but knocks every enterprise of color, except those he can wheedle into then ruin. I cite the Pittsburgh American Newspaper and Third Ward Voters League among the casualties and I predict Greenlee Field if Clark stays on the job.¹¹⁴

He had this to say about Greenlee in the same article:

...his first interest is his own club, even then he is willing to make the necessary moves to

¹¹¹ *ibid.* 7/22/33

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.* 7/29/33

¹¹⁴ *ibid.* 8/5/33

place the League in the confidence of the public, but these moves could not be made when they were ignored or countermanded by one who thinks the baseball public of the world is his between Logan and Fullerton on Wylie Avenue. Efforts to ridicule the Grays ownership or to scare the Grays by threatening to take players is the only weapon that can be used. Why not forget the Grays and attempt to form a real organization?¹¹⁵

Posey did have solutions about what should be done to save the league. Namely, get rid of Greenlee and his associates:

There is one man in public life who is courageous enough to fight fire with fire, and big enough to command respect of the public when he is fighting for what is right. That man is R.L. Vann.

Get an Eastern association after the manner of the 1929 league with man like Rollo Wilson as president and secretary. get a Western association with Dr. Jackson of Nashville as president and Al Monroe of the Chicago Defender as secretary. Put R.L. Vann as commissioner over both associations...If there are colored clubs who will not join the associations, put them on a black list, keep them out of the colored press, and forget them. The writer has been named a league buster. That is wrong. We were in the Negro American League as long as it existed. We were the last to stick in the East-West League.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ibid.

¹¹⁶ibid. 8/12/33

Even though the two teams were at odds, that did not stop them from playing at the end of the season.¹¹⁷ Even in bitter disagreement, the two club owners knew what made money.

Despite all the troubles, the public welcomed the league and the felling for 1934 was one of optimism:

One of the favorite sayings of baseball owners, players, and fans along about now is "Well, wait until next year." It is the cry which arises when your club has failed to make the grade and your natural optimism asserts itself again.

"Next year" always brings something new and better to some few and always brings the stereotyped expression to the lips of the many along about this time.

*There must be changes in Organized Negro baseball next year and the writer has been told that there will be two leagues, where one has tried to exist this year. We are liable to get back to first principles and have circuits in the east and the west. It is no secret that Gus Greenlee, owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, carried a heavy burden this season in trying to keep the loop going at all, and this critic has nothing but praise for him-and sympathy, too, for Gus spent plenty of money for his efforts.*¹¹⁸

Much of this optimism for the 1934 season was generated by the event of the 1933 season, the East-West All-Star game. The East-West Classic was to be the crowning achievement of Black baseball and it came at a very opportune time in August

¹¹⁷ibid. 10/7/33

¹¹⁸ibid. 9/16/33

1933, when the new league was having trouble with Posey, the Eastern clubs, and teams folding up or dropping out.¹¹⁹

As league chairman, Gus wanted to showcase the players and drum up support for the new league. The best way to do so was through an all-star game. The Negro League All-Star game began in 1933 and lasted to 1950. It was to be a match up of two teams, East and West, taken from all across the Negro leagues; not just the new NNL but from all teams throughout the country. A very big draw of the game was that it incorporated two very important Negro institutions, the Pittsburgh Courier and Chicago Defender, by using the newspapers to distribute ballots across the nation for the player selection.¹²⁰ The selection process showed the fans enthusiasm for the game as do the vote counts. In the East the Crawfords did well in the voting, with Sam Streeter getting the most votes at pitcher, 28,989, and Oscar Charleston recieving the highest vote total, 43,793, for first base. But many other teams did well, including the Homestead Grays, who had the most popular outfielder, Vic Harris, who recieved 28,385 votes. In the West, the Chicago American Giants dominated, including the top vote getter in the West, George Foster an pitcher, who gathered 40,637 votes.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ibid. 8/12/33

¹²⁰ibid. 8/5/33

¹²¹ibid. 9/9/33

The game was to be played in Chicago's Cominskey Park. The inaugural game in 1933 drew 20,000 fans, as many as the major league all-star game played in Chicago earlier that year.

1934 started with preliminary meetings in Pittsburgh, specifically the Crawford Grill, the unofficial hub of the league.¹²² Gaining a stronghold in the East was again a large issue and "to promote progress for Negro baseball all over the country."¹²³ Even Cum Posey was invited to these meetings, illustrating Gus' commitment to have the best teams possible in the league.¹²⁴ The importance of the East was illustrate even more by the decision to hold the next session of meetings in Philadelphia.¹²⁵

By the beginning of the 1934 season the East was solid and committed to league play as its own division. Also one of Cum Posey's suggestions was taken up by the league. W. Rollo Wilson, Pittsburgh newspaper man, was named "the Judge Landis of Negro baseball."¹²⁶ Also at this time schedules were drawn up and the Homestead Grays were admitted as associate members.

However, pleasing Posey would again be difficult as it was in 1933. Before a game was played in 1934 Cum was attacking the league for its policies and, as he saw it, special treatment of the Crawfords.

¹²²ibid. 1/6/34, 1/13/34

¹²³ibid.

¹²⁴ibid. 1/20/34

¹²⁵ibid. 1/27/34, 2/10/34

¹²⁶ibid. 3/15/34

In March of 1934 W. Rollo Wilson ruled that two players who were signed by the Grays in 1933 could report to the Crawfords in 1934 because Gus had extended them a contract before Cum. Cum was outraged by Wilson's decision that Leroy Morney and Vic Harris could play for the Crawfords and that the Grays had no legal right to them.¹²⁷ Cum further vented his anger in a April column:

The decision given by W.Rollo Wilson, by which he gave Morney and Harris to the Pittsburgh Crawfords, was one of the things which causes players to continually take advantage of other owners and causes the public to lose interest in baseball. The fact remains that the present Commissioner is not in the same position of Judge Landis. Judge Landis is not subservient to any club owners.¹²⁸

By June the Grays were again on their way out of the league. John Clark again asserted that Posey lacked respect for anything he could not control:

But Posey does things just that way. He might feel that his prestige is lowered to seek information from the proper source or tell all phases of a story. Only a man of regular habits can be expected to do things in a regular way. Posey is not that kind of fellow. About the only act which he performs as a "regular" is to throw mud at everything that he cannot control and compliment people he intends to use. In

¹²⁷ibid. 3/31/34

¹²⁸ibid. 4/7/34

this conduct he can be depended upon as "regular."¹²⁹

As always, Posey struck back with full force:

It seems the secretary of the Negro National Association will not let well enough alone. All articles written before by the writer were based on facts. Clark does not know facts; he is an ultra-theorist and resorts to personalities to cover his short comings.

Clark is a hindrance to the league. His interests are entirely centered on the advancement of the Pittsburgh Crawfords.¹³⁰

And this row was so heated between the two clubs that Posey canceled a sure money maker in August of that year, A Crawford-Grays series, just to get even with his rivals.¹³¹

Even though Posey gave the league fits for the second straight season, the league finished strong, with all its members. The league even had a post season which was won by the Crawfords.

1934 also saw the return of the East-West All-Star game, despite Posey's opposition:

Down on the Avenue they are trying to thresh out the angle which Cum Posey has seen fit to inject. The fiery Homestead manager does not want his team entered in the voting because he is not financially interested.¹³²

¹²⁹ *ibid.* 6/9/34

¹³⁰ *ibid.* 6/16/34

¹³¹ *ibid.* 8/18/34

¹³² *ibid.* 8/4/34

The game was again a success and becoming a national institution for the Negro community. John Clark related his experience at the 1934 All-Star game, illustrating the importance of the game:

The game itself was more than just a ball game. It was more than a promotion by three individuals. It was a most commendable effort to prove that Negro baseball is on the up-climb, because talent such as was shown at Cominskey Park can be developed every year -if Negroes can be induced to support teams in their respective cities.

The game answered the wailing of the small group of half baked critics, who wasted time and energy to keep players out of the voting-and prayed to a public to stay home while the cream of Negro baseball paraded before twenty thousand enthusiastic people. The game opened the eyes of the white man to see a promotion of such proportions directed by Negroes to a successful end.¹³³

Maurice Petross also details the importance of the game in the Negro community:

It was in the black community's mind, nationwide, it was the super bowl. It was a one shot deal. That's where you got to see everybody. Which means you started saving after Christmas for the train fare to Chicago. You had friends or relatives in Chicago get tickets, did not matter where the seats were. The big thing was being there, because this is where

¹³³ibid. 9/8/34

you're going to see everybody in their own uniforms which made it look spectacular.¹³⁴

By 1935 the league was on solid footing. Gus was recognized as the important wheel in its establishment especially through his organizational and financial aid. As Chester Washington wrote:

Outstanding among these men who have done much to try to bring baseball back into its place in the sun which it occupied in the days of the immortal Rube Foster and C.I. Taylor, has been W.A. "Gus" Greenlee, chairman of the association. Greenlee has dug deeply into his own pockets to help promote the cause of organization in Negro baseball and in many instances saved the league from literally "going up in smoke" by his own unselfishness. "Gus" has traveled countless miles on his own resources in order to help make a real, substantial organization. Greenlee's record of personal sacrifices for a worthy goal is well worthy of emulation by other owners of Association clubs. One evidence of their appreciation will in all probability be shown in Philly this week end when they re-elect "Gus" as chairman.¹³⁵

Even Cum Posey had seen the benefits of the league, especially of the lucrative East-West Game. He congratulated Gus for his efforts, while never saying he was wrong:

¹³⁴Maurice Petross, 9/4/94

¹³⁵Pittsburgh Courier, 3/9/35

The writer considered it a privilege in 1933 and 1934 to criticize this game, as it was a progressive idea for the benefit of individuals. The constructive criticism handed down by Cum Posey in The Pittsburgh Courier evidently had its effect.

The 1935 Negro National League is the first league since 1929 which has played their games as prearranged at the schedule meetings. The Negro National Association will exist with the help of the East-West Game, but the proceeds of the East-West Game will help give the players the added confidence to continue as regular players of the Negro National League.¹³⁶

The league would last until 1950, which was the final year for Negro baseball and was the training ground for future major league greats like Jackie Robinson, Larry Doby, Roy Campanella, and Don Newcombe.

What is also important about the league is that it was largely autonomous from white help and white control. Later on when Philadelphia and Kansas City were added to the league roster whites had some say as owners, but no whites were involved in scheduling or governing of the league.

Both the NNL and the All-Star game were means of self-help and self-pride to the nation as a whole. The league illustrated a stability in Negro baseball that had not been seen before. It rivaled the major league in excitement and exhibited just as exciting pennant races, and gave its fans thrilling championship series. Also by providing such a

¹³⁶ibid. 7/27/35

stable financial structure, it was an institution that helped to maintain black sport in America during a time when black entertainment needed as much stability as it could get. While the league was largely run with racketeering dollars, it should not take away from the efforts these people were doing on behalf of the black community. The money was being put to good use, and was largely supplied by the black community itself.

The East-West All-Star game would have great attendance every year from 1933-1950.¹³⁷ These great numbers year in and year out dispelled the myth that black baseball could not draw substantial crowds, and that blacks in the majors would hurt attendance. Also the East-West game was a great source of black pride throughout the nation. By drawing such a large crowd of people and exhibiting fantastic baseball, blacks could show the country that they were equal to the exploits of whites on the diamond. It illustrated the ability of baseball, and entertainment to cut across class lines and help build a stronger identity. Also it gave blacks professional athletes they could identify with, who were as good as the more celebrated white ball players of the period. It is ironic that blacks could play in white parks, like Cominskey and Forbes, attend white games, though sometimes segregated seating, and even play against whites, but could not play with them on the same team.

¹³⁷ Except for 1946. for some reason that year attendance dropped drastically. However 1947 saw a return to great attendance.

What is important about the NNL and All-Star Game that Gus Greenlee formed is that even after he resigned as league president in 1939, the league and the game continued and thrived. This is a very key element to self-help efforts, longevity. While it is great to help the community, what really is needed to build a cohesive community is institutions that are permanent, things that people can look to and know they can rely on to be there. This is what the NNL and All-Star game were, steady traditions within the black community that could be counted on as entertainment, and to relieve themselves from the rigor of everyday life. Like baseball in the rest of society, it became a tradition within the black community that was just as important as the efforts of the Urban League. Bearyard Mosely, in a 1910 harbinger of the 1933 NNL stated what the NNL needed to be and what its goals were in his statement of purpose for a proposed black league:

Negroes are already forced out of the game from a national standpoint and finding it difficult to play with whites on a racial level too...presages of the day when there will be no opponent for Negro players except when the Negro comes to his own rescue by organizing and patronizing the game successfully, which would of itself force recognition from whites. Let those who would save the race and assist it in holding it back up organize an effort to secure the best league of players possible.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Spear, p.117

The Record Against Whites

An important part of the whole self-help process that was the entire Negro leagues, not just the Crawfords, was the black teams success against white teams. Even though these teams rose up from fewer resources than the white teams, they proved to be their equal if not superior. In 436 interracial games, blacks won 268, whites 168, roughly a .614 winning percentage.¹³⁹ Clearly these were some good and even excellent players. This success with their white opponents not only sped up the integration process but demonstrated that the myth that blacks could not play with whites on the same field was absurd. Some vivid examples of Black versus White teams, especially the Crawfords, illustrate the success blacks had:

Facing Dizzy Dean, World Series pitching star, for three innings, the Pittsburgh Crawfords, national colored baseball champions, defeated the Cleveland Rosenblums 4 to 1 in an exhibition game. Satchel Paige, Crawford mound star struck out 13 men in six innings allowing no hits...

Despite the big bats of Hack Wilson, English, Todd and the strong arms of Larry French, Swift, Parmalee, and the rest, the Pittsburgh Crawfords won two games from the National League All-Stars

¹³⁹John B. Holway, *Black Diamonds. Life in the Negro League from the Men Who Lived It*, (Westport CT: Meckler Books, 1989), p.xiii

and made the series count five games won to two lost by the big leaguers.¹⁴⁰

Many other stories attest to the fact that the major leaguers were playing at their best when they went up against black teams. There are the statements made by Dizzy Dean that the best game he ever pitched in was when he and Satchel Paige went nine scoreless innings only to be defeated 1-0 in the tenth. Then there is the classic game in which the Crawfords played a major league All-Star team in Mexico City in 1935. The major league team consisted of such greats as Jimmie Foxx, Rogers Hornsby, Heine Manush, Pink Higgins, and Earl Whitehill. The game was called because of darkness and resulted in a 6-6 tie. However players on both sides agree that there was enough light to decide the game. Another great example of major league respect for the Negro leagues comes from the great Joe DiMaggio, then playing on the west coast. Dimaggio said "Now I know that I can hit in the major leagues. I finally got a scratch single(1-5) off of Satchel Paige."¹⁴¹

In addition to just playing against black teams, many players spoke out against the color bar and would have liked to see the ban lifted. These players included John McGraw, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Frank Frisch, and Herb Pennock.¹⁴² Also many owners of white teams stated that black ball

¹⁴⁰Pittsburgh Courier, 10/27/34, 10/8/32

¹⁴¹ Andrew Young, *Great Negro Baseball Stars*, (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1955), p.83.

¹⁴²Pittsburgh Courier, 3/3/34, 8/19/33, 3/11/33, 3/18/33, and 4/1/33.

players could play in the Majors. William E. Benswagner, owner of the Pittsburgh Pirates said of the Negro National League players, they were "Worthy of The Highest In Baseball."¹⁴³ However these owners balked at the idea of actually putting Negroes on teams and many asserted the same "concerns" as Bob Newhill, a radio personality from Cincinnati, did in this letter:

Basically, it is unfair to bar colored players from Organized Baseball, but you as an intelligent man, must admit the impossibility of their playing, with conditions as they are present.

It is unfair-but a scattering of colored players in professional baseball would cause riots, bloodshed and great bitterness. The colored players would suffer quite as much from this as whites; in fact more so, with many white players antagonistic and the fans, especially in the South, even more so.

Under the law, your race has a legal right to a fair deal in everything, and yet you know as well as I that you cannot get a fair deal. The victory of Jack Johnson over Jefferies caused more bitterness than any other incident. It's mighty tough, I know, but what remedy is there?¹⁴⁴

Also John A. Heydler, then President of the National League, stated "Beyond the fundamental requirement that a Major League player must have unique ability and good character and

¹⁴³ *ibid.* 3/4/33

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*

habits, I do not recall one instance where race, creed, or color to enter into the question of the selection of players."¹⁴⁵ This implies that black ball players did not have the "character" to be in the Majors. However, Ty Cobb, who beat a handicapped fan, Hal Chase, and the 1919 Black Sox some how did possess that character.

The integration of baseball would lead to the integration of other institutions once restricted to blacks. While the breaking of the color bar was a small step in the civil rights movement in a literal sense, it was huge in a symbolic sense. It was important because it got the ball rolling and because it took place in an American institution that everyone could identify with, baseball.

Some criticisms of the talent level of black baseball have stated opinions why blacks did so well against white teams. The first was that black teams were not facing all the best white players, that there were a few big names, the rest journeyman. However the same holds for whites. All of the greatest Negro league players did not come together for 436 games versus white major leaguers. That notion is absurd. Also the idea that blacks did not play at the same level as whites in NNL games because of lack of talent can also be asked of the white leagues. If one fifth of the population is excluded from a sporting activity, it seems obvious that a dilution of talent would occur in the major leagues as well.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.* 2/25/33

Many critics try to claim that the white teams did not play up to the same level as blacks because these games were exhibitions. While it is true that the black teams had something to prove, the white teams were comprised of professionals who did not intend to lose face. This was a time when ball players were heroes, and heroes did not like to lose. Also it was not just a point to prove to white America, it was a chance to show pride in themselves and gave the black community pride as well as Edgar Wideman, Pittsburgh native states:

In black baseball, the best black athletes not only "put on a good show" competing against each other but "beat the stuffing" out of their white contemporaries. Even when a black team didn't win it could produce, in the folk, stories that are better than winning, in which exploits get exaggerated and fabled...all this was very important, particularly at a time in America when race relations were at their nadir.¹⁴⁶

Mal Goode adds:

Sport was segregated in those days, but when you found blacks playing white teams, our pride was showing. It had to be. There was so much negative living that we had to do, over which we had no control. Anything that we could hang on to from the standpoint of pride, it was there and it showed.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶Ruck, p.x

¹⁴⁷ibid. p.xi

A more aggressive pride was illustrated by Bailey in Gloria Nylon's *Bailey's Cafe*:

I didn't question why Negroes had separate teams. Watching their games and white games, it was pretty clear to me. The Negroes were better players. And just like us at school, who wanted to team up with the pee-pants who had snot running out their noses? No, winners stay with winners. But they could have been a little more fair-minded and let the likes of Honus Wagner or Ty Cobb on their teams.¹⁴⁸

Combined with the fact that blacks did have something to prove, the main reason why blacks won more games is that they played a different style of baseball. In contrast to the 1930-1940 era of home run hitting reliance, the Ruthian Era of the major leagues, the Negro leagues were dominated by a faster, more sporadic style of ball. Base running, quick defense, and punch hitting were all the norm in Negro baseball. When opposed by the slower, waiting style of the majors, the Negro style would usually come out ahead. The main reason for this is because the black style produced runs while the majors style waited for runs.

From the contributions of Gus Greenlee to the stellar play of blacks versus their white major league counterparts, and especially the Crawfords, help establish a stronger sense of racial identity, pride, and unity. Because the NNL was such a strong institution in the black community, it helped

¹⁴⁸Gloria Naylor, *Bailey's Cafe*, (New York: Vintage Contemporaries Vintage Books, 1992), p.9

to end segregation in the majors and to begin to eliminate discrimination elsewhere. It is through such avenues as sport and entertainment that people who are marginalized can be brought into the mainstream. In these two areas, performance is what counts, not skin color. While it may be contested, and rightly so, that people are still marginalized off the field and stage, these are areas that can become inroads, beginnings. While other institutions help the black community and pushed the agenda of civil rights, baseball helped in a small way on the social scale, but proved to be of great importance on the symbolic scale.

What is also important to remember is that in Pittsburgh as well as the nation, baseball and other entertainment allowed people to forget the rigors of the rest of the world while they were at the game. During the Depression this was an important function of self-help. Like the major leagues, the NNL was entertainment that was affordable to almost everyone. It provided an outlet that was sorely needed by the community. And while much of its resources came from organized crime, it has been demonstrated that much of the money made its way back to the community. Finally the institutions of black baseball were long lasting and served a great purpose even after their founder, Gus Greenlee, and his team, was out of baseball.

The Latin Link: The Demise of the Crawfords

All throughout the early twentieth century, Latin America provided an opportunity for United States players to

stay in shape and earn some extra money during the winter months. Whites and blacks alike would make the trip south of the boarder and compete against the best teams of the local area such as Venezuela, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico. The game was just as exciting as up north, if not more so because of the nationalism that was tied to many of the games by the fans and players. The Latin game did not have the color bar like the American one and it illustrated even more fully that the idea that blacks could not play with whites was completely false.

Latin America offered a freedom from Jim Crow that was a tremendous experience for the black players who visited there over the winter season. They could live wherever they wanted to, eat wherever they wanted, and were appreciated by the entire population both on and off the field. They were given the respect due to them, the respect that they never received in their own country. It is no small wonder that when in the spring of 1937, the president of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo, offered many of the Crawfords a chance to play for his island team that they jumped at the chance. Not only was the idea of being away from segregation appealing, but the accommodations were nicer, and more importantly the money was greater. Paige, Gibson, Bell, Johnson, and five other Crawfords jumped to Santo Domingo for the 1937 season.¹⁴⁹ The locale was different, but the results were the

¹⁴⁹Pittsburgh Courier, 5/1/37, 5/15/37, 5/29/37

same. The Trujillo All-Stars, with the addition of the Crawfords, were champions in 1937-1938.

This exodus from Pittsburgh in 1937 left the team decimated. Only left with an aging Oscar Charleston, the Crawfords finished second to last that season. Also Greenlee had lost some of his political ties earlier that year at election time and his numbers business was being raided more frequently. The police and the Depression were taking its toll on Greenlee. Also Charles, Gus' son, explained that his father always liked to do something new.¹⁵⁰ Since the Crawfords had become a success, Gus ventured into the fight game as well as other sporting interests. Also the Crawford Grill was having hard times. It was probably a blessing for Gus that in 1938 the Crawfords were gone because, as great as they were they never turned a profit for Greenlee. In 1939 Gus Greenlee resigned as chairman of the NNL, severing all ties with baseball to concentrate on his business ventures. With that action the Pittsburgh Crawfords and their flashy owner, Gus Greenlee were out of baseball.

Conclusion

While they lasted only a brief time, the Pittsburgh Crawfords had a huge impact on their local community and the national community as well. By exhibiting such incredible skill they helped to uplift a community during hard times and through the actions of their owner, Gus Greenlee, established institutions that were to last throughout the time of Jim

¹⁵⁰Ruck, p.162

Crow baseball. The Crawfords were the class of a great league and their numbers speak for themselves. However their impact on the national level is only now being recognized. By rising from a local collection of young boys to become the premier baseball team of their day, it gave the people of the Hill a sense of hope in themselves and their community. "Just as experience at work and in the community shaped black Pittsburgh's conscienceness of itself, so too did its sporting life."¹⁵¹ The Crawfords were one team of many in the Negro Leagues. The impact of teams in other communities, like Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago, needs to be investigated to give a better picture of what baseball meant to the Black community of the United States. The role of women, especially Effa Manely and her Newark Eagles, needs to be discussed to find the role of women in Negro League baseball, and in Negro sports in general.

What is also important to remember is that these contributions were from non-mainstream sources. A racketeer and ball players are not what one normally associates with the self-help process. However it must be remembered that society and groups marginalized did not, and do not always find unity in political or religious settings. Leisure time is an important part of the community building process. Just as important as the foundation of organizations, the building of churches, and success of businesses. What people do outside of work, out of politics, must be studied and

¹⁵¹ibid. p.6

analyzed for its contribution to the self-help process. This thesis has tried to offer a new, more complete definition of community self-help, and has brought new players, namely entertainers and sports figures, into the discussion of self-help and community building. While only a beginning, this thesis' contribution to the dicussion of community building and self-help should be a valuable asset to those investigating the importance of sport to a community. It is only by seeing what people do to relieve the tension of everyday that we can begin to understand what makes the community care about its institutions, organizations and one another.

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