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Beyond the Sports Page: Baseball, The Cuban Revolution, and Rochester, New York Newspapers, 1954-1960

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Kinesiology

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**BEYOND THE SPORTS PAGE:
BASEBALL, THE CUBAN REVOLUTION, AND ROCHESTER, NEW YORK NEWSPAPERS, 1954-
1960**

Monograph

by

Evan Nagel

Graduate Program in Faculty of Health Sciences: School of Kinesiology

**A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Arts**

**The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada**

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Abstract

In the 1950s, the Caribbean island of Cuba underwent a series of emphatic and revolutionary changes, culminating in Fidel Castro's regime coming to power in early 1959. A year later, relations between the Cuban government and their American counterpart had deteriorated rapidly to the point of rhetoric, economic sanctions, and covert military actions. Yet, both nations laid claim to the same national pastime: the sport of baseball. Since the 1860s, America's game of choice had been played passionately by Cubans, helping facilitate their social assimilation into the U.S. economic sphere. There was arguably a cultural sporting bridge between the two nations, and during the Cuban Revolution this relationship was arguably at its most important stage. In fact, the Havana Sugar Kings played in the highest tier of minor league baseball, the International League, from 1954 to 1960. By examining local newspapers from Rochester, New York, another IL city, this study portrays how this shared pastime impacted American front section media coverage about their southern island neighbor during the Cuban Revolution.

Frequently Used Terms Page

IL-International League

D & C- Democrat and Chronicle

T-U- Rochester Times-Union

MLB- Major League Baseball

NLB-Negro League Baseball

OB- Organized Baseball

CWL-Cuban Winter League

AP- Associated Press

UPI-United Press International

FIL-Florida International League

M-26-7- 26th of July Movement.

DR- Directorio Revolucionario

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Chapter 1

From the Straits to the Lake¹

“The Cubans were such a slick and speedy ball club, and so colorful . . . but I guessed they were just a little too hot-blooded, as a people, to play in the International League . . . O those crazy Cubans!” - Howard Senzel²

Introduction

When you look at Rochester, New York on a map, it seems about as far from the tropical Caribbean and Castro’s unique brand of communism as one can get. I should know, I was born there. Januarys of bitter cold, the wind whipping in off Lake Ontario, a collection of upper middle class suburbs surrounding a large capitalist metropolitan area where votes carry more weight than the punch of an AK-47, Rochester, Havana is clearly not. But, in the 1950s these two communities were linked to one another through the All-American institution of Triple AAA baseball. The Rochester Red Wings have a long and extensive history with the sport. The city’s professional diamond legacy itself dates back to 1886 and the founding of the International League (hereafter referred to as IL) and the Rochester Maroons.³ In addition, baseball has been

¹ The Straits of Florida is a body of water which separates Cuba from the mainland United States. Lake Ontario separates Southern Ontario from Western New York.

² Howard Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War: Being a Soliloquy on the Necessity of Baseball* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977). Senzel, a graduate of Brighton High School (my alma mater), was an avid Rochester Red Wings fan during the time period of this study. After graduating from college, he returned to his hometown searching for why those “Crazy Cubans” were forcibly removed from the International League, and rediscovering the role baseball played in his childhood along the way.

³ Jim Mandelaro and Scott Pitoniak, *Silver Seasons and a New Frontier: The Story of the Rochester Red Wings* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010). Other minor league teams Rochester fielded between 1886 and 1928 (many times it was the same franchise under a different name) include: the Jingoos, Broncos, Hop Bitters, Flour Cities, Browns, Blackbirds, Brownies, Patriots, Bronchos, Hustlers, Colts, and Tribe.

well documented in Cuba, both historically and sociologically, in the national narrative since the 19th century, including the IL Havana Sugar Kings, whose brief existence began in 1954.⁴

Both cities, Rochester and Havana, shared the IL spotlight together from 1954-1960. Frequently, baseball reporters from both Flower City (Rochester's nickname) dailies, *The Democrat & Chronicle* and the *Rochester Times-Union*, made the trip south to the Cuban capital to cover games between their hometown Red Wings and Havana's Sugar Kings. However, AAA baseball was not the extent of newsworthy events in Havana. From 1953-1959 revolutionaries of the 26th of July movement under the command of Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz, waged a campaign across Cuba. Needless to say, the paths of rebellion and baseball aligned before the eyes of beat-writers George Beahon and Al C. Weber, and on the front pages of their respective newspapers. The cross-hairs of a lens embellishing baseball and a revolution featured outside the sporting pages is the examination herein pursued.

From 1954 to 1960 the IL "truly" featured international baseball. During that period, franchises located in three countries were members: the United States, Canada, and Cuba. The Havana Sugar Kings, formed during American-patronized President Fulgencio Batista's reign, were an anomaly in the history of baseball. Though affiliated with American professional clubs and featuring numerous American players, the franchise, for all intents and purposes, was a Cuban production. The club, padded with Cuban baseball veterans such as Rafael Noble and Angel Scull, was owned by Havana businessman Roberto "Bobby" Maduro. The nation's leaders treated the Sugar Kings with great deference. For instance, Batista kept the "Cuban Mafia" from extorting money from the club. Later, Fidel Castro's communist regime allowed

⁴ Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). The island had been a scouting outpost for the Washington Senators Major League Baseball franchise since the turn of the 20th century. The Sugar Kings were also not the first "organized baseball" franchise in the capital city, the Havana Cubans of the Class C Florida International League, existed from 1946 through 1953.

Maduro to remain in operation even though many American enterprises were seized and “nationalized” by the Revolutionary government.⁵ Castro, an avid baseball fan and mythologized former player, allocated funds for games to be broadcast on the national radio station as one measure to keep the Kings financially stable. However, in midsummer of 1960, the team departed Cuba and moved to Jersey City, New Jersey due to increasing pressure from the other IL club owners. Even though Havana won the 1959 league title over Minneapolis, AAA baseball under a Caribbean sun had set.⁶

Purpose of the Study

This study examines how Rochester’s local newspaper coverage of minor league baseball factored into its overall portrayal of the Cuban Revolution. By examining the archives of the *Democrat & Chronicle* (hereafter referred to as *D & C*) and the *Rochester Times-Union* (hereafter referred to as *T-U*), I address the following question:

Was the local newspaper reporting sympathetic or critical of Cuba’s move towards Castro and eventual communism, and how did baseball coverage factor into this reporting outside of the sports section?

Literature Review

The concept of baseball serving as a cultural Bridge between the American “North” and the “Pearl of the Antilles” has arguably been present ever since the game was brought to Cuba by “university students returning from the United States sometime in 1865 or 1866.”⁷ This alleged transnational sporting dynamic is examined more thoroughly in the study proper, specifically in

⁵ However, Batista did not spend any money on the club himself.

⁶ Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Rory Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*, <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/c34ce106>

⁷ Thomas F. Carter, *The Quality of Home Runs: The Passion, Politics, and Language of Cuban Baseball* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

Chapter 2. However, a brief chronological introduction to its presence is necessary to understand the information and arguments it precedes. In addition it will help to establish how intrinsically intertwined the two countries' cultures are, especially via America's pastime.

As Louis Pérez Jr.'s excellent magnum opus *On Becoming Cuban* poses: "There has always been a temptation to address these issues (the Cuban-North American connection) separately in monographic form . . . Protestant missionaries, or tourism, or baseball and boxing . . . But such an approach seemed incapable of yielding the desired outcome: names, to understand the context and complexity of these linkages as a totality, as a system."⁸ To attempt a study, especially from the Cuban viewpoint on a singular issue of this complex transnational relationship, fails to provide readers with the tools to understand the "totality" of this dynamic. Pérez Jr. feels that the "objective is to examine the relationship between . . . baseball and national identity, Protestant missionaries and revolution . . . how, in short, these and other factors contributed to arranging the terms by which nationality in Cuba assumed a distinctive form."⁹ Based on this insightful assumption, my background section attempts to convey some of that cohesive whole or "strands of a web." However, it focuses on baseball's role with a few of the other "strands" as I do not want to stray too far off topic. Also, no pun intended, but by condensing 579 pages into 8, important details may be lost in the translation.

While the history of pre-revolutionary baseball on the island (1860s-1959) is extensive and detailed in both English and Spanish, there are, for this study's purposes, three distinct time periods to be covered. I briefly examine the first two here and the third extensively later in its own separate chapter. The first such period spans from the arrival of baseball to Cuba's shores in the mid-1860s to the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898. As several Cuban historians,

⁸ Louis A. Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 5. Parenthesis mine.

⁹ Ibid.

sporting and otherwise, have attested, baseball became embedded in the local populace partially because it represented America or the concept of a “modern” nation. Pérez states: “But it was baseball that took hold most firmly. Cubans were introduced to sport at a critical moment in the formation of national identity, assembling the elements on which to base a separate nationality.”¹⁰ Until the late 1860s, coinciding with baseball’s Antilles importation, Pérez argued that a Cuban nationalism for all intents and purposes did not exist, though with help from American economic and cultural influence it had begun to take shape as early as 1819. This began to change as an increasing reliance on the United States for trade and tourism through much of the 1800s diluted dependence on both Spain and the colonial system as a whole.¹¹

At the close of the American Civil War, the strong economic and cultural relationship between the island and the “North” exploded, causing an irreparable economic rift with motherland Spain. More and more “Cubanos” realized that what benefited the Spanish crown went against their own best interests. Cuba, and by extension America, represented modernity; Spain illustrated backwards barbarism: “This . . . is not a war between Cubans and Spaniards, but between the past and the future, between a spirit that renovates and another that petrifies.”¹² Pérez records an account of a narrator who later commented: “And he naturally desired that this great civilization (United States) be channeled to Cuba, that Cuba would be free to introduce these customs.”¹³ As such, it was no surprise that the majority of rapidly-increasing Cuban independence movements received their funding and cultural philosophies from the United States.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., 75.

¹¹ Ibid., 17-24.

¹² Ibid., 86-87.

¹³ Ibid., 85. Parenthesis mine.

¹⁴ Ibid., 89-95

During the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, “the growing popularity of baseball in the United States coincided with years of mass (Cuban) immigration. Cubans could not ignore the sport that had captured the imagination of the North American public.”¹⁵ In fact, Thomas J. Carter quotes famed Cuban freedom fighter José Martí Pérez, who, while exiled in New York City, espoused: “In every neighbourhood there is a baseball game.”¹⁶ Just as baseball popularity drastically increased in the 1860s and 1870s in the United States, a similar wave struck Cuba with the arrival of returning students and hopeful revolutionaries such as Martí.¹⁷

Baseball spread rapidly from Havana to the eastern rural provinces, with almost every town having at least one team. In fact, at least 200 teams are confirmed to have been formed during the 1880s. Six thousand fans attended the national championship in 1886, though this figure dropped slightly to four thousand two years later. American clubs also began barnstorming tours around the island in the 1880s. The Rochester (New York) Hop Bitters were the first such “Yanqui” team. In 1881 they arrived in Havana to play a series of exhibition contests against the soon to be legendary Almendares of the Cuban Winter League.¹⁸ Major League Baseball teams soon followed, most notably the Philadelphia Athletics in 1886 and the New York Giants in 1890. In 1887, the Cuban Giants, a Negro club with no Latinos on its roster, toured the island.¹⁹ Just 12 years later, Cuba began barnstorming campaigns of its own, when Abel Linares led the All-Cubans on a tour of the northeastern United States.²⁰

Several Cuban historians theorize that one of the major reasons baseball latched onto the national consciousness during this time was the simple fact that it was not Spanish in origin.

¹⁵ Ibid., 75.

¹⁶ Carter, *The Quality of Home Runs*, 49-50.

¹⁷ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 76-78.

¹⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹⁹ Adrian Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007), 46-51.

²⁰ Ibid., 81-82.

With at least two violent rebellions already a part of its history, Cubans' desire to remove the Spanish crown from their heads only seemed to increase as the 1890s wore on. Baseball was often used to instill the spirit of revolution, both in actuality and in the imagination of the Spanish occupation forces.²¹ The Cuban exile community in Tampa, Florida held several charity baseball tournaments to raise funds for various revolutionary organizations on the island.²² Even the American barnstorming teams got into the act, sometimes inadvertently. During the Hop Bitters 1881 tour, American flags the team had brought to pass out to spectators were confiscated by Spanish authorities, worried that "it would encourage the Cubans to rebellion."²³

In 1895, the Cuban War for Independence broke out, and, almost immediately, Spanish authorities passed various ordinances banning baseball across the island, but that did not keep it from being played or from being used in revolutionary propaganda. Even though the rebellion was crushed in 1898, almost immediately afterwards the Spanish-American War began with the mysterious destruction of the USS *Maine* berthed in Havana. In total, 260 American sailors perished, including all but one member of the *Maine*'s baseball team, "The crack club of the fleet." Barnstorming tours from both nations briefly stopped while the conflict raged in Cuba. Several months later, under the banner of "Cuba Libre," American forces emerged victorious over the Spanish. America's "game" and its armed forces had won over the Cuban people, but as the just "liberated" islanders soon realized, they had simply traded one imperial regime for another, and this would reflect itself in future transnational baseball exchanges.²⁴

If the 1860s-1900s represent a period of Cubans embracing American ideals, the 1920s-1940s represent a period of Americans disregarding the separate nature of Cuban national

²¹ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 81-83.

²² Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 83-84. Most of these were sponsored by the owners of local cigar factories.

²³ Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game*, 31.

²⁴ Robert Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out: How Baseball Sold U.S. Foreign Policy and Promoted the American Way Abroad* (New York: New Press, 2010), 37-38.

character. The period in between, 1900-1920, was by no means unimportant in terms of American-Cuban baseball relations. Barnstorming on both sides of the Florida Straits continued at a furious pace during this period. Negro and Major league clubs frequently toured the island, most notably Ty Cobb and the Detroit Tigers in 1909.²⁵ It was during these American tours Miguel Ángel González were discovered by scouts. This first notable example of Cubans being exported to the American majors only increased the cultural baseball marker between the two nations.²⁶ In addition to this exportation, Cuban clubs, mainly under the guidance of the aforementioned Linares, continued to tour Florida and the northeastern states during the period. Of particular note were the 1913 Long Branch Cubans, a squad composed entirely of Cuban players who played in the Class D New York-New Jersey League.²⁷ However, what happened during this period pales in comparison to what began in 1919 with the passage of the Volstead Act, more commonly known as Prohibition.²⁸

As Roberto González Echevarría points out in his history of Cuban baseball, *The Pride of Havana*, American and Canadian tourism had already begun to steadily increase to the island from 1914-1918, due to the ongoing war which made European vacation travel disappear. But this tourism was usually restricted to the American “elite of elites.” Much of what could be found in Havana, could just as easily be found ninety miles north in Miami, Florida.²⁹ This changed in 1919 with the passage of the Volstead Act, which added the 18th Amendment to the American Constitution. From 1920 until its repeal via the 21st Amendment, signed into law by

²⁵ Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 135-136.

²⁶ Samuel O. Regalado, “The Latin Quarter in the Major Leagues: Adjustment and Achievement,” in *The American Game: Baseball and Ethnicity* ed: Lawrence Baldassaro and Richard A. Johnson (Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 164-166.

²⁷ Burgos Jr., *Playing America’s Game*, 94.

²⁸ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 167-169.

²⁹ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 163-164.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932, the production, transportation, and sale of “intoxicating liquors” was illegal within the borders of the United States.³⁰

American tourists flooded Havana almost overnight, and a city already heavily influenced by the United States was now consumed by the bigger nation’s cultural sphere. With liquor still legal under Cuban law, along with other vices such as gambling and prostitution, upper and middle class Americans vacationed frequently to the island during the 1920s and early 1930s.³¹ Pérez’s research concluded that between 1920 and 1940 over two million Americans travelled to Cuba at least once, showing that the island’s tourism industry was “driven by North American tastes and preferences.”³² With over 7,000 bars and taverns located in Havana by the end of the 1920s, along with numerous American-owned-and-operated hotels, the city placed tourists comfort above a Cuban cultural survival.³³ As Adolphe Roberts commented: “He (an American tourist) will be helped in argument or fight by a tourist policeman who will generally give the short end to the Cuban involved.”³⁴ This newly established social hierarchy with the American vacationers at the top lasted until 1960, until the triumph of the Cuban Revolution and the ouster of capitalism. This change in the American-Cuban social dynamic also affected the transnational baseball exchange in many ways, including three representative themes of this study.

The first theme is the concept of Cuba, particularly Havana, being considered by Americans as a foreign extension of the United States. Marketed as: “So close to home and yet so foreign,” both the familiar and exotic elements of the island were constantly promoted by the American media, and on some occasions by the United States government.³⁵ This message was

³⁰ Michael A. Lerner, *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009).

³¹ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 168-174.

³² *Ibid.*, 167-168.

³³ *Ibid.*, 169.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 172-218.

widely read and viewed by American baseball fans during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. While “Yanqui” spectators at Cuban League contests never represented a significant draw to Havana promoters, even during Prohibition, the exotic qualities of the island were heavily promoted by teams touring the United States.³⁶ At the turn of the 20th century, Negro squads sometimes added the moniker of Cuban to their team names in order to convey a sense of exoticness.³⁷

The Abel Linares Cuban Stars continued their American barnstorming tours, staging one every year from 1908 until 1930.³⁸ Noting the drawing power of the island to baseball fans, Cuban-American businessman Alejandro “Alex” Pompez formed his own Cuban Stars, with plans to tour the United States in 1916. During the 1920s, both Stars organizations competed in rival Negro Leagues in America, officially becoming a part of the African-American baseball scene.³⁹ After the Linares club folded in the mid-1920s, Pompez permanently located his squad in the New York City neighborhood of Harlem, rebranding them in 1935 as the New York Cubans.⁴⁰ In their initial season, the New York club consisted solely of Cubans and other dark-skinned Latinos but, by the 1930s and 1940s, half of their roster was African American. Representing a rare combined effort in the American-Cuban baseball exchange, they competed in the Negro League World Series on two occasions, in fact, winning in 1947.⁴¹

The second theme is the increasing attachment to the Cuban leagues by the American Major Leagues, collectively known as Organized Baseball. As part of the Roaring 20s tourism boom in Cuba, many white American ballplayers began joining island clubs during the winter season as a way to supplement their incomes.⁴² Not only did this exchange increase “Yanqui”

³⁶ Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game*, 88-92.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 65-67.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 106-118.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴² Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 171-173.

stereotyping and social Americanization of Havana, but it also forced Organized Baseball by the 1940s to be further involved with the Cuban leagues. The major leagues, essentially via their monopoly, forcibly implemented rules to make sure Cuban clubs compensated their American counterparts for use of their players during the northern nation's off-season.⁴³ This compensation did not extend both ways.

Despite the unwritten yet readily enforced "color barrier" which effectively barred African Americans from participating in Organized Baseball, in the 1920s several light-skinned Cubans such as Adolfo Luque and Miguel González tested the limits of the color line.⁴⁴ By the 1930s, Cuban ballplayers began to seem less an anomaly and more an inexpensive force of labor, compared to white Americans.⁴⁵ When US ball-clubs signed a Cuban player, his former team received minimal compensation, if any at all. In the eyes of American organized baseball, Cuba was just another part of its baseball empire, just like the island nation was essentially an extension of the United States.⁴⁶ This dynamic will be further examined at the beginning of Chapter 3, especially with regard to the likes of Clark Griffith, long-time owner of the Washington Senators during the 1930s, and Gabe Paul, general manager of the Cincinnati Reds in the 1950s.⁴⁷

The third and final theme relates to an increasing interest and devotion held by Cubans towards following American major league baseball. The Cuban circuits, both the amateurs of the sugar mill clubs and the professionals of the Winter League, never lacked local support.

⁴³ Ibid., 46-48. This was a secondary reason for driving Organized Baseball towards Cuba. The main reason was businessman Jorge Pasquel's Mexican League signing or "stealing" many American players from the majors in the late 1940s.

⁴⁴ Samuel O. Regalado, "The Latin Quarter in the Major Leagues: Adjustment and Achievement," 164-166.

⁴⁵ Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game*, 151-153.

⁴⁶ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 48-51.

⁴⁷ Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game*, 151, 214-216. Paul is not mentioned by Burgos by name but he was the general manager of the Reds during their years as major league affiliate of the Havana Sugar Kings, which features briefly in his book.

However, the increasing presence of Organized Baseball on the island, according to Pérez, naturally increased its fan base towards enveloping a majority of Cubans, particularly in Havana. The Cincinnati Reds developed a sizable fan following in the 1920s due to the exploits of Luque.⁴⁸ The now anglicized “Mike” Àngel Gonzàlez, as well became a national hero by briefly coaching the infamous “Gas House Gang” St. Louis Cardinals in 1938.⁴⁹ Pérez points out that: “From the conservative *Diario de la Marina* to the communist daily *Hoy*, papers (were) filled with news about the major leagues, including AP and UPI wire stories of the previous day’s games.”⁵⁰ In fact in several instances, American baseball seemed to be considered of more importance than news regarding the volatile Cuban political scene.

As Pérez quoted journalist Mariblanca Sabas Aloma in 1932 during the violent reign of President Gerardo Machado: “Five assassinations right here in the capital that have not in the slightest diminished the extraordinary enthusiasm of the Cuban fans. Days that should be given to mourning have been spent by the radio that is transmitting the World Series.”⁵¹ And, according to Robert Elias, after a weeklong 1933 communications blackout following Fulgencio Batista’s first coup d’etat: “Cubans wanted-before all else-to know the American baseball scores they had missed.”⁵² That is how hooked on baseball, especially that of the American major leagues, many Cubans were. It was this island cultural scene that formed the stage for the arrival of the Havana Cubans in 1947, as well as their successors, the Cuban/Havana Sugar Kings in 1954.⁵³

Exploring the shared baseball relationship between Cuba and the United States is by no means a rare or untapped field of academic research. Histories of the sport in the Cuban context

⁴⁸ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*, 260-261.

⁴⁹ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball*, 8, 19.

⁵⁰ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 261. Parenthesis mine.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 263-265.

⁵² Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out*, 108.

⁵³ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 259-260.

abound, most notably *Pride of Havana* by Roberto Echevarría,⁵⁴ and Peter C. Bjarkman's *A History of Cuban Baseball*,⁵⁵ two extensively-researched narrative accounts. Sociological examinations on baseball and sport in Cuban culture include: Milton H. Jamail's *Full Count: Inside Cuban Baseball*,⁵⁶ Pettavinno and Pye's *Sport in Cuba: The Diamond in the Rough*,⁵⁷ and arguably the most informative, *The Quality of Home Runs: The Passion, Politics, and Language of Cuban Baseball* by Thomas F. Carter. The latter is a sociological study of Cuban national identity through baseball, or "Cubanidad." Carter concludes that: "Baseball is a definitive Cuban spectacle."⁵⁸ Writings about baseball's role within American imperialism, with substantial focus on Cuba, are not unheard of in academic circles. Such works include Robert Elias's *The Empire Strikes Out*,⁵⁹ *The Nationalist Pastime* by Russ Crawford,⁶⁰ and Gerald R. Gems's *Sport, Colonialism, and the United States*.⁶¹ All three contain examples of how the structure of organized baseball throughout the Caribbean was inextricably linked to the American government's political agenda.

Examinations of baseball and America's national identity are prolific. Most of the compiled essays within *The American Game: Baseball and Ethnicity* examine the theme to greater or lesser extents. The Lawrence Baldassaro-authored introduction surmised that: "baseball history mirrors the larger patterns of American life."⁶² A similar trend is found in many of the journal articles compiled in *The Politics of Baseball*. The editor Ron Briley noted:

⁵⁴ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*.

⁵⁵ Peter C. Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2007).

⁵⁶ Milton H. Jamail, *Full Count: Inside Cuban Baseball* (Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

⁵⁷ Paula J. Pettavino and GERALYN Pye, *Sport in Cuba: The Diamond in the Rough* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994).

⁵⁸ Carter, *The Quality of Home Runs*.

⁵⁹ Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out*.

⁶⁰ Russ Crawford, "The Nationalist Pastime: The Use of Baseball to Promote Nationalism Globally," in *The Politics of Baseball: Essays on the Pastime and Power at Home and Abroad*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2010).

⁶¹ Gerald R. Gems, "Sport, Colonialism, and United States Imperialism," *Journal of Sports History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2006): 3-25.

⁶² Baldassaro, Johnson, editors, *The American Game: Baseball and Ethnicity*, 5.

“the national pastime was a reflection of and not an escape from the American political scene.”⁶³

David Q. Voight’s *Reflections on Diamonds, Baseball and American Culture* proclaims fascination at the ability of “baseball research to reveal fresh insight into American culture and our national character.”⁶⁴ The first episode of Ken Burns’s landmark eleven-part documentary mini-series *Baseball* makes this narrative its central focus.⁶⁵

The crossing of American and Cuban baseball nationalism has been covered to a brief extent. The 1999 two game exhibition series between Cuba’s national team and Major League Baseball’s Baltimore Orioles featured heavily in *The Quality of Home Runs*.⁶⁶ By far the most relevant examination of this international sporting relationship to my study is *Baseball and the Cold War: Being a Soliloquy on the Necessity of Baseball* by Howard M. Senzel, which specifically referenced the potential bonding agent of the Havana Sugar Kings to American baseball fans in his hometown of Rochester, New York.⁶⁷

At first glance, Senzel’s 1977 book seemingly renders my research proposal redundant. He analyzed the archives of the *D & C* from 1954-1960, specifically trying to discover what happened on the night of July 26, 1959, and how the Rochester community and federal government reacted to the incident. However there are several major problems with attempting to classify *Baseball and the Cold War* as an academic source.

Despite the fact that at least one source, *The Empire Strikes Out*,⁶⁸ used Senzel’s work to support its main argument, his credibility comes into question. First there are no endnotes, footnotes, bibliography, index, or literature citations in his work. In the book proper, Senzel

⁶³ Ron Briley, editor, *The Politics of Baseball: Essays on the Pastime and Power at Home and Abroad* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2010), 2.

⁶⁴ David Q. Voight, *Reflections on Diamonds: American Baseball and American Culture*, speech at the 1st annual Convention for North American Society for Sports History, Columbus, OH, May 25-26, 1973.

⁶⁵ *Baseball: Our Game*. Director Ken Burns. Narrator. John Chancellor. PBS, 1994, Netflix.

⁶⁶ Carter, *The Quality of Home Run*, 89-110.

⁶⁷ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*.

⁶⁸ Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out*, 196.

does list article headlines along with the date published, but for this study that is not enough. Also he only looks at the *D & C*, leaving the *Times-Union* unanalyzed. Furthermore, he does not attempt to tie this into any existing academic theories, nor does he reference relevant literature, or any literature for that matter. Finally, and most importantly to my study, *Baseball and the Cold War* has information gaps prevalent throughout regarding Senzel's research methods, which could potentially mislead the reader. For example, he proclaimed: "I had read through the entire 1957 season and there was never any mention of rebel scares affecting the attendance at baseball games."⁶⁹ And yet, 1957 reports from *D & C* columnist George Beahon referenced at least three separate examples: "Rebel propaganda designed to keep tourists out of Havana and natives off the streets,"⁷⁰ "Wings Get Warning Letters from Cuban Rebels,"⁷¹ and "Rebel Bombings and Censorship."⁷² For these reasons, Senzel's work, arguably the premier example for this topic, can by no means be considered an academic source. This realization supports the necessity for this study to have been undertaken.

There are three gaps pertinent to the remaining secondary literature examined that give this thesis significant purpose. The first major gap is the time period questioned: The Cuban Revolution, 1953-1960. While the Cuban Revolution is hardly unexplored territory (*My Life*,⁷³ *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*,⁷⁴ *The Cuban Insurrection*,⁷⁵ *Contesting Castro*,⁷⁶ *Making*

⁶⁹ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*, 44.

⁷⁰ George Beahon, "Red Wings Divide with Havana, as Clark Wallops Grand Slam in 2d," *Democrat & Chronicle*, 31 July 1957.

⁷¹ George Beahon, "Wings Get Warning Letters from Cuban Rebels," *Democrat & Chronicle*, 6 August 1957.

⁷² George Beahon, "What is the Real Situation in Cuba?," *Democrat & Chronicle*, 11 August 1957. This story ran as the headline on the front page of the newspaper.

⁷³ Fidel Castro with Ignacio Ramonet, *My Life* (London: Simon & Schuster Export, 2007). Despite the constant declaration from academics of Castro being a baseball fan, the Cuban leader mentions the game only twice in his 711 page autobiography. The Sugar Kings, or even the Cuban National League are not mentioned.

⁷⁴ Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

⁷⁵ Ramon L. Bonachea and Marta San Martin, *The Cuban Insurrection: 1952-1959* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1974).

State Action Possible,⁷⁷ *The United States and Batista*⁷⁸), the role baseball played in the said relationship is sorely unappreciated, much less explored. The three sources which can be described as making some contribution to this theme are either non-academic,⁷⁹ focus solely on the baseball itself,⁸⁰ or are personal recollections of a local Cuban fan.⁸¹

Most of the literature dedicated to the US-Cuban relationship via baseball focuses on either the pre-revolution period (*The Pride of Havana*,⁸² *Sport and Colonialism*⁸³) or more frequently the post-revolution period (*History of Cuban Baseball*,⁸⁴ *Full Count*,⁸⁵ *Quality of Home Runs*,⁸⁶ and *1970's Baseball Diplomacy*⁸⁷). Arguably, the most important moment between the United States and Cuba, and the most visible cultural link during the Revolution, has remained primarily unexamined. This is the central literature gap that this study attempts to address.

The second academic gap centers upon a lack of variety in American communities examined. Much of the relevant literature, with limited examples via sports, focuses primarily

⁷⁶ Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). It briefly mentions the Sugar Kings as being a symbolic part of American-Cuban international relations.

⁷⁷ Jutta Weldes and Diana Saco, "Making State Action Possible: The United States and the Discursive Construction of the 'The Cuban Problem', 1960-1994," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* Vol. 25, No. 2 (1996): 361-395.

⁷⁸ Hugh Thomas, "Cuba: The United States and Batista, 1952-1958," *World Affairs*, Vol. 149, No. 4 (1987), 169-175.

⁷⁹ Howard Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*.

⁸⁰ Kyle T. Doherty, "The Cause of Baseball: Baseball and Nation-Building in Revolutionary Cuba," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, Vol. 21, No. 1, (2012): 53-68.

⁸¹ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*. Echevarría, a Cuban native, spent much of his young adult life playing and following baseball in Havana. While this source is academic in its approach, he was too personal and brief with his findings.

⁸² Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*.

⁸³ Gerald R. Gems, "Sport, Colonialism, and United States Imperialism," *Journal of Sports History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2006): 3-25.

⁸⁴ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*.

⁸⁵ Jamail, *Full Count*.

⁸⁶ Carter, *The Quality of Home Runs*.

⁸⁷ Justin W.R. Turner, "1970's Baseball Diplomacy between Cuba and the United States," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2010), 67-84.

on Southern Florida,⁸⁸ or cities with large Cuban populations.⁸⁹ Senzel's *Baseball and the Cold War* is the only attempt at discourse aimed at a metropolitan area lacking a substantial Cuban contingent: Rochester, New York.⁹⁰ The one reason why American cities such as Miami, Tampa, or New York City are written about is precisely because of the prominent Cuban communities they each embrace.⁹¹

However, due to the time period of this study, finding out how such an important political event was received, in an area far removed from the conflict, ie average America, is clearly worthy of academic exploration. How did Rochester, New York, a city without a "Little Havana"⁹² or "Miami Mafia"⁹³ interpret the Cuban Revolution? Unlike other American cities, Rochester had a visible window into the Cuban cultural sphere, perfect for the study undertaken here. A secondary goal of this study is to see if that connection of playing in the same professional baseball league was enough to have any sort of impact on the reception an American community held towards the Cuban Revolution.

The final gap featured specifically regards the Havana Sugar Kings franchise. Aside from *Baseball and the Cold War*,⁹⁴ *Bobby Maduro*,⁹⁵ and a chapter in Roberto Echevarría's *Cuban Fiestas*,⁹⁶ most relevant sources relegate the franchise to footnotes, and sadly, sometimes incorrect footnotes. The next closest in detail to the aforementioned three, *When a Dream Plays Reality in Baseball: Roberto Maduro and the Inter-American League* by John Cronin, incorrectly

⁸⁸ Andrew Lynch, "Expressions of Cultural Standing in Miami: Cuban Spanish Discourse about Fidel Castro and Cuba," *Revista Internacional de Lenguística Iberoamericana*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2009): 21-48.

⁸⁹ Andrea O'Reilly Herrera, editor, *Cuba: Idea of a Nation Displaced* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008).

⁹⁰ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*.

⁹¹ Herrera, editor, *Cuba: Idea of a Nation Displaced*.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Castro with Ignacio Ramonet, *My Life*. Castro constantly refers to the Cuban community in Southern Florida as the "Miami Mafia."

⁹⁴ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*.

⁹⁵ Rory Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*, <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/c34ce106>.

⁹⁶ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*.

referred to the club as the Havana Sugar Canes.⁹⁷ *The Pride of Havana*, also written by Echevarría, does focus on the IL franchise for six pages, however he neglects to mention the Verdi shooting incident at all.⁹⁸ Bjarkman relegates the franchise to less than four pages in his pre-revolutionary chapter, and another four separate pages on the shooting incident.⁹⁹ I find this lack of research, and in some cases, incorrect information cited, quite baffling. How is it that a franchise that not only was the highest tier-ranked professional team in the history of Cuba, played in the highest-ranked minor league in North America, was the top farm club for the Major League Baseball Cincinnati Reds, whose lifespan ran almost parallel to the Cuban Revolution itself, that Castro went against his ideological position to preserve, has so little written about it?¹⁰⁰

During Castro's first visit to Canada as the leader of Cuba, he was scheduled to throw out the first pitch at a Sugar Kings' contest against the baseball rendition of Toronto's Maple Leafs.¹⁰¹ The famous picture of Castro in his *Barbudos* (Bearded Ones) baseball jersey was taken before a Havana-Rochester game: a contest that would mark the prelude to the franchise's eventual departure for New Jersey. During their first IL campaign in 1954, a conga band followed them on every road trip.¹⁰² Their lifespan is so quirky and so interesting that one could imagine several academic articles being written on this franchise on a variety of topics, adding much to the literature of sports history. Yet, within the works available in English, they remain footnotes of history. This study attempts to rectify the disproportionate situation.

⁹⁷ John Cronin, *Society for American Baseball Research: When a Dream Plays Reality in Baseball: Roberto Maduro and the Inter-American League*, <http://sabr.org/research/-when-dream-plays-reality-baseball-roberto-maduro-and-inter-american-league>.

⁹⁸ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball*: 336-342.

⁹⁹ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 98, 307.

¹⁰⁰ Rory Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*, <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/c34ce106>.

¹⁰¹ "Cubans Going for Broke but Castro will Pitch," *Toronto Daily Star*, 22 April 1959. With Castro eventually unable to attend the game, Cuban National Director for Sport, Captain Felipe Guerra threw out the first pitch.

¹⁰² Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*.

Methodology

It occurs to me that an explanation of the “main title” of my thesis is necessary at this point. I have not adopted the phrase “Beyond the Sport Pages” without design. The thrust of my thesis examines editorial comment, analysis, public reaction, perception, opinion, and stance, each an approach that is not commonly highly profiled on sports pages. Because baseball is a major theme of the thesis, one would normally think that the sports pages would be the primary newspaper section of investigation. But, the above-listed factors of examination are not often embedded in material found on the sports page, where, generally, upcoming sporting events and their results are reported in detail but little else appears in the way of superimposing a sporting theme on greater social or world events, and hence, the quest to look “beyond the sports page” for the primary sources of data.

Starting with Havana’s IL entry in 1954 and ending with its forced 1960 departure, I examined microfilm scans of the two daily newspapers: Rochester, New York’s *Democrat & Chronicle* and *Times-Union*. Particular attention was paid to the front page and local news sections. Additionally, the feature writings of George Beahon and Paul Pinckey for the *D & C* and Matt Jackson and Al C. Weber for the *T-U* were examined. When IL baseball and the Cuban situation interfaced, how did these writers cover the events? How did their opinions intersect and differ with one another? Did their love for baseball make them sympathetic to the Cuban cause? Was communism too great a presence for them to forgive; or did they feel the revolutionaries deserved a second chance? Though these questions were addressed and analyzed, they are secondary to the thesis’s purpose. The main focus was on how the respective editors for the *D & C* and the *T-U* portrayed the American-Cuban Baseball lens outside the

sporting pages. The feature sections of both dailies were examined with respect to how the Cuban narrative was portrayed separate from the sporting context. Was Cuba portrayed in the same light in both newspapers? How did they react to important figures such as Batista and Castro? Did Cuba feature much in the “Letters to the Editor Section”? Most importantly, did baseball make its way into articles on the Cuban Revolution? These questions are answered by using a *thematic analysis* to construct the narratives within this study.

Thematic analysis, simply put, is the pinpointing, examination, and recording of patterns within data. By discovering these patterns or “themes” across a determined data set using “grounded,” established theory, research questions can be formed and/or answered.¹⁰³ One overarching theme, the crux of this study, is baseball as a “strong link between the Cuban and American peoples.”¹⁰⁴

Cuba’s developing communist ideologies and Fidel Castro’s government represented dogma America allegedly stood against. However, the game of choice for many a Cuban, Castro included, was baseball, America’s national pastime. During the mid-1950s, Rochester was a stronghold for the Republican Party, no friend to the communist community. Frank Gannett, owner of the two major Flower City newspapers, frequently supported Republican political candidates, and even ran briefly for the party’s presidential nomination.¹⁰⁵ And yet, the passion his dailies held for baseball was rivalled only by the Sugar Kings’ supporters in sunny Havana. These two cities were thousands of miles apart, both geographically and ideologically. Yet sport, a common ground, for shared “American” ideals could have proven a bonding agent if presented to enough of the local Rochester community. As such, examinations of three themes

¹⁰³ Greg Guest, *Applied Thematic Analysis* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2012).

¹⁰⁴ Rory Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*, <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/c34ce106>

¹⁰⁵ Bonnie Brennan, *For The Record: An Oral History of Rochester, NY Newswriters* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

were explored: American's national identity regarding baseball, likewise for their Cuban counterparts, and how the two intersected with one another.

Outline of Study

This paper is divided into five sections, four not counting this introduction chapter. The second chapter presents further examination of American and Cuban historical and sociological uses of baseball to define their national characters. In addition, it also attempts to convey that the alleged baseball bridge in itself is not critical to this study but, rather, how the American media portrayed that bridge to its viewers. Continuing onwards with a short but necessary history of Cuban baseball from the 1930s to 1953, the third chapter tightly interweaves the political turmoil on the island with play on the diamond. Of particular focus is the professional Cuban Winter League of the 1930s and 1940s and the Class C/B Havana Cubans of the Florida International League during the reigns of Gerardo Machado and Fulgencio Batista, respectively. This interweaving continues with the major focus on this third section. I portray the Cuban/Havana Sugar King's historical and cultural significances, while separately examining major Cuban Revolution events. This establishes potential Cuban stories, both culturally and militarily, that the Rochester editors could choose to cover for their readerships. The two Rochester dailies are the focus of the fourth chapter. This section's introduction provides a brief background on the two newspapers themselves, along with a short informed look at how Rochester operated as a civic community during the 1950s. Then the focus shifts to the primary narrative: the role the IL and the Cuban Revolution played in each daily's respective coverage beyond the sports page. By subjecting front section articles about Cuba and/or the IL to in-depth thematic analysis, the timelines established in the previous two chapters come into clearer focus. How did the politics surrounding Cuba on what seemed to be a weekly basis incorporate the

baseball lens outside the sports sections of the *T-U* and *D & C*? By observing these collisions, themes came to the forefront of this study's overall narrative. The fifth and final section offers a conclusion and summary of findings noted in the previous three chapters and what this means for the relevant historical literature. More importantly, however, a judgement can be made on how sports can bridge political and social gaps, albeit at a superficial level.

Chapter Structure

1. Introduction
2. "Nocout" On a Walkoff
 - Sociological Analysis of *Americana*: What Baseball Means to the United States
 - Sociological Analysis of *Cubanidad*: What Baseball means to Cuba
3. Pre /Post Cuban Revolution & the Havana Sugar Kings
 - History of Cuban Baseball from 1930 to 1953, with specific mention of US-Cuban interaction
 - History of the Cuban/Havana Sugar Kings
 - Basic Timeline of the Cuban Revolution, with specific mention of US-Cuban international relations
4. *Rochester Times-Union* and *Democrat & Chronicle*.
 - Brief Background on the *Rochester Times-Union* and *Democrat & Chronicle*
 - The Cuban Revolution and Baseball in the Front Sections
5. Findings and Conclusions

Delimitations

The main delimitation is the brief written treatment I give the newspaper sports sections. While they provide a secondary lens for the study, covering what they said in detail was superfluous. I tried to view the newspapers from a perspective of a non-sporting-fan, to judge the representations any American-Cuban baseball bond may have had on the Rochester community. With that said, I did limit my study focus to the *baseball season*, when the majority of relevant stories would have appeared. In addition, this also increases the likelihood of the baseball reporters themselves writing pieces, either in or outside the sports section.

In the world of sports reporting, the coverage of a particular sport or team does not necessarily end when the season is over or the playoff champion has been determined. Off-season moves such as player trades, free agent signings, or general interest stories often crop up in particular daily newspapers. During the mid-20th century, the reporters in Rochester covered baseball nearly 365 days a year. There is too much strictly baseball reporting to extensively search every day of every month from 1954 to 1960, especially since I am not trying to prove Rochester was a baseball city; there is more than enough secondary literature to make that point. Also, the rebels of the Cuban Revolution, which began in 1953, didn't limit their operations to the timetable of the IL baseball season. Not everything that occurred is relevant to this study.

With that in mind I set up my research timeframe. For both the *D & C* and the *Times-Union*, I looked at microfilm scans of each day from April 1 to October 31, spanning the entirety of the IL baseball season. I hold to this pattern for 1954, 1955, 1956, and 1957. For 1958, I also looked at the months of November and December, as they were the decisive months of Castro's military campaign, which saw Batista flee Cuba on New Year's Eve. To this extent, I also focused on January, February, and March of 1959, to shed light on how the world was reacting to this regime change and the resulting foundation of a possible new communist enclave less than

90 miles from American soil. The remainder of research for that year was restricted to the April-October timeline, as were the issues analyzed from 1960.

Limitations

My only primary sources are the newspapers in question. I am unable to use a Havana newspaper as I do not speak or read Spanish and to my knowledge there were no major English language dailies in Cuba during the Revolution. This study is restricted to a one-way viewpoint. Further, it is hard to gather exactly how important the role Havana's IL franchise played in the civic culture of the Cuban capital, let alone the Cuban nation. Not much has been written on the Havana Sugar Kings outside of basic information. Most books on the revolution fail to mention them. Also, due to time constraints as well as access limitations to the *Times-Union* microfilms that required me to travel to Rochester, I may have mistakenly passed over smaller articles. As a result, the scans I made of the microfilm, which I took back to London for careful examination, may be missing a few minor articles related to the narratives involved. However, since this is strictly a thematic analysis, I believe the damage these oversights create is minimal

Chapter 2

“Nocout” On a Walk-off

On 26 April 2014, the Chicago White Sox were hosting the Tampa Bay Rays in an MLB regular season contest at U.S. Cellular Field on Chicago’s south side. In the bottom of the 9th inning, the Rays led the home team by a score of 6-5. With the bases loaded and two outs, White Sox first baseman Jose Abreu, “recently escaped from Fidel Castro,”¹ stepped up to the plate.

On a 0-1 count, the native of Cuba’s Cienfuegos Province hit a grand-slam home run, winning the game for Chicago.² Abreu’s home run not only signified a White Sox victory, or further cemented his then league lead in home runs; it also represented a complex merger of Cuban and American nationalist ideologies through the sport of baseball.

Being in America, Abreu had by virtue of hitting his home run, also achieved a walk-off victory. The term, first coined in 1988, refers to a game winning run, after which the players “walk off” the field. However, due to his Cuban nationality and upbringing, Abreu would likely remember this home run as his first MLB “nocout,” or knockout, a phrase that pays homage to the other national sport of Cuba, boxing.³ The emotional context of a “nocout” in Havana’s Estadio Latinoamericano is similarly revered, if differently expressed, than a walk-off victory is in the United States. Since they occur in the bottom half of an inning, the fans “walk out” of the stadium happy, the runners having triumphantly crossed the plate. Famed Cuban exile and baseball historian Ronaldo González Echevarría proclaimed: “Reaching home calls for a fiesta.”⁴

¹ Tom Hamilton, WTAM Radio, 12 April 2014. Hamilton, the Cleveland Indians play-by-play announcer, made the comment during a game against Abreu’s White Sox.

² MLB Official Game Report 26 April 2014.

³ Carter, *The Quality of Home Runs*, 36-37.

⁴ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 185.

Americans and Cubans, told by their governments to behave as mortal enemies, celebrate in the same manner over the same event. Sporting moments such as Cuban outfielder Eduardo “Sandy” Amorós’s game-saving basket catch and successive series clinching RBIs in Game 7 of the 1955 World Series for Brooklyn are as fondly remembered in Havana as they are in New York City.⁵ This trend most recently occurred when Cubans illegally watched Game 7 of the 1997 World Series between the Florida Marlins and Cleveland Indians. After the Marlin’s walk off win in the 11th inning, joyous Habanos poured onto the capital streets to celebrate Florida’s championship, made possible by Cuban-exile pitcher Liván Hernández.⁶ In doing so, they were simultaneously participating with American fans celebrating in the stadium across the Straits in Miami.⁷

The purpose of this chapter was not to examine the modern day context of these events as they have been examined more thoroughly by writers and historians much more experienced than myself. Nevertheless, the first section will focus on American conceptualization of baseball as the nation’s pastime and as a promoter of alleged American values from the 1870s to the mid-twentieth century. The second section focuses upon Cuba’s historical conception of baseball representing “cubanidad,” or “what makes one Cuban” during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the frustrating attempts by my secondary sources to attach symbolism upon it. By the end of this chapter, the transnational ‘beisbol’ bridge between the United States and the island of Cuba, circa 1930, will be exposed for the readers to absorb.

⁵ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 261-265. His nickname came from a resemblance to boxing champion Sandy Saddler.

⁶S.L. Price, *Pitching Around Fidel: A Journey into the Heart of Cuban Sports* (New York: Ecco Press, 2000), 1-9.

⁷ Steve Fainaru and Ray Sanchez, *The Duke of Havana: Baseball, Communism, and the Search for the American Dream* (New York: Villard Books, 2001)

America's Pastime

*It's our game. That's the chief fact in connection with it. America's game has the snap, go, fling of the American atmosphere. It belongs as much to our institutions, fits into them as significantly, as our Constitution's laws; is just as important in the sum total of our American life. — Walt Whitman, 1889*⁸

Pioneering sports historian David Voight once exclaimed: “It seems that once one grasps the broad historical outline of a sport like major league baseball, one’s imagination turns up endless leads for exploring the connections between stages of baseball history and their counterparts in American life, particularly insights into that will o’ the wisp we call our national character.”⁹ Almost as long ago as whenever the first baseball game was played, people from all sorts of sporting, academic, and sometimes unrelated disciplines attempted to, for one reason or another, examine baseball’s relationship with this transparent citizen that is marketed, packaged, and sold as America’s national pastime.

And it is the sheer number of these publications that is of valuable note in regard to this study. How America’s pastime has been portrayed, propagandized, criticized, and analyzed is of substantial importance to my work, but that it has occurred to such a great extent is in itself of extreme value. The sole fact that academic organizations and journals such as the Society of American Baseball Research, *Nine*, North American Society of Sports Historians, and the *Journal of Baseball Review* exist speaks volumes about how big a role, imagined or real, that the sport has impacted upon the course of American history.¹⁰ The most visible, if not most important historical work, despite its controversial methods and the debate such methods have

⁸ *Baseball: Our Game*. Dir. Ken Burns. Narr. John Chancellor. PBS, 1994, Netflix.

⁹ David Q. Voight, *Reflections on Diamonds: American Baseball and American Culture*, speech at the 1st annual Convention for North American Society for Sports History, Columbus, OH, May 25-26, 1973.

¹⁰ I identified these journals and organizations over the course of my research.

created in the sports history community, is the eleven-part documentary mini-series simply entitled: Ken Burns' *Baseball*.¹¹

In my opinion, there are two common portrayals of baseball in American society: as an intangible representation of the “will o’ the wisp” national character, or as a contained unremarkable yet magnetic microcosm of whatever the current political and social problems then absorbing the country. Ken Burns' *Baseball* attempts and somewhat succeeds to be the second. It is filled with input from noted American historians such as John Thorn, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and even famed Cuban historian Manuel Marquez-Sterling.¹² And yet, that “will o’ the wisp” permeates the entire documentary from start to finish. It begins each episode by playing the Star Spangled Banner, the last two words of which Burns declares are “play ball.”¹³ The first episode or first inning is colloquially dubbed: “Our Game.” The first man on screen giving analysis in “Our Game” is not a historian, nor is he an economist or sociologist, or any other kind of academic. The man in question is Bob Costas, who surmised:¹⁴

"The first thing about it — and this seems so obvious that maybe we overlook it — baseball is a beautiful thing: the way the field fans out, the choreography of the sport, the pace and rhythm of it, the fact that that pace and rhythm allows for conversation and reflection and opinion and comparison..."¹⁵ Moments like these, by a famed sportscaster, seem to bookend the various segments and episodes throughout, acknowledging the flawed logic in the “will o’ the wisp,” while simultaneously revelling in it. As Costas later espoused: "Baseball is a human enterprise. Therefore, by definition, it's imperfect, it's flawed, it doesn't embody perfectly everything that's worthwhile about our country or about our culture. But it comes closer than

¹¹ *Baseball:Our Game*. Dir. Ken Burns. Narr.John Chancellor. PBS,1994,Netflix.

¹² *Baseball:A National Heirloom*. Dir. Ken Burns. Narr.John Chancellor. PBS,1994,Netflix. He is the son of former Cuban Presiden Carlos Marquez-Sterling.

¹³ 2010 interview with Keith Olbermann on MSNBC.

¹⁴ *Baseball:Our Game*.

¹⁵ Ibid.

most things in American life.”¹⁶ America doesn’t want that “will o’ the wisp to fade away or be proven false, so everyone, including academics, continue to promote this ideal. That enthusiasm, that joy, that conscious reliance on myth speaks to the role baseball has played throughout history on American society and national self-understanding. This role makes possible a potential cultural bridge between the United States and other nations. However, what has occurred more often throughout history via the promotion of this “American pastime” is a forced subjugation to “Yanqui” values and the “superior” cult of baseball.¹⁷

What historian Adrian Burgos called a personal “initially flawed hypothesis,” and a central theme of his book, *Playing the American Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line*, was that baseball had been cemented in Latin American culture because of United States imperialism.¹⁸ American foreign incursions during the turn of the 20th century, both militarily and economically, helped establish baseball as a cornerstone of Caribbean sporting culture. Most baseball historians agree with this premise of “U.S. Marines shouldering bats next to their rifles when they imposed imperial order in a region by blood and fire.”¹⁹ However, as Burgos elaborated with his hypothesis: “Baseball’s infusion into Latino culture involved a much more complicated process of transnational exchange . . . In different contexts, Latinos adopted “America’s game” and gave the sport meaning that went beyond athletic competition.”²⁰ But as I stated before, what is important to my study is not how the game became entrenched in the Caribbean, but how Americans at the time viewed the national role in the entrenchment: How did the media view the “spreading of the baseball gospel,” specifically to its southern neighbors?

¹⁶ *Baseball: A National Heirloom*. Dir. Ken Burns. Narr. John Chancellor. PBS, 1994, Netflix. Costas proceeded to tell an apocryphal story involving an American and an Englishman arguing. The American out of patience, yells “Screw the King.” To which the Englishman replies, “Screw Babe Ruth.”

¹⁷ Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out*.

¹⁸ Burgos Jr., *Playing America’s Game*, xiii.

¹⁹ Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out*, 54. He was directly quoting Eduardo Galeano who ended his statement by saying, “Baseball then became for the people of the Caribbean what soccer is to us.”

²⁰ Burgos Jr., *Playing America’s Game*, xvii.

According to Robert Elias, they viewed it as a part of the “white man’s burden,” one that most were quite proud to shoulder.²¹ While the extent to which the United States cemented baseball in the Caribbean may be open for debate, that the sport heavily promoted American superiority in the hemisphere is not. Much of the following argument was gleaned from Elias’s *The Empire Strikes Out: How Baseball Sold U.S. Foreign Policy and Promoted the American Way Abroad*.²²

During the Spanish-American War, baseball promoters and stars were firmly behind the Cuban freedom fighters, or at least the American interpretation of what a Cuban freedom fighter represented. The sailors and the “crack club of the fleet” of the ill-fated USS Maine were heavily promoted as the first casualties in the war for “Cuba Libre!,” a war which was welcomed by Organized Baseball.²³ An unidentified primary or secondary source was quoted by Elias in his book as arguing: “Spanish colonial rulers had been the main obstacle to the unfettered movement of baseball talent within America’s transnational circuit.”²⁴ Elias also stated that former barnstormers got into the act as well, with former player Frank Bancroft commenting that Americans like him were: “dyed-in-the-wool rooters for the Cubans in their struggle for independence from Spanish tyranny.”²⁵ And yet, the Cubans in much of Elias’s source literature, are referred to as: “squealing, watermelon-eating imbeciles and infants.”²⁶ Elias argued that America, including baseball promoters, was more interested in “liberating” Cuba than in winning freedom for Cubans. In 1901, the United States gained an economic stranglehold over the island via the Platt Amendment’s addition to the Cuban Constitution.²⁷ In response to Cuban protests,

²¹ Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out*, 56-57.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 37-38

²⁴ Ibid., 39.

²⁵ Ibid., 38.

²⁶ Ibid., 40.

²⁷ The Platt Amendment, named after Connecticut Senator Orville Hitchcock Platt, once added to the Cuban Constitution in 1902, gave the United States unilateral permission to intervene in Cuban domestic affairs.

this same American exceptionalism was used to condemn many of the same freedom fighters who had fought under the banner of “Cuba Libre!”²⁸

According to Elias, however, baseball was never withheld from the Cubans by the United States, as it was viewed as a way “to promote political order and social control.” Even Cuban ballplayers in America, such as the 1899 All-Cubans, were forced to adapt to America’s view of society. Their United States tour was cut short when it was revealed that black players would be playing with and against whites, something that ran counter to segregated American ideals.²⁹ Nevertheless, baseball was still alleged to be a “goodwill mission,” spreading democracy around the globe. Some initiatives operated under “peaceful” circumstances, such as in Japan; others occurred in the face of bloody insurrection such as in the Philippines. However, despite the wide scope of these efforts, the Caribbean remained the most active region both in the plans of American imperialism and in expanding baseball’s reach.

Elias stated: “From 1899-1933, the U.S. Marines hit the beaches at least thirty-four times in ten different Caribbean nations. . . . And wherever the ‘big stick’ of military might or the ‘big trick’ of economic dominance went, baseball was not far behind.”³⁰ In 1913, editors of *Baseball Magazine* took Organized Baseball to task for not having “established in [these] fertile fields a branch extension of our national game . . . [and to] exploit our South American neighbors.”³¹ During this period prior to World War I, Marines also established beachheads in Nicaragua, Panama, and the Dominican Republic. In each case, baseball was allegedly brought to “civilize” those who many Americans perceived to be “barbarous peoples.”³² During a 1914 American occupation of the Mexican port city of Veracruz, U.S. Navy captain John Leonard claimed that

²⁸ Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out*, 39.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

³² *Ibid.*, 66-67.

‘baseball would civilize the country.’³³ Back home, newspapers were mainly focusing on the positives of “diamond diplomacy,”³⁴ with baseball claims such as those of a 1913 U.S. minister in the Dominican Republic who believed that the sport was: “an outlet for the animal spirits of the young men . . . It is a real substitute for the contest in the hill-sides with rifles [and] might [help save] the nation.”³⁵ This belief that a game, simply by the nature of its national origin, could instill democracy shows the extreme dedication many Americans reserved for that ‘will of the wisp’ idealism regarding the Caribbean.

Beginning in the 1920s, many in the American sporting media and the missionaries themselves declared that the goodwill mission of baseball was a failure. However, their reasoning held nothing against baseball, but instead relied heavily on perceived Caribbean genetic faults. Elias reports that after American occupying forces left the Dominican Republic in 1923, baseball’s popularity on the island decreased greatly. William Pulliam, a Christian missionary, reasoned that their giving up on America’s pastime showed: “Just another example of the lack of sustained effort [by] the average Latin-American in anything calling for perseverance.”³⁶ The *Sporting News* reported that “the military occupation by Americans (in Haiti and the Dominican Republic) is regarded by the natives as a bum decision because it interfered with their national sport of revolution.”³⁷ Again, the notion of American moral superiority, and that if one truly loved baseball, there was no reason to revolt against American friendly governments, seemed quite popular in the American press. This is a prime example of the United States putting the integrity of their ‘will of the wisp’ above condemning the

³³ Ibid., 68.

³⁴ Ibid., 56.

³⁵ Ibid., 67.

³⁶ Ibid., 108.

³⁷ Ibid., 108. Parenthesis mine.

oppressive actions of American-installed right wing dictators. The adherence or rejection of this trend by the Rochester dailies is addressed in Chapter 4.

Béisbol y Cubanidad

Is there anywhere a land where baseball passions run deeper or where baseball tradition stands more ingrained in the national psyche than it does right here in the United States of America? The answer.... Is a resounding "YES!" on both counts -Peter C. Bjarkman³⁸

Baseball will survive one way or another . . . regardless of what happens in Cuban politics after the King of Sugar (Fidel Castro)'s long awaited demise, because it is consubstantial with Cuban culture and superior to his individual will- Roberto González Echevarría³⁹

Cuban historian Graciella Pogolotti once surmised: "Cuba is a country that floats. The great interchange of here with there and there with here. And one of the things that has characterized us is the capacity to synthesize, to take a little of all parts and give it form."⁴⁰ Further elaborating on Pogolotti's statement, Thomas F. Carter correctly pointed out that to view Cuba as existing in one place as one people, with exiles, natives, and Fidel Castro's government representing the same Cuba is to "deny the very history of Cuba."⁴¹ I will add that the concept of a Cuban fluidity not only applies to the current state of Cuban life, let alone baseball, but to the entire chronological extent of Cuba's national character.

The 'will of the wisp' Cuban national identity is known as *cubanidad*, or "what makes one Cuban."⁴² And one thing that seems to be a common trait of *cubanidad* is that it tends to be defined either through the embracing or rejecting of another cultural source, whether that may be another nation such as the United States, or another differing Cuban ideological group. Baseball

³⁸ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-200*, 20.

³⁹ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 212. Parenthesis mine.

⁴⁰ Carter, *The Quality of Home Runs*, 29-35.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 40-41.

is a prime example of this trend occurring throughout the island's tumultuous history, stretching from the end of Spanish colonial rule.

As mentioned before in the background introduction, the period of the 1860s through the 1890s featured a Cuban quest for both modernity within the United States global economic sphere and political freedom by removing the Spanish crown from their heads. The increasing economic and cultural transnational exchange between Cuba and the "North" near the turn of the 20th century coincided with baseball's arrival and cultivation on the "Pearl of the Antilles." This gave baseball the opportunity to transform into one of the earliest cornerstones of Cuban expression of a national identity.

From the 1870s until the Spanish-American War in 1898, bullfighting was frequently ignored if not blatantly criticized and condemned by Cubans, especially when compared to the unprecedented support baseball received across the island. This rejection of Spain's "national sport" in favor of a more American or "modern" game not only reveals the popularity baseball had in Cuba, but also serves as an example of a deliberate attempt by locals to vocally express their distinctive *cubanidad*.⁴³ As Pérez concluded: "Baseball was not merely an alternative for the bullfight . . . it carried a political subtext that both formed and gave form to Cuban discontent."⁴⁴ In *On Becoming Cuban*, Pérez utilizes two primary source quotations that quite effectively sum up the growing anti-Spanish sentiment on the island and how this was expressed passionately and emphatically via baseball. The first is from one Wenceslao Gálvez, who proudly proclaimed: "One of baseball's greatest achievements is without doubt to have turned

⁴³ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 78-79.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

our youth away from the bullfight, an achievement I applaud, even if some *quixote* brands me as anti-patriotic.”⁴⁵

The second comes from a visiting Spanish poet, Manuel Curros Enríquez. Enríquez, after he was told it (baseball) was a North American game, claimed: “I had a presentiment that Spain had died for Cuba . . . Yanqui ways conquer with such finesse . . . when a people are influenced to the extent that they allow games of childhood to be replaced, how can it not be dominated . . . the future which is a peoples’ principal essence no longer belongs to them . . . that is why the popularity of baseball made me realize . . . that I found myself in a foreign country.”⁴⁶ Both Cubans, the ones who favored baseball such as Gálvez and those who lamented its presence such as Enríquez, were unwittingly using the sport to define their “fluid” notions of *cubanidad*. The sport continued to “dominate” in similar ways long after the Spanish fleet left Havana harbor for the last time in late 1898.⁴⁷

Most of the sources I utilized came to the same conclusion, some more reluctantly than others, regarding the period between the 1902 constitutional installation of the Platt Amendment and the first military coup of Fulgencio Batista in 1933. The Cuban people, or at the very least middle-class white *habanos*, desired to become more closely linked to the United States both culturally and economically, and baseball was one such way to achieve this.⁴⁸ But to single out middle-class white *habanos* and to declare all of Cuba was equally invested, would be extremely short-sighted. Due to segregation found in American baseball and “North” society in general, Cuban blacks stood to lose much racial equity by moving closer to the American system, both on

⁴⁵ Ibid., Gálvez wrote the first ever history of Cuban baseball in 1889.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁷ Carter, *The Quality of Home Runs*, 40-41.

⁴⁸ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 186-188.

and off the diamond.⁴⁹ Lower and working class Cubans in and outside of Havana did not stand to gain much from having their sport taken over by Americanos at all levels of operation. In addition, most could not afford to vacation to the United States outside of Florida and thereby, were unable to experience the “freedom” of American culture first-hand.⁵⁰ Much of the positive outlooks on this change came from the white upper and middle-class *habanos*.

However, as Pérez surmises: “It (the North American presence) became a permanent condition . . . a way to take measure of the world and be measured by it.”⁵¹ Essentially, *cubanidad* was measured in a variety of ways. However, those ways always filtered through the American lens, whether the Cubans measuring it liked it or not. For example, much of the baseball on the island was organized by Americans.

While the Cuban Winter League dominated interest in the capital, the level of baseball that dominated the entire island was “sugar mill” baseball.⁵² American and wealthy Cuban economic executives, namely owners of sugar mills and nickel mines, set up the corporate Sugar League to give their Cuban employees entertainment to enjoy. With the locals inclined to: “talk about their imaginary grievances and create discontent,” baseball was viewed by many elites and government bureaucrats as a form of social control. By watching and competing in the Sugar League, where future big leaguers such as Eduardo “Sandy” Amoros and Saturnino “Minnie” Minoso honed their talents, Cubans were projecting their *cubanidad* by comparing and contrasting their baseball with that in the North.⁵³ The Cuban Winter League, by being so intertwined with Organized Baseball, was also participating in this transnational exchange, or, more succinctly, transnational engulfment. Again, as Pérez concludes: “Participation (in

⁴⁹ Ibid., 190-192

⁵⁰ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 432-444.

⁵¹ Ibid., 194.

⁵² Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 162-164.

⁵³ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 259-261.

baseball) provided access to equality, an opportunity to compete and prevail within a North American framework and thereby affirm the value and validity of being Cuban by meeting and surpassing standards set and recognized by the United States.”⁵⁴

Even academic historians fell prey to presenting Cuban baseball or their *cubanidad* through the lens of the American variety or American society in general, with both positive and negative viewpoints. Louis Pérez Jr., by combining all aspects of Cuban life into one work, seemed to avoid these pitfalls for the most part, yet he still acknowledged that for better or for worse, *cubanidad* was inseparable from American cultural influence.⁵⁵ When historians fail to acknowledge this concept, or overdramatize it, their own personal biases seep through, which only further supports Pérez’s conclusion as well as supporting my decision to focus solely on American newspapers for this study.

I was not expecting to find one true Cuban baseball identity from the past; I knew no such thing exists: It differs from person to person, and that the heated political diatribes between the two sides permanently taints the sources with bias. But, I thought I would at least be able to find some sort of consistent cultural existence, i.e., how the sport was used to define *cubanidad* during the Revolutionary Years from 1954 through 1960. However, the level of bias present in the sources, especially in the works of Roberto González Echevarría and Peter C. Bjarkman, made this virtually impossible. Yet this impossibility proves extremely beneficial to my study as it further shows how, in large measure history, is viewed through the American baseball lens. By focusing on the complete inability of Bjarkman and Echevarría to separate their political and cultural biases from their writings, it becomes clear that a Cuban’s view of *cubanidad* is

⁵⁴ Ibid., 272-273.

⁵⁵ Ibid., I felt, while not explicitly stated, that this was indeed a central theme of Pérez’s work.

relatively unimportant to my study when compared to what Americans think “makes one Cuban.”

I placed academic sources into two categories based on ideological slant, or what I perceived as such. The first of these are firmly anti-Castro, who believe comparisons between the “Maximum Leader” and Hitler and Mussolini are fairly warranted.⁵⁶ Two of the most informative sources, *The Pride of Havana: a History of Cuban Baseball* and *Baseball and Revolution in Cuba*, were both written by an exile of Castro’s regime, Roberto González Echevarría. He acknowledges the fluidity between American and Cuban cultures, when he states: “One thing appears to be clear: Cuban national, cultural and political identities can only be carved out of their involvement with the United States . . . The process through which national and political identity are defined on the island is a complex mixture of admiration for and rejection of the United States.”⁵⁷ However, his failure to truly understand this concept is revealed in between those two sentences, where he proclaims: “All the paeans to the Soviet Union in the recent past, to the sister countries of the Communist block, to the third world, and to Latin America were largely propaganda.”⁵⁸

According to Peter C. Bjarkman, Echevarría tends to underplay the brutality of Fulgencio Batista’s reign so that his beloved 1930s-1950s baseball, the “Golden Age” that he grew up with on the island, is not sullied.⁵⁹ While he does refer to Batista as a dictator, and in fact draws parallels between him and Castro as “strongmen,” he also attacks those he feels oversimplify the Revolutionary period. “Batista was a populist dictator,” Echevarria explains. “As for dictatorship, Batista was very unlike Trujillo and Somoza. These tyrants owned their

⁵⁶ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*. He places three photographs of rallies held by Castro, Hitler, and Mussolini and calls them one and the same.

⁵⁷ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 353.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 5-8.

countries . . . Not Batista, who, for all the millions he misappropriated, owned very little in Cuba, and was far from being in control of the economic elite.”⁶⁰ In his *Baseball and Revolution* chapter of his book *Cuban Fiestas*, Echevarría essentially describes his life growing up under Batista, especially with regard to the Cuban Sugar Kings, as a fiesta.⁶¹ He further elaborates on his earlier stance that Batista: “is not an evil monster of historic deminsions.”⁶² I will not enter into a judgement of Batista’s character as this is not the point of this study. However, Echevarria’s failure to admit the possibility that his life experience could potentially slant his historical recreation of these events, makes me question if his works can be relied upon when trying to define a collective *cubanidad*.

On the other end of the spectrum, is what I would call the American defenders of the Revolution, led by Peter C. Bjarkman. Though some have called him a “Castro stooge,”⁶³ of the two major English historical volumes on Cuban baseball, I perceive his to be less biased than Echevarría’s. On several occasions throughout his *History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, Bjarkman commended Echevarría for his “great storytelling and wonderful research on the pre-revolutionary period.”⁶⁴ Like his predecessor, Bjarkman made a painstaking effort to disprove the myth of Fidel Castro being a pitching prospect for the Washington Senators.⁶⁵ On occasion, he begrudgingly admitted faults with the Castro regime, much more so than Echevarría did with the Batista administration.

Bjarkman submits to Pérez Jr.’s conclusion by espousing: “University of North Carolina cultural historian Louis Pérez Jr. eloquently captures much of the connection between Cuba’s 19th century national origins and the foundations of the Cuban national game of baseball . . .

⁶⁰ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 303-304.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 176.

⁶³ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 10. This myth permeates all levels of baseball.

How Cubans of the fifties had ultimately become fed up as a society with their loss of national identity with related wholesale submergence of everything that was natively Cuban to the pervasive intrusion of all that is covetously and embarrassingly North American.”⁶⁶ Finally, the area where much of Bjarkman’s bias is found, in his extensive post-revolutionary section, is mostly irrelevant to my study, so it does not hinder my ability to establish a collective *cubanidad*.⁶⁷ However, the bias that springs up elsewhere in the work, while not prevalent, definitively mar the work as too slanted to be valuable to my research.

While Bjarkman criticized Echevarría for being too nostalgic to be accurate in the latter’s coverage of baseball under Machado and Batista, the former still neglects to address his own biases for the 1961 to the present “amateur” period. Bjarkman does admit that he is perhaps being a bit selfish with wanting to keep Cuban baseball amateur, or, in his words, “pure.”⁶⁸ However, he refuses to fully acknowledge how his preference for the modern era of Cuban baseball, one which he developed with full cooperation and access to INDER, Castro’s sporting arm, could unfairly slant his judgement of Echevarría’s work.⁶⁹ In his introduction, Bjarkman wrote: “the baseball reorganization under Cuban government control that emerged in the sixties was for the first time one that existed solely for the benefit of the collective Cuban people and thus no longer controlled and exploited ... by U.S. professional organized baseball.”⁷⁰ He continues his “unbiased” claims when he trumpets yet fails to name: “those factors that truly make Cuba’s game one of the truest treasures of international baseball play.”⁷¹

⁶⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 101-406.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁹ I found this on the official Cuban baseball website www.beisbol.cu.

⁷⁰ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 9.

⁷¹ Ibid., 13.

Bjarkman, ironically, is one of the same “American tourists who only see what they want to see,” that he openly loathes.⁷² Just as vehemently as Echevarria bashes Castro’s alleged amateurism and “holding athletes hostage,” Bjarkman constantly informed the reader about alleged impurity and corporate excess in the American professional game.⁷³ Bjarkman was at his most hypocritical, however, when he criticized the United States government for: “restricting our constitutional right to visit the communist country,” while simultaneously defending Castro’s declarations of baseball defectors as national traitors.⁷⁴ In my opinion, like Echevarría, Bjarkman is an idealist who wrote an extensive and informative account on Cuban baseball. However, also like Echevarría, his ideology muddles whatever trace of true *cubanidad* might have been found within.

What this section has proved is that especially when it comes to the decade I am studying, everything revolves around the American role, or how Americans perceive the Cuban role regarding the two nations’ respective baseball identities. It is impossible to separate the two. On the American side of the equation, historical longevity of the game is on their side as well as geographical size and economic might. By the time the allegedly first Cuban baseball game was played in 1875, the sport had been America’s national pastime for at least a decade or more.

Baseball had been firmly woven into American culture and national character no matter which side of political issues Americans found themselves. In addition, Americans introduced baseball to the first Cubans to play it. As such, no matter what the Cuban role in this transnational baseball and cultural exchange, or how emphatically unbiased an American author tries to be, the lens expressed via Ken Burns’ *Baseball* will always be the one through which this role is examined.

⁷² Ibid., 205.

⁷³ Ibid., 5, 12.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 5, 189.

Finally, this study, as I slowly came to realize, is not about the Cuban baseball scene but how the American media and their readership perceived that scene. Even if I could read Spanish in addition to having access to local Havana sources, my paper always has been about American perceptions, nothing more and nothing less. Admittedly, how Cubans perceived their own scene and that of their U.S. counterparts, is important, it is at best secondary, as their accounts are not what the denizens of Rochester were reading, at least firsthand. They were reading the opinions of a couple of local American sports writers who, in turn, were writing through the lens of the long established cultural ideal of America's national game, whether a positive or negative report. So the mystical "floating" *cubanidad* of the period, while by no means irrelevant, does not need to be delved into further.

Chapter 3

Just One More Step

To understand Rochester's media reaction to the revolutionary events in Cuba, we must discuss the events themselves, both on and off the baseball diamond. As I have stated in previous chapters, Cuban professional baseball from the 1930s until its abrupt end in the 1960s grew closer and closer to the American organized variety. This strengthening relationship coincided with the political unrest and unsure social atmosphere of Cuba's government, both nationally and abroad. The parallel nature of these two circumstances, not just in a chronological sense, but how both would receive coverage in Rochester newspapers, shows the importance of documenting both Cuban narrative strands before beginning the thematic analysis of their American interpretations.

The first section in this chapter focuses on the island's baseball and political backgrounds prior to 1954. Cuba's increasing role in organized baseball's hierarchical structure is discussed in detail, namely the pressure local promoters felt until they signed an official agreement with MLB in 1947. In addition, the section specifically documents the 1930s arrival of professional scouts, Cuban players appearing on 1940s and 1950s major league rosters and finally, the presence of the Florida International League's Havana Cubans from their 1946 creation until their 1953 dissolution. This beginning section concludes with a brief description of the Cuban political situation during this transitory period, in particular the reigns of Gerardo Machado, Ramón Grau San Martín, and Fulgencio Batista.

In its second section, Chapter 3 covers the brief yet tumultuous history of the Havana Sugar Kings. It references the Revolution only in instances where the war directly impacted the

Havana franchise, such as increased security measures imposed by Batista during the 1957 season, the constant complaints made by other IL owners during the 1958 campaign, the eventful 26 July 1959 game, and the Sugar Kings' eventual 1960 relocation to Jersey City. However the main focus is spent on events away from the front lines, namely upon the team's diamond exploits, attendance and gate receipt trends, in addition to the naïve, sometimes xenophobic, perceptions of many North American baseball insiders. Unlike the first, the second section does not attempt much in the way of in-depth thematic discussion. It strictly relies upon basic facts and narratives, as Chapter 4 features the majority of the relevant academic analysis.

Finally, the Cuban Revolution is chronologically detailed, from the 1956 arrival of Fidel Castro aboard the *Granma* on the eastern shores of Oriente Province¹ to Batista's flight into exile on 31 December 1958.² Castro's first year and a half in power, which directly coincided with the remaining days of the Sugar Kings, is also documented. The time period from his victorious 8 January 1959 arrival in Havana to the Americans severing economic relations with Cuba on 6 July 1960 was invaluable to this study.³

This chapter reveals tightening American grips on the island through baseball, characterized by the Havana Cubans and through political means via a revolving door of dictatorial regimes. It explores the life and times of the Cuban/ Havana Sugar Kings, the franchise without which Rochester's media would have never travelled to the "Pearl of the Antilles." Finally, the chapter chronologically details the Cuban Revolution, the four-year war which occurred parallel to the Sugar Kings' seven year existence. Covering both narratives, the baseball and the politics, this chapter puts the remainder of the study into necessary perspective.

¹ Castro with Ramonet, *My Life*, 182-183. Oriente Province no longer exists, having since been divided up into several smaller provinces.

² Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 222-224.

³ Castro with Ramonet, *My Life*, 637-638.

A full picture here in Chapter 3 is provided so the readers can understand how it was edited, cropped, highlighted, and exposed by the local Rochester press, as detailed in Chapter 4.

Scouts to Smokers to Strongmen

As stated before, in the 1920s and 1930s American baseball truly began expanding its efforts regarding Cuba, particularly in the search for new sources of talent. However, the 1920s Cuban-American exchange mostly consisted of NLB players swapping with CWL counterparts during their respective seasons, and American white players barnstorming the island in winter. MLB examples such as Adolfo Luque and Miguel González were rare exceptions. In addition, with American organized baseball still two decades away from integration, talented Cuban blacks such as pitcher Martín Dihigo and power-hitter Crístobal Torriente were limited to performing in the NLB.⁴ It wasn't until the mid-1930s that anyone in American organized baseball turned a serious eye to Cuba to acquire new talent. It had nothing to do with finding the next Babe Ruth, Josh Gibson, or even the next Luque. It had everything to do with one man's realization he could pay light-skinned Hispanics far less than American whites to do the same job of hitting or throwing a baseball. That man was Clark Griffith, long-time owner of the American League's Washington Senators.

With the Senators winning zero World Series titles since their 1901 foundation, many Washington baseball fans felt that times were changing when former player/manager Clark Griffith bought the team in 1919.⁵ In the short term, this was indeed true as the Washington club won the American League pennant in 1924 and 1925, winning its first World Series in the

⁴ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 25-35. Bjarkman called Dihigo, "Baseball's Least-Known Hall of Famer." He was the first Cuban native to have been elected to Cooperstown, receiving the honor in 1977.

⁵ Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game*, 151.

former.⁶ However by the mid-1930s, while not wholly worthy of their World War II byline: “First in war, first in peace, and last in the American League;” the Senators rarely finished out of the second division.⁷

Instead of trying to build a competitive team, Griffith pursued a path to obtain high profits with little money spent. With his lacklustre clubs drawing low attendance figures, Griffith looked elsewhere to make money. For example, he charged the local professional Negro club, the Homestead Grays, a team that frequently drew higher crowds, a sizable rental fee to use the Senators’ Griffith Stadium.⁸ However, Griffith’s biggest concern was finding ways to lower his talent payroll. With black ballplayers still barred from MLB, he turned his attention southward, to the white and light-skinned “mulattoes” of the Caribbean.⁹

In 1934, Senators’ scout and “erstwhile Baltimore laundryman,” Joseph Cambria, was sent to Havana per Griffith’s orders.¹⁰ A few months into the season, Cambria signed outfielder Bobby Estalella, and assigned him to the Senator’s Double-A Albany farm team.¹¹ In 1936, at least three other Cubans joined him in New York’s capital.¹² This was only the beginning for the Senators. From 1934-1960, Bjarkman estimated Cambria signed over four hundred “Cubanolas” to varying Washington contracts. Less than half that number ever saw Griffith Stadium.¹³ In this regard, Cambria’s Cuban signings definitively helped produce the baseball scouting frenzy that arrived in Havana’s 1940s-50s era. It should be noted that most of his acquisitions either didn’t

⁶ http://www.baseball-reference.com/postseason/1924_WS.shtml. In said World Series, Washington defeated the Yankees in seven games.

⁷ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 64.

⁸ Burgos Jr., *Playing America’s Game*, 184.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁰ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 64. Apparently Cambria owned a string of laundromats in the Baltimore area.

¹¹ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 219. His nickname amongst Cuban fans was Tarzán.

¹² <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/team.cgi?id=a636e0b5>. Those additional Cubans were Thomas de la Cruz, Mike Guerra, and Reggie Otero. Rafael Suarez also played but it is unknown if he was Cuban.

¹³ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 64. Cubanolas were Cambria’s racially insensitive term for his island prospects.

pan out or simply filled empty uniforms playing on the Senator's lacklustre World War II era clubs.¹⁴ However, Cambria's resulting establishment of durable minor league prospects, plus his few quality major league signings such as Estalella, outfielder Roberto Ortíz, and junk-ball pitcher Conrado Marrero, made other organizations factor Cuba into their scouting plans.¹⁵

Cuban sportswriter Jess Losada, mainly due to his dislike for Cambria, helped the Cincinnati Reds scout Cuban talent in the early 1940s.¹⁶ Other teams such as the Brooklyn Dodgers began holding exhibition contests in Havana to scout potential prospects, in addition to testing the waters for general manager Branch Rickey's integration plan.¹⁷ Cambria and colleagues were both a blessing and a bane upon island baseball, on the field and off. The risk was minimal for these owners and scouts, but severe for their Cuban acquisitions. If they signed an organized baseball contract, they subjected themselves to verbal racial abuse, poor transportation and housing, along with a substantial language barrier. MLB clubs, in essence, usually paid their Cuban recruits a one-way ticket to the United States and accommodations in segregated housing.¹⁸ These contracts were clearly one-way agreements as far as profit was concerned. Despite this, the interest organized baseball showed in the island only served to draw American-Cuban business relationships closer. By 1947, these relationships reached a climax due to the actions of a man with no involvement in Cuban or American baseball. The actions and dreams of Jorge Pasquél, a Mexican businessman, drastically raised the price of securing not only Cuban players, but Americans as well. In doing so, Pasquél forced Cuban baseball promoters to jump into Organized Baseball's arms.

¹⁴ Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game*, 163-164.

¹⁵ Bjarkrkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 65.

¹⁶ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 269-270. Losada perjoratively called Cambria "The Christopher Columbus of baseball."

¹⁷ Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game*, 184-185.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 158-160.

Pasquél, a native of Veracruz, was determined to make baseball thrive in Mexico. While he did not found the Mexican League, in 1940 he established the two most popular franchises, Mexico City and Veracruz. He eventually owned the entire circuit.¹⁹ But Pasquél's main objective was to make his league comparable in quality to MLB, hoping to eventually force the creation; "Of a truly World Series."²⁰ To achieve this, he offered MLB, NLB, and CWL players expensive contracts, with the intent to lure them to play in Mexico.²¹ Being offered in some cases three times what the other club owners paid them, many players accepted Pasquél's enticements. In the mid-1940s, each of the three aforementioned circuits lost quality talent to their "outlaw" Mexican counterpart. MLB lost stars such as St. Louis pitcher Max Lanier,²² New York Giant's moundsman Sal Maglie,²³ and Brooklyn catcher Mickey Owen.²⁴ NLB lost future Hall of Famers Josh Gibson, James "Cool Papa" Bell,²⁵ and Roy Campanella.²⁶ The CWL lost the services of manager Adolfo Luque, pitcher Napoleón Reyes, and Cambria signee Roberto Ortiz.²⁷

In response to Pasquél's tactics and furious American owners, MLB commissioner Albert "Happy" Chandler decreed in 1946 that any player abandoning his Organized Baseball contract would be banned from playing in any affiliated league.²⁸ This not only included players who

¹⁹ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 20.

²⁰ John Virtue, *South of the Color Barrier: How Jorge Pasquel and the Mexican League Pushed Baseball Towards Integration* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2007), 110. Mexican sportswriter Angel Fernandez made this statement about Pasquél's baseball goals.

²¹ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 20-22.

²² Ibid. According to Echevarría Lanier was paid \$20,000 a year for five years, which the Cuban historian also called, "A fabulous sum in 1947."

²³ Virtue, *South of the Color Barrier*, 128. Maglie was signed by Pasquél to a \$15,000 a year contract.

²⁴ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 22.

²⁵ Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game*, 167-168.

²⁶ Virtue, *South of the Color Barrier*, 102-105.

²⁷ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 22. Both players also competed in MLB, Reyes for the Giants and Ortiz for the Senators.

²⁸ Burgos Jr., *Playing America's Game*, 174.

went to Mexico, but those who played against them in the various winter ball leagues of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic.²⁹

For much of 1946 and 1947, Chandler pressured many of these winter circuits to become official MLB minor league feeder systems.³⁰ By far, Cuba was the most sought after in this move to increase Organized Baseball's influence. In April of 1947, Chandler and Clark Griffith flew to Havana in an attempt to convince their Cuban counterparts to sign a binding agreement, one which would effectively tie the island's baseball system to MLB. When they failed to achieve this, Chandler said, in Echevarría's words, "That baseball, after all was an American sport that had to be played by American rules."³¹ However, despite the clear bitterness felt on both sides, the dispute came to an end three months later. After the Cuban owners discussed the issue further, they collectively came to the decision to sign, realizing MLB would otherwise eventually drive them out of business.³² On 10 June 1947, a Cuban delegation headed by Almendares shareholder Dr. July Sanguily, approved a working agreement with the National Association of Professional Baseball Clubs, regulator of the American minor leagues.³³

The impact this document had on the Cuban-American baseball relationship was fourfold: First, with the signing of the agreement, the CWL had to abide by the rules Chandler set forth regarding Mexican League "jumpers." The likes of Max Lanier, who in February helped Almendares win the CWL championship, was banned from the league.³⁴ Famed Cuban managers, such as Luque and Miguel Gonzalez, were also banned. Since Luque coached in Mexico, and

²⁹ Ibid., Beside Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico made up the winter ball locations.

³⁰ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 44-45.

³¹ Ibid., 46.

³² Ibid., 48-49.

³³ Ibid., 47.

³⁴ Ibid., 41-43.

Gonzalez allegedly helped several St. Louis players including Lanier to defect, these two CWL icons were forced to technically retire, albeit only until 1949 when Chandler reversed his ban.³⁵

Second, it further regulated the talent pool to the point where a Cuban who wanted to make playing baseball his livelihood was essentially forced to do so through MLB's system. This meant that Cuba further became an extension of American baseball. Cuban baseball was drifting away from the sugar mill and amateur contests towards joining ranks with American professionalism.

Third, it was the preceding forerunner to a summer 1955 dispute between the various Latin American winter leagues and MLB. In 1954, there was a cap from each MLB club allowed to play in the Latin leagues: "three men . . . who had been on the roster 45 days or more, and two others who had been on the roster less than 45 days." This cap extended to native Latins as well.³⁶ In addition, the previous summer Organized Baseball had attempted to pressure the Caribbean leagues to cut their seasons in half to reduce wear and tear on participating MLB players.³⁷ In protest, the winter circuits, lead by the CWL, each threatened in 1955 to bar for life any native MLB star who without "'justifiable cause' does not play in his home country during the Caribbean season."³⁸ This led to a war of words between various MLB owners and their Latin counterparts. Frank Lane, then GM of the Chicago White Sox, echoed many of his fellow American colleagues when he commented:

In one way, adoption of such of a rule might be a good thing . . . it would make the players put their cards on the table as to whether they want to play major league ball in the States or winter league ball in the Caribbean sector . . . some of the players are more concerned with landing a job in winter baseball than they are with holding the ones they have in the majors . . .

³⁵ Ibid., 49. Also the two managers helped found and coach in a rival circuit, Liga Nacional, during their two year CWL ban.

³⁶ J.G. Taylor Spink, "Latin Demands Threaten Majors' Tieup," *The Sporting News*, 20 July 1955.

³⁷ J.G. Taylor Spink, "Big Leaguers Face Winter Ball Curb," *The Sporting News*, 7 July 1954.

³⁸ J.G. Taylor Spink, "Latin Demands Threaten Majors' Tieup," *The Sporting News*, 20 July 1955.

especially the Caribbean natives . . . We have received letters in the White Sox office from fans who are demanding to know whether the players are ‘saving themselves’ for winter ball.³⁹

An anonymous “topline executive from the National League,” further argued: “Nobody can make me believe that anyone can play 325 days a year and still operate at the top of his ability. The human body just cannot stand that incessant nervous strain, as well as the wear and tear physically.” Executives even accused the various Latin American circuits of “exerting pressure on the individual players . . . to dictate to the major leagues who can and who can’t play winter ball.”⁴⁰ The CWL responded: “If you bar our own players competing in our leagues, you will kill us.”⁴¹ Although this issue was somewhat resolved for the start of winter play in August, tensions between the two groups was palatable and represents how truly one-sided Organized Baseball preferred to operate their relationship with its Cuban counterparts.⁴²

Finally, in regard to forces that specifically prompted Rochester and Havana to collide in the 1950s IL, the 1947 working agreement that tied the CWL to the American minor leagues was critical.⁴³ This cut through a lot of the red tape involved with transporting recently-signed Cubans, mainly by the Senators, from the island to their minor league clubs scattered throughout the Southern United States.⁴⁴ More importantly, it came a year after the creation of a Washington affiliated franchise in Havana. With financial help from Griffith and former Senators prospect Merito Acosta, Cambria formed the Havana Cubans Baseball Club in 1946, a founding member of the Class C/B Florida International League.⁴⁵ Its eight-year competitive and financial success, caused in part by the 1947 agreement, served as a precedent that led to the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Dan Daniel, “Latin Loop Envoys Outline Problems in Confab with Frick,” *The Sporting News*, 27 July 1955.

⁴² Dan Daniel, “Dual O.B.- Caribbean Player Pacts Ended,” *The Sporting News*, 24 August 1955.

⁴³ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁴ Burgos Jr., *Playing America’s Game*, 159-161.

⁴⁵ Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

creation of the Sugar Kings and bringing Roberto “Bobby” Maduro into the business of professional baseball.⁴⁶

Throughout much of the Havana Cubans’ existence, they were financially run by the aforementioned trio of Cambria, Griffith, and Acosta. It was not until 1953, contrary to many sources, that Maduro owned a majority stake in the team.⁴⁷ From 1947 onwards, however, he was indeed the co-owner of Gran Estadio de La Habana, the 35,000 capacity ballpark where the Cubans played their home contests.⁴⁸ With the franchise being the stadium’s primary summer tenant, Maduro heavily promoted the team and, since he was Cuban, unlike Cambria, he likely became cemented in the eyes of local fans, incorrectly, as being the true owner.⁴⁹ Whatever “Bobby’s” true role in running the team prior to 1953, the impact the team had on the Havana baseball scene was indisputable.

The new league instantly provided give Havana new competitive diamond rivals, such as the Miami franchises, the Flamingoes and Sun Sox, and Tampa’s Smokers. Both Miami and Tampa had large Cuban populations.⁵⁰ Smoker/Cuban contests could not compete with “eternal rivals” Habana/Almendares games, but the club nevertheless played, according to Echevarría, “Triple-A caliber” baseball.⁵¹ Under the field management of Oscar Rodríguez, the Havana Cubans won the pennant in each of their first five seasons.⁵² In 1947, the Cubans won the league title by amassing an astonishing record of 105 wins and 45 losses.⁵³ They won the championship again the following year, and made it to the final round in 1949 and 1950. The fans responded in

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Echevarría mentions that Cambria formed them initially but that he sold them to Maduro after their inaugural campaign.

⁴⁸ Ibid., It was also known as El Cerro or the Hill.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 295-296. Apparently Echevarría’s great-uncle Aurelio was the Smoker’s team physician.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 103.

⁵³ Ibid.

kind, with over 200,000 fans passing through the turnstiles in their first four seasons, and just under 170,000 in the fifth.⁵⁴ Their final three seasons, however, bore witness to a drastic slide both on the field and in the grandstands. The Cubans never finished higher than fourth, failed to make the playoffs every year except 1953, and drew under 100,000 consecutively, including a disappointing 23,460 final campaign.⁵⁵ The attendance drop was in part due to the poor performance on the field, but other factors also contributed. Two such factors in particular prompted Maduro to seek entrance into the Triple-A IL the following year, while also highlighting important historical differences between the Cubans and their Sugar King successors.

First, unlike their NLB namesakes in Harlem, the Havana Cubans were, until 1951, entirely white, with a couple of fair-skinned “mulattos.” This was due to a Florida ordinance, found in many Southern states which forbade blacks and whites from taking part in the same athletic contest.⁵⁶ According to Costello, Havana’s roster featured at least six Negro players in their 1953, their last FIL campaign. This mirrored the composition of future Sugar King lineups.⁵⁷ Also Maduro’s SABR entry mentions that he was criticized for allegedly complaining that his 1953 roster contained, “Frankly . . . too many Negroes.”⁵⁸ Until 1951, however, one could argue that this meant the club did not symbolically represent Cuba. Even Echevarría points out that at the time, “It was the only professional Cuban team without black players even

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Lloyd Johnson & Miles Wolff, *The Encyclopedia of Minor League Baseball: The Official Record of Minor League Baseball; 1st Edition* (Durham, North Carolina: Baseball America, INC, 1993), 271. Bjarkman, who quotes their 2nd edition, claims the Cubans did not make the playoffs their last year. However both *The Encyclopedia* and newspaper articles reveal that Havana lost in the first round to Ft. Lauderdale, 3 games to 1.

⁵⁶ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 296-297.

⁵⁷ Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*. Via BaseballReference.com there are only 2 Negro players I can identify (many do not have pictures.) The three players I can confirm were black were Julio Becquer and Juan Delis. Angel Scull, another Negro, is listed on the 1952 roster.

⁵⁸ Ibid. The article also claims Maduro refuted this charge.

after the Dodger's signing of Jackie Robinson."⁵⁹ Despite the admitted quality of Cuban icons such as Conrado Marrero and Roberto Estalella, until Negro players competed for Havana in 1951, the franchise was not considered representative of island baseball.

The second factor was the low level of playing classification in which the Cubans competed. Class B was just two steps above the lowest tiers of Organized Baseball.⁶⁰ Maduro, ever the ambitious dreamer, felt that Cuba deserved only the highest quality of the diamond sport. To remain toiling in a circuit far below the stature of the American Major Leagues, especially with the lacklustre results the previous three seasons, would obviously have trouble drawing fans.⁶¹ Both the quality of play and racial tensions could only be improved by a move to a higher designated league, such as to the historic and established IL.⁶²

Jim Crow laws of the American south did not apply to the IL, with each franchise located in either the Northeast U.S. or Southern Canada.⁶³ The league already had shown its acceptance to integrated teams, as the 1946 Montreal Royals proved when they fielded Jackie Robinson.⁶⁴ If Maduro was given virtually zero restrictions on the team's ethnic makeup, while keeping a prominent national roster presence, he could appeal to a wider Cuban audience. The quality of play would be solved as well. The IL was designated as a Triple-A circuit, the highest certification a minor league could obtain, meaning their players would be more talented and athletic than their FIL counterparts. Along with the Pacific Coast League and the American Association, the IL served as the literal final step before the majors,⁶⁵ a fact touted by 1954

⁵⁹ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 296.

⁶⁰ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 190-191.

⁶¹ Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

⁶² Johnson & Wolff, *The Encyclopedia of Minor League Baseball*, 13. The IL initially formed in 1884 as the Eastern League and still plays to this day.

⁶³ Echevarria, *The Pride of Havana*, 337.

⁶⁴ *Baseball: The National Pastime*. Dir. Ken Burns. Narr. John Chancellor. PBS, 1994, Netflix.

⁶⁵ Johnson & Wolff, *The Encyclopedia of Minor League Baseball*, 276. The IL and AA were official Triple-A circuits while the PCL was classified as an Open loop.

Sugar Kings advertisements: “Un Paso Más y Llegamos,” roughly translated as “One More Step and We Get There.”⁶⁶ Organized Baseball’s Cuban relationship hit its apex, and reached a new level of stability. In a far more brutal and repressive manner, however, the same description could not be applied to the political and social upheavals then plaguing the island nation.

In the 1930s and 1940s Cuba was, simply put, a revolving door of dictatorial leadership. The nine year period of 1925-1933 was ruthlessly ruled by Cuba’s fifth president, Gerardo Machado. While freely elected, his reign was frequently marked with despotic tendencies and repressive decrees, which included instituting martial law during his final months. Anti-Machado protests and demonstrations occurred often during this time, eventually coalescing into a general strike across all walks of Cuban life in early August 1933. Faced with such overwhelming opposition, Machado fled.⁶⁷ On 4 September, Fulgencio Batista, a prominent noncommissioned officer in the Cuban Army, launched a “Sergeants’ Uprising,” in which the new president Carlos Manuel de Céspedes was ousted and replaced by Ramón Grau San Martín.⁶⁸ From 1934 to 1940, Batista was the head of the Cuban military, and allegedly the strongman leader behind a host of one-term puppet presidents.⁶⁹ These included the aforementioned San Martín, Manuel Márquez-Sterling,⁷⁰ and Carlos Hevia.⁷¹ After Federico Laredo Brú held the top post from 1936-1940, Batista was chosen to serve as the ninth Cuban President in what most observers claimed were fair elections.⁷²

⁶⁶ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 336.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 184-185.

⁶⁸ Castro with Ignacio Ramonet, *My Life*, 631.

⁶⁹ Ramón L Bonachea & Marta San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection: 1952-1959* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1974), 1-3.

⁷⁰ <http://www.vitral.org/vitral/vitral51/cent.htm>. His reign only lasted a few hours. He is the father of a son who bears his namesake, the same Márquez-Sterling featured in Ken Burns’s *Baseball* mini-series.

⁷¹ John P. McKnight, “Carlos Hevia is Now to Head Troubled Cuba,” *Montreal Gazette*, 16 January 1934

⁷² Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 16-17.

After his willing 1944 abdication at the end of his term, Batista retired to live on the Miami beachfront. His political rival San Martín won the election to replace him. Batista remained heavily involved in island politics. He was elected to the Cuban Senate in 1948 and returned to Havana.⁷³ In 1952, the former general ran again for president, with full support of both the labour unions and his biggest power base, the army. However, it became obvious in the months before Election Day that Batista would finish behind frontrunners Roberto Agramonte and Carlos Hevia.⁷⁴ On 10 March 1952, with the support of the Cuban Army, Batista overthrew President Carlos Prío Socarrás⁷⁵ in what Echevarría called a “bloodless coup.”⁷⁶ It was during the beginning of Batista’s new reign that the Havana Sugar Kings came into existence.

Sugar’s International Flavor

As mentioned previously, in 1953 Roberto Maduro bought a majority stake in the Havana Cubans. This was the Cubans’ worst campaign in their eight year existence, finishing with a paltry record of 63-69 and drawing well under 30,000 fans.⁷⁷ Yet this setback did not dampen Maduro’s spirit. According to Echevarría, it only increased his determination to “make Havana the spearhead of a well-coordinated Latin American invasion of organized baseball.”⁷⁸ Despite Bjarkman retroactively calling the Cuban businessman’s vision, “An entirely futile dream from the outset,” he remained intensely obsessed with the notion of the island capital hosting a MLB franchise.⁷⁹ It was through this obsession, filtered through the lacklustre demise of the Havana

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Robert Jason Alexander, *A History of Organized Labor in Cuba* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2002), 133.

⁷⁵ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 17.

⁷⁶ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 302. The historian also declares, “No period in Cuban history has been the object of more mythmaking than the fifties.

⁷⁷ Johnson & Wolff, *The Encyclopedia of Minor League Baseball*, 271.

⁷⁸ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 338.

⁷⁹ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 102-103.

Cubans, that Maduro came up with the concept and business model for the yet-to-be-named Sugar Kings.

On 5 September 1953, Jack Sheehan, GM of the IL's Springfield (Massachusetts) Cubs, announced the club would likely fold following the current season.⁸⁰ This put the circuit with only seven teams and the owners wanted it to remain an even-numbered league. IL Commissioner Frank Shaughnessy responded by pressuring Sheehan to find a buyer for the Springfield franchise while simultaneously attracting potential cities to fill the open slot. Sometime in either September or October, Maduro answered Shaughnessy's overtures by submitting a franchise bid on behalf of Havana.⁸¹ He spent much of the following three months trying to convince IL owners of Cuba's baseball potential, at the same time keeping FIL officials informed of his activities.⁸² Maduro faced three major stumbling blocks: Springfield's refusal to commit to either staying or folding, the Baltimore franchise turning defunct due to the Maryland city's acquisition of an MLB club,⁸³ and transportation costs to the island.⁸⁴ Despite this, the IL owners seemed to want Maduro and Havana in the league. On 3 November, Montreal Royals' GM Guy Moreau stated, "There are many good players in Cuba . . . A Cuban team would be more of an attraction in Montreal than Springfield."⁸⁵ On the 15th, Shaughnessy declared "Havana is definitely in if the league operates as an eight team circuit."⁸⁶ Eventually on 13 January 1954, following Springfield's official withdrawal, the Commissioner announced

⁸⁰ AP, "Cubs to Sell Springfield Club," *Palm Beach Post*, 6 September 1953. Maduro did not buy Springfield and move them as both Echevarría and Costello have claimed.

⁸¹ I found articles in Google archives that mention Havana's attempts to get into the IL, but I can find no start date for either Maduro's submission or for the IL deliberations.

⁸² Lonnie Burt, "Draft Leaves Saints Intact; Shocks Lions," *St. Petersburg Times*, 2 December 1953.

⁸³ AP, "Havana Puzzle Maybe Cleared Up by Thursday," *St. Petersburg Times*, 15 December 1953.

⁸⁴ UPI, "International League Meets to Consider Applications," *Spencer Daily Reporter*, 31 October 1953.

⁸⁵ CP, "IL Heads to Decide Issues," *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 November 1953.

⁸⁶ UPI, "Havana Nine Set for Entrance to Baseball's IL," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, 16 November 1953.

Havana's IL admission along with Richmond, Virginia, replacing Baltimore.⁸⁷ Two days prior, Maduro had announced the name of Cuba's new baseball franchise: The Sugar Kings.⁸⁸

Before the 1954 season began, however, one major issue had to be addressed: the aforementioned concern IL owners had regarding transportation expenses. Even with Richmond's inclusion enabling a reasonable game and travel schedule, it did nothing to defray what Shaughnessy described as "prohibitive" costs involved.⁸⁹ Maduro's response was to effectively remove the issue from the table. In exchange for his franchise, the Cuban agreed to personally pay each team's airfare to Havana, excluding Richmond, for the Sugar Kings' first two IL campaigns. While Maduro knowingly assumed a very large financial risk, he felt it a necessary short-term loss to ensure Cuba's long-term Triple-A survival.⁹⁰ The issue of travel costs affected the Sugar Kings for each of their seven IL seasons.

1954

The inaugural 1954 campaign could easily be considered an overall success, especially when put into context of the problems Maduro had to overcome to gain IL admission. The other major problem that could have hindered the King's competitiveness was the lack of a working agreement with a major league club. If they were stricken with injuries or the players were not performing at the Triple-A level, Havana would have either had to individually negotiate with MLB teams in the hopes of getting the necessary replacements or make do with their current roster; nothing was guaranteed.⁹¹ Despite this, Maduro's "Cubans" were competitive from their opening contest to the season's final day.

⁸⁷ International News Service, "Havana in IL Officially Now," *Miami News*, 13 January 1954.

⁸⁸ AP, "Cubans Pick 'Sugar Kings' as Nickname," *Miami News*, 11 January 1954.

⁸⁹ UPI, "International League Meets to Consider Applications," *Spencer Daily Reporter*, 31 October 1953.

⁹⁰ Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

While by no means dominant, the Kings surprised everyone, not just by winning a few games against more established teams such as Rochester and Toronto, but actively competing for one of the league's four playoff spots. Led on the field by manager and former Washington Senator Reggie Otero, the club finished with a 78-76 record, placing them in a fourth-place tie.⁹² Although Havana lost the ensuing one-game playoff against the Syracuse Chiefs, 13-4, their fifth place finish was much higher than anyone expected.⁹³ Havana's stellar field performance was made possible by the likes of ex-Major Leaguers such as Clint "Hondo Hurricane" Hartung and Johnny Lipon, and local Cuban favorites Angel Scull and Julio Becquer.⁹⁴ Most importantly for the Cubans' future competitiveness, however, was when Maduro signed a MLB working agreement with the Cincinnati Reds on 4 August.⁹⁵

The Kings finished second in overall attendance, with 295,453 fans for the season.⁹⁶ It was not uncommon to see over 15,000 Havanans cheering on the home team in a 35,000 capacity stadium.⁹⁷ For road trips, Maduro hired an 11-piece charanga band to accompany the team, to perform "Cuban" or "jungle" music to curious foreign fans.⁹⁸ In every opposing IL city the Sugar Kings visited, home town spectators came out in droves to see these "hot-blooded" Latinos perform America's pastime.⁹⁹

Covering their opponents' airfare was a bit more expensive than Maduro had anticipated. The businessman's total operating costs for the 1954 IL campaign were approximately around

⁹² Johnson & Wolff, *The Encyclopedia of Minor League Baseball*, 276.

⁹³ International News Service, "Chiefs Gain Final Berth in Playoffs." *T-U*, 15 September 1954.

⁹⁴ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/team.cgi?id=dc19fd6c>

⁹⁵ AP, "Havana Pact," *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, 5 August, 1954. The Cincinnati Reds were the Redlegs from 1954-1959 due to Communistic connotations associated with the term Red.

⁹⁶ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 196. Doubleheaders however were not attended very well and sugar harvest played a role in a minor May drop in attendance.

⁹⁷ *T-U* and *D & C Sports Pages*, April-October 1954. I gleaned this from several box scores, where crowds were recorded at 25,000, 18,800, 8,000, 6,000, 15,000 etc. Hower attendance might even be higher as several box scores fail to list a recorded number.

⁹⁸ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 295.

⁹⁹ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*, 23.

\$50,000, \$40,000 of which was reserved for transportation expenses, this 4/5ths of Maduro's entire budget.¹⁰⁰ However, Maduro acknowledged that if his 1955 home attendance figures remained the same, air transportation costs would have a negligible effect in this regard.¹⁰¹ Financial issues aside, his fellow IL owners were quite happy with the Sugar Kings' performance. The Cubans provided quality completion, Maduro's transportation deal prevented opposing teams from losing money on the Havana venture, and, in fact, their marketing as the exotic baseball team helped draw fans to IL ballparks.¹⁰² As such, the Kings' 1955 expectations were quite understandably raised.

1955

Havana's 1955 season not only met these increased expectations, but managed to raise the bar. With Otero again serving as manager, his Cincinnati-reinforced squad raced ahead to a third-place finish with a record of 87-66, losing to Toronto four games to one in the first playoff round.¹⁰³ Despite the MLB working agreement, the most productive Sugar Kings were Latin Americans, featuring the productive base running of Cubans Alberto Baro and Ray Noble, Puerto Rican Nino Escalera, and Venezuelan Pompeyo "Yo-Yo" Davillo.¹⁰⁴ Power hitting was still an issue, but stellar pitching from the likes of Pat Scantlebury, Emilio Cueche, Bubba Harris, and even the forty-four year old Connie Marrero, dominated IL opponents.¹⁰⁵ Home field advantage was present more than any other campaign, with the Kings losing less than twenty Gran Stadium contests.¹⁰⁶ However, their away record was well under .500. This obvious distinction between the two records resulted in opponents blaming outside factors such as the

¹⁰⁰ Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

¹⁰¹ Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

¹⁰² *T-U and D & C Sports Pages*, April-October 1954.

¹⁰³ Johnson & Wolff, *The Encyclopedia of Minor League Baseball*, 281.

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/team.cgi?id=99a1d74b>

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *T-U and D & C Sports Pages*, April-October 1955.

“jungle music,” inedible food and water, away players spending more time partying than playing, and umpires intimidated by the local fans.¹⁰⁷

Attendance rose, with 313,232 fans on hand for Havana’s home ballgames, as the club’s gate total finished second only to Toronto.¹⁰⁸ However, the Cuban economy started to take a decline around the midway point of the season. The local sugar harvest, more important than normal, likely prevented cane cutters and other field workers from attending contests, as it had the previous year.¹⁰⁹ However, the Kings’ unexpected winning ways, combined with the relative calm in regards to the Cuban political situation, enabled the team to avoid any long-term drain from their fanbase. It was not uncommon for opponents to have played in front of 25,000 “howling fanatics”¹¹⁰ with waving neckerchiefs, banging drums, aka “Baseball, Cuban style.”¹¹¹ Though airfare continued to be an issue, the rise in attendance, along with local television and radio contracts, greatly boosted the Kings’ financial margin. In fact, Havana’s total transportation costs came to approximately \$24,000, just over half of their 1954 receipts.¹¹² However, the following year, nothing went right for Maduro nor the team he fielded at Gran Stadium.

1956

Although the Cubans’ home domination of teams barely remained intact, in 1956 their away record was absolutely dreadful. They finished in sixth place.¹¹³ As a result, complaints

¹⁰⁷ George Beahon “In This Corner,” *D & C*, 8 August 1955.

¹⁰⁸ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 103. In fact, the Cubans drew 29,917 fans to a game against Columbus setting a then IL single contest attendance record.

¹⁰⁹ George Beahon, “In This Corner,” *D & C*, 30 April 1954. In other sources, they mention Cuba had lacklustre sugar harvests until 1957, which likely meant this fan trend continued in 1955.

¹¹⁰ George Beahon “In This Corner,” *D & C*, 8 August 1955.

¹¹¹ Al C. Weber, “Clark Going Up, Whisenant to Wings?,” 10 June 1955. There is a second title for article above it but it got cut off in my scan.

¹¹² Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

¹¹³ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/team.cgi?id=de8230ea>

against Havana's supposed unnatural home field advantages decreased dramatically.¹¹⁴ Halfway through the season, Otero was fired and replaced by his assistant, "Nap" Reyes. The coaching swap did nothing to change the Kings' fortunes, as they stumbled to a 72-82 finish.¹¹⁵ Hitting was still an issue, with only six players in the IL top fifty, and only a single Cuban in the top twenty.¹¹⁶ Pitching was subpar as well, with only Rudy Minracin in the top twenty.¹¹⁷ In addition, the Cincinnati working agreement was decidedly one-sided, with only two players, pitchers Scantlebury and Don Gross, spending time on both rosters.¹¹⁸

Attendance dropped off slightly with only 220,357 fans coming through the Gran Stadium turnstiles.¹¹⁹ In addition, this was the first season that Maduro did not have to pay airfare for visiting clubs.¹²⁰ However, while Maduro's home profits rose as a result, those of his fellow IL clubs suffered as they now had to finance their own Cuban trips. This sparked a lowering of American enthusiasm for Havana's place in the IL.¹²¹ This downward trend both on the field and at league headquarters only deteriorated further in the next two years.

1957

The 1957 IL Havana season was almost a mirror image of the preceding campaign. The Kings finished with the same record, 72-82. Even with a full season at the helm, Reyes was unable to improve their fortunes.¹²² The Cubans' bats were largely silent, with only Danny

¹¹⁴ Bill Vanderschmidt, "Wings Seldom Home Sick," *T-U*, 20 August 1956. This was more of a trend in 1955, especially in Rochester papers. In the Vanderschmidt article he only cites the heat.

¹¹⁵ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/team.cgi?id=de8230ea>

¹¹⁶ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/leader.cgi?type=bat&id=2942fa2d>

¹¹⁷ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/leader.cgi?type=bat&id=2942fa2d>

¹¹⁸ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/team.cgi?id=de8230ea>

¹¹⁹ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 103.

¹²⁰ Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/team.cgi?id=5743b711>

Morejon ranked in the IL top twenty-five.¹²³ Havana's pitching rebounded slightly, with five hurlers ranked in the top twenty-five.¹²⁴ The Reds sent little help during the season with only pitcher Vincente Amor representing both Cincinnati and Havana.¹²⁵

Gran Stadium attendance was at its lowest, with only 84,320 fans bothering to show up.¹²⁶ Although most of Castro's revolution was limited to the easternmost Oriente Province, Batista's government imposed curfews, which drastically curtailed fan turnout.¹²⁷ In addition, two Havana bombing campaigns in July and August, tightened the curfews even more, with one Rochester reporter joking that a third of a Kings crowd of 2,000 were comprised of policemen.¹²⁸ It was no surprise that Maduro's team finished dead last in attendance.

1957 also featured American opinion turn firmly against Cuba's further IL participation. Since the league operated under a revenue-sharing agreement, visiting teams received half the gate receipts. With the likes of Rochester and Toronto now forced to pay their own transit to Cuba, making only \$500 on a four-game stand in Havana was considered decidedly unacceptable.¹²⁹ Vocal opposition from IL owners in Buffalo, Rochester, and Toronto pressured Shaughnessy to consider replacing the Cubans.¹³⁰ Also, with Miami joining the previous season, was Havana necessary anymore as a southern IL port?¹³¹ These questions only increased the following year.

¹²³ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/leader.cgi?type=bat&id=76934b8d>

¹²⁴ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/leader.cgi?type=pitch&id=76934b8d>

¹²⁵ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/team.cgi?id=5743b711>

¹²⁶ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 103.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ George Beahon, "What is the Real Situation in Cuba?," *D & C*, 11 August 1957.

¹²⁹ AP, "Hitter-Pitcher-Pilot: 'Iron Man' Deal, Now," *T-U*, 9 August 1957.

¹³⁰ Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

¹³¹ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 198-199.

1958

If 1955 was their best regular season showing, 1958 was by far the Cubans' worst. Havana finished dead last in the IL with a record of 65-88; even their home dominance was decidedly over.¹³² Midway through the season, Reyes was fired and replaced by his assistant, Tony Pacheco but, again, this managerial change did little to impact the IL standings.¹³³ The Kings' batting hit its lowest point with only Elio Chacòn in the top thirty.¹³⁴ The pitching, was back to its usual form, led by future Baltimore Oriole Miguel Cuellar. Three Cuban hurlers finished in the top twenty-five, one in the top ten.¹³⁵ However, in fielding they ranked dead last,¹³⁶ and only three Reds wore a Havana uniform during the 1958 campaign.¹³⁷

Attendance rose to 178,340 paying customers; however the total is not indicative of the entire picture.¹³⁸ Revolutionary victories grew with each passing month, curfews and restrictions increased across the nation, and bombings and protest occurred with alarming frequency. As a result, many fans chose to stay at home.¹³⁹ In fact, one of the highest attended Kings' "home" games took place outside of Havana. Allegedly to celebrate the building of a new stadium, but also to try and expand the Kings' national popularity, they played a two-game June series against Buffalo in the small Camaguey town of Moròn, drawing around 7,000 fans each time.¹⁴⁰ However, back in Havana, to quote Bjarkman, the Sugar Kings, "seemingly couldn't draw flies even in one of Latin American baseball's hottest venues."¹⁴¹

¹³² <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/team.cgi?id=629e68af>

¹³³ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 199.

¹³⁴ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/leader.cgi?type=bat&id=d2291373>

¹³⁵ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/leader.cgi?type=pitch&id=d2291373>

¹³⁶ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/league.cgi?id=d2291373>

¹³⁷ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/team.cgi?id=629e68af>

¹³⁸ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1846-2006*, 103.

¹³⁹ George Beahon, "In This Corner," *D & C*, 18 August 1958.

¹⁴⁰ Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

¹⁴¹ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1846-2006*, 103.

Maduro was now bleeding money left and right. The local television and radio stations, that initially clamoured for broadcast rights before the Kings' first season, were now attempting to jump their contracts. In addition, Miami bailed on playing in Moròn for a July doubleheader, which cost the franchise \$10,000.¹⁴² Outside pressure to move or replace Havana in the IL grew, with the Buffalo franchise particularly adamant in this regard. Club president John Stiglmeier and Bison players expressed safety concerns as their primary reasons for initially refusing to play their season opening series in Cuba.¹⁴³ The success of Castro's revolution in early January 1959, heightened anti-Cuban sentiments across the IL.¹⁴⁴ Even Maduro threatened that if the woeful financial trends continued, he would reluctantly move the team.¹⁴⁵ Other cities such as Jersey City and San Juan, Puerto Rico generously offered to replace the unwanted Sugar Kings on the 1959 IL schedule.¹⁴⁶ Despite numerous rumors to the contrary, Shaughnessy announced the Sugar Kings would compete in 1959, inadvertently enabling their most successful season to unfold.¹⁴⁷

1959

Under new field manager Preston Gómez, Havana dominated much of the 1959 IL opposition, finishing the regular season with a record of 80-73, enough for third place.¹⁴⁸ Their batting featured two players in the top fifteen: #5 Carlos Paula and #11 Tony González.¹⁴⁹ Their pitching came in second overall, with seven hurlers in the top thirty and three in the top twenty:

¹⁴² Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

¹⁴³ Matt Jackson, "Bisons Won't Play in Cuba, Stiglmeier Standing Firm," *T-U*, 14 April 1958.

¹⁴⁴ George Beahon, *D & C Sports Page*, January-February 1959. Various articles

¹⁴⁵ Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

¹⁴⁶ George Beahon, "League OK's '59 Baseball in Havana," *D & C*, 31 January 1959.

¹⁴⁷ AP, "Int. League Set to Open in Havana," *T-U*, 8 January 1959.

¹⁴⁸ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 103.

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/leader.cgi?type=bat&id=2dece84d>

#4 Ted Wieand, #13 Walt Craddock, and #20 Raúl Sánchez.¹⁵⁰ In addition, the Kings' success along with the presence of a semi-stable government drew fans back to Gran Stadium, with a 200,094 turnout for the campaign.¹⁵¹ Also of note were the five Sugar Kings who suited up for the 1959 Reds.¹⁵²

In terms of on-field activity this season is historically significant for two other reasons. The first was the aforementioned 25 July doubleheader against the Rochester Red Wings, held during the anniversary celebrations of Castro's 1953 "demented" Moncada assault.¹⁵³ These contests are thematically examined in more depth in Chapter 4, but some essential elements need to be explained here. The first game ended uneventfully, ending in a 4-3 seven inning win for the Kings.¹⁵⁴ The same cannot be said of the nightcap contest. In the bottom of the eleventh inning, with Rochester up by a single run, Havana's American catcher Jesse Gonder¹⁵⁵ led off with a double. However, Ellis "Cot" Deal, the Red Wings manager was convinced Gonder forgot to touch first base before heading to second. Whether Deal was right in his protests, and whether the umpiring crew was afraid of upsetting the over capacity crowd at Gran Stadium are unimportant. What was relevant was first base umpire Frank Guzetta's decision to eject Deal. This decision was important for two reasons. The first was Gonder remained safe, which eventually allowed him to score the tying run. The second was that utility infielder Frank Verdi had to take Deal's third base coaching position at the top of the twelfth.¹⁵⁶

Reports of what actually happened somewhat conflict but here are the basic facts. Back in the tenth inning, at the stroke of midnight, wild celebrations broke out in the stands as well as

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/leader.cgi?type=pitch&id=2dece84d>

¹⁵¹ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 103.

¹⁵² <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/team.cgi?id=02d34da9>

¹⁵³ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 197.

¹⁵⁴ Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

¹⁵⁵ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 308-309.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

on Havana's busy streets in honor of Castro's 26 July assault. Echevarría compared the festivities to a "combination of the Fourth of July and New Year's." As the Cuban exile also noted, it is quite common on New Year's Day in Latin American countries for guns to be fired into the air.¹⁵⁷ Although the majority of the Cuban capital's fusillade occurred at midnight, sporadic gunfire occurred throughout the early summer morning. Which gun fired the important bullets, either inside or outside the Gran, has never been determined, but the points of impact are indisputable: One grazed Kings' shortstop Leo Cárdenas in the shoulder, and the other ricocheted off Frank Verdi's plastic-lined ballcap, nicked his neck and ear, and floored him instantly.¹⁵⁸ Verdi's teammates carried him immediately to the visitor's clubhouse, and everyone else ran off the field. Despite assurances from both the Sugar Kings and the Cuban government that it was a fluke accident, both Deal¹⁵⁹ and Red Wings GM George Sisler refused to play the next game the following afternoon. After heated negotiations, including alleged threats from the Cuban military, Rochester was eventually allowed to board a plane, and fly back to the States without either game being completed. The box score of the twelve inning contest simply read: "Game called on account of gunfire."¹⁶⁰ Although largely forgotten in the American press less than a week afterwards, it eventually provided the necessary catalyst for IL owners to successfully pressure Shaughnessy to pull the franchise off the island.¹⁶¹

The second moment, in hindsight a bittersweet finale for Cuban professional baseball, was the final game during the Sugar Kings' postseason run. As a result of finishing third in the IL, Havana qualified to play the Columbus Jets in a seven game semi-final series. They pulled a

¹⁵⁷ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 171-172.

¹⁵⁸ Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball: 1864-2006*, 308-310.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. Bjarkman pulled this from Cot Deal's account despite fact that when gunfire took place, Deal admittedly was in the dressing room showers. He came out of the shower just as Verdi was carried past him into the dressing room.

¹⁶⁰ Dave Occor, "Protests by League Players Against Havana Mounting," *T-U*, 27 July 1959.

¹⁶¹ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 201-202

shocking upset by sweeping their Southern Division rivals in four games. The Kings went on to beat the fourth place Richmond Virginians in six Governor's Cup contests. Surprisingly, the team had accomplished the impossible: finishing last in 1958 amidst threats of relocation and revolutionary conflict, to securing a berth in the Little World Series, with a chance to bring home arguably the second most prestigious championship in baseball.¹⁶²

The Kings' final opponent was the American Association's Minneapolis Millers, a Boston affiliate, whose lineup featured future Hall of Famer Carl Yastrzemski.¹⁶³ The first two games were played in Minnesota's capital, ending in a split. However with the third contest cancelled due to snow and a looming blizzard expected to blanket the region, both teams agreed to play the remaining five games in Havana.¹⁶⁴

Every game was sold out. Castro and his *barbudo* entourage attended each one, and the "Maximum Leader" threw out the ceremonial first pitch of Game Three. TV sets and radio dials across the island were tuned into, as Echevarría described it, "the voice of Rubén Rodríguez." The official newspaper of the new regime, *Revolución*, treated the Little World Series as front page news.¹⁶⁵ A surreal moment occurred at the end of the third contest. After outfielder Ray Shearer knocked in the winning RBI in the bottom of the tenth inning, as Echevarría recalled, "The fans carried him on their shoulders in triumph. Fidel Castro exited . . . on board the jeep used to bring in the (relief) pitchers from the bullpen."¹⁶⁶

It came down to the deciding seventh game, with the Kings winning Game Four, before the Millers staved off elimination with victories in Games Five and Six. With over 35,000 fans jammed into the Gran Stadium, the Little World Series' conclusion became another mass Cuban

¹⁶² Johnson & Wolff, *The Encyclopedia of Minor League Baseball*, 297.

¹⁶³ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 341. He hit a home run in Game 1.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 206-208.

¹⁶⁶ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 341. Parenthesis mine.

revolutionary fiesta. With two outs in the bottom of the ninth, the score tied at two, Danny Morejón stepped into the batter's box. The native Cuban hit a grounder off Millers' pitcher Billy Muffet that hopped over second base, allowing Raúl Sánchez to score the game-and series-winning run.¹⁶⁷ As Echevarría stated, "No sooner had he been called safe than the crowd surged onto the field and carried their heroes on their shoulders to the area in front of the Maximum Leader's box . . . a gesture worthy of the Roman Coliseum."¹⁶⁸ Another Cuban historian, Jorge Figueredo, wrote, "I was there, among the delirious thousands that would not leave the stadium, as if trying to preserve forever the emotion of the moment. It was most exhilarating and unforgettable for all us Cubans who loved the game."¹⁶⁹

Echevarría noted:

The Cuban Sugar Kings had-it cannot be forgotten-American players. So the nationalism expressed at that point was not necessarily anti-United States. It was in line with the early aspirations of the revolutionary regime: to perfect a political system, not to destroy it, and to continue to profit from Cuba's relationship with the United States. In a few months this would change drastically.¹⁷⁰

This spelt the end of IL baseball in Cuba by July of 1960.

1960

By 1 July 1960, the Sugar Kings were determined to prove their Little World Series title had not been a fluke. At the season's halfway point, their 37-41 record secured fourth in the league, three Kings' batting averages were ranked in the top twenty, and pitching remained

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 342.

¹⁶⁸ Echevarria, *Cuban Fiestas*, 208.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 342.

dominant.¹⁷¹ Tony Castano was the new field manager. Preston Gómez had departed to coach Spokane of the Pacific Coast League.¹⁷² Havana continued to draw large crowds to Gran Stadium, but not quite the overflow capacities found during their 1959 championship campaign. For the first time, Maduro's club was financially stable, with Castro's government providing substantial monetary and promotional support. The year prior, the de facto ruler of Cuba was famously quoted, in regard to keeping the club on the island, "even if I have to pitch."¹⁷³ However it was not to be, as on 8 July, while the Kings were on the road facing Columbus, Shaughnessy announced its forced relocation to Jersey City, New Jersey on the pretense of "protecting our players."¹⁷⁴ The political reasons for this move, namely the Castro government's nationalization of American businesses, increased communist leanings, and the Eisenhower administration's drastic reduction of America's Cuban sugar quota, are examined in the final section of this chapter.¹⁷⁵

The team finished the campaign as the Jersey City Jerseys/ Reds with hastily rebranded uniforms and a new coach. Castano and several of his players resigned from the club in protest. His assistant, the familiar "Nap" Reyes, accepted the resulting promotion to manager.¹⁷⁶ Despite Thomas F. Carter's assertions to the contrary, most of the squad's Cuban players finished out the season in Jersey City.¹⁷⁷ In fact the majority of their roster remained emphatically Cuban, with

¹⁷¹ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/league.cgi?id=56716f8b>.

¹⁷² Johnson & Wolff, *The Encyclopedia of Minor League Baseball*, 300.

¹⁷³ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 235.

¹⁷⁴ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*.

¹⁷⁵ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 258.

¹⁷⁶ Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana*, 345. *Revolucion* sportswriter Faustro Miranda wrote that Cuba was , "without a franchise but without a master."

¹⁷⁷ Carter, *The Quality of Home Runs*, 74. The exact quote was, "The managers and coaches all of whom were Cuban, resigned in protest.

the likes of Miguel Cuellar, Octavio “Cookie” Rojas, Leo Cardenas, and Rogelio Álvarez remaining in the United States.¹⁷⁸

Maduro was furious with Shaughnessy’s “completely outrageous” decision. The Cuban businessman responded to the IL Commissioner by stating, “The International League is making a big mistake. Baseball was a strong link between the Cuban and American peoples . . . Cubans will interpret [the decision] as a demonstration to harm the nation . . . I don’t know what I’m going to do.”¹⁷⁹ Now living under Castro’s government, and experiencing the first American business, professional baseball, flee the island, millions of Cubans likely asked themselves that very same question.

Cuba’s Revolutionary Tendencies

1953

Batista’s military coup the previous year had stirred up resentment and anger amongst the Cuban population, especially within the student body at the University of Havana. While the deposed Prío’s tenure had not been ideal, it had been legally placed in power via a fair and free election process.¹⁸⁰ By overthrowing the established government and simultaneously refusing to hold elections, Batista’s actions infuriated and united a majority of the students. According to writers Ramón L. Bonachea and Marta San Martín, this resulted in the formation/revival of several anti-government organizations both on and off Havana’s campus. These included the Triple-A faction, the Acción Revolucionara Oriental, and most notably the Federación Estudiantil Universitaria.¹⁸¹ While not officially involved in any of these organizations, one who

¹⁷⁸ <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/team.cgi?id=e1a78821>

¹⁷⁹ Costello, *Society for American Baseball Research: Bobby Maduro*.

¹⁸⁰ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 17. Paterson does call Príos corrupt

¹⁸¹ Bonachea and San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection*, xvi-xviii.

was greatly involved in the student movement against Batista was none other than Fidel Castro.¹⁸²

His exact role in the movement is somewhat hard to pinpoint pre-Moncada. He was a card-carrying member of the Ortodoxo party, recent law school graduate, and was identified with several radical organizations even before Batista's coup, most notably the Movimiento Socialista Revolucionario and the Unión Insurreccional Revolucionaria.¹⁸³ He wrote articles for anti-government periodicals such as *El Acusador* under a pseudonym, and even filed a lawsuit against Batista on behalf of the Cuban people.¹⁸⁴ He held no official position in any of these organizations. Nevertheless, he was definitely a major player on the revolutionary scene, particularly amongst his fellow Ortodoxos.

In late 1952, from August through December, Castro began organizing contacts to undergo military-style training for an assault upon a yet-to-be determined target. He had given up on a peaceful end to Batista's reign, quoted afterwards as saying, "I already had the idea that a revolutionary takeover of power was necessary . . . Nothing was going to change. The frustration and disillusionment were going to be repeated all over again. And it was not possible to go back . . . back over those long-travelled roads that went nowhere."¹⁸⁵ Sometime early in 1953, Castro decided how he was going to enact his revolutionary takeover: by targeting the Moncada military barracks in Santiago province on the eastern side of the island.¹⁸⁶

As to why Castro chose Moncada, along with a diversionary assault at the Bayamo barracks, then a part of Oriente province, is irrelevant to this study.¹⁸⁷ What is important is the

¹⁸² Ibid., 10-13.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 11-13.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 14-15.

¹⁸⁵ Castro with Ramonet, *My Life*, 100-103.

¹⁸⁶ Bonachea and San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection*, 16-17.

¹⁸⁷ Castro with Ramonet, *My Life*, 104-115. His main reasoning was that far away from Havana, he would have time to stabilize his hold on Santiago and foment rebellion across the rest of Cuba.

result of Castro's attack itself. In the early morning of 26 July 1953, ninety five men under Castro's command launched the raid on Moncada while twenty-four others assaulted Bayamo. After a fierce battle, in which sixty-one rebels and nineteen *batistianos* were killed, Castro and eighteen survivors fled into the surrounding mountains. Less than a week later, everyone involved had either been killed or captured. Castro had been the government's primary focus.¹⁸⁸ On 16 October 1953, after a lengthy show trial, Castro and eight of his co-conspirators were sentenced to varying prison terms. As Bonachea and San Martín stated, "For the time being, the leader of the Moncada attack was out of circulation."¹⁸⁹

1954-1955

In terms of revolutionary activity on the island, 1954 and 1955 were remarkably similar in what transpired. First, Castro remained imprisoned on the Isle of Pines until 15 May 1955, so for almost a year and a half Fidel was unable to effectively impact the situation going on in nearby Havana. He smuggled letters from prison to various people across the island, but his presence in the revolution was minimally felt at best.¹⁹⁰ When Castro was released due to a conciliatory agreement in which Batista freed all political prisoners, he wasted little time remaining in the country of his birth. On 7 July, shortly after officially founding the 26th of July Movement, Castro and several others went to Mexico, from where they planned to regroup and eventually launch an invasion of Cuba.¹⁹¹ Castro spent much of the remaining year doing public speaking across the eastern United States, gathering support, arms, and finances from exiled anti-

¹⁸⁸ Bonachea and San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection*, 19-28.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35-37.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

Batista organizations.¹⁹² The urban fight against the dictatorship during this two year period had to be led by other men.

Even with Castro imprisoned and later exiled, the streets of Havana were not lacking in revolutionary activities. Student leaders such as Frank País¹⁹³ and José Antonio Echevarría enacted several anti-government demonstrations, protests, and even attempted military actions.¹⁹⁴ In February 1954, Echevarría took over as head of the FEU, the largest radical organization on campus. During his first year in charge, he led numerous demonstrations, most notably in March, May, October, November, and December.¹⁹⁵ Bombing campaigns in the capital became frequent occurrences, albeit not by the FEU.¹⁹⁶ This strategy of peaceful protests mixed with violent acts continued, culminating in two major events: a massive riot in downtown Havana on 27 November and a failed sugar worker's strike which lasted from the 5th of December until the 30th.¹⁹⁷

1956

On 24 February 1956, Echevarría founded the Directorio Revolucionario (hereafter referred to as DR), the “student’s insurrectionary instrument,” and began fomenting armed insurrection.¹⁹⁸ On 19 April, another radical group called the Organización Auténtica assaulted the Goicurúa Barracks in Matanzas Province; they were slaughtered almost to a man.¹⁹⁹ For the most part however, public demonstrations of anti-Batista sentiments were minimal until late autumn.

¹⁹² Ibid., 65.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 39-40.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 42-49.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 340-345.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., It was Triple-A, the officially funded terrorist wing of exiled president Prío’s efforts to oust Batista.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 52-60. The worker’s strike ended with Batista capitulating to the union’s demands and then breaking his word.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., xvii, 344.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 345.

Most of Castro's involvement in the Revolution took place outside Cuban borders. Castro, along with eighty-two others, including his brother Raul and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, trained in guerilla warfare tactics just outside of Mexico City.²⁰⁰ Besides dodging Mexican authorities, Fidel Castro spent most of his time either training or making preparations for the rebels' eventual return to Cuba. In early August, he secured over \$70,000 from former president Prío for the revolutionary cause.²⁰¹ On 31 August, Castro and other members of the July 26th Movement signed the so-called "Pact of Mexico" with DR representatives to coordinate military and propaganda efforts. This resulted in a wave of October/November bombings, assassination attempts, and violent clashes with police in four different Cuban provinces, all orchestrated by the DR. These actions were meant, according to Bonachea and San Martín, to "prepare the conditions for the general uprising that would ensue upon Castro's landing."²⁰²

It was not until late November, however, that Castro set his invasion plan in motion. On 25 November, all eighty-three rebels boarded a rusting yacht known as the *Granma*, and set sail for Oriente Province.²⁰³ On 2 December, his forces ran aground in Cuba. But by the 5th they managed to regroup in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. However, Castro's army had been reduced to twenty men, and most of their weapons and survival gear lay on the ocean floor. And with the news that an attempted uprising in Santiago province led by Frank País had met with disaster, the *Granma's* survivors were hardly in the mood for New Year's Eve festivities.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Castro with Ramonet, *My Life*, 171-175.

²⁰¹ Bonachea and San Martín, 66.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 69-75.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 85-89.

1957

For much of early 1957, Castro's forces managed to play hide-and-seek with the Cuban military, practicing their carefully-honed guerilla tactics to delay their seemingly inevitable destruction, a destruction so inevitable that Batista announced Castro's death on 3 December 1956, a deliberate lie!²⁰⁵ Even after 17 January, when Castro gained momentum with a military victory at Las Platas, the average Cuban assumed he had been killed aboard the *Granma*.²⁰⁶ It wasn't until 24-26 February, when the *New York Times* published three articles based on an interview columnist Herb Matthews had conducted with the M-26-7 leader, that Castro's survival became public knowledge.²⁰⁷ Around this time his support amongst the Cuban population grew dramatically as a result of the interviews. In addition, Matthew's expose revealed the apparent support the U.S. government lent to Batista's regime, mainly in the forms of weapons and military training. This began to turn American public opinion squarely against his dictatorship.²⁰⁸

The Cuban-American community threw a majority of their support behind Castro's cause. There were several protests as well as hunger strikes outside the United Nations headquarters in New York, and violent clashes with police became a common occurrence in South Florida cities such as Miami, Tampa, and Key West.²⁰⁹ Public perception of the Batista regime grew to be so negative that on 3 June America's Cuban ambassador Arthur Gardner, proponent of supporting the dictator, was forcefully retired and replaced by the "wealthy investment broker" Earl E.T. Smith.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 69-71.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 72-73

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 74-77.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

Four other major revolutionary events occurred during 1957 in Cuba. First, from 28 May to 10 September, Castro's forces waged an intermittent guerrilla campaign, with minimal losses, in particularly fierce engagements at El Uvero, Estrada Palma, Bueycito, and Pino del Agua.²¹¹ They were so successful in their assaults that by mid-November, *batistiano* Major Castro Rojas wrote to the general staff begging that the army change its strategy to deal with the *barbudos*.²¹²

Second, on 28 July, Castro released the "Sierra Maestra Manifesto," in which, according to Paterson, he "pledged free elections, rejected a military junta as an alternative to Batista, offered social and economic reforms, and warned against foreign intervention or mediation in Cuban affairs." While his declaration coincided with M-26-7 infighting, potential fatal "bickering" that endangered the uprising, more importantly it further entrenched Castro's persona into the American mindset.²¹³

Third, throughout much of June,²¹⁴ July, and August extensive bombing campaigns occurred across Cuba, including Havana, mainly attributed to DR revolutionary cells active in multiple provinces. However, due in part to Batista's suppression of the truth, low civilian casualties, and much of the military fighting taking place far away from tourist-infested Havana, these events were not widely reported.²¹⁵ Economic sabotage and more intense bombing campaigns were waged in November and December.²¹⁶

Before that, however, on 5 September, the Cuban Naval Academy at Cienfuegos erupted into an uprising as, "young naval officers aligned with M-26-7 and Auténtico militants rebelled." Although this revolt was quickly crushed, with the help of Cuban Air Force B-26 bombers purchased from the U.S., it was a Pyrrhic victory for Batista, with hundreds of his best and

²¹¹ Bonachea and San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection*, 95-97.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 98.

²¹³ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 93.

²¹⁴ Bonachea and San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection*, 342.

²¹⁵ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 93-96.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

brightest naval officers dead. As Paterson pointed out, “The foundation of his power-the military-was beginning to crumble.”²¹⁷ By the end of the following year, that military had completely collapsed.²¹⁸

1958

At the beginning of 1958, the American state department was undergoing heavy public criticism, both at home and abroad, because of its frequent approval of Cuban orders for weapons and vehicles for the island’s military. America’s continued funding of Batista’s dictatorial regime was a public relations disaster. In fact, sometime preceding the Cienfuegos revolt, the State Department decided to defer any further military requests from Cuba.²¹⁹ Despite continued assurances from Ambassador Smith that Batista would restore constitutional guarantees and hold elections, arms flow from the “North” was cut off, at least officially.²²⁰ After the dictator had made clear his “sincere desire for free elections” in early February, the arms flow resumed with a well-publicized shipment of armored cars.²²¹

However, on 12 March, Batista re-suspended constitutional guarantees, particularly freedom of the press.²²² In response, the State Department sent a telegram on the 14th to the American embassy in Havana, that the U.S. was deferring process on “all Cuban arms requests and shipments.”²²³ Even though a few orders were eventually processed, the Pentagon-Batista relationship was on the downturn. As Paterson exclaimed, the dictator had, “profoundly poisoned the political environment and his relationship with the United States.”²²⁴

²¹⁷ Ibid., 96-97.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 222.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 97-98.

²²⁰ Ibid., 112-114.

²²¹ Ibid., 113.

²²² Ibid., 125.

²²³ Ibid., 130-131.

²²⁴ Ibid., 127.

On 9 April, a forced general strike organized by Havanan M-26-7 operatives ended in failure, with hundreds of militants killed by the National Police.²²⁵ While it proved a temporary setback for the Revolution, with Castro declaring “a moral rout,” police brutality further poisoned Batista’s image in the U.S.²²⁶ The incident also pushed Fidel to the fringes of his revolution’s ideology. On 3 May, he and several of his top commanders held a meeting in which Castro emphatically declared that he was the one in charge and “named himself commander-in-chief of the armed forces, including the urban militias.”²²⁷ This put moderate revolutionaries in a terrible quandary. As Paterson wrote, “Their dilemma was real, for they could in no way abide the usurping *bastistianos* nor wholly embrace the radical *fidelistas* . . . the two primary protagonists in the Cuban conflict . . . Politics became more polarized.”²²⁸ This was true not just in Cuba, but the rest of the hemisphere.

By late May 1958, it was quite clear that “Yanqui” influence was not viewed favorably in much of Latin America. When Vice President Richard Nixon went on a regional public relations tour, he flew home prematurely, fearing for his life. He had waded through riots in Argentina and Ecuador, been attacked with rocks and clubs in Venezuela, and received death threats in Peru.²²⁹ Press coverage of the tour exposed to many Americans what decades of unwanted U.S. influence had inflicted upon their southern neighbors, including Cuba. Batista’s regime fell into further disrepute with the American public as a result, especially in the Cuban exile community. For much of the remaining year, pro-Castro organizations attempted to smuggle weapons and equipment to the rebels from all over the U.S. Eastern Seaboard.²³⁰

²²⁵ Bonachea and San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection*, 201-215.

²²⁶ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 145-146.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 151-152.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 153-155.

From late May until early August, the Cuban military waged an all-out offensive, Operation Verano, attempting to destroy the rebellion with brute force. By 19 June, the army had Castro pinned down with deadly mortar fire, an incident from which Fidel barely escaped.²³¹ The revolutionaries were on the defensive for the remainder of the summer until suffering a crushing defeat at the Battle of Las Mercedes on 28 July. Despite being routed by Batista's men, the encircled M-26-7 fighters managed to escape, greatly demoralizing the Cuban army.²³² By mid-August, Castro began drawing plans for an offensive of his own.²³³

The most important event that occurred during Operation Verano was Raúl Castro's unsanctioned kidnapping of fifty North Americans. The American and Canadian hostages, comprised of business contractors and U.S. Marines, were taken captive during various rebel excursions between 26-30 June, in what is now Guantánamo Province.²³⁴ Operation Antiaeria was authorized by Fidel's younger brother to create a human shield. Not wanting to risk killing North Americans, Batista halted deadly bombing strikes on rebel positions. In this regard, Antiaeria was a complete success, allowing the 2nd Front to regroup, resupply, and raise their morale.²³⁵ In addition, the American State Department sent representatives into the Sierra Maestra to personally negotiate for the hostages, which gave unintentional American political recognition to the M-26-7 movement.²³⁶ It also increased U.S. press coverage of the situation in Cuba to unprecedented levels, much of it negative towards Raúl Castro's actions.²³⁷ However by

²³¹ Ibid., 156.

²³² Bonachea and San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection*, 251-260.

²³³ Ibid., 261-265.

²³⁴ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 160-162.

²³⁵ Ibid., 173-174.

²³⁶ Ibid. 160-172. The two officials were Consul Wollam, local manager of the Moa Bay Mining Company, who had twelve employees among the hostages, and CIA agent Vice Consul Robert Wiecha.

²³⁷ Ibid., 174.

the time the last of the hostages were flown to safety on 19 July, as Paterson explained, “The U.S. press, more anti-Batista than pro-Castro, never spoke with one-voice.”²³⁸

By mid-August, Operation Verano had entirely collapsed, as Batista’s forces stumbled out of the eastern mountains in tattered disarray. By the end of the month, M-26-7 troops began pushing back. On 31 August, Che Guevara and Major Camilo Cienfuegos led two rebel columns into previously unmolested Camaguey Province.²³⁹ Throughout September, the two guerilla leaders conducted effective raids on army patrols across the province. Rebel fronts also were established in the Las Villas and Pinar del Rio regions in Cuba’s heartland.²⁴⁰

M-26-7 attacks on American business enterprises across the frontlines were commonplace during the autumn months. During August, September, and October, the United Fruit Company lost over \$50,000 worth of property, a Goodyear manufacturing plant burned to the ground, and the famed Nicaro nickel mine was overrun by Castro’s forces.²⁴¹ Most notably, a large Texaco oil refinery in Oriente Province was frequently harassed by rebel threats, thefts, and kidnappings throughout October.²⁴² Fidel Castro and the men under his command were fast becoming enemies of American big business in Cuba. And, America’s biggest friend, Fulgencio Batista, was fast losing control of his dictatorial regime.²⁴³

By the time long-promised presidential elections were held on 3 November, Castro and the M-26-7 movement held the upper hand both on the frontlines and in gaining public support. Castro had become so beloved by the peasant Cubans, that each new Batista crackdown upon constitutional liberties swelled M-26-7 ranks to unprecedented numbers. When the dictator’s handpicked successor, Andrés Rivero Aguero, won in a rigged landslide victory, it effectively

²³⁸ Ibid., 176.

²³⁹ Bonachea and San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection*, 266-267.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 179-180.

²⁴² Ibid., 180-182.

²⁴³ Ibid., 188-190.

crushed whatever public support Batista had left amongst the working and lower classes.²⁴⁴ One of Agüero's election opponents sarcastically but accurately remarked, "Fidel Castro has won the elections."²⁴⁵ And with Batista breaking his promise to hold fair and honest elections, the U.S. State Department unofficially withdrew the majority of their support, the little that was left, from Cuba's president.²⁴⁶

The events of late November and December 1958 are full of confusion and intrigue. As Paterson explained, "Although Batista's press censorship, inaccurate Cuban military press releases . . . repeated breakdowns of communications . . . made getting at the truth elusive, a pattern of rebel advance and Cuban army dissolution emerged."²⁴⁷ On 30 November, Castro's troops conquered the city of Guisa near Bayamo.²⁴⁸ Throughout December, Guevara and Cienfuegos's columns encircled the Las Villas city of Santa Clara²⁴⁹ while Castro personally targeted Oriente's provincial capital, Santiago de Cuba.²⁵⁰ When Batista's Santa Clara defenders surrendered on the 30th, combined with increasing internal and external pressure to abdicate his presidential position, he decided to flee the country.²⁵¹ On New Year's Eve, Batista and select officers boarded a plane at Havana's Jose Marti Airport, and flew off to the Dominican Republic, never to return.²⁵² Even though Castro and his forces did not enter Havana until 8 January, by the following morning it was clear to everyone in the capital that Fidel was now in charge.²⁵³

1959

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 195.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 196.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 197-199.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 199.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 200.

²⁴⁹ Bonachea and San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection*, 290-292.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 298-299.

²⁵¹ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 220-221.

²⁵² Ibid., 222-223.

²⁵³ Ibid., 226-227.

Castro's first year and a half in charge of Cuba, particularly in the island's new political relations with America, can be divided into five time periods. The first such period took place in the immediate aftermath of Batista's flight. Soon after Fidel's arrival in Havana, summary executions began taking place. *Batistianos* were rounded up, given speedy trials, and then put to death by firing squad.²⁵⁴ By the time Castro's handpicked presidential candidate, Manuel Urrutia Lleó, had arrived from exile in Venezuela and finished organizing the Revolutionary Government, dozens had been executed.²⁵⁵ In fact, by the end of January, an estimated 257 Cubans were put to death by Castro's military tribunals.²⁵⁶ Alleged denials of due process of law ran rampant both in the local and foreign press. In mid-February to try and resolve the public relations disaster, the trials became open to the public, but that only fueled the fire further.²⁵⁷ Public perception in America, while not yet ready to declare him a dictator, did begin to take a negative direction. This was intensified by his treatment of American hotel/casino owners, imposing heavy taxes and strict regulatory guidelines.²⁵⁸

He was seen by many in the Western press as being nothing more than a "power hungry caudillo,"²⁵⁹ which was further underscored by his actions the following month. On 1 February, Castro began implementing agrarian reform projects on the island, long perceived as an initial step towards communism.²⁶⁰ On the 13th, Castro declared himself the new Cuban Prime Minister, replacing José Miró Cardona, an Urrutia appointee.²⁶¹ With Urrutia increasingly taking the role of a figurehead president, the man who chose the former federal judge to run Cuba, was

²⁵⁴ Castro with Ramonet, *My Life*, 220-223.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 637.

²⁵⁶ AP, "War Crime Trials Continue in Cuba," *T-U*, 30 January 1959.

²⁵⁷ Maurice Zeitlin and Robert Scheer, *Cuba: Tragedy in Our Hemisphere* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 64-70.

²⁵⁸ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 234-235.

²⁵⁹ Bonachea and San Martí, *The Cuban Insurrection*, Pejorative Spanish term loosely translated as warlord or dictator.

²⁶⁰ AP, "Castro Starts Cuban Land Reform," *T-U*, 2 February, 1959.

²⁶¹ AP, "Major Problems Face Castro as Cuba's Premier," *T-U*, 14 February 1959.

revealed to be the one truly in charge.²⁶² By March however, executions were no longer commonplace, Castro was content as prime minister, and a rudimentary governmental setup was firmly in place.²⁶³

The second time period, albeit a brief one, took place in April. On the 14th, Castro embarked on a public relations/ fact-finding tour across North America. His primary stop was the United Nations in New York City.²⁶⁴ He also visited Boston, Montreal, and Washington D.C., where he gave several speeches to the American press.²⁶⁵ By the time Castro returned to Cuba, he had become an American celebrity, and had entrenched his presence in the North's national psyche.²⁶⁶

The third period, April through July, was one of insecurity and uneasiness on behalf of the American State Department. During his first four months in power, Castro had showed both positive and negative traits from a U.S. foreign policy standpoint. As such, government experts deliberated endlessly what leadership role he would exhibit: capitalistic reformer or socialist dictator.²⁶⁷ During his D.C. trip, Castro had pledged to the Associated Press that if a war broke out between the United States and the Soviet Union, Cuban troops would contribute to the American war effort.²⁶⁸ On 30 April, he also told the Associated Press that, "I don't agree with Communism."²⁶⁹ Earlier that month, he demanded American companies based in Cuba to

²⁶² Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 197.

²⁶³ AP, *T-U*, January-March 1959. However executions did occur on and off.

²⁶⁴ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 257.

²⁶⁵ AP, *D & C*, April 1959. Eisenhower was notably absent from Washington during Castro's visit. In fact the Cuban leader was told the President had a golf game that was unavoidable.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 257-258.

²⁶⁸ AP, "Castro Vows to Side with West in War," *D & C*, 20 April 1959.

²⁶⁹ Lyle C. Wilson, "Castro's Words Vs Facts," *T-U*, 1 May 1959. Wilson labeled it a "stock answer."

increase their production output to stimulate the new and struggling economy, despite rumors alleging he planned to nationalize them.²⁷⁰

In contrast, Castro publically supported left-leaning revolts in fellow Latin American nations, such as Panama.²⁷¹ Rumours abounded in early June that he had personally supplied three rebel-crewed boats to Nicaraguan rebels fighting the American-backed Somoza regime.²⁷² Castro never officially denied or confirmed these rumors, but their existence made the State Department uneasy about its relationship with the island.²⁷³ On 17 May, Eisenhower's administration reacted with alarm when the Agrarian Reform Act, seemingly a socialist economic strategy, became Cuban law.²⁷⁴ On 18 July, Urrutia unwillingly resigned the presidency, citing irreconcilable differences with Castro, namely that the former had come out very strongly against Communist influences. His replacement, Osvaldo Dorticòs Torrado, was even more of a figurehead than Urrutia, further cementing an anti-American mentality surrounding Cuba's revolutionary leaders.²⁷⁵ Even though 26th July celebrations went off with nary a mention of anti-Americanism, there was a sense that U.S.-Cuban relations were about to take a drastic turn.²⁷⁶

The fourth time period, August-December gave little hints towards the break that was about to occur between the two nations. Near the middle of August, Castro's forces foiled an alleged Dominican-sponsored coup just north of Havana.²⁷⁷ In the middle of October, a British government delivery of fighter jets intended for the Cuban Air Force, was clandestinely nixed by

²⁷⁰ AP, "Castro Denounces all Dictators, Wants Bigger Output by U.S. Plant," *D & C*, 21 April 1959.

²⁷¹ Jack Rutledge for AP, "Cuban Invaders Sing, Leave Weeping Girls," *D & C*, 2 May 1959. Castro supported their cause, but helped negotiate the invaders' surrender on behalf of the Organization of American States.

²⁷² AP, "Nicaragua Mounts Grim for Unconfirmed Invasion Force," *D & C*, 4 June 1959.

²⁷³ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 257,

²⁷⁴ Castro with Ramonet, *My Life*, 637.

²⁷⁵ Echevarría, *Cuban Fiestas*, 198.

²⁷⁶ AP, "Millions in Havana Cheer as Castro Warns Critics, Accepts Post as Premier," *D & C*, 27 July 1959.

²⁷⁷ AP, "Almost Got Trujillo, Castro Tells Cuba," *D & C*, 15 August 1959. The invaders were repelled by American *barbudo* commander William Morgan.

the U.S. State Department.²⁷⁸ Earlier that month, a Cuban airliner was hijacked by men wielding grenades, ordering it rerouted to Miami, where the attackers claimed asylum.²⁷⁹

In early December, Eisenhower granted approval to the Central Intelligence Agency's request to conduct a plan of sabotage and covert action against the Castro regime.²⁸⁰

1960

Almost as soon as 1960 began, the American-Cuban governmental impasse widened insurmountably. First in February, Cuba signed a \$100,000,000 trade agreement with Soviet deputy premier Anastas Mikoyan, a move pushing the island further into the Communist sphere of influence.²⁸¹ In March, Eisenhower and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara approved Operation Pluto, intended to create a paramilitary group of exiled Cubans to overthrow Castro.²⁸² On 4 March, the French freighter *La Coubre*, carrying weapons and other supplies for Cuba, exploded in Havana's harbor. Almost immediately, Castro erroneously declared it to be the work of the CIA, which only enflamed tensions further.²⁸³

On 8 May, Cuba and the Soviet Union officially reopened diplomatic relations with one another after having been suspended by Batista almost a decade earlier.²⁸⁴ In addition, Castro began nationalizing Cuban newspapers, effectively muzzling free press, a lingering mainstay of *América*.²⁸⁵ This action renewed angry feelings between the U.S. and Cuba as political rhetoric flew back and forth. On 11 May, the revolutionary government alleged that Eisenhower was planning on invading Cuba, which fanned the island's population into an anti-American

²⁷⁸ AP, "British Hedge on Report of Jets-For-Cuba Deal," *D & C*, 17 October 1959.

²⁷⁹ AP, "Cuba Tightens Rules After Plane Incidents," *D & C*, 4 October 1959.

²⁸⁰ Castro with Ramonet, *My Life*, 637.

²⁸¹ Castro with Ramonet, *My Life*, 637.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.* Even Ramonet admits there was no evidence to back up Castro's charges.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ AP, *T-U*, May-June 1959. This included *Diario de la Marina*, *Prensa Libre*, *El Mundo*, and the *Havana Post*.

mob.²⁸⁶ On the 13th, Castro claimed the Cuban Navy had attacked a U.S. submarine just off the Havana coast.²⁸⁷ On the 23rd, American papers printed alleged Cuban persecution of its Catholic citizens.²⁸⁸ And on the 27th, Eisenhower publically revealed a 14 May mandate that ceased technical aid, around \$200,000 annually, to the island.²⁸⁹

During June and July, the two governments participated in what was essentially a diplomatic standoff. Neither wanted to blink first. In mid-June, Eisenhower and his allies in Congress released statements, threatening to eliminate the Cuban sugar quota, a potential crippling blow to the island's single-crop economy.²⁹⁰ This was allegedly done to discourage further Warsaw Pact economic and political advisors flocking to the island, mainly from the USSR, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. It did not have the desired effect.²⁹¹ Castro's administration retaliated with statements revealing his intent to nationalize American business holdings. On 28 June, Castro accused the U.S. government's proposed sugar cuts of being, "not only immoral but treacherous . . . They reserve the right to do us harm in the magnitude they desire."²⁹² The Cuban prime minister did not wait long to make good on his nationalization threat.

On 29 June, Castro seized and nationalized three American oil refineries belonging to Texaco, Esso, and Shell, after each facility refused to refine Soviet oil.²⁹³ On 1 July, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution that gave Eisenhower executive privilege regarding the purchase of Cuban sugar.²⁹⁴ Five days later, the President reduced the U.S./Cuba sugar contract by 95%,

²⁸⁶ UPI, "Cubans Stage Anti-U.S. Rallies," *T-U*, 12 May 1960.

²⁸⁷ AP, "Cuba Fired at U.S. Sub, Castro Says," *T-U*, 14 May 1960.

²⁸⁸ AP, "Fight Reds, Catholics in Cuba Told," *T-U*, 23 May 1960.

²⁸⁹ AP, "U.S. Slashing Aid to Cuba," *T-U*, 27 May 1960.

²⁹⁰ UPI, "House Unit Undecided on Giving Ike Power to cut Cuba Sugar Sales," *D & C*, 24 June 1960.

²⁹¹ George Beahon, "U.S.-Cuba Gap Widens Daily; Reds Pour In," *D & C*, 28 June 1960.

²⁹² AP, "Sugar Bill Arouses Castro in New Anti-U.S. Diatribe," *T-U*, 28 June 1960.

²⁹³ Castro with Ramonet, *My Life*, 637.

²⁹⁴ AP, "House Votes Ike Sugar Quota Rein," *T-U*, 1 July 1960.

virtually banning the product from American markets.²⁹⁵ On 6 August, Castro decreed that all American oil refineries, sugar mills, and electric/telephone companies were to be nationalized by the Revolutionary Government. U.S. businesses began evacuating personnel. Between Eisenhower's sugar cuts and Castro's hostile takeovers, as writer Hugh Thomas described, "A baseball team decided not to play in Havana."²⁹⁶

At the time that the Havana Sugar Kings' first game was played in April of 1954, Fidel Castro was serving a fifteen-year jail sentence on the Isle of Pines. By the time their last game ended on 8 July 1960, that same man had ruled Cuba for a year and a half. The Kings' IL arrival falsely portrayed Cuba to Americans as a quiet and unvolatile island country the island country seemingly was under Batista. It also helped emphasize the friendly business relationship between Cuba and their American neighbors. Their forced removal to Jersey City served as a forgotten yet symbolic exclamation point on the virtual cessation of diplomatic relations between the two nations. The journey of the IL in Cuba and the Revolution's path through the island nation resulted in two narratives unique to their own separate cultural worlds of politics and sports. Rochester, New York's newspaper coverage on these two intersecting narratives, along with my thematic analysis of it, is the major focus of Chapter 4 and this study.

²⁹⁵ Castro with Ramonet, *My Life*, 638.

²⁹⁶ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*, i. It came from Thomas's book *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*.

Chapter 4

Off the Cuban Cuff

“The paroxysm of guilt that Frank Verdi’s shooting caused between my memory and my sense of self was no more than the effect of a successful public-relations presentation. The league smelled like roses because it got exactly what it wanted. My devotion to the newspapers is now revealed as no more than a willful submission to the self-serving pronouncements from the people who made the money off baseball. The joke is only on me. And the joke exists only because, against my knowledge to the contrary, I chose to take this issue seriously.”— Howard Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*.¹

In the past three chapters, the alleged baseball cultural bridge between the American and Cuban peoples was thoroughly examined. The study presented that international cultural bond as being real, yet almost entirely one-sided. On one hand, Organized Baseball’s influence upon Cuba was profound as it not only impacted the island culturally, but economically and politically. On the other hand, only Latin American stereotypes, cultural anecdotes, and a handful of big league prospects travelled from Cuba to the United States. In this regard, the Havana Sugar Kings experiment was no exception from its barnstorming predecessors. The question persists: with only “hot-blooded Latinos”² a “bongo orchestra, or whatever you call those tub thumpers,”³ and rare prospects such as Miguel Cuellar being presented to American audiences, how could the sporting cultural dynamic between the two nations have remained functional, despite the allegedly “anti-American” Cuban Revolution?⁴

To answer this question on a small yet important scale, I turn to the two Rochester dailies of the time period, the *D & C* and the *T-U*. For the city’s newspaper readership, these

¹ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*, 121.

² Burgos Jr., *Playing America’s Game*, 37.

³ Tony Wurzer, “Bisons Home after an Adventure in Dust, Heat, Bugs, and Baseball,” *Buffalo Evening News*, 9 June 1958.

⁴ UPI, “Cubans Stage Anti-U.S. Rallies,” *T-U*, 12 May 1960.

publications were the primary purveyors and analysts of the American-Cuban relationship, both on and off the diamond. In days long before the internet, local newspapers remained a primary source for Americans to learn about civic, federal, and global issues.⁵ What 1950s Rochesterians read in the *D & C* and *T-U* likely shaped and influenced how each individual reader, as well as the community in general, viewed the outside world. By examining what the two dailies published, presented either by their own writers or other sources during this time frame, this study exposes a singular Gannett-Cuban position touted to Rochester's public.

This chapter consists of two encompassing sections in which the study's findings are presented. The first is a brief historical background on the Rochester newspaper industry up to the 1950s, specifically the beginnings of Frank Gannett's multimedia empire. As the *D & C* and the *T-U*, Gannett's flagship operations, contained the majority of articles thematically analyzed, it was important to detail a chronological and philosophical blueprint of how the two dailies conducted business. This section largely takes its conclusions from Bonnie Brennan's *For the Record: An Oral History of Rochester, New York Newswriters*. It was an incalculable asset in this regard.⁶

The second section chronologically analyzes the Gannett newspaper coverage of Cuban issues, mainly from outside the sporting pages. This is key for four reasons. First, while baseball was the primary excuse for Rochester-based reporters to visit Cuba, by the end of the 1950s, it was not the most newsworthy island story, as Chapter 3 emphatically proved. Baseball games took place during the Revolution; the Revolution did not take place during baseball games. Essentially, Sugar Kings contests were nothing more than a lens through which Cuban political unrest could be viewed. As such, analyzing the Rochester print presentation of the

⁵ Radio and Television were also important sources, but I meant in terms of print media.

⁶ Bonnie Brennan, *For the Record: An Oral History of Rochester, New York Newswriters* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

entire Cuban narrative is academically necessary. Second, most of these front page and front section stories were written by the Associated Press, United Press International, or writers co-opted from larger, more influential newspapers.⁷ How the *D & C* and *T-U* utilized these essential media tools further helped contextualize how the sporting angle factored into Gannett's portrayal of Cuba. Third, editorial columns and Letters to the Editor revealed how important the dailies' respective editors perceived Cuban events and how local readers reacted to them. As Senzel said: "My interests began to spread to the front sections of the newspaper, which I hadn't realized existed . . . I turned my back on baseball. Invigorated by that great American energy of progress and self-development, I was moving on to more important things."⁸ Since it is likely many Rochesterians did not read the sports section, it was important to analyze the front sections to see how much impact the sports section might have had upon the front pages. Finally, it helped reveal publishing, editorial, and narrative differences between the morning newspaper, the *D & C*, and the afternoon daily, the *T-U*.

⁷ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1954-1960.

⁸ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*, 27.

A Tale of Two Newspapers

Émigrés from less conservative climes find the Rochester newspapers conspicuously lacking in any semblance of metropolitan journalism . . . A kind word for the Democratic Party or its candidate is harder to find than a downtown parking place. Without serious competition there is no necessity to crusade and therefore increase reader interest and circulation. (They) content themselves with a role of mere documentation . . . This estimate is slightly more accurate than cruel- G. Curtis Gerling.⁹

When people complain about the allegedly liberal press, my God! I can remember when we used to be afraid to turn a story in because it would reflect adversely on the Republican Party- Arthur Deutsch, former *D & C* investigative reporter, 1994.¹⁰

Without or with offence to friends or foes, I sketch your world exactly as it goes- Lord Gordon Byron. This quotation ran underneath the *D & C* logo on the morning daily's editorial page.¹¹

Although newspapers have a long-established history in the Greater Rochester metropolitan area, to trace how the local media market evolved by the 1950s into a Gannett monopoly, requires a study directed on the period after the conclusion of World War I. This is because between the late 1800s and the turn of the twentieth century, the industry remained largely the same, not in technology, but in the producer-consumer economic relationship. Throughout the 1800s, Rochesterians and those living in surrounding areas had a wide variety of local newspapers and broadsheets to choose from, featuring a fair range of political and social views between them.¹²

In this regard, little had changed by the time of the Great War. By early 1918, at least five independently-owned major dailies competed for control of Rochester's circulation and advertising market. The morning's *Democrat & Chronicle* (the *Daily Democrat* and *Daily Chronicle* merged in 1870) and the afternoon's *Rochester Times* and *Rochester Post-Express* represented the local Republican interests. The city's Democrat stalwarts received their daily

⁹ G. Curtis Gerling, *Smugtown, U.S.A* (Webster: Plaza Publishers, 1957).

¹⁰ Brennan, *For the Record*, 75.

¹¹ *D & C*, Editorial Page, 1954-1960.

¹² Blake McKelvey, *Rochester on the Genesee: The Growth of a City* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 145.

news from the *Rochester Herald* and the *Rochester Union & Advertiser*.¹³ By 1937 just two of the five remained in operation, and both were owned by Frank Ernest Gannett.¹⁴

Having risen from the *D & C* delivery boy ranks in 1885 to owning his first newspaper, the *Elmira Gazette* in 1906, Cornell alum Frank Gannett would have accepted nothing less than achieving a media empire across the United States.¹⁵ In early 1918, Gannett and his business partner Erwin L. Davenport moved to Rochester in the hopes of buying an established daily. The duo ended up purchasing both the *Times* and *Union & Advertiser*, immediately announcing a merger of the two newspapers. The 9 March 1918 *Union & Advertiser* front page proclaimed: “The oldest and the newest are now brought together, consolidated into one GREAT NEWSPAPER under new and progressive management, and united for A GREATER AND BETTER ROCHESTER.”¹⁶ After this deal went into effect, Gannett proceeded to diminish the rest of his Flower City competitors into submission.

Almost immediately following the newly minted *Rochester Times-Union*’s first printed edition, Gannett dubbed the *T-U* as a politically unaffiliated “independent paper.”¹⁷ In addition, the ownership group aligned themselves with local businessman, philanthropist and anti-union advocate, George Eastman. Having founded the industrial giant Eastman Kodak, the elderly camera magnate was considered a hero amongst many Rochesterians across all social classes and political boundaries.¹⁸ His support of Gannett’s group undoubtedly held major influence over their subsequent rise to the top of the local market.

¹³ Brennan, *For the Record*, 2.

¹⁴ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*, 11.

¹⁵ Brennan, *For the Record*, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-3.

¹⁷ Gerling, *Smugtown, U.S.A.*

¹⁸ McKelvey, *Rochester on the Genesee*, 166-173. McKelvey attributes the aftermath of World War I as a primary enabler of this collaboration.

By 1924, Gannett had purchased five more major dailies across the Empire State. More importantly, he bought out his fellow *T-U* investors to become the afternoon paper's sole proprietor. Four years later, Gannett bought out his last original competitor, the *D & C*, and in an interesting move, decided to keep both papers instead of merging his two local acquisitions. With the *Herald* and *Post-Express* having left town, only one man stood in the way of Gannett having a Rochester monopoly: powerful newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst. From 1922 to 1937, Gannett competed in the Flower City against Hearst's daily, the *Rochester-Evening Journal*, and his weekly publication, the *Rochester Sunday American*. In 1937, however, the former proposed to the latter a mutually beneficial arrangement. At that time, Gannett was trying to move into Albany, which had always been a Hearst New York stronghold. Over time, Hearst's businesses in New York State's capital city had incurred a massive amount of debt. If Hearst would sign over the rights to his Rochester newspapers, Gannett would pay off the former's debt and give up his incursions into Albany's market. After the deal was made official, Gannett closed both the *Evening Journal* and the *Sunday American*.¹⁹

From 1938 onwards, Rochester's newspaper industry comprised, as Senzel described: "a Gannett morning paper, a Gannett evening paper, and never a liquor or cigarette advertisement between the two. And given the character of the time and place, it would have been unthinkable for things to have been otherwise."²⁰ The character of that time and place, 1940-1950s Rochester, was a city of distinct economic and industrial growth. While Eastman Kodak brought prosperity to the greater metropolitan area since 1888, other companies populated the business landscape as well.²¹ Bausch and Lomb, a vision-wear company which had provided local jobs for

¹⁹ Brennan, *For the Record*, 3-5.

²⁰ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*, 11. While Gannett did indeed bar alcoholic beverages to be advertised in either Rochester daily, cigarette and cigar advertisements appeared on occasion.

²¹ McKelvey, *Rochester on the Genesee*, 147-151

decades before Eastman's development, experienced a boom in the aftermath of the Second World War.²² Xerox also prospered with its exclusive monopoly over the fairly new yet widely utilized invention, the photocopier.²³ Genesee Brewing Co. experienced a local post-Prohibition resurgence that lasted for decades.²⁴ Yet Rochester was still called, both by locals and outsiders, as "Kodak's Town." As a naïve youth at the time, Senzel later recounted, "It was believed that there were no poor people in Rochester, only Kodak workers."²⁵

During the 1940 and 1950s, there were two seeming absolutes about Rochester, the first related to race. Rochester was not just "Kodak Town," but a white Republican town, at least on the surface.²⁶ In terms of ethnic ancestry, British, German, and Italian were the most commonly traced lineages for the local-born up to the 1940s.²⁷ There were also several sizable thriving Eastern European enclaves including over 20,000 Jewish residents.²⁸ In the late 1940s, out of a civic population of around 330,000, just over 7,000 were classified as Negroes. Within less than ten years, that number more than doubled to well over 16,000.²⁹ Until the late 1940s, there was barely any trace of a Hispanic community in the Flower City. Those that did live there struggled heavily with a language barrier and ethnic discrimination.³⁰ By the 1960s with a population of around 4,000, Puerto Ricans had entrenched themselves in Rochester's community, founding the Puerto Rican Council in the mid-1950s.³¹ As official city historian Blake McKelvey pointed out: "newcomers were welcomed to Rochester-except for Negroes and Puerto Ricans."³²

²² Ibid., 234.

²³ Ibid., 245.

²⁴ Gerling, *Smugtown, U.S.A.*

²⁵ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*, 10-11.

²⁶ Gerling, *Smugtown, U.S.A.*

²⁷ McKelvey, *Rochester on the Genesee*, 139.

²⁸ Blake McKelvey, *Rochester: An Emerging Metropolis, 1925-1961* (Rochester: Christopher Press, 1961), 241.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 237.

³¹ Ibid., 241-242.

³² Ibid.

Despite this, according to several former Gannett employees, it wasn't until the 1964 citywide race riots that the two Rochester dailies covered local minority issues in any meaningful way.³³ The *D & C* and *T-U* did not hire their first black writers until the mid-1960s: Earl Caldwell and Desmond Stone, respectively.³⁴ In *For the Record*, one *D & C* reporter mentioned a photo editor that would deliberately white-out or crop black faces from photographs.³⁵ Former *T-U* police beat reporter Robert Beck lamented in a 1994 interview that the Rochester media after the 1960s had allegedly become a “Negro throwaway,” and talked about African-Americans and Hispanics in extremely negative terms.³⁶ This study is not trying to make the case that Gannett's Rochester publications were racist. It is important, however, to consider how newspapers, alleged to be either blind or willfully ignorant of the city's ethnic and racial divisions, would accept a baseball team comprised primarily of Hispanic and Negro players, many whom didn't speak English.

The other absolute was Rochester's and Gannett's unwavering loyalty to the Republican Party. Even before Gannett gained his Rochester media monopoly, the Western New York area had long been a Grand Old Party stronghold, outside of the Democrat hub in neighbouring Buffalo.³⁷ Senzel recalled, “Government in Rochester was always conservative and always Republican. Rochester always considered its own districts to be the safest Republican seats in Congress.”³⁸ In 1957, local author G. Curtis Gerling commented that the city was run by “ultra-conservative Republican policies and the administration's short sighted miserliness,” albeit stating that those tendencies were then, “at least temporarily on the shelf.”³⁹ Arthur Deutsch,

³³ Brennan, *For the Record*, 61-65.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 57-59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

³⁷ Gerling, *Smugtown, U.S.A.*

³⁸ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*, 10.

³⁹ Gerling, *Smugtown, U.S.A.*

former *D & C* reporter, surmised: “If you did any digging it was Republican dirt because there was no other dirt to dig.”⁴⁰ And in contrast to Buffalo, Rochester was definitively not a union town, with George Eastman’s paternalistic methods of looking after employees enough to prevent the labor movement from gaining much traction in the Flower City.

Though Gannett promised in 1918 that the *T-U* would be an “independent paper,”⁴¹ by the 1940s and 1950s, this was no longer the case. Gerling claimed it frequently read as a “house organ of the Republican party” due to the “official” Gannett company policy: “See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil.”⁴² He also expressed sympathy for Rochesterians when the city “was relegated to the status of a one newspaper town, condemned to the consumption of carefully selected, slightly slanted, well masticated news regurgitated in printed form.”⁴³ *Ex-D & C* reporter Mitch Kaidy commented: “There was pressure to not write certain stories, not to write about labor, and not to write about left-wing groups and not to write about consumer interests . . . There were stories that I thought the community should know about and the unseen editors didn’t.”⁴⁴ Kaidy further reflected: “The Gannett newspapers were always right-wing. Gannett himself was far to the right of his editorial staff.”⁴⁵ Deutsch claimed that Paul Miller, editor of the *T-U* as well as VP of the Gannett Board, was one of the “Big Three in Monroe County Republican politics.”⁴⁶ Since these kinds of conditions did not bode well for reporters wanting to issue a pro-communistic message, despite Gannett’s death in early 1957, the previous paragraph should be well held in mind when reading the study’s findings.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Brennan, *For the Record*, 74.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴² Gerling, *Smugtown, U.S.A.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Brennan, *For the Record*, 159.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

It is also important to understand how Gannett's Rochester media monopoly operated. Despite the fact they shared the same owner and to an extent the same editorial policies, in both claim and in practice, the *D & C* and *T-U* operated as separate organizations. As stated before, the *D & C* served the morning readership, the *T-U* the afternoon. But the differences went beyond just time of day.⁴⁸ Outside of using the same printing facilities, the two dailies rarely collaborated on anything. Each had its own editor and staff-ranking structures and functioning from separate offices until 1959.⁴⁹ According to Brennan, the *T-U* was considered as Rochester's "paper of record," whereas the *D & C* was more of a "writer's paper."⁵⁰ Gerling put it more colorfully: "The *Times-Union* right under the ivory tower . . . is only just saved from being hick town class . . . On the *Democrat & Chronicle* a far better spirit exists and is reflected in a far better product. Staffers enjoy working there: the proportion of skilled old-timers and bright young up and comers is properly divided."⁵¹

Brennan's interviews with Gannett writers are proof that there was more of a rivalry and competitiveness felt between the papers than any collective spirit. Kaidy recollected: "We had two newspapers that competed, that feverishly competed. We tried to be first and of course tried to be the more accurate of the two papers . . . that was a point of pride."⁵² *T-U* writer Charlie Luckett explained: "We were really rivals-geographically separated. An afternoon paper is at a disadvantage time wise, we felt they were lazy-they were working for a morning newspaper."⁵³ Due to this rivalry the tactic known as "scooping," was intensely pursued. Essentially, reporters would try to cover as many angles for a story as possible, "not just for objectivity, but to prevent

⁴⁸ Ibid., 158-159.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Never stated directly it was 1959 but is easy to discern from the accompanying literature.

⁵⁰ Brennan, *For the Record*, 22-25.

⁵¹ Gerling, *Smugtown, U.S.A.*

⁵² Brennan, *For the Record*, 39.

⁵³ Ibid., 85.

the other newspaper from getting a lead on the story.”⁵⁴ As reporter Tim Connolly remembered: “One of the fears was that you would have half a story and you couldn’t go with it because that would open up the door for them to follow up and maybe get a bigger story.”⁵⁵ It was due to this competitive nature that former employees of both dailies contended that despite public disbelief, it actually resulted in better, more accurate, albeit politically-biased news reporting. In addition, they felt the 1940s-1960s to be the period when the two newspapers were at the peak of their civic influence.⁵⁶

The Front Section’s “Paper Curtain”⁵⁷

Because public opinion in our country is largely created and shaped by the mass media, the news services assume a crucial significance in the formation of a policy towards Cuba . . . The little that has appeared in the daily newspapers or mass-market magazines, has been distorted . . . On the basis of the mass media, to be intelligently informed about Cuba would be impossible- Maurice Zeitlin and Robert Scheer, 1963.⁵⁸

The sports section played an influential role in creating the modern layout for many a daily newspaper. This role is too often ignored by academics who feel that sports history is insignificant if not irrelevant when compared with “real” history. The same is true when examining an average local newspaper’s structure: the sporting news is relegated to its own section away from the “real” important issues facing the community, country, and globe.⁵⁹ Senzel described that politics, not sports, dictated what section of the news he read: “Baseball was a part of my life that had been rejected.”⁶⁰ Even in a historic sporting town such as

⁵⁴ Ibid., 112.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 113.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁷ Maurice Zeitlin and Robert Scheer, *Cuba, Tragedy in Our Hemisphere* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 283-284.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*, 27.

Rochester, N.Y., any in-depth athletic coverage frequently could not be found on the front pages during the 1950s and 1960s.⁶¹

But, sports did feature in both the *D & C* and the *T-U* outside of the designated sporting sections. The Red Wings home opener always received substantial first page coverage, as did every postseason contest.⁶² Other local professional teams, mainly hockey's Rochester Americans, also were covered to a similar extent.⁶³ Both IL and MLB score-lines were almost always printed, usually in a bottom corner, on each daily's opening page.⁶⁴ Major sporting events such as the Olympics⁶⁵ and the World Series prominently received front-section treatment.⁶⁶ Also, contests featuring one of the three New York MLB teams or the Red Wings parent club in St. Louis would receive a headline or front page brief quotation on occasion.⁶⁷ When local Rochester sports hero and New York Giants pitcher Johnny Antonelli figured prominently in a contest, he sometimes appeared outside the sports section.⁶⁸ For the most part, however, local sports, especially away-contests, were limited to the two sporting sections and the editorial page. It was not "real" news. In fact, when George Beahon wrote several front pages articles on the ongoing Cuban crisis, the *D & C* editors took great lengths to inform the reader he was only a "baseball reporter."⁶⁹ This newspaper dichotomy was the primary basis for this second section.

⁶¹ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1954-1960.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Evan Nagel, "They Should Have Their Heads Examined: How the Democrat and Chronicle Repackaged & Resold Rochester, New York on Minor League Hockey" (Independent Research Study, Western University, 2013).

⁶⁴ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1954-1960.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* I judged this on coverage involving the 1956 and 1960 Summer Olympiads.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* This was and still is common for many American newspapers.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Of the three teams at the time (The New York Yankees, New York Giants, and Brooklyn Dodgers,) the Giants seemed to be the sentimental favorite amongst Rochestarians.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Ads for the Firestone dealership Antonelli owned, with a picture of him on the mound, frequently appeared in both Rochester papers.

⁶⁹ George Beahon, "U.S.-Cuba Gap Widens Daily; Reds Pour In," *D & C*, 28 June 1960.

The goal of this second section was to establish how Cuba, under Batista, during its subsequent Revolution, and during Castro's initial years in charge, were presented in both the *D & C* and the *T-U* outside the sporting pages. To do this I separated the front page/local coverage into yearly segments. Each segment then underwent a quantitative/thematic examination, with two important details impacting each analysis.

The first or quantitative portion of the study, took into account how often Cuban stories appeared on Rochester's newspaper front pages and local sections. This portion does not include any extensive original charts or equations, only simple notation of how often the "Pearl of the Antilles" received non-sporting attention. However, during the section's latter part, which covered 1959-1960, a 1963 quantitative study conducted by Maurice Zeitlin and Robert Scheer was thematically compared to my findings.⁷⁰

The second or thematic portion analyzed the tone of each respective *D & C/T-U* Cuba-focused article printed outside the sports pages. The vast majority of the pieces were not written by Gannett staffers; they were usually taken from the Associated Press, United Press International, and other nationally available press services.⁷¹ However, the editors in charge of both dailies were responsible for deciding what appeared within their respective final editions. As such, even when a column was not written by local writers, this study considered it to be a part of Gannett's overall message. The editorial section, where the few Rochester-based statements were printed, was particularly scrutinized. This study also focused upon instances where baseball notably impacted representations of Cuba outside of the two dailies' sports section. Since the sportswriters were the only ones consistently writing about the island and its

⁷⁰ Zeitlin, *Cuba, Tragedy in Our Hemisphere*, 285-292.

⁷¹ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1956-1960.

relationship to Rochester, how their coverage filtered into the rest of the paper took on pertinent importance regarding this study.

Another Day in Paradise

1954-1957

If one did not read the local sports section during the baseball season, a 1954 Rochesterian could easily have been unaware that Cuba existed, let alone that it was a cultural and historical American ally.⁷² Outside of the sports sections, the Rochester dailies only printed two articles clearly about Cuba in 1954. On 23 June, the *T-U* published an AP article on Page Two entitled: “Latin American Governments Neutral, but Anti-U.S. Groups Active.” In that article, Batista and other Latin American leaders’ opinions on a civil war then raging in Guatemala were listed and explained.⁷³ On 15 August, the *D & C*’s morning edition ran a Page Fifteen UPI story which proclaimed: “President Batista of Cuba Steps Down to Run Legally.”⁷⁴ That day was a Sunday, and only the *D & C* printed Sunday editions. However, none of the next six *T-U* issues featured this story or any other Cuba-related pieces.⁷⁵

In both dailies, neither the Red Wings 1954 exhibition series against the Sugar Kings in early April, their first regular season games in Havana in late April,⁷⁶ nor their early May contests against them in Rochester, warranted coverage outside of the sports section. Both the *T-U* and the *D & C*’s sporting pages featured articles on each of these events. In contrast, both newspapers featured front page stories about the Red Wings’ home opener against Richmond in

⁷² *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1954.

⁷³ AP, “Latin American Governments Neutral, but Anti-U.S. Groups Active,” *T-U*, 23 June 1954.

⁷⁴ UPI, “President Batista of Cuba Steps Down to Run Legally,” *D & C*, 15 August 1954.

⁷⁵ *T-U* archives, 15-21 August 1954.

⁷⁶ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 April-31 May 1954. Said exhibition contest was a four-game series in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico.

late April.⁷⁷ Yet, the very next week, outside of IL scorelines, there was no evidence other than the sports section that Havana was playing at Red Wing Stadium.⁷⁸ In fact, the only front page baseball article during that entire week was a 3 May AP piece run by the *D & C* about MLB St. Louis outfielder Stan Musial.⁷⁹ Baseball was occasionally featured on the editorial page, notably a 7 April column entitled: “The Meaning of America . . . Baseball: Our Token of Power.”⁸⁰ However, Cuba, even via “beisbol,” was not considered newsworthy outside of the sports sections.

One thing to make clear is that the *D & C* and *T-U*'s lack of articles on Cuba was not because of a simple U.S.-Latin American public interest gap. Other Latin American nations received substantial front page and editorial coverage in Rochester dailies during 1954. From early June to mid-July, Rochester was bombarded with front page stories, editorials, and even political cartoons focused on the Guatemalan crisis. Alleged communist infiltration into Guatemala's government, the subsequent right-wing civil war/ military coup, and its immediate aftermath garnered significant article space in both newspapers.⁸¹ This 22 June *D & C* cartoon not only summarizes the extent to which this issue dominated both dailies' headlines, but also Latin American stereotypes that ran through Gannett's portrayal:⁸²

⁷⁷ Al C. Weber, “Wings Take on Richmond: 10,000 See Opener,” *T-U*, 29 April 1954.

⁷⁸ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1-7 May 1954.

⁷⁹ AP, “Musial Slams 5 Homers for Doubleheader Record,” *D & C*, 3 May 1954.

⁸⁰ John Coleman, “The Meaning of America . . . Baseball: Our Token of Power,” *T-U*, 7 April 1954.

⁸¹ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 June-31 July 1954.

⁸² “Where the Shoe Pinches,” *D & C* Editorial Page, 22 June 1954.



Political upheavals in Paraguay, Brazil, Colombia, Nicaragua, and a few other nations in the region also received significant if comparatively brief coverage.⁸³

Between the two Rochester dailies, outside of the sporting pages there was one article about Cuba in 1955. On the front page of the *D & C*'s local news section, the 5 April headline declared: "Factory Makes Giant Sugar Mill for Cuba." Accompanied by a picture showing the mill's construction, the article touted how Rochester's Consolidated Machine Tool Co. helped the Cuban economy. The story concluded: "The sugar cane harvest starts in July, and that's when the mill is scheduled to start rolling."⁸⁴ In addition, there were several advertisements in later issues of both newspapers that told locals to: "visit sunny Havana."⁸⁵ At this point, it would seem that Cuba's sole quality in the eyes of Rochesterians was either as an extension of the American economy or as a "so near and yet so foreign" tourist destination.⁸⁶ Neither daily covered Fidel Castro's mid-May release from prison or his subsequent flight into exile.

⁸³ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 June-31 July 1954.

⁸⁴ "Factory Makes Giant Sugar Mill for Cuba," *D & C*, 5 April 1955.

⁸⁵ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, April-August 1955.

⁸⁶ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 172. The quote is from a 1920s postcard.

Gannett's Flower City readership was also kept in the dark regarding the very vocal anti-Batista student movement in Havana.⁸⁷

Cuban baseball received the same Rochester non-sports section coverage it had in 1954. Outside of the IL scorelines on the front page, only one relevant article appeared in either the *D & C* or the *T-U*. The day the Red Wings played their first home contest against Havana, a small headline ran across the opening page of the latter daily: "Wings, Fans There, but Not Sugar Kings." The article simply detailed a misunderstanding the Kings' manager Reggie Otero, had regarding the start time of the game, along with a recap of the first two innings of play.⁸⁸

Compared to the other IL teams, the Cuban franchise received neither more nor less front page coverage in Rochester newspapers. In fact, outside of the mid-season replacement of Red Wings Manager Harry "The Hat" Walker with his brother Fred "Dixie" Walker, reported on the front-page of both dailies, local baseball received no out-of-the-ordinary coverage.⁸⁹ Baseball and Cuba were not enough to generate headline-worthy stories.

In the sports sections, Cuba was receiving some in-depth coverage with *T-U* baseball writer Al C. Weber⁹⁰ and his *D & C* counterpart George Beahon, each focusing on the differences between the Cuban and American games. In an 8 August sports section column, Beahon dedicated its entirety to defending the Sugar Kings' alleged "unfair" home field advantages. In it, the *D & C* writer declared:

At hand is an urgent request from a Columbus, Ohio, newspaper friend to file a few words on why the Havana Sugar Kings beat the brains out of all International League foes who venture into Cuba. Up to date figures on the Cubans- 1955 won-lost record, before today's activity- show the Cuban Petes are "running pool" on the opposition. They had lost only 14 of 65 home assignments . . . There is nothing illuminating in reminding the customers that visiting

⁸⁷ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, April-October 1955.

⁸⁸ Al C. Weber, "Wings, Fans There, but Not Sugar Kings," *T-U*, 7 May 1955.

⁸⁹ Al C. Weber, "Dixie Walker New Wing Pilot; 'The Hat' gets Stankys' Job." *T-U*, 28 May 1955. This was due to St. Louis Manager Eddie Stanky being fired and the Cardinals called Walker up to replace him.

⁹⁰ Al C. Weber, "Clarks Going Up, Whisenant to Wings?" *T-U*, 10 June 1955. There was likely a Cuban-themed line above Clark's but it was cut off in my scan.

teams claim adverse effects from the long plane trips to Havana. Everyone has heard about the terrible psychological effect of the weird music in Gran Stadium . . . Even the peculiar lighting in cavernous Gran Stadium has been blamed after poor hitting performances . . . We have heard all the wailing about the hazards of playing in Havana. What, I ask, about the hazards to Havana in bringing an almost exclusively Latin American cast into the United States and Canada . . . My theory is that Havana is a fine ballclub that plays to its full potential on the road- and for BETTER reasons than seven other teams can find for losing in Havana.⁹¹

Beahon expressed distaste for the complaints and stereotyping lobbed at the Sugar Kings by their IL colleagues, pointing out that the cultural shock the Cubans faced when playing outside the island was far worse. Unlike many of his colleagues, he exposed yet did not mock the language barrier many Latin players dealt with when they travelled the United States and Canada. He showed cultural understanding towards Cuba, if only through the lens of baseball. To at least one Rochester writer, the potential for a Cuban-American baseball bond was indeed present. However, this American-Cuban baseball bridge continued to be ignored on Rochester's front pages.

Other Latin American countries featured prominently on the front pages and in the editorial sections. The main Gannett focus on the region centered upon growing unrest in Juan Peron-led Argentina. During July and August alone, the two months leading up to Peron's overthrow and flight into exile, the *D & C* published twenty articles about the Argentinian crisis. The *T-U* printed eighteen in comparison.⁹² While Argentina did not feature as prominently in political cartoons as Guatemala had the previous year, there was still an attempt to present a company, if not civic position, on the latest Latin American flare-up.

For the two Rochester dailies, 1956 was an intriguing year from several perspectives. First, stories about Cuba were featured on a semi-regular basis in the *T-U*, throughout April,

⁹¹ George Beahon, "In This Corner," *D & C*, 8 August 1955.

⁹² *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 July-31 August 1955.

May, and isolated instances during the summer.⁹³ On 4 April, a Page Two AP article proclaimed: “Cuba Nips Plot by Military...army officers face court martial today, accused of participating in an abortive plot against President Fulgencio Batista.”⁹⁴ After almost a month of silence, a 24 April quotation appeared entitled: “Anti-Americans Stone 2 More Firms in Havana.”⁹⁵ Six days later, the *T-U*'s front page blared: “With Revolt Over, Cuba Frees Ex-Leader.” Within the attached AP article, it mentioned Carlos Príos had been freed twenty-four hours after Batista's army crushed a civilian revolt in Matanzas Province.⁹⁶ On Page Seven the next day, the afternoon edition declared: “Cuba Suspends Civil Liberties after Crushed Rebellion.”⁹⁷ The same day this cartoon ran:⁹⁸



The 2 May edition's Page Twenty-one included the headline: “Cuban Congress Okays Revolt Curbs.”⁹⁹ Ten days later, Page Four of the *T-U*, via the AP declared: “Cuban Stormy Petrel Back in Miami Exile,” in which Príos alleged he had been deported by the island's

⁹³ *T-U* archives, 1 April-31 August 1956.

⁹⁴ AP, “Cuba Nips Plot by Military,” *T-U*, 5 April 1956.

⁹⁵ AP, “Anti-Americans Stone Two More Firms in Havana,” *T-U*, 24 April 1956.

⁹⁶ AP, “With Revolt Over, Cuba Frees Ex-Leader,” *T-U*, 30 April 1956.

⁹⁷ AP, “Cuba Suspends Civil Liberties after Crushed Rebellion,” *T-U*, 1 May 1956.

⁹⁸ “Last-Minute Instructions,” *T-U* Editorial Page, 1 May 1956.

⁹⁹ AP, “Cuban Congress Okays Revolt Curbs,” *T-U*, 2 May 1956.

national police.¹⁰⁰ After that the afternoon daily went silent about Cuba until late June. On 26 June's Page Six, underneath a large article entitled: "4 Guatemalan Students Killed: Army is Put in Control"¹⁰¹ and next to one proclaiming: "Brazil Seizes Would-Be Assassin,"¹⁰² the *T-U* announced: "Mexico Nabs 20 Cubans." The article focused on a raid the Mexican police launched against Fidel Castro's guerilla camp just outside Mexico City.¹⁰³ The next day, the story was followed up on a Page Seven piece entitled: "17 More Held in Plot on Batista."¹⁰⁴ For the rest of the year, however, outside of the sports section, the *T-U* remained silent about Cuban matters.

The *D & C* coverage on Cuba was slightly different. Rochester's morning daily printed no stories about the island outside of the sports section, with one exception. On 23 May, a Page Seven story ran with the headline: "Judge Stops Expulsion for Ex-Cuban President."¹⁰⁵ Other than that no other Cuban-related stories appeared during the study period in 1956. The reasons for this are likely due to one or a combination of two contributing factors.

First mentioned in *For the Record*, reporters and writers from both papers were sensitive to the urge to "scoop" or from being "scooped" themselves. Since in 1956 Cuba's political unrest was only commencing to become noticeable to the average American newsman, the *T-U* staff perhaps simply scooped this angle off the AP wire over the *D & C*. Second, most of these incidents occurred when the Wings and Kings played each other, and it is possible that the *D & C* felt that Cuba didn't warrant any coverage outside the sports section.¹⁰⁶ Beahon of the *D & C* mentioned political tensions in a handful of his 1956 columns, and perhaps that constituted an

¹⁰⁰ AP, "Cuban Stormy Petrel Back in Miami Exile," *T-U*, 12 May 1956.

¹⁰¹ AP, "4 Guatemalan Students Killed; Army is Put in Control," *T-U*, 26 June 1956.

¹⁰² AP, "Brazil Seizes Would-Be Assassin," *T-U*, 26 June 1956.

¹⁰³ AP, "Mexico Nabs 20 Cubans," *T-U*, 26 June 1956.

¹⁰⁴ AP, "17 More Held in Plot on Batista," *T-U*, 27 June 1956.

¹⁰⁵ AP, "Judge Stops Expulsion for Ex-Cuban President," *D & C*, 23 May 1956.

¹⁰⁶ *D & C* archives, Sports Section, April-October 1956.

“unscooped” angle on the Cuban situation, erasing the need for additional articles.¹⁰⁷ Thanks to the *T-U* sources, it is indisputable that coverage of Cuba noticeably increased in at least one Rochester newspaper. Relevant articles that appeared in the 1956 editions of the afternoon daily alone outnumbered those from the preceding two years of both the *D & C* and the *T-U*.

Cuban baseball appeared out of the sporting pages four times, at least according to the scans. On 20 April, the *D & C* published the beginning of a Beahon article entitled: “Wings Tame Havana for Seasons 1st Win,” which covered Rochester’s home opener.¹⁰⁸ Al C. Weber wrote a similar quotation for the *T-U* two days prior.¹⁰⁹ On 2 May, the *D & C* published an above-the-fold Beahon piece under the headline: “Wings to Meet Havana in Home Opener Today.”¹¹⁰ The *T-U* also printed a front-page write-up about the contest.¹¹¹ While the *D & C* columnist described Havana in detail, nothing emerged to differentiate the squad from the American or Canadian teams in the IL outside of simply calling them: “Havana’s swift and daring Sugar Kings” and “Reggie Otero’s Cubans.”¹¹² Conversely, when the *T-U*’s afternoon edition hit the newsstands that same day, at least two innings of the game had already been completed.¹¹³ As a result, the article was much shorter, and did not contain any differentiating remarks regarding either Cuba or the island’s Sugar Kings. Once again, baseball had failed to factor into Rochester’s slowly growing coverage of Cuba outside of the sports section. In contrast, alleged Communist incursions in the rest of Latin America, particularly in right-wing controlled Argentina,¹¹⁴ received more than their fair share of stories, at least in the *T-U*.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁷ George Beahon, “In This Corner,” *D & C*, April-October 1956.

¹⁰⁸ George Beahon, “Wings Tame Havana for Seasons 1st Win,” *D & C*, 18 April 1956.

¹⁰⁹ Al C. Weber, “Wings to Use 3 Rookies in Debut Tonight,” *T-U*, 18 April 1956.

¹¹⁰ George Beahon, “Wings to Meet Havana in Home Opener Today,” *D & C*, 2 May 1956.

¹¹¹ Al C. Weber, “Home Runs Enliven Red Wing Opener,” *T-U*, 2 May 1956.

¹¹² George Beahon, “Wings to Meet Havana in Home Opener Today,” *D & C*, 2 May 1956.

¹¹³ Al C. Weber, “Home Runs Enliven Red Wing Opener,” *T-U*, 2 May 1956.

¹¹⁴ Also focused upon was Peron’s movement in exile.

¹¹⁵ *T-U* archives, April-October 1956.

From April through June 1957, Cuba managed to remain almost entirely off Gannett's front pages. During this three month period, the *D & C* only ran three Cuban-related pieces, all occurring in the last week of May. On 26 May, a Page Seven story proclaimed: "Cuba Rebels Hiding in Hills."¹¹⁶ On 29 May, their front page had a small article entitled: "Rebels Douse Havana's Bright Lights."¹¹⁷ Two days later, a Page Eight AP column proclaimed: "Batista Maps Out Drive to Wipe-Out Rebels."¹¹⁸ In comparison, the *T-U* published only three relevant articles. On 10 May, a Page Two brief quotation, referring to three American youths who fled Guantanamo Bay in March to join Castro's forces, declared: "Two Quit Rebels, Third Stays."¹¹⁹ On 29 May, under a photograph of a burning building, the front page headline proclaimed: "Cuba Battle Erupts: Saboteurs Hit Havana."¹²⁰ Lastly, on 4 June, the *T-U* printed a story entitled: "3 Bombs Explode in Havana." In none of these articles was baseball discussed.¹²¹

Ironically, these three months featured large amounts of Latin American coverage. Both dailies were extensive in informing their respective readerships about important events in the region. Border skirmishes between the Honduran and Nicaraguan militaries received mention.¹²² The ouster of Colombian president Gustavo Rojas due to a 10 May coup d'état also featured on Gannett's front pages.¹²³ Haiti was by far the most covered Latin American nation during this period, as the island's citizens experienced violent protests, military suppression, and contested elections.¹²⁴ During this three month period, the *D & C* printed at least thirteen Haiti-related

¹¹⁶ AP, "Cuba Rebels Hiding in Hills," *D & C*, 26 May 1957.

¹¹⁷ AP, "Rebels Douse Havana's Bright Lights," *D & C*, 29 May 1957.

¹¹⁸ AP, "Batista Maps Out Drive to Wipe-Out Rebels," *D & C*, 31 May 1957.

¹¹⁹ AP, "Two Quits Rebels, Third Stays," *T-U*, 10 May 1957.

¹²⁰ AP, "Cuba Battle Erupts; Saboteurs Hit Havana," *T-U*, 29 May 1957.

¹²¹ AP, "3 Bombs Explode in Havana," *T-U*, 4 June 1967.

¹²² *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 April-31 July 1957.

¹²³ Richard G. Massock, "Colombia Dictator Swept from Power," *T-U*, 10 May 1957.

¹²⁴ This eventually culminated in the September elections of Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier, who ruled Haiti with an iron fist until 1971.

articles.¹²⁵ In contrast, the *T-U* ran fifteen. However, in the following two months, Cuba started to feature prominently in both newspapers in areas outside the sporting sections.¹²⁶ This negated any further examination of Gannett's coverage involving other Latin American nations as far as the study is concerned, as a definable Cuban position emerged.

While the *D & C* failed to print any narratives on Cuba in July, their afternoon competition at the *T-U* more than compensated. On 1 July a Page Four AP article appeared entitled: "5 Killed as Cuban Rebels Riot after Peace Rally."¹²⁷ Five days later Page Two was headed by a picture of an explosion, along with the caption: "Blasts Hit Cuba."¹²⁸ On 11 July a full page column written by AP writer Larry Allen proclaimed: "Cuba's Wave of Prosperity Rolls, Freedom Ebbs." This article is extremely significant as it marked the first occasion either newspaper published an opinion piece regarding the Cuban situation. Allen wrote: "Cubans are riding high, wide, and handsome on a wave of lush prosperity . . . It doesn't wash out a burning desire for basic freedoms . . . Today only tight gun rule seems to be keeping most of Cuba from erupting into shooting revolt . . . Cuba's constitution guarantees basic liberties . . . But the laws that protect seem only to be applied at the convenience of the government."¹²⁹ After 15 July, when a Page Six AP quotation informed the readership: "Cuba Rebel Bombs Mar Invasion," the *T-U* went silent until the beginning of August.¹³⁰ When they picked up the narrative again, they were no longer alone.

For the first half of August, nine different days featured at least one story about Cuba between the two Rochester dailies. On 2 August a Page Three *T-U* article proclaimed: "Army

¹²⁵ *D & C* archives, 1 April-30 June, 1957.

¹²⁶ *T-U* archives, 1 April-30 June, 1957.

¹²⁷ AP, "5 Killed as Cuban Rebels Riot after 'Peace Rally,'" *T-U*, 1 July 1957.

¹²⁸ AP, "Blasts Hit Cuba," *T-U*, 6 July 1958.

¹²⁹ Larry Allen, "Cuba's Wave of Prosperity Rolls, Freedom Ebbs," *T-U*, 11 July 1957.

¹³⁰ AP, "Cuba Rebel Bombs Mar 'Invasion,'" *T-U*, 15 July 1957.

Holds Cuba under Military Rule.”¹³¹ The next day their afternoon edition began on Page Two with the headline: “Cuban Bill Assails U.S. Envoy.”¹³² The *D & C*’s Page Three from that morning ran two AP Cuba-focused articles side by side. The first read: “Cuban Rebels to Clash with Batista.”¹³³ The second and much larger of the two was entitled: “U.S. Envoy’s (Earl T. Smith) Visit to Rebel City Studied for Diplomatic Blunder.”¹³⁴ On 4 August the *D & C*’s Page Six printed a quotation from the AP wire that read: “U.S. Envoy Flies Back to Havana, Mute on Charges.”¹³⁵ The front page of the 5 August *T-U* stated: “Cuba Rebels Push War of Nerves.”¹³⁶ Another AP quotation underneath that column announced: “Eleven ‘Propaganda’ letters addressed to Red Wings players were received today from Rebel-agitated Cuba. *Details on page 34.*”¹³⁷ This was only one of two instances in 1957 where the Cuban Revolution and Red Wings baseball were mentioned together outside the sports section. The second and more notable of the two, occurred six days later.

On 11 August, the *D & C*’s front page headline blared: “What is the Real Situation in Cuba? Rebel Bombings . . . Censorship . . . ‘Stay Home’ Squeeze by Natives.” The attached article, promoted as “A Report from the Scene by *D & C* baseball writer George Beahon,” was the first time a local opinion on Cuba featured prominently in either newspaper. Beahon described a striking scene:

Sweltering Havana is a giant powder keg waiting to be fused by rebel leader Fidel Castro, the elusive attorney-turned warrior. Cubans are a strange breed of cats, reluctant to talk, unwilling to show emotion or feelings about their government. They whistle wildly over a bonehead baseball play and flip madly over an umpire’s decision. Politics and revolutions they

¹³¹ AP, “Army Holds Cuba under Military Rule,” *T-U*, 2 August 1957.

¹³² AP, “Cuban Bill Assails U.S. Envoy,” *T-U*, 3 August 1957.

¹³³ AP, “Cuban Rebels to Clash with Batista,” *D & C*, 3 August 1957.

¹³⁴ AP, “U.S. Envoy’s Visit to Rebel City Studied for Diplomatic Blunder,” *D & C*, 3 August 1957. Parenthesis mine. The named rebel city was Santiago.

¹³⁵ AP, “U.S. Envoy Flies Back to Havana, Mute on Charges,” *D & C*, 4 August 1957.

¹³⁶ AP, “Cuba Rebels Push War of Nerves,” *T-U*, 5 August 1957.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* Both dailies ran sport section stories on this incident, but only Beahon at the *D & C* wrote an in-person account, as he was travelling with the Red Wings when they received the letters in Miami.

hesitate to discuss, giving an impression that no one can be trusted . . . No one openly admits sympathy for Castro. On the other hand, there is little open criticism except from the government-controlled press. Censorship and suppression of news in . . . Havana is exactly what you'd expect under a dictatorship . . . copy sent from Havana by wire services is strictly censored. All phone calls are monitored.

Beahon then recounted a personal incident:

In the press box in Gran Stadium . . . this reporter typed sidebar notes (about a bombing at a Havana Woolworth Department Store) . . . This copy was passed along to the cable operator who promptly let out a howl and called a meeting of his teletype colleagues. One who spoke English brought the copy back to me and said . . . 'We wish you not to write anything about the situation here—for your sake and for ours. You are under censorship the same as everybody else.' Well the office picks up the tab for these trips, but this does not include bail money, and the airline insurance does not cover risk of acquiring tropical crud in the Cuban pokey. So no serious attempt was made to beat the censors. Starting then, off-field distractions no longer appeared of earth shattering importance. Even though Cot Deal pitched a complete game that included pauses to estimate how far away from the bark the bombs were exploding. (One's concussion actually was felt in the stadium, three cramped blocks from the theater it blew out.)¹³⁸

The *D & C* baseball writer concluded the two page article with a particularly baseball-themed focus:

More than 10,000 of the Cubans now living in Florida are reported contributing to Castro's campaign and would love to see some of the Batista mob ventilated. . . Batista must stick and stay and hope it pays. Club-owner Bobby Maduro pays his bills and is prepared to fight an anticipated drive to force Havana out of the International League so long as the political situation is not cleared . . . Batista," claims Maduro, "has the Cuban Negro population on his side and his is 35 per cent of our country. He also has the labor leaders and of course he has the Army. When you have the Army you are the boss."¹³⁹

This article revealed several important states of the American-Cuban bonding dynamic, at least as portrayed in the Rochester press. First, the Cuban Revolution was now considered to be important enough to warrant front-page coverage. Second, the lens of baseball was indeed being utilized to gain access to such stories, and to portray them to the Rochester readership in a familiar setting. Aspects such as censorship, bombings, and political protests were not common events at Red Wings games, so this overlap with a baseball contest showed to the public that

¹³⁸ First parenthesis mine, second is Beahon's.

¹³⁹ George Beahon, "What is the Real Situation in Cuba?" *D & C*, 11 August 1957.

something was amiss in Cuba. However the most important revelation was that even the bond of baseball was not enough to keep the Cuban Revolution on the front page for long, showing the weakness the sport had as a cultural lens.

The rest of August featured two more articles outside of the sport section, both in the *T-U*.¹⁴⁰ Coverage briefly picked up again in early September following the failed Cienfuegos uprising. The *D & C* printed seven Cuban-focused pieces and the *T-U* printed five, respectively. However, by the middle of the month, Cuba fell out of each of the front sections for the remainder of the baseball season.¹⁴¹ Yet, when Red Wing training camp began in the spring of 1958, the island had become permanently attached to both the *D & C*'s and *T-U*'s front pages. As this study's findings for the last three seasons show, this was not because of baseball. The American-Cuban baseball relationship, while undeniably present, was simply along for the ride.

The Pot Boils

1958-1959

The Cuban Revolution received a sharp coverage increase by the two newspapers in April 1958. With Red Wings spring training almost half-over, the "Pearl of the Antilles" seemed to be the new headline staple. On 1 April, the *T-U*'s third page announced via the "Times-Union Wire Services" that: "Batista Gets Dictator Powers."¹⁴² The *D & C*'s seventh page that same day commented: "Cuban Rebels Hit Communications."¹⁴³ On 2 April, the morning daily's Page Two exclaimed: "Cuban Rebels Kick off Total War on Batista."¹⁴⁴ The *T-U* scooped its competitors that afternoon when it ran a story about the arrest of three Rochester-based businessmen, the

¹⁴⁰ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 12 August-31 August 1957.

¹⁴¹ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1-30 September 1957.

¹⁴² "Batista Gets Dictator Powers," *T-U*, 1 April 1958.

¹⁴³ AP, "Cuban Rebels Hit Communications," *D & C*, 1 April 1958.

¹⁴⁴ AP, "Cuban Rebels Kick Off Total War Against Batista," *D & C*, 2 April 1958.

Bachman brothers, who were charged with smuggling weapons to Castro.¹⁴⁵ The next page published an AP piece entitled: “22 Rebel Supporters Arrested in Miami,” with a photograph showing Cuban hunger strikers.¹⁴⁶ The *D & C*’s Mitchell Kaidy reported the following day: “‘Amazing Bachmans’ Face Charges of Supplying Arms to Cuba Rebels.”¹⁴⁷ In neither paper were the Bachmans criticized or praised. The *T-U* utilized its lead by running a full length column: “Kill if Necessary, Cuban Workers Told,”¹⁴⁸ along with a Page Two article entitled: “Smuggling Guns to Cuba Big Business.”¹⁴⁹ On 4 April the *T-U*’s headline declared: “Total War Will Start Tonight, if Necessary says Castro,”¹⁵⁰ while the editorial section ran this cartoon:¹⁵¹



During the rest of April, the *D & C* published twenty-eight Cuba-related stories and the *T-U* ran fourteen.¹⁵² Headline after headline drew respective readerships into the ongoing island crisis. In this regard, the two papers remained largely consistent with their coverage. On 5 April, Rochester’s morning daily ran the headline: “Cuban Rebels ‘Total War’ Opens in Ominous

¹⁴⁵ “3 Bachmans Indicted in Cuban Arms Plot,” *T-U*, 2 April 1958. The brothers were Stanley J., Jerome H., and Bernard S. Their case was declared a mistrial subsequent to a hung jury.

¹⁴⁶ AP, “22 Rebel Supporters Arrested in Miami,” *T-U*, 2 April 1958.

¹⁴⁷ Mitchell Kaidy, “‘Amazing Bachmans’ Face Charges of Supplying Arms to Cuban Rebels,” *D & C*, 3 April 1958.

¹⁴⁸ AP, “Kill if Necessary, Cuban Workers Told,” *T-U*, 3 April 1958.

¹⁴⁹ AP, “Smuggling Guns to Cuba Big Business,” *T-U*, 3 April 1958.

¹⁵⁰ AP, “Total War Will Start Tonight, if Necessary says Castro,” *T-U*, 4 April 1958.

¹⁵¹ “A Hurricane That Will Bear Watching,” *T-U* Editorial Section, 4 April 1958.

¹⁵² *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 5-30 April 1958.

Silence as Batista Readies Troops.”¹⁵³ The following day, the front page featured a full length AP column entitled: “Castro Forces Now Isolated, Cubans Claim.”¹⁵⁴ On 8 April, Page Three reported: “Police in Havana Arrest 26 Men in Fight on Rebels,”¹⁵⁵ and 9 April’s Page Seven commented: “Cuba Civic Resistance Movement Claims Thousands Oppose Army.”¹⁵⁶ The next day, the opening headline declared: “Havana Crushes Rebel Uprising: Batista Opens Counter Offensive.” Two other Cuban-centered articles appeared alongside a photograph of a fire-engulfed Havana street.¹⁵⁷ The *D & C*’s 11 April front page announced: “Cuban Rebels Fail in Second Uprising.”¹⁵⁸ Also that day the morning daily printed an op-ed editorial on the Cuban situation, the only one in either newspaper in April. The unauthored piece, entitled “Cuba’s Warning,” posed the following:

As rebel and government forces in Cuba spill blood in scattered clashes across the island, the American bystander is put in a curious position. Choosing sides isn’t easy. Fidel Castro and his abortive uprising aren’t likely to draw much American sympathy. Castro’s cause has won the sympathy of Cuba’s few Communists. For years Castro has behaved in a manner to suggest that he is a Red or a fellow traveler. As for Batista, his rule is a dictatorship rating as only slightly the better of two bad choices . . . Batista was elected president under a new constitution adopted in 1940, and was renamed president for another 4-year term in 1954 . . . in an election in which he was the only candidate . . . *Under the terms of the Platt Amendment the United States could intervene “for the preservation of Cuban independence.” At least four times the U.S. intervened in Cuban insurrections. But not since the amendment was abrogated in 1934. Now its policy is “hands-off.” This isn’t Russia, which sent tanks and guns into a satellite to quell a revolt.* At the moment the threat of a Communist coup in . . . Cuba, is remote but the possibility exists. Cuba may be warning us to intensify our propaganda program for freedom in the Western Hemisphere.¹⁵⁹

Putting aside the writer’s assumptions on Castro’s political affiliations, this article revealed a disturbing trend about Rochester’s view of Cuba. The Platt Amendment was brought up as a potential solution if a Communist coup were to unfold on the island, showing a sense of

¹⁵³ AP, “Cuban Rebels ‘Total War’ Opens in Ominous Silence as Batista Readies Troops,” *D & C*, 5 April 1958.

¹⁵⁴ AP, “Castro Forces Now Isolated, Cubans Claim,” *D & C*, 6 April 1958.

¹⁵⁵ AP, “Police in Havana Arrest 26 Men in Fight on Rebels,” *D & C*, 8 April 1958.

¹⁵⁶ AP, “Cuba Civic Resistance Movement Claims Thousands Oppose Army,” *D & C*, 9 April 1958.

¹⁵⁷ AP, “Havana Crushes Rebel Uprising; Batista Opens Counter Offensive,” *D & C*, 10 April 1958.

¹⁵⁸ AP, “Cuban Rebels Fail in Second Uprising,” *D & C*, 11 April 1958.

¹⁵⁹ “Cuba’s Warning,” *D & C*, 11 April, 1958.

how Cuba best served American interests, and not how they both could best serve each other. . . Although the author reminded the readers that “this isn’t Russia,” the suggestion was that nothing should be taken off the table regarding, “our . . . program for freedom.” It was under this attitude that the next few months of the Revolution was portrayed in the Rochester press.

The next day a *D & C* front page headline proclaimed: “Dynamite Blasted by Rebels in Cuba after Swift Foray.”¹⁶⁰ An opening AP article on 13 April was entitled: “Cuban Revolt Fizzles as Dissension Splits Havana Rebel Chiefs.”¹⁶¹ The following morning, two relevant pieces on the Revolution were printed on Page Three.¹⁶² On 15 April, a front page story declared: “Cuban Rebels Land on Coast for 2d Front.”¹⁶³ On 16 April, a Page Two AP quotation announced: “Rebels Shoot-Up 3 Cuban Towns, Scatter to Hills.”¹⁶⁴ On 18 April, a small article informed readers that: “Castro Shakes up Rebel Commands to Halt Bungling.”¹⁶⁵ The next relevant story appeared on Page Three ten days later.¹⁶⁶ On 29 April, a Page Eleven quotation commented: “Cuba Calm Ends, Attacks Renewed.”¹⁶⁷ The last day of April, a similar-sized quotation appeared on the front page which claimed: “Rebels Trapped, End of Uprising Seen by Cubans.”¹⁶⁸

For the most part baseball was a negligible influence, at least thematically, upon the two newspapers’ 1958 April coverage of Cuba, although baseball in relation to Cuba was featured four times outside the sports sections. The first, written by the *T-U*’s baseball reporter Al C. Weber, appeared on the 14 April edition’s front page entitled: “Havana- - Or Else, Bisons Told.”

¹⁶⁰ AP, “Dynamite Blasted by Rebels in Cuba after Swift Foray,” *D & C*, 12 April 1958.

¹⁶¹ AP, “Cuban Revolt Fizzles as Dissension Splits Havana Rebel Chiefs,” *D & C*, 13 April 1958.

¹⁶² Ben Funk, “‘Youth on the Block’ Fights Batista,” *D & C*, 14 April 1958.

¹⁶³ AP, “Cuban Rebels Land on Coast for ‘2d Front,’” *D & C*, 15 April 1958.

¹⁶⁴ AP, “Rebels Shoot-Up 3 Cuban Towns, Scatter to Hills,” *D & C*, 16 April 1958.

¹⁶⁵ AP, “Castro Shakes Up Rebel Commands to Halt ‘Bungling,’” *D & C*, 18 April 1958.

¹⁶⁶ AP, “Rebellion Over, says Some Cubans,” *D & C*, 28 April 1958.

¹⁶⁷ AP, “Cuba Calm Ends, Attacks Renewed,” *D & C*, 29 April 1958.

¹⁶⁸ AP, “Rebels Trapped, End of Uprising Seen by Cubans,” *D & C*, 30 April 1958.

Due to the heightened political tensions and outbreaks of violence during early April, the Buffalo Bisons' players voted not to play their season opening series in Havana, even under threat of forfeiting those games. Weber commented:

The directors, in an emergency meeting here yesterday, voted 7-0 to maintain its original schedule. Buffalo although invited to attend, was not represented. However, Buffalo through club president John Stigimeir, announced it would "stand by the action taken by its Executive Committee Apr. 12 and will not send its club to Havana . . . If Buffalo forfeits its games there, the Wings will be the first league team to appear in strife-torn Cuba. George Sisler, representing Rochester, after hearing assurances from Maduro that there was no risk involved . . . voted to maintain the schedule. The meeting heard other assurances relayed by League President Frank Shaughnessy from Earl T. Smith, US ambassador to Cuba . . . Maduro read a telegram signed by six American-born players on his team and one umpire, Augie Guglielmo. It said they had played six exhibition games in Moron . . . 300 miles closer to the main trouble spot at Santiago than Havana, without incident or harassment of any kind . . . He said he would not transfer his games to Tampa, because conditions "are better in Havana now than at any time in two years." Thus the Diamond Jubilee opening of the International League, oldest of the minors, appears a bit tarnished at the moment.¹⁶⁹

Unlike Beahon, Weber made little-attempt outside of "strife-torn Cuba," to explore the revolution in-depth, seemingly content to simply discuss the baseball side of the equation. This pattern also appeared throughout his sport section articles, as after 1957, Weber stopped travelling to Cuba with the Red Wings, thereby shrinking the baseball window Rochester had to the island's revolution.

The second was a Letter to the Editor that appeared on the *D & C*'s 18 April editorial page, which essentially declared any American-Cuban relationship via baseball as a fraudulent one. The letter proclaimed:

As I write this the internal situation in Cuba is to say the least, uncertain. The opinions I express are non-political for my views are strictly concerned with baseball. Incidentally, I have

¹⁶⁹ Al C. Weber, "Havana- - or Else, Bisons Told," *T-U*, 14 April 1958. On 5 April, Beahon had printed in the *D & C* sports section brief individual Red Wing responses to the question whether or not they would be up to travel to Havana. Most said they were "leery," but would go if they had to. However, Beahon quoted the lone Latin American questioned, Puerto Rican third baseman Tony Alomar, as saying, "Si, I go. Why no go?" George Beahon, "Red Wings Don't Relish Playing in Havana," *D & C*, 4 April 1958.

always scoffed at reports that it is also Cuba's national pastime. Obviously, the Batista and Castro forces have other ideas. I cannot believe our George Sisler would be a part of a mandate to the Buffalo Bisons that they must enter Havana to open the baseball season midst the very definite risk of injury to personnel directly involved in the business of baseball, the players . . . Don't they (IL Board of Governors) consider the entire island of Cuba a warzone battleground? Or do they think that Gran Stadium will be allowed to remain a playground? I feel that baseball players earn their livelihood in the game of baseball, not . . . as soldiers in wartime. I believe Mr. Sisler should explain his stand (which I cannot fathom as being his true feelings) to the fandom of the local team who subscribed to save baseball here, not to feed it to the rebels of Cuba. And just what are the feelings of the stockholders- the owners of the Wings?- SEBASTIAN J. FICHERA, 176 Fulton Ave.¹⁷⁰

This revealed how little at least one Rochesterian viewed the American-Cuban baseball bond: barely existent. If the majority of Red Wings fans shared his views, then no matter how positively Beahon may have covered the bridge, its ability to serve the greater good would have been largely lacking.

The third was a surprise George Beahon column featured on the opening page of the *D & C*'s 16 April local news section, entitled, *Everybody's Business*. Beahon, amongst other baseball reflections, opined:

Spring training is many things to a ballplayer. And many things also to a writer . . . It is the constant, conflicting series of reports-hearsay, rumor, censored stories-about what's happening in Havana, where your ballclub has to appear before you get home . . . It is wondering whether your insurance is effective in Havana . . . It is talking with newsmen who are forced to fly daily from Havana to Miami in order to avoid censorship: but are censored by restriction in their every movement under the martial law of Cuba.¹⁷¹

The final front page Cuban baseball entry was a second edition of Beahon's *Everybody's Business* on 23 April. This one entitled: "Nothing Doing," attempted to portray the Havana scene to Rochesterians, as the Wings had played a season series there over the weekend. Beahon articulated:

In Miami one day last week a carload of Fidel Castro supporters celebrated the opening of the baseball season in their native Havana by massaging a Cuba legislator with Louisville sluggers . . . In Havana the same night Cuban government censors celebrated the opener by blue-

¹⁷⁰ Sebastian J. Fichera, "'Shooting, Baseball Just Don't Mix,'" *D & C*, 18 April 1958.

¹⁷¹ George Beahon, "Everybody's Business," *D & C*, 16 April 1958.

penciling this line . . . “Havana tonight was as quiet as a drive-in theatre at high noon. Well, almost” . . . Cuban President Fulgencio Batista clearly won a round two weeks ago when he suppressed the attempt at a general strike. It would appear however . . . tremendous publicity accorded Castro’s disorganized armed revolt has almost completely paralyzed Cuba’s lush tourist trade. In a discount house in midtown Havana, a shopkeeper who does business with visiting ballplayers told me: “I had a full week in which not one customer walked into my shop. There is no reason for it. But that awful publicity and propaganda in the U.S. press ruined us” . . . Thousands of good, average Cuban breadwinners are not winning bread. It’s a national emergency without another shot being fired. And the man on the street has become more inclined to swing his blame away from the government and toward the costly war of nerves being fought by the rebels. Meanwhile, also, three more multi-million dollar tourist traps are in the planning stage in Havana. After all, it’s only money.¹⁷²

In both of Beahon’s articles, he once again articulated a sense of attempted understanding between him and the everyday *habanos* he would come across. Unlike his front-page counterparts, the “baseball writer” revealed the negative impact American coverage was having on the Cuban economy, namely the tourist trade. By comparing these two entries with Fichera’s op-ed piece, it also revealed a potential disconnect between the writer and reader. Unlike Fichera, Beahon had for the previous four and a half years travelled to Havana on a frequent basis, experiencing the Cuban spectacle firsthand. With baseball serving as his entryway into this spectacle, it perhaps also enabled him to understand the average Cuban more accurately and quickly. Since Fichera had no access to these resources, it is understandable why the bond had little impact upon his perception of Cuba.

Cuban events, both on and off the baseball diamond, dropped out of the front sections of the Rochester newspapers for all of May and the majority of June. Neither the *D & C* nor the *T-U* printed a relevant story until 27 June.¹⁷³ The *T-U* that day hit newsstands under a banner reading: “Cuba Rebels Kidnap 10 Americans,” and featured a front page article entitled: “Engineers Kidnapped in Cuba.”¹⁷⁴ The following morning, the *D & C* trumpeted the headline:

¹⁷² George Beahon, “Everybody’s Business,” *D & C*, 23 April 1958.

¹⁷³ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 May-30 June 1958.

¹⁷⁴ AP, “Engineers Kidnapped in Cuba,” *T-U*, 27 June 1958.

“Cuban Rebels Kidnap, Hold 10 Americans.”¹⁷⁵ These articles unknowingly signalled the beginning of a much larger hostage crisis, along with a drastic increase in coverage of Cuba. By the time the crisis ended on 19 July, the two Rochester dailies ran thirty-nine combined stories, twenty-five in the *D & C* and fourteen in the *T-U*.¹⁷⁶ While none of the articles mentioned baseball, it is important to mention that the kidnappings drastically colored local opinion of the Cuban Revolution. On 3 July a *T-U* editorial entitled: “Cuban Rebels Lose American Sympathy,” reported:

Strict censorship by the Cuban government has clouded the real situation. . . The rebels are said to resent the fact that the United States is not providing them with support and that it has been helping the government. In either case it is just as criminal for them to kidnap innocent Americans from their jobs . . . to express this resentment. They display a complete lack of understanding of freedom to resort to such means. These kidnappings suggest that the rebels would be no better than the present government.¹⁷⁷

A 6 July editorial in the *D & C* called for Castro to be “slapped,” and labelled the Cuban rebel leader, a “modern Simon Bolivar.”¹⁷⁸ However, an 11 July editorial written by AP journalist J.M. Roberts contended: “Russia and the East German communists . . . make their attempts in petty ways. That’s even different from the way it’s done by the Cuban rebels who wanted foreigners as insurance against government bombs.”¹⁷⁹ And yet, as soon as the captured Americans were returned, both the *D & C* and the *T-U* returned to not focusing on Cuba.¹⁸⁰

Ironically, the next three months, regarded as the turning point of the Cuban Revolution, developed the smallest amount of Rochester-Cuba coverage. From the beginning of August until the end of October, only one relevant article between the two dailies was printed, an 11

¹⁷⁵ AP, “Cuban Rebels Kidnap, Hold 10 Americans,” *D & C*, 28 June 1958.

¹⁷⁶ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 29 June-19 July 1958.

¹⁷⁷ “Cuban Rebels Lose American Sympathy,” *T-U*, 3 July 1958.

¹⁷⁸ John F. Collins, “Cuban Rebel Leader Should be Slapped,” *D & C*, 6 July 1958.

¹⁷⁹ J.M. Roberts, “Reds Resort to Barbarism with Kidnappings,” *D & C*, 11 July 1958. The Reds in the article are East Germans who were holding American military pilots hostage.

¹⁸⁰ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 19 July-31 October 1958.

September *T-U* photo exposé about gun smuggling.¹⁸¹ Cuba had gone from being an island of global importance to seeming irrelevance as far as Gannett's newspapers were concerned. This changed dramatically in the last two months of 1958.

November and December featured extensive front-page coverage of Cuba in both the *D & C* and the *T-U* as twenty articles ran in the morning newspaper, and thirty-two were printed by their afternoon competitor.¹⁸² However, while the two dailies informed Rochester readers about controversy in the Cuban Presidential election,¹⁸³ rebel-hijacked airplanes,¹⁸⁴ and Castro's forces besieging Santa Clara,¹⁸⁵ not a single relevant editorial was printed in either one.¹⁸⁶ In fact, on 31 December, when *T-U* Special Services writer William H. Stoneham listed six "restive explosive situations . . . that are clear to the naked eye as the year begins," neither Cuba nor Latin America was mentioned.¹⁸⁷ So, while the Revolution increased its coverage in Rochester, the editors did not hold it to be a "true global crisis." Seemingly not even the baseball connection warranted any local press perspective on Cuba. Literally overnight, however, both the *D & C* and the *T-U* were forced to change their Cuban assessment as Batista fled the island and Castro came to power.

In this chapter's introduction, I established I would utilize a 1963 quantitative study, conducted by Zeitlin/Scheer, when thematically analyzing 1959-1960. In this study, the *Washington Post*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *San Francisco Examiner* newspapers were examined to determine how prominent the Cuban Revolution was featured and portrayed in their

¹⁸¹ "Men, Arms for Cuba, Seized in Florida," *T-U*, 11 September 1958.

¹⁸² *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 November-31 December 1958.

¹⁸³ AP, "Cubans Shun Polls as Voting Begins," *T-U*, 3 November 1958.

¹⁸⁴ AP, "Cuba Rebels Seize Plane; 17 Killed," *T-U*, 3 November 1958.

¹⁸⁵ AP, "Cuban War Rages in Two Offensives; Payoff Held Near," *D & C*, 29 December 1958.

¹⁸⁶ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 November-31 December 1958.

¹⁸⁷ William H. Stoneham, "Challenge of '59-A Restive, Possibly Explosive, World," *T-U*, 31 December 1958.

respective coverages.¹⁸⁸ The answers Zeitlin/Scheer reached via their quantitative experiments served as the point/counterpoint to the Rochester analysis, and helped add academic weight to my study's primary thematic conclusions. However, two important distinctions must be noted between their research and my own before going further. First, their study period was divided into three time frames: 1 January 1959-11 June 1959, 12 June 1959-11 January 1960, and 12 January 1960-7 July 1960. These were chosen due to important events occurring on those particular dates.¹⁸⁹ My analysis was more loosely divided into six time frames: 1 January 1959-31 March 1959, 1 April 1959-30 June 1959, 1 July 1959-15 August 1959, 16 August 1959-15 October 1959, 1 April 1960-15 June 1960, and 16 June-31 July 1960. These were chosen due to what I saw as major themes relevant to my study occurring during each designated period. Lastly, Zeitlin/Scheer came to their quantitative conclusions based on measuring column inches in their chosen newspapers, whereas I simply counted the number of articles.¹⁹⁰

In both the *D & C* and the *T-U*, the Cuban Revolution's immediate aftermath dominated front-page coverage, albeit steadily decreasing each month. In January, the morning and afternoon dailies published seventy and sixty-three relevant articles, respectively. The following two months, the *D & C* ran twenty-nine Revolution-focused stories and the *T-U* ran twenty-seven.¹⁹¹ The "Pearl of the Antilles" had definitively become an event of "global importance, at least as far as Rochester newspapers were concerned.

While the published pieces ranged through a wide variety of topics, there were two major narratives that the *D & C* and *T-U* focused on, each one representing an issue that a baseball bridge would have to overcome. The first, featured primarily in January and somewhat in

¹⁸⁸ Zeitlin, "Cuba, Tragedy in Our Hemisphere," 288.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 286-292. For 1959 and 1956 I included relevant political cartoons as articles in my quantitative count.

¹⁹¹ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 January-28 February 1959.

February, had each Rochester newspaper print some editorials praising Castro for deposing Batista, while simultaneously warning that the head rebel had to prove himself to the “North” before gaining American support. In a 3 January *D & C* editorial entitled: “Good for Cuba! (We Hope),” an unknown writer pontificated:

Let this not be construed as favorable to Gen. Fulgencio Batista . . . His blood-spattered administration since he seized control in 1952 invites only disgust. On the other hand, who knows anything about . . . young Fidel Castro? A courageous young man? Yes. An oddball? Yes, one who openly insults other nations by kidnapping foreigners to dramatize his cause. A Communist? Maybe . . . but probably not, although he is the darling of the Moscow Press . . . Meanwhile a brief pause here up north in terms of . . . endorsement will do Uncle Sam no harm, while Cuba figures out whether or not it has skidded out of the political frying pan and into the fire.¹⁹²

A 9 January *T-U* opinion piece, after the Eisenhower administration officially recognized the Revolutionary Government, similarly concluded: “Recognition is apparently the formal handshake. The embraces will come when recognizable democratic government is established in Cuba.”¹⁹³ On 15 January in the *T-U*, a front-page column by AP News Analyst James Marlow queried: “The announced purpose of Fidel Castro’s revolution, which threw out the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, was to restore democracy to Cuba. The question now is, will it?”¹⁹⁴ Based on how the two Rochester newspaper editorial staffs covered the war criminal executions, the second major early 1959 narrative, the answer was an emphatic no.

According to the Zeitlin/Scheer study, between January and June 1959, thirteen to thirty-nine percent of 418-858 total column inches of their examined coverage focused on trials and summary executions by Castro’s forces.¹⁹⁵ Based on my own brief quantitative analysis, January and February featured numerous related articles, as my Rochester examples showed. Of the sixty-three total Cuban-related pieces printed in the *T-U* in January, thirty-two of them were

¹⁹² “Good for Cuba! (We Hope),” *D & C*, 3 January 1959.

¹⁹³ “U.S. Gives Cuba Handshake, Embrace May Come Later,” *T-U*, 9 January 1959.

¹⁹⁴ James Marlow, “Castro’s Democracy Remains to be Proven,” *T-U*, 15 January 1959.

¹⁹⁵ Zeitlin, *Cuba, Tragedy in Our Hemisphere*, 289.

primarily focused on the ongoing executions.¹⁹⁶ The few editorials on the same topic both in the *T-U* and in the *D & C*, negatively portrayed Castro's actions in this regard. Many of them claimed all the American public needed to support the executions were for the accused *batistianos* to be given "trials by due process,"¹⁹⁷ not by "mob justice."¹⁹⁸ On 16 January, the *D & C* ran the headline: "'200,000 Gringos to Die' if U.S. Interferes with Killings, Castro Declares."¹⁹⁹ In response, the *D & C's* editorial page on 22 January took condemnation of the executions one step further. Under the headline: "Two Views on Fidel Castro," were printed two op-ed columns. David Lawrence, staff writer for the *New York Herald-Tribune* wrote:

Two wrongs do not make a single right. This moral principle seems to have been abandoned not only in Cuba, but by some people inside this country who condone the savagery which has prompted the executions of dozens of persons without trial . . . Can any government which does not give a fair trial to a person accused of crime be regarded as civilized? . . . Yet above all Castro could think of the other day was that the United States might intervene militarily. So he promptly threatened to massacre Americans.²⁰⁰

AP writer J.M. Roberts stated: "When Castro reacted against congressional critics . . . he was reacting against those who fought for his country 50 years ago and then declined to take it over as any other world power would have done . . . The United States won Castro's war for him when it finally cut off those (Batista's) arms."²⁰¹ Overhead, the *D & C* ran this cartoon (see next page):²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ *T-U* archives, 1-31 January 1959.

¹⁹⁷ "Castro Losing American Sympathy," *T-U*, 16 January 1959. There was a single editorial which chose not to immediately condemn the executions, an 18 January *D & C* Letter to the Editor, written by Ellen W. Perkins.

¹⁹⁸ David Lawrence, "Moral Principles Abandoned," *D & C*, 22 January 1959.

¹⁹⁹ AP, "'200,000 Gringos to Die' if U.S. Interferes with Killings, Castro Declares," *D & C*, 16 January 1959.

²⁰⁰ David Lawrence, "Moral Principles Abandoned," *D & C*, 22 January 1959.

²⁰¹ J.M. Roberts, "'Cuban Rebels Urged Revenge'," *D & C*, 22 January 1959.

²⁰² "Starting Off in the Red," *D & C* Editorial Page, 22 January 1959.



This seemed to be a quite loud damnation of Castro's executions, with little understanding of any favorable position. Both articles, despite being labelled "Two Views on Fidel Castro," shared essentially the same viewpoint, one which any American-Cuban baseball bond would have had a hard time overcoming.

In the *D & C's* sports pages, Beahon covered the fate of the Sugar Kings semi-extensively, culminating in a full page 31 January article entitled: "League Okays '59 Baseball in Havana." In his piece, Beahon referred to a report Maduro gave to the IL Board of Governors while presenting to Rochester an optimistic outlook on the IL's future in Cuba. The *D & C* Baseball Writer expressed:

Significant developments were: 1. The revolutionary government headed by Fidel Castro has assured Maduro the fullest cooperation, even to the extent of helping to sell season tickets. 2. Castro will throw out the first baseball of Cuba's IL season before an expected throng of 25,000 in Gran Stadium April 14 . . . It is quite possible the victorious rebel leader will fly to Toronto to repeat the courtesy for that club's home opener April 29. 3. Dr. Manuel Urrutia, new president of Cuba, has repeatedly and publicly promised help for all sports in Cuba. 4. As evidence of Maduro's standing with the new government, Army Capt. Felipe Guerra, the new director of sports, offered Maduro a non-salaried job as coordinator of all amateur sports in Cuba. 5. The same Guerra's first official act was to check out rumors that the Sugar Kings might not be playing at home . . . 6. Castro's government will attempt to destroy the "numbers racket" . . . that conspires to keep Cuba's lower income population financially broke, and this should help promote baseball attendance. 7. The civic resistance to the overthrown dictatorship, a two-year long "stay home" strike is naturally a thing of the past and the fans will return to the ballpark in greater numbers than ever before.²⁰³

²⁰³ George Beahon, "League Okays '59 Baseball in Havana," *D & C*, 31 January 1959.

There are three important revelations regarding this article. First, unlike his front-page counterparts, Beahon tried to focus on a positive side of the Cuban Revolution, if solely in a sporting context. Again, his background in baseball may have enabled him to see between the lines on this issue. Second, it is solely through the baseball window that either Rochester paper received any in-depth in-house writing on the Cuban Revolution. Most importantly however, is that once again, this was buried in the sports section, far from the front page, and many a *D & C* reader.

As the previous paragraphs clearly show, the American-Cuban baseball relationship was being ignored by the Rochester front pages. No article or editorial in either daily outside of the sports section mentioned the Sugar Kings in the first three months of 1959.²⁰⁴ With executions and suppression of liberties going on, baseball was apparently irrelevant in terms of important news from Cuba. This trend of apathetically disregarding the cultural bond of baseball's potential in terms of international diplomacy continued during the following three months.

From the beginning of April to the end of June, coverage of Cuba in the Rochester newspapers remained level in terms of quantity. In total number of columns, the *D & C* ran twenty-four in April, eleven in May, and seventeen in June. During those same months, the *T-U* printed sixteen, twelve, and eleven articles, respectively.²⁰⁵ The Revolution remained an important issue, but not enough to dominate either daily's headlines.

Thematically, the Rochester press narrative also remained static. Executions were no longer the focus, shifting towards Castro's plans for agrarian reform and his views regarding Cuba's relationship with the United States. Most of the articles seemed to present a sympathetic,

²⁰⁴ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 January-31 March 1959.

²⁰⁵ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 April-30 June 1959.

if wary, view of his regime.²⁰⁶ Paul Miller, the *T-U*'s editor, who served on the Gannett Board of Directors, published an 18 April column in which he recounted the speech Castro gave in Washington D.C. the day before. Miller remarked:

It was an appealing performance . . . He (Castro) is brave and . . . intelligent. He is also inexperienced and beset by towering problems. Most of those who heard him . . . found themselves generally sympathetic but they will wait and see . . . Time will tell whether an earnest young fighter for freedom can now keep the Commies and their assorted fronts from becoming the scavengers of his victory.²⁰⁷

With the exectuions in the not-so-distant past, Miller's review showed a Rochester press focused primarily on the future of Cuba under Castro, one which he felt Americans should be optimisitic, yet wary about.

This trend continued through June, most notably expressed by *T-U* staff writer Bill Ringle, who went to Havana for a story. On 9 June, the *T-U*'s front page ran the headline: "Under Castro, Cuba is Grippd in Almost Evangelical Fervor," and then in smaller print: "But There's Some Distrust of his Aims, Methods." Within the article this distrust mainly revolved around the issue of land reform. Regarding other Cuban issues however, Ringle noted: "In talking to both . . . supporters of Castro and those who despise him, you find they agree: That Castro has made Cuban government honest . . . That Batista was despicable . . . (share) puzzlement and resentment over American objections to executions of Batista followers . . . The Cubans I talked to thought killing was too good for them."²⁰⁸

Ringle's article is notable for another reason, one arguably more important in regard to this study. His trip to Havana was made possible due to the Havana Sugar Kings, a relationship not disclosed in the article. Earlier in the week, another Ringle front-page article appeared, about

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Paul Miller, "Castro Faces the Editors; His Plea: 'Come to Cuba'," *T-U*, 18 April 1959.

²⁰⁸ Bill Ringle, "Under Castro, Cuba is Grippd in Almost Evangelical Fervor," *T-U*, 9 June 1959.

Floridians running guns to anti-Castro forces.²⁰⁹ This article coincided with an away-from-home series the Red Wings were playing against the Miami Marlins.²¹⁰ The aforementioned Havana column also took place following the conclusion of the Wings-Kings series in the Cuban capital. The sole mention of baseball came on 8 June, when, above the *Rochester Times-Union* logo, appeared: “In Cuba, They’re Fanaticos. Meet Them on Page 40.”²¹¹ In the article, Cuban passion for the game is clearly defined and placed on display for the *T-U* readers, as Ringle wrote:

Take a fanatico, then give him some chicharrones, a bottle of beer, an occasional jonron, some tubeys, and well-timed ponchados. The result: one happy Cuban . . . Apart from the “Barbados,” Castro’s bearded followers . . . the first differences the Rochester fan notices are the ticket hawkers standing outside the big cast-concrete stadium . . . Once the game begins, he (the fanatico) becomes more effervescent than Wings fans usually do. Every pitch is an event, a hit a signal for cheering, a triple or home run an excuse for pandemonium . . . U.S. ball players experienced in Latin America think Cuban fans have more savvy than Americans. “They really know the game,” says Wings manager Cot Deal, who has played in Latin American winter leagues . . . Havana baseball officials don’t agree. “Sure, they’re more passionate than U.S. fans,” says one. “That’s our Latin temperament. But they also think they know more baseball. Every guy is a manager. They don’t come to see the game they only come to see the home team win. They don’t really like baseball. They come here to criticize more than to enjoy the ball game” . . . Havana absorbs a lot more baseball than Rochester in a year. In the winter a four team Cuban League operates in La Gran, Some of the Wings played in it . . . The Cuban baseball vocabulary is borrowed from the American. Most terms have no roots in Spanish, but approximate the American sound . . . The average attendance per game is 3,000 in a summer season . . . Cuban fans like to catch pop flies, clap in unison for no reason at all and, more than Americans, boo the umps. They booed yesterday when they felt the Wings were stalling in the second game on which a time limit had been agreed. Missing yesterday was one of the hallmarks of Sugar Kings baseball – the fans’ rhumba band which used to play constantly while the Cuban club was at bat. But with no rhumba band to listen to, some fans contented themselves with listening to play by play accounts, over small radios, of the game they were watching.²¹²

Since Ringle was not a sportswriter, there are several key notes to mention about his article. First, unlike Beahon, he resorted to using stereotypical language to describe the Sugar Kings’ fanbase, something the former had stopped using years before. In fact, Ringle went one step further by throwing Spanish words in the first sentence, without bothering to translate for his

²⁰⁹ Bill Ringle, “Smuggler of Arms are Brazen,” *T-U*, 5 June 1959.

²¹⁰ Bill Ringle, “Wings Defeat Miami,” *T-U*, 5 June 1959.

²¹¹ “In Cuba, They’re Fanaticos. Meet them on Page 40.” *T-U*, 8 June 1959.

²¹² Bill Ringle, “Baseball . . . Cuban Style,” *T-U*, 8 June 1959.

English speaking readership. This showed how ineffective limiting the baseball lens to the sports section had prepared the average Rochesterian to utilize it in understanding their Cuban counterpart. Second, it also described the atmosphere at a La Gran contest, something which could have gone a long way towards entrenching a Rochester-Havana cultural connection if it had received front-page coverage.

Most importantly, in order to read this article, to find out it was about baseball, and even to learn that Ringle had written it, one had to turn to the opening page of the sports section and locate it right next to the box score.²¹³ The *T-U*'s editorial staff essentially exploited the Red Wings as a way to get a local perspective on the Cuban situation, without actually mentioning such means. With baseball arguably being the best way to establish a cultural bond of friendship between America and Cuba, the IL connection was ignored by Rochester's front pages. This trend briefly subsided during the rest of June but emerges reinforced at the end of the following month.

Quantitatively, July 1959 saw a drastic increase in Cuban-focused stories in both the *D & C* and the *T-U*, running thirty-five and thirty-three front-section articles, respectively.²¹⁴ On 2 July, an editorial article ran in the *D & C* which prophesized:

A land-distribution law . . . certain to plunge Cuba into a long depression unless drastically altered . . . At the same time political purges are being carried out in Havana's schools . . . Reports have been coming out of the island for months about allegedly growing Communist strength . . . A man who means so well is doing so badly that his efforts will result in the opposite of what he wants for his people.²¹⁵

Not only was the coverage increasing, but as the previous quotation revealed, it was primarily negative towards the current regime.

²¹³ Ibid. There was no game report ie play by play, simply an attached box score.

²¹⁴ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1-31 July 1959.

²¹⁵ "Cuban Tragedy," *D & C*, 2 July 1959. There was a cartoon over it showing a machete wielding Castro making a jungle trail, and the forest was labelled "Post-Revolution Problems."

On 16 July, a *T-U* editorial criticized Castro for anti-American rhetoric when the former commander of the Cuban Revolutionary Air Force, Pedro Luis Díaz Lanz, testified before a U.S. Senate Subcommittee that Cuba's government had fallen to heavy communist infiltration. The article argued, "As hard as it may be for some Cubans to understand, a Senate Subcommittee does not speak for the United States."²¹⁶

Two days after Cuban President Manuel Urrutia's forced resignation, in what Senzel described as a "personal finger-wagging warning to Castro,"²¹⁷ a 21 July *D & C* editorial further lamented: "Castro has spent most of his time in office castigating this country. Talk about biting the hand that feeds you! He's been trying to take ours off at the elbow . . . Castro must understand the unwritten rule: Don't kick your best customer."²¹⁸

During July, Cuban baseball was nowhere to be seen in the front page or editorial discussions, even during the Wings-Kings series.²¹⁹ In the early morning of 26 July, the Verdi shooting incident briefly changed that. The coverage of it also clearly showed that Cuban baseball did not bring the Revolution to Rochester's front pages, but the other way around.

First we need to focus on George Beahon's front section coverage of the event, as his is the most notable. The *D & C*'s 26 July morning edition ran with the headline: "Marines Storm Ontario Beach in Windup of Lake Operations." And, as Senzel described: "At the top of the page, in the right-hand corner and obviously a bit late in arriving: BULLET HITS VERDI IN CUBAN BALLGAME."²²⁰ The entire article read:

Frank Verdi, coaching at third base for the Rochester Red Wings, was grazed by a "July 26 Celebration" stray bullet early today. The Wings immediately walked off the field with the score tied 4-4 after eleven innings. Havana shortstop Leo Cardenas was also hit by another stray

²¹⁶ "Diaz' Charges Not Made by the United States," *T-U*, 16 July 1959.

²¹⁷ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*, 72.

²¹⁸ "Castro Cracking," *D & C*, 20 July 1959.

²¹⁹ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 23-25 July 1959.

²²⁰ Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War*, 80. Senzel fails to mention that Beahon wrote it.

bullet. Neither player was injured seriously, the bullet not breaking the skin. An outbreak of stray firing in Gran Stadium began shortly after midnight, the beginning of the anniversary of the July 26 Movement. Many troops were in the stands, some carrying tommy guns and side arms. *Other details, see page 1C.*²²¹

Ironically, on page 14A that same morning, a Beahon piece written prior to the same game was featured. Entitled: “Cubanistas, Machetes at Sides, Gather to Cheer Rebel Anniversary,” the article described:

Free Cuba on the eve of its first big celebration is a city of many contradictions. In the streets below my hotel window, the impromptu parades have started, nearly 24 hours in advance. The bars are closing at 6 p.m. because Fidel Castro . . . does not want his little people to get in trouble tonight before they pay homage tomorrow. In the lobby, an American whispers: “This man is a wild idealist. He can’t guarantee seven million tons of sugar, which is the make-or-break industry. But he is taking farms from the landowners and splitting them out to the peasants. Not to grow sugar. He is economically unsound.” On the streets the Cubanistas walk, machetes swinging at their side. They are incredibly polite and well behaved . . . the monied Cubans talk disparagingly of Fidel, “He is promoting a circus tomorrow . . . The whole thing is corny.” In a shopping center, a Cuban storekeeper was angry. “Why must you suspect everything bad . . . Your government helped Batista when he was torturing and murdering our students. Now Castro is trying to put the pieces together and give Cuba real democracy, but you Americans pick, pick, and pick. Why?” . . . He is an incredible hero here . . . Said a hotel man hopefully, “They are certainly entitled to their demonstrations and celebrations but when does he get down to business in the cabinet meetings instead of at mass meetings and on television shows?”²²²

Once again, Beahon was trying to portray both sides of the Castro debate, this time with nary a mention of baseball. This led further credence to the theory that baseball had helped, at least within Beahon, establish a bond with his Cuban interviewees. This also marked a turning point as the usage of baseball within his front-page coverage of the island would drastically decrease after the Verdi incident, further revealing how separate the Rochester press wanted to portray the two storylines: baseball and the spectacle of Cuba.

The following morning the *D & C*’s main headline proclaimed: “Millions in Havana Cheer as Castro Warns Critics, Accepts Post as Premier.” The attached AP column, described in

²²¹ George Beahon, “Bullet Hits Verdi in Cuban Ballgame,” *D & C*, 26 July 1959.

²²² George Beahon, “Cubanistas, Machetes at Sides, Gather to Cheer Rebel Anniversary,” *D & C*, 26 July 1959.

lengthy detail the anniversary celebrations, minus any mention of baseball.²²³ However, next to the article was a picture of Frank Verdi poking his finger through the bullet hole in his ballcap, while surrounded by other Wings. Underneath the photo was a Beahon article entitled:

“Nightmare in Havana – Wings in Real Danger, *other stories, picture, Page 31.*” Beahon related:

Were they real bullets flying around in Gran Stadium Saturday night? They were. Were they aimed at the two players who were struck by the nearly spent missiles? Unquestionably not. Was the danger that prompted the Red Wings to refuse to finish the series today and pull out of Cuba several hours ahead of schedule, real or imagined, or exaggerated? The answer to that question is not easy . . . One thing cannot be argued: When highly emotional Cubans-armed young soldiers wearing pistols, rifles, and sub-machine guns-begin blasting into the air and into the ground in a wild, uncontrolled celebration, there is danger . . . It was impossible to determine whether the bullets that struck Verdi and Cardenas came from inside or outside the stadium.

After describing the Verdi incident in detail Beahon continued:

There will be varied versions of this Latin-American baseball “shoot-em-up.” To this reporter, from a press box vantage point, it looked this way: Promptly at midnight, rockets behind the stadium signalled the start of . . . celebrations. The Cuban anthem was played, and everyone rose to sing. At the same time, weapons inside and outside the ballpark began firing, to desist only while the anthem was finished. The umpires had a conference, debating whether to call the game right there, with Rochester leading 4-3 after 10 ½ innings. The arbiters decided not to risk the wrath of perhaps 5,000 fans whose team . . . was losing. Shooting was sporadic for several minutes and play halted several times while *barbudos* fired their weapons from various sections of the spacious stadium. One soldier, sitting next to Red Wing General Manager George Sisler Jr., in a front row box seat, emptied a .45 automatic into the turf near the dugout . . . (Then after Verdi was hit,)²²⁴ The general effect was terrifying to many. One veteran Cuban writer . . . hit the deck when the firing started. Many players from both teams, and the umpires, were visibly shaken even an hour after they left the field. Immediately after the game, Deal said he would not ask his players to take the field today for a double-header . . . Guzzetta the International League’s umpire in chief, told this writer he would, “not umpire . . . on Sunday even if it costs me my job.”

Finally, after describing the failed “negotiations” between Red Wings and Cuban officials to resume play of the doubleheader, Beahon concluded:

The entire incident last night is due to the simple fact that many of the Cuban soldiers are untrained in handling of weapons. Almost daily, in barracks and on streets, Cubans are wounded or killed in gunfire accidents. In the dugout and the stands and in the press box, you rub elbows and shoulders with weapons at all time. Even during the games . . . soldiers are on the field. This

²²³ AP, “Millions in Havana Cheer as Castro Warns Critics, Accepts Post as Premier,” *D & C*, 27 July 1959.

²²⁴ Parenthesis mine.

lack of training, plus emotion, caused last night's near-tragic incident. Today it might have been perfectly safe to play, but as general manager . . . Sisler felt he had no right to subject his players to possible danger. As this is written in my Nacional Hotel Room . . . thousands of Cubans line the Malecon, waiting for the mass celebration and Fidel Castro's speech.²²⁵

As the most thoroughly detailed account of 25-26 July 1959 in Gran Stadium, this article magnified several key elements of American-Cuban baseball relations, at least through the lens of Gannett publications. First, compared to many other Revolutionary incidents, the coverage on the Verdi shooting was calm, detailed, and put a familiar face upon Cubans for Rochester readers to identify with. In this manner, baseball was still in the mind of George Beahon, a bonding agent between American and Cuban fans. It should not be thrown away lightly. However, due to Beahon being the sole Rochester voice on the incident, the impact of the bonding agent is lost on his audience. Second, it marked one of the few instances where the event on the field was considered more important than the Revolution. Most of the baseball stories covered in this study talked about how the sport impacted the Revolution. This one focused upon how the Revolutionary fervor interrupted the 'will o'the wisp' of baseball. Finally, outside of the editorial page and the sports section, the Verdi incident was not mentioned on the *D & C's* front pages again for the remainder of 1959, showing how little appeal baseball had as a Revolutionary lens by the Rochester press.²²⁶

In contrast, outside of the editorial and sports sections, the Verdi incident featured only on the *T-U's* front page. Since the *T-U* did not print a Sunday edition, their editors had to wait till Monday, after the Wings had already arrived back in Rochester, to comment on the story. On 27 June, this photograph ran on the front page (see next page):

²²⁵ George Beahon, "Nightmare in Havana – Wings in Real Danger," *D & C*, 27 July 1959.

²²⁶ *D & C* archives, 28 July-31 October 1959.



Attached to the picture was an article written by sportswriter Dave Occor, who had interviewed Verdi at the Rochester airport. Afterwards, Occor's journalistic energies shifted focus toward opinions regarding the Havana situation from around the IL. He quoted Montreal manager Clay Bryant, Miami manager John (Pepper) Martin, Richmond manager Steve Souchak, and Columbus GM Harold M. Cooper expressing refusal to travel to Havana. Toronto representatives, while unable to be interviewed, were said by Occor to "reportedly have signed a petition saying they would not play in Havana anymore this season." He also summarized IL commissioner Frank J. Shaughnessy's remarks that stated: "the incident was a 'fourth of July' type celebration" and said there is no reason why Toronto and Montreal (the next two Havana home opponents,) should not go to Havana." Then Occor interviewed Sisler Jr., who made no mention about potentially having to return to Cuba. The article concluded:

Manager Cot Deal says he wouldn't balk at going to Havana again. 'This was a one-shot thing' . . . The Wings had in their possession Verdi's hat. Near the peak on the hat band was a hole the circumference of a man's little finger. A plastic liner under the hat saved Frank from serious injury. Pitcher Cal Browning summed up the feelings of the deplaning Wings with a grin and, 'I was one of those who missed the purple heart.'²²⁷

²²⁷ Dave Ocorr, "I Wouldn't Go Back to Havana' Says Verdi'," *T-U*, 27 July 1959. This was their afternoon edition. Their evening edition had a slightly different article on the front page, also by Ocorr, entitled, "IL President

In contrast to his morning counterpart, Occor did not attempt to portray the incident through the lens of the Cuban Revolution, ie why it had happened in the first place. Instead, he shaped it as simply being a baseball story. Admittedly, as the several IL officials he interviewed attested, this was by no means a normal baseball occurrence, but Occor failed to explore it beyond that point. Whereas the *D & C* would remove Beahon's baseball narrative viewing of Cuba from the front pages the following year, the *T-U* had already abandoned what was left of their coverage.

Just like their morning counterpart, the *T-U* failed to mention the Verdi incident for the rest of 1959, outside of the editorial and sports sections. From 28 July to 3 August, a total of four editorials relevant to the 26 July episode were published between both Rochester dailies. On 28 July, one such *T-U* piece reasonably proposed:

The incident Saturday night was not anti-American or anti-Red Wing. The casualties were equally divided. It was just one of those things that happens in a place where a large number . . . carry guns and are in the habit of firing them off to show their exuberance. This is not the atmosphere for baseball . . . Red Wing Manager Cot Deal, who was there, does not consider the incident an example of what normally could be expected in Havana . . . But since July 26 now has been proclaimed a day for similar celebrations in Havana, it's something for the schedule makers to take into account. Better schedule the . . . Sugar Kings in some other International League city on that day.²²⁸

In response to Shaughnessy's statement that "there is no reason why Toronto and Montreal should not go to Havana," a 30 July *D & C* Letter to the Editor waxed pessimistically that: "At this time may I suggest that if 'Fearless Frank' really believes this line, and thinks the players would be on the 'chicken' side if they don't go he, and any other League officer who

Discounts Cuba Shooting." The primary difference was that this article removed all of the Red Wing quotes, and solely focused on the words of Frank J. Shaughnessy.

²²⁸ "Havana No Place for Baseball on July 26," *T-U*, 28 July 1959.

feels the same way, should volunteer their services for all the remaining Cuban home games as foul line umpires.”²²⁹

On 2 August, a *D & C* editorial entitled “Lethal League” proposed:

There is a report that some Red Wing ball players are reluctant to play . . . in Havana, on grounds that gunfire is not a normal occupational hazard of baseball. Inasmuch as these seem to be days of changing . . . affiliations and formation of new leagues, we suggest a league composed of the following areas (for a starter) which have a good deal in common: Cuba, Viet Nam, Tibet, Iraq, Matsu, and Jordan. Any player surviving a swing around this circuit would be eligible for a bonus, retirement, and the hall of fame.²³⁰

Finally, a 3 August *D & C* Letter to the Editor featured Marianne Dean of 507 Grand Ave complaining:

Is Rochester that much off the map, that “Maverick” . . . cannot be skipped for one night to make room for the Vice President . . . in a very important debate? I would also like to mention that the shot fired at one of our baseball players in Havana was mentioned 50 times in the news broadcasts. Could 25 times possibly be considered enough and could the time for the other 25 minutes be used for the Vice President . . . This . . . is not the first time that we have been deprived of internationally important events when they coincided with the drivel on our local stations.²³¹

These were four different quotations with different viewings of the Verdi incident, and yet they all lead credence to the same argument. The 28 June *T-U* article showed Beahon-esque understanding of what happened, simply proposing that games on 26 July not be played in Havana anymore. The two corresponding *D & C* editorials each argued, through levels of sarcasm, that IL baseball should not be played in Havana regardless of the date. Both compared sending another IL team to Cuba as parallel to sending soldiers to a dangerous warzone. Mrs. Dean’s Letter to the Editor showed incredulence that something baseball related was taking away from “real news” involving the then-Vice President. In fact, she condemned the “drivel from

²²⁹ Robert Butterfield, “Let Fearless Frank Make Havana Trip,” *D & C*, 30 July 1959.

²³⁰ “Lethal League,” *D & C*, 2 August 1959.

²³¹ Marianne Dean, “Red Wing Casualty Overshadows Nixon,” *D & C*, 3 August 1959. Maverick refers to the TV Western starring James Garner and Jack Kelly.

our local stations,” from depriving Rochester listeners of “internationally important events.” Despite being seemingly different there was three key similarities between them.

First, they all showed indifference if not outright hostility to the concept of any American-Cuban bond, let alone through baseball. Second, they viewed baseball as something separate from “international important events.” The *D & C* editorials felt that Cuba was too hostile to send in simple ballplayers. Mrs. Dean felt the story itself was not even worth covering. Finally, they marked the last time until the following year that this narrative was covered in either dailies’ front sections.

On a side note, from 4 August to August 7, the Sugar Kings came to Rochester for a three-game series. It was briefly discussed on the front page of the 4 August *T-U* edition, which proclaimed: “‘Beisbol,’ Sugar to Sweeten Fans.” This photograph of a Red Wings tickethandler surrounded by bags of sugar and travel brochures was attached to the accompanying article.²³²



SWEET WAY TO DO IT - Rochester Red Wing secretary Lucie Marriott stands behind stack of sugar which will be passed out at tonight's baseball game with Havana Sugar Kings. She holds pamphlets which also will be distributed.

In both dailies’ sport sections, the first game of the Wings-Kings series was advertised in a comical fashion (see next page):²³³

²³² Al C. Weber, “‘Beisbol,’ Sugar to Sweeten Fans,” *T-U*, 4 August 1959.

²³³ “Night Baseball,” *D & C Sports Section*, 4 August 1959.



That is how the Verdi crisis ended on the front pages of Gannett's Flower City dailies, as a comical unimportant footnote. It also appears to show that the newspaper editors viewed supposed American-Cuban cultural baseball bonds as mere jokes.

The last three months of the 1959 baseball season featured a dramatic decline in the number of Cuban-related stories in both Rochester dailies. While in August the *D & C* and the *T-U* printed twenty-five and twenty-one relevant front section articles, respectively, in September and October the two newspapers only published eight, combined.²³⁴ They spoke briefly about the counterrevolutionary invasion crushed in part by American *barbudo* William Morgan,²³⁵ as well as the nixed deal between the British government and the Cuban Air Force.²³⁶ For the most part Rochester went back to a semi-silence regarding its southern island neighbor. To follow the Sugar Kings miracle run to the Little World Series championship, or to even know they had made the final, one would have had to read the sports sections.²³⁷ Not only was baseball failing to serve as an American-Cuban cultural bond, but America's pastime could not even make Castro, by this point a huge "cause celebre," appear in either Rochester newspaper. By the following spring, the "Maximum Leader" was firmly entrenched within the *D & C*'s and *T-U*'s

²³⁴ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 August-31 October 1959.

²³⁵ AP, "Castro Confer with Naval Aide amid More Rumors of Invasion," *D & C*, 14 August 1959.

²³⁶ AP, "British Hedge on Report of Jets-For-Cuba Deal," *D & C*, 17 October 1959.

²³⁷ AP, "Cuba Still Whoops Up Junior Series Victory," *D & C*, 8 October 1959. The only non-AP story during the entire AAA playoffs was a Beahon In This Corner at the start of the Kings-Millers LWS championship series. In said article, the Rochester sportswriter mocked the likely stereotypical approach that Millers players would take regarding their Cuban opponents, and how big of a miscalculation that approach would turn out to be.

opening sections. The American-Cuban baseball relationship prompted several articles to appear, notably two lengthy front-page columns by Beahon. However, the utilization of the relationship was barely acknowledged. And when it was acknowledged, it was solely to express division between the two nations.

The Pot Runneth Over and the Benches Clear

1960

From the end of the Red Wings training camp in early April to early July's forced Sugar Kings relocation to Jersey City, both Rochester dailies published a stream of relevant front section articles.²³⁸ In April, the *D & C* ran twenty-seven stories about Cuba, while their afternoon competitors ran twenty-nine. In May, the morning daily published twenty-four and the *T-U* published twenty. The month of June featured the *D & C* print twenty-nine and the *T-U* print twenty-two. Finally, in July, the morning newspaper ran fifty-five and their afternoon counterpart ran thirty-six.²³⁹ Quantitatively, this was the high water mark of Cuban-centered stories featured in the two Rochester dailies. Thematically, both local newspapers portrayed Fidel Castro in a singular and overbearing fashion, as an enemy of the American people, who only spouted anti-U.S. diatribes.

On 5 April, the front page of the sports section announced: "Maduro Sees No Reason Why IL Should Quit Cuba." Beahon, after conducting an interview with the Sugar Kings owner, announced:

Bobby Maduro . . . is a proud man. He is hurt by all the talk about whether the International League should evacuate his native Havana. He was bitterly disappointed when the

²³⁸ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 April-31 July 1960.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

Baltimore Orioles reneged on exhibition dates in Cuba last week, thereby spotlighting the scheduled April 20 IL inaugural on the Island. The Red Wings, controversial figures in the 26th of July . . . incident last year, are scheduled “to go in the first wave,” as one baseball man facetiously put it. This is Bobby Maduro’s side of the story as he told it to the Democrat and Chronicle here before he flew back to Havana to prepare, he hopes, for a full season of baseball. “I feel like the child of a divorced couple . . . I love Cuba and I love the United States. Which way can I turn this thing? . . . I do not feel that politics and baseball should mix . . . Everyone . . . seems to adopt the attitude of wondering who will be responsible if something should happen. I’ve got five U.S. players on my club right now. They are neither complaining nor asking anyone to take responsibility . . . Tell me about responsibility. I get my hair cut in the barbershop of the Park Sheraton Hotel when I am in New York City. This is where Albert Anastasia was killed. Who’s responsible for me in New York City? Last week, the Richmond Virginians had some shoes and gloves and a wrist watch stolen from their clubhouse in a Florida training camp. If this had happened in Havana, it would have been an international news item. A terrible thing . . . What I really don’t understand is why all this excitement about sending teams to fill league commitments in Cuba, only 95 miles from your country, when you are sending teams to compete in nearly all sports in Russia. Russia is alright, but Cuba is not. Is that the picture?”²⁴⁰

Again, this showed Beahon’s movement against the grain as he attempted to portray the other side of the relocation coin ie giving Maduro a chance to address those criticizing him, both in Rochester and elsewhere in the IL. He did not agree with or refute the Cuban’s points, but laid them out for his readership to absorb, albeit solely in the sporting pages. However, this seemingly marked the end of Beahon’s conciliatory nature as his articles both on the front page and in the sports sections took an increasingly critical tone.

On 6 April, the headline on the morning newspaper’s fifth page blared: “Cuba Catholics Rapped for Opposing Regime.”²⁴¹ On 9 April, the front-page headline announced: “Castro Betraying Ideals of Freedom, says Eisenhower.”²⁴² An editorial that same day warned of a potential “Guantanamo Grab.”²⁴³ The next morning, the editorial page had two anti-Castro columns and a cartoon which implied that Cuba was a “bad apple,” which left unchecked would

²⁴⁰ George Beahon, “Maduro Sees No Reason Why IL Should Quit Cuba,” *D & C*, 5 April 1960.

²⁴¹ AP, “Cuba Catholics Rapped for Opposing Regime,” *D & C*, 6 April 1960.

²⁴² AP, “Castro Betraying Ideals of Freedom, says Eisenhower,” *D & C*, 9 April 1960.

²⁴³ “Guantanamo Grab,” *D & C*, 9 April 1960.

spread Communism across Latin America.²⁴⁴ On 16 April, a William S. White editorial declared: “Is it better to go on with the policy of do-nothing and lose Latin America’s and the world’s respect? Or is it better- to take up our clear duties, and act . . . Surely the question answers itself.”²⁴⁵ The next morning, the *D & C* baseball writer, George Beahon commented in a front-page article entitled: “Cubans Building towards Inevitable Bloodshed.” Sent to the Cuban capital to cover the Wings season opener against Havana, Beahon’s lengthy column concluded:

The bloodiest internal struggle in Cuban history could result. Even before then, the United States might be pushed to the point where it is forced to break off diplomatic relations. Castro behaves exactly like a man with that goal foremost in his workings. When? Nobody will offer a guess. Five days to five months, say accredited newsmen who have spent decades covering such scenes. They agree on but one point: It is a pressure chamber that must blow. After that? Possibly a sober government, possibly an out and out Communist state. But certainly bloodshed.²⁴⁶

The only hint of baseball in the article was the notification which read: “Havana Sugar Kings to be transferred to Jersey City within 30 days, forecasts Sports Writer Beahon, in a sports special today on Page 1C.”²⁴⁷ On the 19 April front page appeared a quotation entitled: “Least Popular, That’s Beahon.” Further, the article announced:

Beahon has been under fire by Cuban press as a result of recent events . . . an exclusive story saying baseball had less than 30 days to live in Havana. Said a U.S. wire service correspondent to Beahon via telephone from Havana today: “You are not quite the No. 1 public enemy of baseball in Cuba. The . . . spot is reserved for Lee MacPhail, the Baltimore general manager who called off the exhibition games. You are however running a close second.”²⁴⁸

These two articles showed that the *D & C* editorial staff, if not Beahon himself, were now deliberately separating the baseball from the Revolution in their constructed narrative. In order to

²⁴⁴ “Hard to Do Much about It,” *D & C* Editorial page, 10 April 1960. The two articles were an op-ed entitled, “Latin America Now is Target of Pink Push,” by Lorna Morley and an unattributed editorial called “Dictator Defined.”

²⁴⁵ William S. White, “Either We Face Up to Castro or Lose World Respect,” *D & C*, 16 April 1960.

²⁴⁶ George Beahon, “‘Cubans Building towards Inevitable Bloodshed,’” *D & C*, 17 April 1960.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ “Least Popular, That’s Beahon,” *D & C*, 19 April 1960.

read the baseball story, one had to go to page 1C ie the sports section. Second, the latter article fails to take into consideration the possibility Beahon's falling out amongst Cubans had more to do with his insinuation that Cuba was about to break out into civil war rather than his stance about the Sugar King's place in the IL.

On 20 April, underneath "Indians Overcome Amerks, 3-2,"²⁴⁹ a front-page article proclaimed: "Wings Open in Havana Tonight." After a two sentence quotation detailing manager Clyde King's plan to utilize power hitter Luke Easter against Havana's pitching, the article read: "George Beahon story on Page 28 (ie. the sports section.)"²⁵⁰ The following day's front-page saw a Beahon piece which announced: "Prime Minister . . . Castro and U.S. Ambassador Phillip Bonsal attended the same party tonight, but they didn't mix." After further chastising Castro for showing up minutes late, Beahon commented:

Someone in the press box wondered out loud why it had not been arranged for Bonsal to catch the Cuban leader's first pitch, "After all," reasoned this dubious wit, "Castro has been doing all the pitching and Bonsal all the catching up to now in Cuba." Fan reception for the Red Wings in pre-game ceremonies was tremendous, offering added evidence that . . . troubles still are confined to government level. . . . Game Story, Page 45.²⁵¹

This article also offered evidence of splitting the two narratives, baseball and political, as far as possible from each other. It is also important to note that this was the last time Cuban baseball appeared on the *D & C*'s front page until the end of June, while the *T-U* did not feature the Wings-Kings series at all on its front page.²⁵²

During the month of May, both Rochester newspapers primarily focused upon the alleged "muzzling" of Cuba's press.²⁵³ Articles taken from the AP repeatedly talked of Castro's regime

²⁴⁹ Hans Tanner, "Indians Overcome Amerks, 3-2," *D & C*, 20 April 1960.

²⁵⁰ George Beahon, "Wings Open in Havana Tonight," *D & C*, 20 April 1960. Parenthesis mine.

²⁵¹ George Beahon, "Castro at Wings Game, So is U.S. Envoy But- -," *D & C*, 21 April 1960.

²⁵² *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 22 April-30 June 1960.

²⁵³ UPI, "Last Independent Paper under Castro's Thumb," *D & C*, 17 May 1960.

“nationalizing” newspaper after newspaper, primarily *Diario de La Marina*²⁵⁴ and *Prensa Libre*.

In fact, on 17 May, Page Two of the *T-U* declared: “Castro Seizes Last Free Daily.”²⁵⁵ A 21

May *T-U* editorial proclaimed:

Prensa Libre, Havana’s last outspoken independent newspaper was taken over (with government approval) by employees who refused to print an editorial denouncing, “the sinister international plot led by Russia against our soil” . . . Still the United States adhered to its policy of patience, patience, and more patience, although the longer this continues the more costly it will be in human anguish and treasure to bring some order out of the chaos which seems drawing nearer in the Pearl of the Antilles.²⁵⁶

This differs from Zeitlen/ Scheer, who attempt to make the claim that the newspaper workers did it without the government’s approval.²⁵⁷ Whatever the case, it was clear that the Rochester press was fully buying into the “nationalizing angle,” and were not interested in hearing opposing viewpoints. Baseball was nowhere to be found in either the attached AP articles or the locally written editorial columns during May.²⁵⁸

Throughout June, both the *T-U* and the *D & C* ran several anti-Castro editorials. On 7 June²⁵⁹ and 11 June, each daily ran a separate op-ed column calling for Congress to slash America’s sugar quota with Cuba.²⁶⁰ The *D & C*’s 12 June editorial page printed an article that proclaimed:

A Cuba becoming a Soviet base, a cog in the vast Communist apparatus, is something the Western Hemisphere cannot afford. What can be done about it without reverting to old-style Yankee “imperialism” . . . That would wreck our relations with Latin America and possibly do far more damage than a Communist Cuba . . . Meanwhile, U.S. self –restraint is put under even more severe strain by the fanatic Castro. That self-restraint could break.²⁶¹

²⁵⁴ AP, “Cuban Paper Seized,” *T-U*, 11 May 1960.

²⁵⁵ UPI, “Castro Seizes Last Free Daily,” *T-U*, 17 May 1960. This is the exact same article as the one from the *D & C*.

²⁵⁶ “. . . How Costly is Patience in Cuba?,” *T-U*, 21 May 1960.

²⁵⁷ Zeitlin, *Cuba, Tragedy in Our Hemisphere*, 164-174.

²⁵⁸ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1-31 May 1960.

²⁵⁹ Congressional Quarterly, “Will Congress Swat Castro, the Fly in Our Sugar Bowl,” *D & C*, 7 June 1960.

²⁶⁰ “. . . Fly in Our Sugar Bowl,” *T-U*, 11 June 1960. This was a response to the previous editorial in the *D & C* even though that connection is not mentioned.

²⁶¹ “Future of Cuba,” *D & C*, 12 June 1960.

The article essentially argued which would be worse: destroying American relations with all of Latin America by invading Cuba, or allowing communism to infiltrate the western hemisphere via U.S. inaction? This framing device continued throughout the remainder of the study period in both Rochester dailies.

During the latter part of June, both Rochester newspapers published article after article about a potential break between the U.S. and Cuba in their long-established sugar trade. This was the environment in which Beahon was sent to Cuba in the month's final weekend. On 27 June, both dailies ran a front page AP quotation which declared: "Munitions Blast Rips Havana: 2 Die, 50 Hurt."²⁶² At the bottom of the article, the *D & C* announced: "Electrical power was cut off to part of the city, and an International League doubleheader was delayed, (See story on Page 20.)"²⁶³ On Monday, 28 June, featuring a notification which read: "*D & C sports writer George Beahon developed this exclusive report on Cuba while covering the Red Wings-Sugar Kings baseball games in Havana during the weekend,*" an article was printed entitled: "U.S., Cuba Gap Widens Daily: Reds Pour In." Beahon lamented:

The breach between the U.S. and Cuban government widens every day. And the world's foremost Communist organizers are pouring through the gap in droves. This is not hearsay nor speculation. It is the considered opinion of the State Department, as expressed to me in Havana yesterday by an Embassy spokesman . . . Havana, 235 miles from Miami . . . is a demoralized city that has not begun to fight against communism's crash program here . . . Russian architects are in Havana, working on plans for a five million dollar embassy. This carries a note of permanency . . . "Their job is only to hate our guts," said a U.S. newsman. "We are in a very critical, crucial stage," says the source close to the Embassy. "Anyone who does not agree is either a liar or a damn fool . . . This is what we fight here in Cuba, the propaganda battleground, the key nation" . . . In the face of this (calls to cut the sugar quota,) while Cuba makes land grabs, Guevara shouts that we pay the sugar bonus, "to enslave the Cuban people" . . . Consensus gives Castro 40 per cent of the Cubans as active supporters. Estimates as to where the other 60 . . . stand are varied . . . In the Stadium Club, which is the Havana baseball plant, Castro was available on TV after the game Friday night. The receiving set is in the bar section of the club. There were three people in that section. Twenty-five or 30 others shunned the magic lantern, and instead sat in a separated section in which service was much slower. It was obvious why they

²⁶² AP, "Munitions Blast Rips Havana; 2 Die, 50 Hurt," *D & C*, 27 June 1960.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

chose the other section. Embassy people considered this significant . . . All agree on one prediction: An uprising with bloodshed, and lots of it, before the year is ended. Meanwhile, Americans rush out, Communists rush in. It is indeed a depressing situation. And the fate of all the Americas could depend on future events in Cuba.²⁶⁴

Once again, this article revealed two important facts about the state of the American-Cuban baseball bond. First, the front page did not consider baseball important in the grand scheme of international relations with the island nation, as Beahon only mentioned it once in the piece. Second, Beahon was now firmly anti-Castro. Since Castro was to many Rochesterians the public face of Cuba, this stance by Beahon hurt the bond. Beahon had been one of the sole sources of positive stories from the island nation in the Rochester press, and this change in his position only meant more negative pieces about Cuba, not less.

The first two weeks of July featured four events: Three American oil refineries were nationalized by Castro's regime, President Eisenhower officially cut off sugar purchases from Cuba, the Sugar Kings unknowingly played their last road series in Rochester representing Havana, and the front pages of Gannett's local dailies ignored the baseball connection.

On 1 July, the Sugar Kings began a four-game series against the Red Wings. They played a doubleheader the first day, and then one game each of the following two days.²⁶⁵ Despite both dailies featuring news about the seized oil refineries and the proposed sugar cuts on each day of the series, the respective game reports failed to leave the sports section.²⁶⁶ Perhaps it was because the Rochester press was no longer interested in, if it ever was, maintaining a cultural connection with the Cuban people. On 4 July, the *D & C* printed an op-ed piece entitled: "Castro Spending Plenty to Subvert Latins," William S. White wrote (see next page):

²⁶⁴ George Beahon, "U.S., Cuba Gap Widens Daily; Reds Pour In," *D & C*, 28 June 1960.

²⁶⁵ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 25 June-15 July 1960. It was advertised in both dailies, calling on fans to spend the 4 July weekend at the ballpark. The only information the advertisement had about their Cuban opponents was a Vs. Havana notification under each home date.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

The infection in Cuba is reaching the point of intolerable danger to the free world in this hemisphere. This is not the judgement of mere hysterical professional “anti-Communists” who see Moscow agents everywhere. It is the coolly considered conviction of elevated and truly liberal leaders of South America with whom this correspondent has talked . . . have told our State Department plainly that . . . Castro has permitted Cuba to become nothing less than a bridgehead for Soviet communism within 100 miles of the United States . . . they have suggested to the State Department, politely, that the United States government has so far failed to explain the realities to the American people, of whom only a tiny minority has any notion whatever of the facts of life in Cuba . . . This small step, however, if and when it is actually taken-will be only the barest beginning toward the development of a policy adequate to quarantine the Castro virus . . . Professional ‘liberals’ who in the beginning howled Castro up as a kind of secular saint, have ceased their syrup eulogies of this bearded, this sensitive, this poetic lyncher . . . It is no longer possible to look at this hemisphere as a low-priority foreign policy area. It is becoming absolutely necessary to look homeward as well as across the sea.²⁶⁷

This piece continued the trend of calling for Americans to turn their attention towards Cuba in order to prevent communism from gaining a foothold in the Western Hemisphere, with little attention given to the actual people living on the island. Interestingly, the article claimed that the United States government was not portraying Cuba accurately to Americans, while simultaneously inaccurately portraying Cuba to Americans on its own.

The following afternoon, an editorial in the *T-U* called for the establishment of a “New Monroe Doctrine.” The attached article stated that America should not “become so morally hogtied it can’t tell black from white . . . There is a wide variety of measures of increasing severity available for use in fighting Castro’s embrace of communism . . . The time to start the big squeeze is now.”²⁶⁸ On 6 July, a *D & C* Letter to the Editor argued: “No Cuban team should represent an American sport while the hammer and sickle are at work. This has no reflection on the players themselves, but as a part of the team these young men are being jeopardized morally and physically as long as they represent a country of Communist leanings.”²⁶⁹ As it turned out,

²⁶⁷ William S. White, “Castro Spending Plenty to Subvert Latins,” *D & C*, 4 July 1960.

²⁶⁸ “A New Monroe Doctrine Can be Used to Fight Castro,” *T-U*, 5 July 1960.

²⁶⁹ Donald C. Whiting, “Cut Off Trade with Cuba,” *D & C*, 6 July 1960.

the Havana Sugar Kings, at least under that name, only featured three more times on the front pages of either Rochester daily.

On 7 July, in an article entitled “Baseball’s Ax Falls on Cuba,” Beahon announced:

The International League has played its last game on Cuban soil. The Havana franchise will be yanked from its roots through execution of an emergency measure-within a few days. The Cubans, currently playing in Columbus and due home a week from today, will finish out their 1960 season in a three-way split schedule, the Democrat and Chronicle learned exclusively last night. Havana will play some of its game in Cincinnati’s Crosley Field, a few in Jersey City, and others . . . in the parks of clubs that normally would be playing in strife-torn Cuba . . . Maduro for obvious reasons must resist the move by the league, but actually is powerless, barring a complete breakup of the club, which carries many Cubans on its roster. The IL directors gave Shaughnessy this emergency power . . . in a meeting last December in St. Petersburg. “We can’t hurt Maduro, that’s important,” said Shaughnessy. “But I guess the time has finally come . . . We’ve got to make a move . . . We just can’t send any more of our teams into Havana.” Shaughnessy’s statement eliminated any remaining vestige of doubt in the matter . . . At least five (league directors) of them are opposed to playing any more games in Cuba, simply because of the increasing tension between dictator Fidel Castro’s government and the U.S. . . . The Red Wings are scheduled to play in Havana next month.²⁷⁰

It is important to note that this article did not mention any specifics as to why Cuba was strife-torn, simply that the situation was as such and that it necessitated a Sugar Kings relocation. Even, when baseball was the primary focus of a Beahon front-section story, it was treated as a footnote in regard to the overall Cuban situation.

To further follow Havana’s relocation in the *D & C*, a Rochester reader would have had to have been exposed to the next week’s several sports section articles. Nothing appeared on the morning daily’s front page.²⁷¹ The *T-U* did not have any front-page columns on the announced Kings Jersey emigration from Cuba, choosing only to have a single sentence printed above the *Rochester Times-Union* logo which read: “International League Pulls out of Havana, Page 26.”²⁷² Again, all of the published articles about the relocation would have had to have been read in the

²⁷⁰ George Beahon, “Baseball’s Ax Falls on Cuba,” *D & C*, 7 July 1960. Parenthesis mine.

²⁷¹ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 9-14 July 1960.

²⁷² “International League Pulls Out of Havana, Page 26,” *T-U*, 8 July 1960.

afternoon newspaper's sporting pages. The next, and last front-section article on the Havana Sugar Kings, came in the form of a 15 July AP quotation on the *T-U*'s opening page which declared: "Baseball Manager Called 'Traitor.' The unnamed writer elaborated:

Nap Reyes, newly named manager of the former Havana team in the International Baseball League, is a 'traitor and an enemy of his own country,' the semi-official newspaper of Premier Fidel Castro's Cuban government said today . . . The front page story in today's *Revolucion* said Reyes defended his action by saying he was employed by the Cincinnati Reds . . . The story said he 'behaved like a Yankee.' The story continued that Reyes now is working "for the U.S. State Department and the Yankee dollar and is a traitor to the cause of Cuban baseball which in this case is the same cause as the Cuban Revolution." (*Other details, Page 23.*)²⁷³

This article showed two key factors regarding the endstate of the Rochester-Havana cultural bond via sport as portrayed by the Gannett Flower City press. First, although it was a front page story, it was penned by an outside source, showing how unimportant the bond was thought to be by *T-U* editors. Second, even in its own story baseball was portrayed as a footnote to the larger Revolution.

The final coverage the Sugar Kings received in either the front pages or the sports sections occurred two days later in an edition of Beahon's semi-daily column, *In This Corner*.

The *D & C* baseball writer reflected:

Goodbye, Havana: I'll miss the talks with the pit bosses in the casinos when the action was good, interesting men and real experts in a specialized field. I'll miss the black bean and rice soup, sprinkled with fresh chopped onions. And the sunsets over the Malecon. *But I'll never miss the depressing poverty of the streets.* I'll miss the tremendous color of Gran Stadium when the crowds were there: the trumpets in the stands: the lighted candles when the team was losing: the shrill whistles that served as the Cuban raspberries. I'll miss Johnny Diaz Lopez, the clubhouse boy who helped the trainers, Danny Whelan and Sir James Dudley. And the pool at the Nacional. *But I'll never miss the first stories of Batista brutalities incredible but later authenticated.* I'll miss the honest, dedicated faces of the young *barbudos*, the bearded, rifle-bearing farmers down from the hills, when they saw Havana for the first time after Batista went down. I'll miss the little men in white who always dashed into your hotel room to shutter the blinds five seconds after you closed the door. And the fresh pineapple juice. *But I'll never miss the eviscerating midday heat, and the bad drinking water, and the bad stomachs.* I'll miss Willie, at the Siboney Store, and his "nice cold cokes," and the bartering he couldn't deal without. I'll miss the Stadium

²⁷³ AP, "Baseball Manager Called 'Traitor'," *T-U*, 15 July 1960.

Club, and some of the ugly and not-ugly Americans who used to visit there after the games. And the ever delightful trio at the Club 21. *But I'll never miss the 10-a-night bombings, (Molotov cocktails) that were executed in the streets like clockwork, before Castro.* I'll miss the wonderful courtesies of Bobby Maduro, and the visits to his beach front home. I'll miss the chef at "21" who used to kid us about the Sugar Kings. And the always thrilling taxi trips: horns only, no brakes allowed. *But I'll never miss the tourists who complained loudly and in public places, that "These people don't even speak English!"* I'll miss the impassiveness of the high-life European gambler who fought it until 7 a.m. and lost \$32,000 at the Capri. I'll miss the lottery salesmen, a vanishing breed: and the street scenes: and the fabulous color of Tropicana. And arroz con pollo at Monseigneur. *But I'll never miss the arrogance of Batista's censors, or the increasingly bad manners of some of Castro's officers.* I'll miss the curious way the bartenders set the bottles in front of the customers, never caring how much or how little you pour. I'll miss the thrill and dignity of a visit to the residence of the U.S. ambassador, the dedicated career diplomat, Philip Bonsal. And the appreciation of the good Cuban fans for the artistic play and the extra effort on the diamond. *But I'll never miss all the sweet souls who were too quick to needle me about my spring prediction that baseball was finished in Cuba, and that Havana would wind up in Jersey City.*

This article showed why Beahon represented the best chance for a baseball bond to succeed between America and Cuba, if only in the mind of one Rochester-based sports writer. He clearly was well-travelled throughout the Havana scene, both amongst his fellow tourists and the locals. He appreciated many aspects of Cuban culture, and celebrated the unique attributes of island baseball, both on the diamond and in the grandstands. He was seemingly well-informed regarding Batista's negative impact upon the country, referencing both the brutal war crimes carried out in his name and the censorship Beahon experienced firsthand. However, the article also showed why any baseball bond would not succeed in the Rochester press, primarily for two reasons. First, as shown by the last sentence, Beahon regarded Cuban baseball, while deserving of praise, as being limited in scope. He seemed to think that with the departure of the Sugar Kings, that the sport itself was also leaving the island. Second, similar articles, even those written by Beahon were either limited to the sports section or had the baseball narratives removed.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ George Beahon, "In This Corner," *D & C*, 17 July 1960.

The Havana Sugar Kings, now dubbed the Jersey City Jerseys/Reds, were permanently absent for the rest of either daily's 1960 editions as far as their front-sections were concerned.²⁷⁵ However, in many respects this is not that much different from their coverage from early 1954 to mid-1960. While the Sugar Kings, and to a minute extent, the American-Cuban baseball cultural bond received obligatory front-page article space, it had been largely considered a footnote of the Revolution, and had little place outside the sports section.

My study's quantitative and thematic analysis of Rochester newspaper coverage of Cuba outside the sports section make two things perfectly clear. First, whatever sympathy the Flower City press had for the Revolution in early 1959 was long gone. All talk of Castro as being a "man with the best of intentions,"²⁷⁶ had been replaced by editorial harangues calling him a "dictator."²⁷⁷ While the people of Cuba were not criticized in print form to the same extent as the socialist Revolutionary Government, the island had been firmly painted in the minds of the Rochester media as a Soviet satellite.²⁷⁸ As a result, any attempt at utilizing the American-Cuban baseball cultural bond to increase positive dialogue between the two countries would have been hindered by the extensive negative coverage featured on Gannett's front pages during 1959 and 1960. To help solve this problem, either the *D & C* or the *T-U* would have had to include the Red Wings-Sugar Kings dynamic frequently in their front sections. Neither did.

The word *incidental* aptly describes Gannett's front-section coverage of American-Cuban baseball relations, especially when it came through the window of the local IL franchise, the Red Wings. While Buffalo players threatening to strike in 1958, the Verdi shooting incident in 1959, and Beahon's assuredness of the Sugar King's New Jersey relocation in early 1960 all received

²⁷⁵ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 18 July-31 October 1960.

²⁷⁶ Paul Miller, "Castro Faces the Editors; His Plea: 'Come to Cuba'," *T-U*, 18 April 1959.

²⁷⁷ "Dictator Defined," *D & C*, 10 April 1960.

²⁷⁸ *T-U* and *D & C* archives, 1 January 1959-31 October 1960.

decent column space outside the sports sections, each event was portrayed as a simple after-effect of the Revolution instead of something to impact Cuban-American relations. The few times that this bond was addressed, it was regarded as insignificant. Beahon was frequently referred to, even when his articles failed to mention baseball, as either a “baseball writer” or a “sports reporter,” never a respected journalist.

As such, regardless of how much coverage the American-Cuban baseball narrative may have received in either or both of the *D & C*'s and *T-U*'s sports sections, the apathy it underwent in their respective front pages arguably negated whatever impact the sports section may have had, which is why, for this study, the sports sections were not examined in any meaningful way.

Chapter 5

Diplomatic Footnote: A Conclusion

At the beginning of this study, I asked a simple question: Was the local newspaper reporting sympathetic or critical of Cuba's move towards Castro and eventual communism, and how did their baseball coverage factor into this portrayal? Or to put it another way, how was the Cuban Revolutionary period covered in the Rochester press, and how did their baseball writing impact coverage? When I initially asked, it might have seemed strange to put the baseball aspect at the query's end, especially with over half the paper being sports-centered.

While baseball may be the shared national pastime of both the United States and Cuba, my first three chapters established that any cultural bond between the two hemispheric neighbors on the diamond was decidedly one-sided. Back in the first half of the twentieth century, extending to today, many Americans view baseball as "their" game. In Chapter 2, I used Ken Burns' *Baseball* to show the huge impact the sport has had on American national identity and its prospective use as a cultural bridge. However, that Yankee "will o' the wisp," at least during the imperialist-colonialist period, was not used as leverage to remove dividing cultural prejudices, but rather as an exterminator of concepts, movements, and even human beings which disagreed with "American" values and interests. Baseball was meant to convert "heathens and savages" into civilized members of advanced society, who would pay economic and social tribute to the United States in exchange for their cultural salvation.

Seemingly, from the minds of Americans, baseball did not give another country the right to come up with their own rules and laws outside of Washington D.C. approval. All it gave the

“converted” nation, in this case Cuba, was the right to be promoted as having been “saved” by American imperialism. Baseball simply helped Cuba into the U.S.’s sphere of economic and social influence, where they would be forced to abide by their northern neighbor’s policies via cultural assimilation. The average American gained little to no cultural understanding or sympathy towards their Cuban allies, with the diamond sport simply serving as proof of U.S. natural superiority. The U.S.-Cuba baseball relationship was always displayed either with or against the notion that Organized Baseball was the superior brand. Even modern day historians such as Bjarkman and Echevarría, who hugely disagree whether the CWL or the post-revolutionary League Nacional was superior, unknowingly state their positions through the same American lens.

As Chapter 3 showed, the Cubans were forced to change and adapt to American regulations in order to be accepted into Organized Baseball, further diluting any potential cultural bond. The CWL had to promise to punish Mexican League defectors and accept losses of more and more homegrown talent to MLB, which in itself was not happy letting its employees participate in winter play, largely due to the physical injury factor. Cuban blacks had to endure racist housing and transportation policies, meager pay, and a sizable language barrier, just to play at the Class D Level. Fans were forced to accept weaker and weaker CWL competition in order for the American game to prosper. Their American counterparts had to make no such concessions and therefore only witnessed minimal contact with Cuban culture via the sporting arena. When the Revolution broke out, other than a geographic connection and a stereotypical understanding of Cuba, there was no cultural bond to connect the two countries, even though they shared the same national pastime. The Cuban relationship was viewed as a footnote by Organized Baseball, and the Sugar Kings were no different.

If the Havana Sugar Kings existed in the lead-up to the Spanish-American War, maybe the cultural connection would have received more Rochester coverage, as a pre-Platt Amendment baseball bridge would have better served U.S. interests. Spanish attempts to muzzle baseball's American influence by trying to remove the Kings from the IL, would have been met negatively by the U.S. press, under the rallying cry of "Cuba Libre." In that conflict, Americans were supposed to be on the same side as the Cubans. However during the Cuban Revolution, with U.S. newspapers unsure of whether to back Batista or Castro, inserting baseball into the situation would have surely "confused" American readers. And as Castro's Cuba slowly slipped away from the U.S. sphere of influence, any attempt to humanize or make Americans more understanding of those soon to become possible enemy combatants, would have been discouraged. This, combined with newspaper prejudice towards the sports section, with events such as baseball games not considered "actual news," caused the potential bonding agent of the Sugar Kings to be ignored. From 1954 to 1960, Rochester's *T-U* and *D & C* coverage of Cuba went from being unaware, to indifferent, to slightly optimistic, to finally being outright hostile towards Fidel Castro and Cuba. The two dailies' baseball coverage impacted this portrayal very little, except for adding an additional lens through which to perceive American propaganda.

From 1954 through 1956 very few Cuban-centric articles, let alone those about Cuban baseball made the Rochester front pages. If the American-Cuban cultural bond on the diamond was as significant as some modern academics like to claim, Cuban stories in general would have appeared much earlier on both the *T-U*'s and the *D & C*'s opening sections. In these early Sugar King campaigns, both Gannett publications sent beat reporters to cover Red Wings trips to the Cuban capital. Any reports they gave regarding political and social upheaval on the island nation were relegated to each respective daily's sport section. There was no attempt to dig any deeper

into the Cuban cultural psyche. While other Latin American countries such as Guatemala and Argentina received extensive coverage in Rochester's newspapers without any history of baseball, Cuba remained largely ignored in the Flower City's press during these three years. In 1957 the "Pearl of the Antilles" received a drastically increased presence in both the *T-U* and *D & C*, with baseball barely playing a role in such presence.

With revolutionary violence exploding across Cuba, including Havana, the island appeared much more frequently in both Gannett publications. Outside the sports section however, the cultural connection of baseball was virtually ignored. In fact, during the entirety of 1957, only one such article appeared in either daily's opening section. George Beahon's 11 August column did not use baseball as a bridge between two cultures. Instead, the story of his encounter with Batista's censorship at Gran Stadium was offered as proof that Cuba was starting to spin out of control.

In 1958, the *T-U* and the *D & C* again increased their Cuban-related content, but with the exception of April, baseball was never the focus outside the sports section. And when it was focused upon, either in a *D & C* editorial which scoffed at the idea of the island sharing its national pastime with the United States, or in Beahon's foray into the local news section, it was not to establish any cultural bond. When the *T-U* gave the Shaughnessy vs Stiglmeir feud brief front page coverage in early April, it ignored the larger ramifications of taking IL baseball away from the island. While by no means were any of these articles in support of Batista's regime, neither did they impact on the negative press Cuba received in Rochester. In fact, editorials that came out during the failed strike in early April and the hostage crisis in late June roundly condemned Castro forces, laying much of the blame for the death and destruction primarily at the *barbudo's* feet.

Once Castro came to power in early 1959, both Rochester dailies maintained a constant stream of pieces about Cuba published in their front and editorial sections. While they both applauded the overthrow of Batista, both editorial staffs focused on criticizing the new Castro government. The numerous post-revolution war crime tribunals and summary executions especially prompted negative editorial after negative editorial. Any talk about potentially moving the Havana franchise off the island was directly contained within the *T-U* and *D & C*'s sports section, with only Beahon providing consistent coverage on it. Shaughnessy's decision to allow the Sugar Kings to remain in Cuba garnered little fanfare in either daily.

Before the Verdi incident, Cuba again picked up steam in the Rochester press, but not via baseball. While the Red Wings's Havana connection provided local reporting opportunities for the likes of the *T-U*'s Bill Ringle, the diamond's role in prompting such opportunity was drastically downplayed. While Ringle did publish a full-page article on the Cuban "fanáticos," it was the only one of his four subsequent columns relegated to the sports section. In fact, if BULLET HITS VERDI had arrived too late to run on the *D & C*'s front page, the only Cuban-centered article was Beahon's full page expose that carried nary a single mention of baseball. The Sugar Kings seemingly only provided a means to get local reporters on the Havana scene, with the sport itself only a secondary importance.

The Verdi incident only served to inflame American-Cuban tensions on the front pages of the Flower City press. The *T-U* pasted a full page photograph of Verdi's bullet scarred ballcap over an article which quoted IL representative after representative as being against returning league play to Havana. The *D & C*, while running a front-page Beahon column which arguably removed any intent/ill-will directed at the Americans during the incident, also featured numerous editorials calling for the franchise to be relocated to the United States. In fact, a letter to Paul

Pinckney, *D & C* sports editor, that was rerouted to Bobby Maduro, as well as the Sugar Kings owner's written response, only featured in the sports section.¹ After the initial two to three days of coverage, articles on Cuba focused solely away from the baseball diamond. While the American-Cuban baseball bond may have prevented the Verdi incident from being taken out of proportion, it did nothing to relieve the overall tensions between the two Western Hemisphere nations.

By 1960, Rochester's baseball window into the Cuban crisis was far from closed, yet was not featured in the *T-U* and barely mentioned in the *D & C*. Even though Beahon ran three front page columns because of his Red Wings assignment, only one of the articles mentioned baseball. His first, a quotation of a game report covering the IL season opener, portrayed Castro and Bonsal as being on opposing sides. He once again stressed that this division was only between the two nation's governments; however it was not the average Cuban Eisenhower needed to appease. Beahon's second article warned the Rochester readership that massive bloodshed would be seen in Cuba's near future as more and more Cubans turned against the Revolutionary government. Beahon's final front section column definitively labelled the island as having turned into a Soviet satellite, a place where America was no longer welcome.

By the time the sugar quota debate arose in late June-early July, both Rochester dailies inflamed tension amongst their readership with little regard for unity with Cuba. Baseball's presence in the crisis once again took a back seat, at least in the opening sections. The very week Eisenhower virtually eliminated sugar purchases from Cuba, Havana was in town to play a three-game series against the Red Wings. And yet, outside of the sports pages, this diamond connection was either suppressed or ignored by both dailies' editors. In Beahon's 3 July piece: "In This Corner, the baseball writer proposed (see next page):

¹ Paul Pinckney, "Maduro Replies to Rochesterian," *D & C*, 22 August 1959.

Shaughnessy and the league had ample anticipation of the current mess . . . Apparently, however what the U.S. government worries about does not work Frank Shaughnessy, who observes all of this from his sunny, third base field box in Montreal, Que. That's exactly where Shaughnessy will be-in Montreal-when Toronto plays in Havana next July 26. Last year's near-tragic shoot-em-up in Gran Stadium could be excused. There was absolutely no malice connected to this simple celebration . . . The Cubans are an emotional people. They are so emotional that next July 26 they may be taking an entirely different view of goings-on, even playful, between Cuban and American athletes. By that time, the Cuban sugar quota to the U.S. probably will have been slashed to the minimum. Because the U.S. finally is taking a different view of the situation in Cuba. Reducing the sugar quota could have one direct effect in Cuba. It could take bread from the mouths of Cuban babies. By that time, the hate-American campaign being directed and executed by Communists in Cuba could be getting through loud and clear. Perhaps not loud enough to be heard in Montreal. But acoustics in Gran Stadium are remarkable. Luck, and health, too, to the Toronto Maple Leafs.²

During this crisis, Beahon's line of taking bread from Cuban children was one of only a handful of sympathetic remarks in either daily, and it was buried away from the front page. So while there may have indeed been the chance for a transnational cultural bond between Cuba and the United States via baseball, it was effectively hidden within sports sections such as those at the *T-U* and the *D & C*.

And when the IL finally forcibly relocated the Sugar Kings to Jersey City, outside of one front page column in the *D & C*, there was little Rochester press recognition of how that which had transpired impacted a cultural sporting bond between the United States and Cuba. Instead, the two dailies focused their attention solely on Castro's seemingly unending outbursts of anti-American rhetoric. Not only did Gannett's newspapers ignore baseball as a potential American-Cuban bonding agent, the sport was further used to widen the gap between the Rochester readership and their Havanan counterparts.

Most telling, however, was the word choice Beahon used in these articles. It was not the IL's baseball axe that fell on Cuba, nor was it MLB or even Organized Baseball. Quite simply, it was just baseball. Beahon gave no credit to the CWL which was still alive on the island, nor the

² George Beahon, "In This Corner," *D & C*, 3 July, 1960.

amateur game still hanging on. There was no talk of stickball games in the streets or pickup contests in local parks. According to Beahon and the Rochester press, that all-American institution of baseball would vanish from Cuba along with the capital's Sugar Kings.

In summation, baseball had very little impact on Rochester's evolving coverage of Cuba from the Sugar King's IL entrance in 1954 to their 1960 exit other than providing an additional and unique lens through which to view the island's revolution. The indifferent, to wary, to negative tones taken by the *T-U* and *D & C* featured little to no baseball in the majority of relevant articles. This diamond narrative was relegated away from the "real news" to the sports section. As the American-Cuban baseball bond had primarily been nothing more than attempted enforcement of U.S. political and social agendas, rather than trying to truly understand and coexist with Cuban culture, it is far from surprising this was the case. The Rochester press felt that baseball was nothing more than a footnote in American-Cuban relations, and the Havana Sugar Kings-Red Wings connection did nothing to amend that sentiment.

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www.mlb.com

www.sabr.org

www.vitral.org

Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

February 2015

MASTER OF ARTS IN KINESIOLOGY- SPORTS HISTORY

Western University

June 2012

BACHELOR OF ARTS

University of Alberta, Augustana Campus, Camrose, AB

Major: History

Minor: Political Science

PRESENTATIONS

March 2014

THE PHIL WHO CRIED WOLF: MANON RHEAUME REINFORCES THE GENDER BARRIER IN HOCKEY

Western University- Tri-University Conference for the Trans/Disciplinary Study of Sports w/ Dunja Antunovic

March 2013

CALGARY OLYMPIANS VS EDMONTON OILERS: A TALE OF SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT SPORTS SECTIONS IN 1979-80 ALBERTA

Penn State University- Tri-University Conference for the Trans/Disciplinary Study of Sports

PUBLICATIONS

May 2013-Present

MAKING THE LEAGUE MINIMUM: SPORTS RAMBLINGS AND THOUGHTS FROM THE KID PICKED LAST IN GYM

Self-Published Blog, 17 Entries and Counting

<http://eknagel.wordpress.com>

VOLUNTEERING

2012

Calgary Children's Hospital Fundraiser

2010

Autism, Aspergers, Friendship Society Volunteer at the Calgary International Beerfest

Speaker on Q & A panel at Sinneave Family Foundation Autism Conference

2009

Feed Calgary for Christmas Food Distributor

2006

Fundraising Award from the National Association of Autism Research