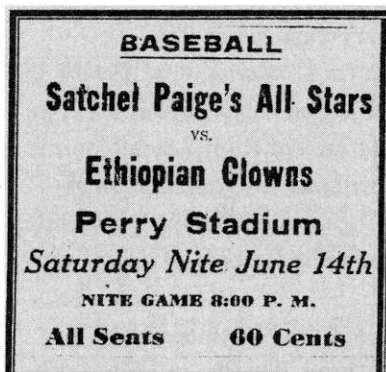


Clowning Around: The Miami Ethiopian Clowns and Cultural Conflict in Black Baseball

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In October 1939, columnist Stanley Sweeting of the *Miami Times* interviewed Leroy "Satchel" Paige, the legendary black ballplayer who



Promotional newspaper ad for Clowns game, 1942. Like the Ethiopian Clowns, Satchel Paige's barnstorming all-star team was a major attraction for black baseball fans. *Indianapolis Recorder*, 1942.

was in Miami for a game with a local black team. As Sweeting reported, Paige complimented "Miami's local baseball club, the fast-fielding, hard-hitting Ethiopian Clowns, distinguishing them as one of the greatest clubs he has ever played against." A decade and a half later, in a 1953 interview with *Collier's* magazine, Paige offered a set of "rules for staying young." Rule number six recommended: "Don't look back, something might be gaining on you." Fortunately, this rule does not apply to historians. Thus, this article will "look back" on one

aspect of Miami's black sports history, focusing especially on the clowning tradition of the Miami Ethiopian Clowns and the controversies spawned by the on-field combination of sports and comedy.¹

The Miami Ethiopian Clowns began playing in the late 1930s. They barnstormed around the nation, playing an average of two hundred



Syd Pollock's barnstorming team combined excellent baseball with slapstick entertainment, sometimes playing with painted clown faces, ca. 1940. Courtesy of the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, N.Y.

games a year, beginning during spring training in Miami in March and then hitting the road until October, when they typically returned to Miami for a final home stand against a variety of Negro League and all-star teams. By 1940, according to the team's owner, Syd Pollock, the team was "breaking attendance records from coast to coast" and had "thrilled" over a million baseball fans during its barnstorming tour that year. Because of the popularity of their on-field clowning antics, which included at various times wearing grass skirts, wigs, or clown suits; slapstick comedy, flashy practice routines and baseball trickery; and even wearing "whiteface" make-up, the team came to be known as the Harlem Globetrotters of baseball. In fact, Abe Saperstein of the Globetrotters and Syd Pollock of the Clowns were close associates; both were sports promoters and booking agents. Saperstein himself was deeply involved in black baseball, not just as a booking agent but as part-owner of several Negro League teams, and he even fielded a clowning Globetrotter baseball team for a time in the 1940s and early 1950s.²

In 1942, Pollock's Ethiopian Clowns moved to Cincinnati. The team joined the Negro American League in 1943, and then shifted to a new base in Indianapolis for the 1944 season. However, the team's roots remained in Miami, where they continued to hold spring training, and

the Clowns roster always included many Florida ballplayers. Like most Negro League teams, the Clowns continued to barnstorm extensively as well. The Clowns did well enough in the Negro American League, winning the championship at least four times before the League collapsed in the mid-1950s. But owner Syd Pollock thought of baseball primarily as entertainment, which the Clowns provided. Spectators turned out in large numbers for the Clowns' appearances, and they always seemed to have a good time. Attendance at Clowns games generally surpassed that for most other Negro League or barnstorming teams, suggesting that many baseball fans—both black and white—found the combination of baseball and slapstick entertainment appealing.³

But not everyone loved the Miami Ethiopian Clowns. By the late 1930s and into the early 1940s, the clowning around that had become the trademark of the team and accounted for its great fan popularity had begun to stir anger and resentment in some quarters. Baseball clowning was attacked by sportswriters and some players in the black press as demeaning and undignified. Clowning around on the ball field, it was argued, played to the negative and offensive stereotypes about Blacks common at the time. Other Negro League owners envied the Clowns' attendance statistics, but they disliked the clowning, too. Baseball purists thought clowning should be banned from the game.⁴

Use of the Ethiopian label stirred controversy, as well. Ethiopia had only recently been invaded by an Italian army, as Benito Mussolini sought to colonize north Africa. The black press in the U.S. took up the Ethiopian cause. Ethiopian successes on the battlefield stirred great pride in black America. The embattled African nation quickly became "a symbol of liberation" for peoples of African descent around the world. Combining the Ethiopian name with baseball clowning, critics contended, seemed an insult to Blacks everywhere.⁵

Equally important, perhaps, black team owners also resented the role of the Jewish booking agents and promoters such as Pollock and Saperstein, as well as two other booking agents—Ed Gottlieb of Philadelphia and Nat Strong of New York. Black team owners lacked sufficient capital to build their own ball parks. Most of the land in urban black ghettos was owned by Whites in any case. As one black sports writer noted in 1929, "Playing parks in the big cities is our chief handicap. The scarcity of available ground and the expenses of construction is [sic] almost prohibitive." Thus, black owners relied on the

booking agents for access to the larger urban ball parks in the Northeast and Midwest. Black teams played in major league ball parks when the white home team was on the road, but the booking agents were the gatekeepers to those venues. The owners felt that they were being squeezed on the percentage of the gate taken by the booking agents. Thus, controversy swirled around Syd Pollock's Ethiopian Clowns in the late 1930s and into the early 1940s—controversy that involved both cultural conflict within the black community over the acceptability of baseball clowning, and a more focused set of disputes between Blacks and Jews over economic control of black baseball.⁶

A bit of background history on black baseball will help place the story of the Miami Ethiopian Clowns in context. Black baseball in America has a fascinating history, which sports historians have only recently begun uncovering. We now know, for instance, that black baseballers played in the early major and minor leagues in the late nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, however, with the rise of Jim Crow in the North as well as in the South, black players had been locked out of “organized” (read white) baseball. A short-lived “League of Colored Base Ball Players” surfaced as early as 1887. In 1910 and 1911, a proposed National Negro Baseball League of America also failed to get off the ground. But many black teams competed regularly in the 1890s and the early years of the twentieth century, with the best teams meeting in the “colored championship of the world,” a black version of the white World Series.⁷

The first successful effort to organize black teams came in 1920, when the Negro National League was formed in Kansas City, the inspiration of Rube Foster, a former star player and later owner of the Chicago American Giants. Composed mostly of midwestern teams, the Negro National League (NNL) soon found a counterpart in the Eastern Colored League, formed in 1923, and the two leagues began playing a Negro World Series in 1924. Black baseball thrived for some years in the 1920s, but the Eastern League folded in 1928, and, as the Great Depression deepened, the Negro National League collapsed as well in 1931. By 1933, however, with an infusion of “gangster capital” derived from the “numbers” rackets in the black ghettos of urban America, the Negro National League was revived. Gus Greenlee, the chief numbers racketeer in Pittsburgh, took the lead in rebuilding the league, which included teams from Pittsburgh, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Newark. A competing East-West League emerged about the same

time, promoted primarily by another Pittsburgh sports promoter, Cumberland "Cum" Posey, but the league fell apart after only one season. In 1937, the Negro American League (NAL) was established, representing southern and midwestern teams from Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, and Birmingham, among others. Over the years, some teams dropped out and others joined; the Negro Leagues generally lacked the stability of the white major leagues. The massive migration of southern Blacks to northern cities that began in earnest in the 1920s provided the large spectator base that supported the Negro Leagues from the late 1930s to the demise of organized black baseball in the mid-1950s. The annual East-West All-Star Game between the NNL and NAL attracted great fan interest, even more than the Negro League World Series between NNL and NAL pennant winners.⁸

In the days before television, African Americans throughout the country also supported a variety of black minor league and semi-pro teams, as well as the more accomplished and more organized Negro League teams. A Southern Negro League, first established in the 1920s, continued to thrive into the late 1940s, including at different times such teams as the Atlanta Black Crackers, the Chattanooga Choo Chos, the New Orleans Black Pelicans, the Little Rock Black Travelers, the Memphis Black Chicks, the Nashville Black Vols, the Mobile Shippers, the Lexington Hustlers, and the Jacksonville Eagles. Several black semi-pro leagues sprouted in California and the Pacific Northwest, along with an integrated California Winter League. Abe Saperstein headed a Tri-State Midwest League. In the South, the Texas Negro League and the Georgia-Alabama League drew on widespread baseball enthusiasm among black fans in small southern towns and cities.⁹

In Florida, organized black professional and semi-professional baseball had been around since the late nineteenth century. As early as 1895, when baseball was reported to be "the National Craze," a "colored State baseball association" was formed in Tampa, with teams in Jacksonville, Orlando, Ocala, Gainesville, and Tampa. As one Tampa newspaper reported at the time, "the inauguration of this scheme has filled our colored people chock full of base-ball enthusiasm, and the national game is likely to be as popular among the colored people of Florida this year as football ever was among Yale students." Florida's mild climate permitted year-round baseball, which was especially popular in Jacksonville, Florida's largest city at the turn of the century.

Jacksonville's oddly named black Roman Cities team dominated play in north Florida and south Georgia during the 1890s, and the city always had team entries in early southern black leagues. Some northern black teams spent their winters in Florida. As baseball historian Robert Peterson wrote in *Only the Ball Was White* (1970), "In 1889, the [New York] Cuban Giants spent the winter at a resort hotel in Jacksonville Florida, where they supplemented ballplaying with waiting on tables to earn their board." As winter tourism became established in South Florida in the early twentieth century, major hotels in Palm Beach such as the Breakers and the Royal Poinciana established their own black teams to entertain winter visitors. In 1946, a brand new Florida State Negro Baseball League included such teams as the Daytona Black Cats, the St. Pete Pelicans, the Tampa Pepsi Cola Giants (and later the Tampa Black Smokers), the Miami Giants, and teams from Bradenton, Bartow, Lakeland, Cocoa, Orlando, and West Palm Beach. A year later some of those black teams were gone, but others had replaced them, such as the Coconut Grove Black Spiders and the Tampa Rockets. In the forties, the Southern Negro League included such Florida teams as the Jacksonville Eagles and the West Palm Beach Rockets. In 1949, two Florida black teams—the Miami Giants and the West Palm Beach Rockets—joined the International League of Cuba, with many of their games played in South Florida. Baseball, in short, has been extremely popular among black Floridians since the beginnings of the sport.¹⁰

As sports writers and baseball historians have noted, black baseball in the days before integration generally was faster, flashier, and more aggressive than the brand of play in the white major leagues. African American fans who attended Sunday afternoon doubleheaders also came out for a good time. The mixture of sport and entertainment began quite early in black baseball history. Clowning around on the baseball field was already well established by the late nineteenth century. The black writer James Weldon Johnson, originally from Jacksonville, in writing about the 1890s Cuban Giants in his novel *Black Manhattan* (1930), noted that:

They brought something entirely new to the professional diamond; they originated and introduced baseball comedy. The coaches kept up a constant banter that was spontaneous and amusing. They often staged a comic pantomime for the benefit of the spectators.... Generally after a good play the whole team would for a moment cut monkey shines that

would make the grand stand and bleachers roar. Delighted crowds went as much to hear as to see the Cuban Giants play ball.

By contrast, Johnson wrote, “baseball in the white professional world... remained a dignified and rather grim performance.” Sol White, a former star player and author of *Sol White’s History of Colored Baseball*, originally published in 1907, wrote that in the 1880s and 1890s, “Every man on a team would do a funny stunt during a game.” By the time he was writing, however, White noted that “the funny man in colored baseball is becoming extinct.” As Don Rogosin has suggested in *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball’s Negro Leagues* (1987), one of the better histories of the subject, baseball clowning drew upon “a long tradition of comedy deeply embedded in black American folk culture.” But when the first Negro National League was formed in the 1920s, team owners and leading players rejected clowning and sought to imitate the professionalism of white major leaguers.¹¹

By the 1920s, clowning had been relegated to a “baseball minstrel circuit” of small-town barnstorming. The black clowning and novelty teams of the period included the Tennessee Rats, the Kokomo Circus Giants, The Florida Colored Hoboes, the Colored House of David, and, by the 1930s, the Zulu Cannibal Giants. The 1976 film, *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings*, according to some sources, was loosely based on such barnstorming comedy teams. The Zulu Cannibal Giants, organized by Charles Henry, a former player and black baseball promoter from Louisville, carried on-field baseball comedy to new extremes. Players suited up in grass skirts and wore makeup or “war paint” similar to that used by actors portraying Africans in the popular, but racially insensitive Tarzan movies of the time. In the early 1930s, the Zulu Cannibal Giants regularly traveled to Miami for a season of winter ball, which is where we can pick up the story of Syd Pollock’s Ethiopian Clowns.¹²

When the Zulus came to Miami for winter baseball, they regularly played a local black team, the Miami Giants, financed in the late 1920s by a local black bootlegger and numbers king, Johnny Pierce. Playing around Florida, the Miami Giants also went on the road, barnstorming up and down the east coast and eventually coming to rely on Syd Pollock as their booking agent. In May 1929, for instance, after playing a spring schedule in South Florida, the Miami Giants traveled north for

a three-game series with the Gainesville Stars, then went on to Georgia for games with the Thomasville Giants, the Dalton Tornados, and the Atlanta Gray Sox, and still later barnstormed through Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, and New York. As the barnstorming season came to a close in the fall, Pierce's Miami Giants would return to South Florida for winter baseball. By 1937, perhaps at the urging of booking agent Pollock, Pierce had renamed his Giant team the Ethiopian Clowns. During that year, as the team was traveling in the Northeast, they ran out of money. Hunter Campbell, the team's traveling manager, called Pollock to tell him they were heading back to Florida. Instead, Pollock sent money to Campbell so that the Clowns could fulfill their booking commitments. Later that year, Johnny Pierce died and Syd Pollock bought the team from Pierce's widow. Over the next twenty years, as Pollock perfected his promotional techniques, the Miami (and later, Indianapolis) Clowns, like the Harlem Globetrotters, became synonymous with sports comedy.¹³



Clowns owner Syd Pollock was involved in black baseball from the mid-1920s through the 1950s. Courtesy of the Pollock family.

Syd Pollock was the moving force behind the Ethiopian Clowns. He was born in North Tarrytown, New York, in 1901; his parents were theatrical people involved in vaudeville. By the early 1920s, the young Syd Pollock was managing the theater owned by his parents in North Tarrytown, showing silent films and booking vaudeville acts. This early business experience soon led to a larger role as a vaudeville booking agent. Pollock was also an avid baseballer, playing for the local Westchester Blue Sox and booking their games as well. After a baseball injury, Pollock became a full-time book-

ing agent and, by the mid-1920s, a team organizer, promoter, and owner of barnstorming black baseball teams.¹⁴

Pollock's career as a team owner in black baseball began in 1926 with the Havana Red Sox, the beginning of Pollock's long association with

Cuban baseball. Over the next few years, he developed and perfected the promotional techniques he used later with his various Clowns teams. Composed primarily of Cuban players, including the famous pitcher Luis Tiant, Sr., the Havana Red Sox generally began their season in Miami in March with numerous games against local competition. In 1929, for instance, they opened in Miami with an eight-game series against the Miami Athletic Club, then launched the long barnstorming season on a northward swing through the southern states. The team played almost daily, with weekend doubleheaders. Pollock promoted awareness of the team through his dispatches to the black newspapers about the team's prowess. Pollock's idea of baseball as entertainment as well as sport makes a first appearance with the Havana Red Sox, too. In



Abe Saperstein's Harlem Globetrotter clowning baseball team barnstormed around the country in the mid-1940s. The game in 1944 also featured the white House of David novelty team and Olympic track champion Jesse Owens. *Indianapolis Recorder*, 1944.

a report to the *Chicago Defender* in May 1929, Pollock boasted of the team's "dazzling pace" and strong win record, but went on to tout the fun and entertainment provided to fans: "The visitors [Havana Red Sox] lived up to their reputation of entertaining as well as playing sensational ball, singing their song entitled 'Whoopee' in their Cuban dialect much to the amusement of the crowd, performed their famous shadowball exhibition and keeping the game pepped up with their jabbering in Spanish, with the fans in an uproar from the time the Red Sox took the field until the last out was made." A week later, Pollock reported that "the attraction is provoking a real sensation everywhere, breaking attendance records in most every town and

city they appear." The idea that the baseball team was an "attraction" serves as key to understanding Syd Pollock's approach to black baseball.¹⁵

Pollock's Havana Red Sox continued to barnstorm through the 1930 season. During that year, a second touring Pollock team emerged, the

Florida Cuban Giants, composed of many ball players from Florida, which Pollock began calling “the Alligator State.” By 1931, those two teams had disappeared, now replaced by another Pollock team, the Cuban House of David, a knock-off of the original white, bearded House of David team from Benton Harbor, Michigan. The “bewhiskered Islanders,” or “bearded beauties,” as Pollock often called his new team in press reports, barnstormed for two seasons. In the 1932 season, the team joined Cum Posey’s new East-West League. The players barnstormed through small-town America as the Cuban House of David, but shaved their beards and became the Cuban Stars for league games in the big cities. By 1933, the East-West League had disappeared, as had the Cuban House of David. Pollock’s team that year was the Cuban Stars, but the players were mostly black Americans, with a few Puerto Rican players added to maintain the Hispanic charade, presumably a cost-saving measure in the depths of the Great Depression. Always on the cutting edge of baseball innovation, Pollock introduced a set of portable lights that year, permitting the barnstorming Cuban Stars to play night games and build a better gate.¹⁶

Pollock became increasingly involved in black baseball in the 1930s. In addition to promoting his own teams, he booked games for the Miami Giants and the Zulu Cannibal Giants, later called the Zulu African Jungle Giants. The details are fuzzy, but he may have owned, or partially owned, other teams, such as the Puerto Rican Stars, the Borneo Cannibal Giants, and the Canadian Clowns, a white clown team that barnstormed towns along the Canadian Pacific Railroad in the early 1930s. These early years of owning and booking comedy baseball teams set the stage for Syd Pollock’s most enduring baseball creation, the Miami Ethiopian Clowns and its successor Clowns teams.¹⁷

While booking and promoting these various teams, Pollock also became an early advocate of integrating major league baseball. In an open letter in September 1933 to Bill Veeck, Sr., then president of the Chicago Cubs, Pollock pushed for an end to the major-league ban on black players. The majors were suffering severe attendance declines in the depths of the Great Depression. Veeck had complained in the press that “major league baseball must do something drastic in order to revive interest in 1934.” Pollock offered to place entirely black teams, including possibly his own Cuban Stars, in each of the major leagues for the

1934 season. Such a plan, Pollock suggested, would make baseball more exciting, stimulate spectator interest, and boost profits for owners. As the headline in the *Chicago Defender* sports section put it, "Syd Pollock Tells Veeck of Cubs How to Fill Park." There is no record of Veeck's response at that time, but a decade later, the more famous Bill Veeck, Jr., claimed in his autobiography, *Veeck—As in Wreck* (1962), that he sought to buy the Philadelphia Phillies in 1943 and stock the team with black players, a plan supposedly nixed by baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis. It made a good story, but Veeck's claims have recently been disproved by baseball historians.¹⁸

Pollock's letter to Veeck, Sr. came at the beginning of a white journalistic campaign to integrate the major leagues. Earlier the same year, another Tarrytown sports personality, *New York Daily News* sports editor Jimmy Powers, began pushing the issue in his widely read column, "The Powerhouse." As the *Chicago Defender* noted in 1933, Powers and the *Daily News* had "taken a stand against the color line in major league baseball." Other well-known white newspapermen, such as Paul Gallico, Westbrook Pegler, Lloyd Lewis, and Heywood Broun, also raised questions about the exclusion of Blacks from major league baseball. Also agitating on the desegregation issue at the same time was the American Communist Party and its newspaper, *The Daily Worker*, which coordinated efforts with black sports writers to end the race barrier in white baseball. In 1938, continuing the campaign, Powers identified several black players who could almost guarantee a pennant for the struggling, white New York Giants team. Powers continued to use his "Powerhouse" column to promote baseball desegregation until the mid-1940s when the color line finally fell.¹⁹

As owner of the Miami Ethiopian Clowns beginning in 1937, Syd Pollock mastered the art of promotional hype. Few black newspapers had the financial resources to send sportswriters on the road to report on black baseball. Consequently, the African American press relied primarily on reports mailed in by team managers or owners for their baseball coverage. In 1929, for example, the *Chicago Defender* published a "Notice to Baseball Men," laying out the guidelines for special delivery game reports. This system fit perfectly with Pollock's promotional talents. He relentlessly over many years wrote his own press reports and mailed

them off to black newspapers around the country. Thus, the same stories about the Clowns would appear throughout the nation. African Americans had great pride in their sports heroes, and the sports pages of the black papers were widely read. Consequently, few black sports fans could have avoided weekly accounts of the Miami Ethiopian Clowns, and later the Cincinnati or Indianapolis Clowns—almost all of them written by the team owner himself. By the early 1950s, Pollock was sending out thirty thousand pieces of mail a year from his Clowns office in Tarrytown.²⁰

When the Clowns were traveling, which was most of the time, Pollock sent long press releases in advance to the black papers in cities on the tour. In fact, advance stories about coming Clowns games bristled with promotional excitement, seeking to build fan anticipation in the week prior to the game date. By contrast, follow-up stories on games just completed were shorter or sometimes never appeared. Laying the promotional groundwork in advance of a game and building the gate were important to a team's financial success. Pollock's typical pre-game Clown press release invariably began with ubiquitous references to "the nationally famous Miami Ethiopian Clowns," or "the sensational Clowns," or "the world champion traveling ball club," or "the greatest traveling club in the nation," or "the inimitable funsters of the diamond," or "Syd Pollock's amazing baseball club," or "the wonder team from Miami, Florida." One hyped-up press release in 1940 asserted that "those classy Ethiopian Clowns, who hail from the sunny shores of Miami, Fla., are rated the fastest and peppiest traveling combination touring the U.S. ... [They] carry the greatest assembly of Negro baseball talent ever assembled together on one ball club." The prototype press release went on to note the Clowns terrific won-lost record and the record crowds that greeted them everywhere they played. Top Clown players were identified, with some of their notable pitching and batting accomplishments. Then, the standard press release would turn to the team's clowning antics and the good time that fans might anticipate at the coming game. With the Clowns playing as many as two hundred or more games in a seven-month season, Pollock's advance publicity and sports hype helped turn out big crowds for the team's performances.²¹

Pollock had few rivals at the time in the art of sports flair and promotion. A few examples from the early forties convey the verbal flavor of this genre of sports publicity. A press release in 1939, for

instance, characterized the Ethiopian Clowns as terrific ball players who in most games

hogged the spotlight with their funmaking. The latter interferes in no whit with their able playing, for with all their horse-play, they show more speed than a flock of gazelles, handle the ball with the dexterity of shell-game manipulators, and at any stage of a tilt, convulse the fans when infielders and outfielders alike recline on the ground while pitchers hurl their smoke ball past their batsmen.... The dusky warriors of the diamond have a continent-wide reputation for mixing mirthful entertainment with outright clever baseball ability.

A year later, Pollock wrote of the Clowns: "Their bats are loaded with dynamite, they are as speedy as a flock of gazelles, and handle the ball with the dexterity of major leaguers." Notice the similarity of language and imagery in the two press releases, which draw upon stock phrases used often over the years. According to a 1941 Pollock press release, if the Ethiopian Clowns failed to live up to advance expectations, "then Washington never crossed the Delaware, the Yanks never won a national pennant, and the late Chamberlain never said a mean word about Hitler." Of the Clowns pre-game "pepperball" warmup routine, Pollock wrote: "The Clowns deft manipulation of the spheroid in the 'now-you-see-it, now-you-don't' performance... would put a flock of Houdinis to shame." Pollock was a man with a mission and an undeniable flair for sports hyperbole.²²

The Clowns held their own against most of the ball clubs in the Negro Leagues and usually triumphed easily over small-town amateur and semi-pro teams on barnstorming tours. But clowning around was what distinguished the Clowns and what the fans came out to see. And they rarely disappointed those who enjoyed baseball comedy. The Miami Ethiopian Clowns began in the 1930s with the grass skirts and whiteface routines. Players took the field under such names as Wahoo, Tarzan, Impo, Bebop, Abbadaba, Kaliharri, Selassi, King Tut, and Nyasses. For a time in the late 1930s they dressed up in real clown outfits, performed slapstick skits derived from vaudeville and minstrel routines, and amused the crowds with their "shadowball" warm-up activities. Dave Barnhill, later a top pitcher in the Negro Leagues, played for the Ethiopian Clowns in the late 1930s and married

owner Johnny Pierce's daughter. Barnhill remembered his Clown days in an interview: "We'd come to the park with paint on our faces like a clown. Even the bat boy had his face painted, too. We wore clowning wigs and the big old clown uniforms with ruffled collars. My clowning name was Impo. We'd play 'shadow ball,' pretend to hit and throw without any ball at all. They'd 'hit' the ball to me, I'd run to field it, I'd jump, turn a flip, grab and throw it like I'm throwing the ball to first base. They'd pay us extra money to do it over again, that's how good it was. Then when we were supposed to get down to business, we pulled the clown suits off, and we had our regular baseball uniforms underneath. But we didn't change our faces. We played with the clown paint still on our faces."²³

The Clowns were famous for their vaudeville-type, slapstick routines. A tooth-pulling comedy skit invariably got big laughs. A former Clown player, Othello "Chico" Renfro, later a sports writer in Atlanta, described these on-field antics: "We used to take infield practice with an imaginary baseball. The crowd loved it. We played baseball up until the fifth inning, then the fun began." Two players, King Tut and Goose Tatum, went into their tooth-pulling routine. As Renfro reported the action: "They'd go through a tooth pulling act where Goose was the dentist and Tut was the patient. Tut would fill his mouth up with corn, and Goose kept pulling his teeth and pulling his teeth and it never seemed to do any good. So he'd go get a fire cracker and light it, and as soon as the firecracker would go off, King Tut would jump up and go hollering and spitting out all the corn, like all his teeth were coming out." "Everyone in the place laughed," Renfro remembered vividly. Goose Tatum, incidentally, perfected his clowning abilities in black baseball and later became a clowning basketball star for the Harlem Globetrotters.²⁴

Over the years, Syd Pollock and his Clown teams perfected baseball comedy and invariably put on an entertaining show. The Clowns had a number of routine slapstick skits such as the tooth pulling act or a popular and funny rowing and fishing routine. But they often improvised as well, especially in non-league games when they were well ahead in the score. Instead of running to first base on a routine infield grounder, the batter might run instead to third base. With runners on first and second, the runner on first base might steal second, while the player on second would run to first. Sometimes the first- or third-base coaches or

the umpires would run the bases, too. The crowds would usually roar in astonishment and unexpected pleasure.²⁵

Pollock tempered the on-field clowning somewhat after his team joined the Negro American League in 1943. But in later years, as Negro League baseball declined in the 1950s, clowning and novelty acts became a more important drawing card to maintain a profitable gate. For instance, Pollock was the first team owner to put a woman in the lineup as a regular player. In 1953, twenty-three-year-old Toni Stone from St. Paul, Minnesota, became the Clowns' regular at second base, hitting a respectable .243 for the season. Stone already had several years of professional experience in Pacific Coast ball, but the Clowns sold her contract to the Kansas City Monarchs the next year, where she played regularly. Meanwhile, the Clowns hired Mamie Johnson and Connie Morgan to pitch and play second base, respectively. The novelty of women on the diamond added to the Clowns attendance at a time when the integrated major leagues had begun to draw fans away from Negro League games. Pollock tried a lot of other baseball gimmicks, as well, including dwarf pinch-hitters, one-armed players, a catcher in a rocking chair, a first-baseman with a three-foot-long glove, juggling acts, a one-man band in a baseball suit, anything to pull in the fans or get a laugh. Bill Veeck, who jazzed up major league baseball as owner, successively, of the Cleveland Indians, St. Louis Browns, and Chicago White Sox, learned a lot from his friend Syd Pollock.²⁶

However, as noted earlier, clown baseball had its detractors. As early as 1939, opposition to clowning around began to surface in the black press. A. E. White, a syndicated writer for the Associated Negro Press (ANP), wrote a stinging article about black baseball in July 1939. He was critical of the powerful role played by white owners, promoters, and booking agents, who, he wrote, rarely worked for the best interests of black ball. White promoters and bookers virtually controlled the scheduling for Negro League teams and barnstorming independents. Teams and players were powerless pawns exploited for the interests of others. The worst consequence of this situation, White contended, was that white owners and promoters expected black ballplayers "to be clowns and do the unusual in baseball—not play good straight clean baseball, but dress in grass skirts, adopt fictitious and phoney names and put on a show before the game and during the intermission between doubleheaders." Clearly, this verbal blast was aimed at promoters and

booking agents such as Syd Pollock and Abe Saperstein, and at those who created and profited from such teams as the Zulu Cannibal Giants and the Miami Ethiopian Clowns.²⁷

A year later, at the end of the 1940 baseball season, Pollock was on the defensive once again. This time it was Cum Posey who attacked Pollock and the Ethiopian Clowns. Posey was a powerful figure in black ball, a former player and then owner of Pittsburgh's Homestead Grays, and also a sports columnist for the widely read *Pittsburgh Courier*. The whole idea of "clowning around," Posey wrote, was demeaning to Blacks, while invoking the name of Ethiopia held that nation up to ridicule. Posey urged black editors to keep news of the Ethiopian Clowns out of their sports pages.²⁸

Pollock responded immediately and vigorously with an open letter published in many black newspapers rejecting Posey's charges. He asserted instead that his team was providing both good baseball and good entertainment for tens of thousands of fans throughout the country. Pollock concluded by suggesting that Posey was "motivated more by jealousy, than by ... personal interest in the Negro race." The public exchange between Posey and Pollock reflected some bad feelings between the two men going back more than a decade: In the 1932 season, Pollock pulled his Cuban Stars team out of Posey's new East-West League, contributing to its demise; and in 1929 Pollock and Posey conducted a bitter public dispute about Negro League rules and business conditions. The verbal battle between Posey and Pollock also exposed some deep fissures in black baseball. The public discussion often focused on the appropriateness of baseball clowning. Behind the scenes, however, the control of white booking agents such as Pollock and Saperstein over ball parks and schedules loomed large.²⁹

The issue simmered into the early 1940s. In a decisive move in December 1941, Negro League owners banned their teams from playing games with the non-league Miami Ethiopian Clowns. As reported in the African American press in January 1942, "the eastern owners had long been of the opinion that the painting of faces by the Clowns players, their antics on the diamond, and their style of play was a detriment to Negro League baseball." In other action, the owners also banned league teams from playing two other Pollock teams, the Cuban Giants and the Havana Cubans, allegedly because these teams were "using Cuban names for players who ... were American Negroes." But when these



Clowns team photo, early 1940s. This photograph carries the autograph of Buster Haywood who played for the Clowns in the 1940s and managed the team in the 1950s. Courtesy of Raymond A. Mohl.

matters were discussed by black sportswriters, the issue of financial control by booking agents such as Abe Saperstein and Syd Pollock was always given prominence in the decision to ban play with the Miami Ethiopian Clowns. The black owners, it seems, attacked Pollock not just because of his team's on-field clowning but because of his role as a powerful booking agent and his close relationship with Saperstein.³⁰

The ban on the Ethiopian Clowns did not find universal approval. Some black sports writers supported Pollock and the Clowns. Unlike some black team owners, sports columnist R. E. Rea of the *Baltimore Afro-American* wrote, Pollock was meeting his payroll, employing black ballplayers, and stimulating fan interest. In a series of articles, Rea challenged the black owners to build their own ball parks, take over their own booking, pay better salaries, and put on a better show to attract fans. The ban on the Clowns, Rea noted humorously, was "as childish a gesture as Snow White's revelry with the Seven Dwarfs." To Rea, the Clowns were not a "detriment" but composed of good players trying to make a living playing ball. "Instead of trying to kill off these star players, it would be better to take them into League circles." Finally, Rea recommended that the black owners work with the white promoters, who were doing a good job for black baseball.³¹

With the ban on the Ethiopian Clowns about to take effect, Pollock and Saperstein soon posed a new challenge for the Negro League owners.

In March 1942, they announced the formation of a new league—the Negro Major Baseball League of America—with headquarters in Chicago and with several prominent African Americans (including former All-American football star Fritz Pollard) holding official positions in the new league. Teams scheduled to play in the new league included the Chicago Brown Bombers, the Detroit Black Sox, the Boston Royal Giants, the Baltimore Black Orioles, the Minneapolis-St. Paul Gophers, and, not surprisingly, Pollock’s Clowns, now renamed the Cincinnati Ethiopian Clowns. Pollock had been successful with a non-league barnstorming team, but recognized the financial advantages of regular league play in big-city ball parks. Shifting the “home” base from Miami to Cincinnati reflected an effort to tap into fan interest in the Midwest, where most of the new league teams were located.³²

The *Pittsburgh Courier* played a leading role in attacking the new league. The paper’s sports editor, Wendell Smith, blasted Pollock and Saperstein, labeling the new league an “outlaw” organization. It was nothing less, Smith charged, than an effort by the white booking agents to “take over organized Negro baseball.” In the same paper, Cum Posey used his column “Posey’s Points” to condemn the “Abe Saperstein Protective Association.” Saperstein, Posey contended, was “out to keep control of the independent baseball parks of the middle west,” at the expense of the Negro League teams. Pollock, too, came in for Posey’s criticism, as he was “capitalizing on the rape of Ethiopia when that country was in distress” by calling his team the Ethiopian Clowns. Posey also hinted, however, that if Pollock dropped the Ethiopian label, then his team might not be “blacklisted” by the League teams. While sports editor Smith took a hard line toward the new league, Posey offered a softer position—one more open to compromise.³³

As the upstart league began the 1942 season, the *Courier’s* attack on Pollock and baseball clowning intensified. Wendell Smith used his column to skewer Pollock’s Clowns as “the awful Clowns of Negro baseball.” Pollock thought his “minstrel show” was “good enough for Broadway,” Smith wrote, but their performances on the baseball field were demeaning and racially dangerous. The slapstick comedy performed by the Ethiopian Clowns represented to Smith “the kind of nonsense which many white people like to believe is typical and characteristic of Negroes.” While Wendell Smith was attacking clown baseball, he and his newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, were at the same time leading a

press campaign to integrate the white major leagues. Not coincidentally, the *Courier* had earlier led a nationwide campaign against the extremely popular radio comedy, the *Amos n' Andy* show, claiming that its stereotypical portrayal of African Americans was damaging and demeaning. The *Amos n' Andy* show survived the newspaper's crusade against it, but many of the same arguments were now used in the *Courier's* attack on clown baseball.³⁴

In retrospect, the *Pittsburgh Courier* campaign against baseball clowning coincided with three other powerful forces for racial change in the U.S. in the early 1940s. First, American involvement in World War II initiated major social transformations on the home front. Again leading the charge, the *Pittsburgh Courier* announced that for black Americans the war effort had two goals: victory over totalitarianism abroad and victory over racism and segregation in America. Thus, the "Double-V campaign" was born—a powerful idea that resonated throughout black America. Second, active support for the civil rights movement took off during the war years, with rising membership in the NAACP, a succession of favorable U.S. Supreme Court decisions, and major racial breakthroughs for Blacks in union employment and government policy such as the creation of the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice (FEPC) and, by 1946, the President's Committee on Civil Rights. Finally, these changes took place in the context of a great mass migration of southern Blacks to northern and western cities. As a consequence of these transforming developments, black America became restive and more militant. Race riots in Detroit, New York, and elsewhere challenged the racial status quo. Articulate black spokesmen in the press, in politics, and in national race organizations like the NAACP spoke out for racial equality and rejected as offensive the racial stereotyping that had been common in the past. In the cauldron of racial change sparked by the war, clowning baseball was targeted for attack by those adhering to the emergent civil rights agenda. As the newspaper that initiated the "Double-V" campaign, the *Pittsburgh Courier* led the charge on the sports front. The nation's largest black newspaper, with a weekly circulation of about two hundred thousand, the *Courier* played a major role in raising racial consciousness during the war years.³⁵

Black baseball began the 1942 season in controversy, but ended in compromise of sorts. Without the regular contracts typical in white

baseball, Negro League players began jumping to teams in the new rival league that paid slightly better salaries. With their best players jumping ship, their bookings in jeopardy, and their attendance dropping, the resolve of the NNL and NAL owners weakened. By September, after winning the Negro Major Baseball League title, the Cincinnati Clowns were playing double-headers against Negro League teams in violation of the league ban.³⁶

In a final resolution of the dispute with the Negro Leagues, Pollock agreed to drop the Ethiopian name and the most offensive aspects of clown baseball—the whiteface makeup, wigs, grass skirts, and clown suits—and limit most of the slapstick comedy to pre-game activities and between games of double-headers, or to non-League games on barnstorming tours. In return, Pollock's Cincinnati Clowns team was admitted to the Negro American League for the 1943 season, while the existing NAL team from Cincinnati, the Buckeyes, was shifted to Cleveland. The next year, 1944, Pollock's team found a new home in Indianapolis, although they continued to play some "home" games in Cincinnati for a while. The Clowns attracted a large gate for NAL and inter-league games, justifying for a time Pollock's long-term goal of participating in Negro League play. Meanwhile the problem of the white booking agents lingered on unresolved, and within a year, Cum Posey was attacking Abe Saperstein again.³⁷

For the next decade, the Indianapolis Clowns added to the spectator allure of Negro League baseball, even as fan interest and loyalty quickly shifted to newly integrated major league teams such as the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Cleveland Indians, the first teams to integrate. The Negro Leagues ultimately disbanded by the mid-1950s, an inevitable consequence of baseball desegregation and of that increasingly important sports medium—television. One by one the teams folded, and in 1950 those remaining merged into a single Negro American League. The Clowns won four pennants during the early 1950s. The team continued to hold spring training in Miami in the mid-century years, playing numerous exhibition games with a new Pollock team from Cuba, Havana La Palomas, described in the *Florida Sentinel* as "the new edition to Pollock's Baseball, Inc." One of the prominent Clown players during this period was Henry "Hank" Aaron, who as a teenager from Mobile, Alabama, signed his first professional contract with Syd Pollock's Indianapolis Clowns in 1952. By mid-season, as Aaron was tearing up

the NAL, the Clowns sold his contract to the Boston Braves for ten thousand dollars, and the rest is history.³⁸

The Negro American League finally collapsed in 1955. Soon after, Syd Pollock sold the Clowns to Ed Hamman, a white professional clown who had traveled with the team for many years. Hamman had earlier learned something about the links between baseball and entertainment as a young man when he played for the original bearded House of David team. Under Hamman, the team continued to barnstorm into the 1980s, but it was all clowning by that time, with no pretense toward baseball professionalism. Oddly, in 1967 the sixty-ish Satchel Paige, still looking forward, signed with the Indianapolis Clowns for one thousand dollars a month, briefly returning to the barnstorming schedule that had always been common in black baseball. Meanwhile, Syd Pollock had moved his family from Tarrytown to Hollywood, Florida, in 1955 and went into the real estate business, although he continued to work as a baseball booking agent and talent scout as well. The Clowns 1958 *Souvenir Program and Fun Book* humorously suggested that "Syd's story might almost be called 'From Sandlots to Houselots,'" a line probably written by Pollock himself.³⁹

The saga of the Miami Ethiopian Clowns, then, reflects some of the cultural and economic complexity of Negro League baseball during its peak years. Clowning around had historically been an integral part of black baseball, but its acceptability waned by the 1940s as civil rights issues became more pressing in black America. The Miami Ethiopian Clowns were popular among both black and white audiences, and they had better attendance statistics than any other black ball team over two decades. But there were many critics; indeed, there were some offensive and demeaning aspects to the clowning tradition. And just below the surface, the dispute between the black team owners and the Jewish booking agents simmered for years. The few historians of black baseball who have discussed clowning have been critical and dismissive, generally following the *Pittsburgh Courier's* line of attack. But, as this article has sought to demonstrate, there is a lot more to this fascinating story of Florida baseball history than initially meets the eye.⁴⁰

Notes

¹ *Miami Times*, 28 October 1939, clipping in Stanley Sweeting Collection, microfilm in Miami-Dade Public Library; Richard Donovan, "Time Ain't Gonna Mess with Me," *Collier's*, 131 (13 June 1953), 54-59. On Paige, see also Leroy (Satchel) Paige, *Maybe I'll Pitch Forever* (New York: Grove Press, 1971); Leroy Satchel Paige, *Pitchin' Man: Satchel Paige's Own Story* (Westport, Conn: Meckler, 1992); John B. Holway, *Josh and Satch: The Life and Times of Josh Gibson and Satchel Paige* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1992); Mark Ribowsky, *Don't Look Back: Satchel Paige in the Shadows of Baseball* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994). Interestingly, in another bit of little-known Miami sports history, Paige pitched successfully for the Miami Marlins of the International League for three years in the 1950s. See Paige, *Maybe I'll Pitch Forever*, 237-248.

² *Indianapolis Recorder*, 18 March 1939, 6 June, 22 June 1940, 1 March, 7 June, 1941, 1 September 1945.

³ Dick Clark and Larry Lester, eds., *The Negro Leagues Book* (Cleveland: Society for American Baseball Research, 1994), 23-24; Phil Dixon with Patrick J. Hannigan, *The Negro Baseball Leagues, 1867-1955: A Photographic History* (Mattituck, N.Y.: Amereon House, 1992), 19-20; James A. Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1994), 633; "Meet Syd Pollock's Indianapolis Clowns," Press Release, 1952, Indianapolis Recorder Sports Collection, Collection P303, Box 128, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

⁴ On these points, see Jules Tygiel, "Black Ball," in John Thorn, et al., eds., *Total Baseball: The Encyclopedia of Major League Baseball* (6th ed.; New York: Total Sports, 1999), 499; Donn Rogosin, *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues* (New York: Atheneum, 1987), 141-151.

⁵ Joseph E. Harris, *African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 1936-1941* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), quotation on p. xi; William R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1941* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 37-57; Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race and Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 11.

⁶ *Chicago Defender*, 13 April 1929; Jules Tygiel, *Past Time: Baseball as History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 132-135; Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1987), 144-124; James Overmyer, *Queen of the Negro Leagues: Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 127-165; Mark Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues, 1884-1955* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1995), 63-65, 154-155, 230, 239; Michael E. Lomax, "Black Baseball, Black Entrepreneurs, Black Community" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1996), 505-506.

⁷ Jerry Malloy, *Sol White's History of Colored Baseball, with Other Documents on the Early Black Game, 1886-1936* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Larry Bowman, "Moses Fleetwood Walker: The First Black Major League Baseball Player," *Baseball History*, 1 (1989), 61-74; David W. Zang, *Fleet Walker's Divided Heart: The Life of Baseball's First Black Major Leaguer* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 193-198; Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The People's Game* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 531-609; Tygiel, "Black Ball," 493-497; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 10; Clark and Lester, eds., *The Negro Leagues Book*, 15-17.

⁸ Tygiel, "Black Ball," 496-500; Clark and Lester, eds., *The Negro Leagues Book*, 17-19, 242; Dixon and Hannigan, *The Negro Baseball Leagues*, 153-157; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 14-17, 25-27; Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 154-156; G. Edward White, *Creating the National Pastime: Baseball Transforms Itself, 1903-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 127-159. On the significance of the East-West game, see Larry Lester, *Black Baseball's National Showcase: The East-West All-Star Game, 1933-1953* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

⁹ *Miami Tropical Dispatch*, 29 June 1946, 15 March 1947, 12 March, 25 June 1949; *Indianapolis Recorder*, 7 May 1938, 16 March 1956; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 28-29, 44-46; Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 169-170, 190.

¹⁰ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 21 May 1895; *Chicago Defender*, 1 February 1930; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 20 April 1946; *Florida Sentinel*, 27 April, 20 July 1946; *Miami Tropical Dispatch*, 20 July, 10 August 1946, 15

March, 21 June, 1947, 12 March 1949; *Tampa Tribune*, 1 October 1994; Agnew Welsh Scrapbook, p. 48, Florida Room, Miami-Dade Public Library; Stuart McIver, "Cooks to Catchers, Bellhops to Batters," *Sunshine: The Magazine of South Florida* (22 August 1993), 22-26; Kevin M. McCarthy, *Baseball in Florida* (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 1996), 83-87; Seymour, *Baseball: The People's Game*, 542-543; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 27-28; Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White: A History of Legendary Black Players and All-Black Professional Teams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 39.

¹¹ *Chicago Defender*, 8 August 1938; James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Knopf, 1930), 64-65; Malloy, ed., *Sol White's History of Colored Baseball*, 74; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 80-82, 142, 145; Tygiel, "Black Ball," 499.

¹² *Chicago Defender*, 16 March 1929, 29 March 1930; Bruce Chadwick, *When the Game Was Black and White: The Illustrated History of Baseball's Negro Leagues* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992), 92-94; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 145; John B. Holway, *Black Diamonds: Life in the Negro Leagues from the Men Who Lived It* (New York: Stadium Books, 1991), 94-95; Buck O'Neil, *I Was Right on Time* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 70-73; William Brashler, *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

Suggesting the wider dimensions of sports comedy, the Zulu Cannibal Giants also had a basketball team in the late 1930s that played in grass skirts and war paint. See *Chicago Defender*, 2 January 1937. On the Tarzan movies, see John Taliaferro, *Tarzan Forever: The Life of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Creator of Tarzan* (New York: Scribner, 1999); John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

¹³ *Miami News*, 13 May 1929; *Chicago Defender*, 27 February 1937; Alan J. Pollock [son of Syd Pollock], telephone interview with Raymond A. Mohl, 14 August 1998; Holway, *Black Diamonds*, 94-95; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 146-147.

¹⁴ Jerome F. Pollock [son of Syd Pollock], telephone interview with Raymond A. Mohl, 27 July 27 1998; Alan Pollock, telephone interview, 31 July 1998.

¹⁵ *Chicago Defender*, 18 August 1928, 16 March, 18 May, 25 May, 1 June, 20 July 1929. On baseball in Cuba during this period, see Roberto González Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban*

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¹⁶ *Chicago Defender*, 26 April, 24 May 1930, 30 May, 11 July, 5 September 1931, 27 February, 26 March, 2 April, 14 May 1932, 18 March, 6 May 1933. On the House of David novelty team, see Joel Hawkins and Terry Bertolino, *The House of David Baseball Team* (Chicago: Arcadia, 2000).

¹⁷ *Chicago Defender*, 23 August 1930; *Philadelphia Tribune*, 30 May 1940; Holway, *Black Diamonds*, 94-95; O'Neil, *I Was Right on Time*, 70-73.

¹⁸ See *Chicago Defender*, 2 September 1933 for Pollock's letter to Veeck, Sr. For Veeck, Jr.'s claims, see Bill Veeck with Ed Linn, *Veeck—As in Wreck: The Autobiography of Bill Veeck* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1962), 171-172; Gerald Eskanazi, *Bill Veeck: A Baseball Legend* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), 25-26; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 196-197. The Veeck story is challenged in David M. Jordan, Larry R. Gerlach, and John P. Rossi, "Bill Veeck and the 1943 Sale of the Phillies: A Baseball Myth Exploded," *The National Pastime*, 18 (September 1998), 3-13.

¹⁹ *New York Daily News*, 8 February 1933; *Chicago Defender*, 25 February 1933; 15 August 1936, 27 August 1938; *Baltimore Afro-American*, 17 September 1938; *Indianapolis Recorder*, 17 June, 22 July 1939; H. B. Webber and Oliver Brown, "Play Ball!" [NAACP] *The Crisis*, 45 (May 1938), 137; *Buck Leonard with James A. Riley, Buck Leonard, the Black Lou Gehrig: An Autobiography* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1995), 98-99; Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 175; Richard Crepeau, *Baseball: America's Diamond Mind, 1919-1941* (Orlando: University Presses of Florida, 1980), 168-169; Kelly E. Rusinack, "Baseball on the Radical Agenda: *The Daily Worker* and *Sunday Worker* Journalistic Campaign to Desegregate Major League Baseball, 1933-1947," in Joseph Dorinson and Jorem Warmund, eds.,

Jackie Robinson: Race, Sports, and the American Dream (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 75-85.

²⁰ *Chicago Defender*, 18 May 1929; Alan Pollock interview, 31 July 1998; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 88-89; "Meet Syd Pollock," *Indianapolis Clowns Souvenir Program Book*, n.d., c. 1955, unpaginated, in Indianapolis Clowns File, National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.

²¹ For examples of Pollock's exaggerated claims, see *Indianapolis Recorder*, 24 June, 16 September 1939, 1 June, 22 June 1940, 1 March, 26 April 1941.

²² *Indianapolis Recorder*, 24 June 1939, 22 June 1940, 7 June 1941; *Miami Tropical Dispatch*, 22 March 1947.

²³ Holway, *Black Diamonds*, 139-140.

²⁴ John Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (rev. ed.; New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 340-341; Paul Debono, "The Negro Leagues Major Part of Baseball History," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 27 May 1989; "The Dynamite Days of Negro Baseball," undated clipping, Sports-Baseball File, Black History Program, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

²⁵ For examples, see *Chicago Defender*, 17 September 1938, 29 August 1942; *Indianapolis Recorder*, 24 August 1940, 2 August 1941; Frazier "Slow" Robinson, with Paul Bauer, *Catching Dreams: My Life in the Negro Baseball Leagues* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 105-106.

²⁶ Alan Pollock interview, 31 July 1998; *Miami Times*, 28 February, 11 April, 1953; Biff Bennett, "Sportalk," *Sport*, 16 (July 1954), 8, 88; Mamie "Peanut" Johnson, interview with Reba Cottingham, Negro League Oral History Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Baltimore, Baltimore, Maryland; Eugene L. Meyer, "In a League of Her Own," *St. Petersburg Times*, 2 February 1999, 1D, 3D; Gai Ingham Berlage, "Robinson's Legacy: Black Women and Negro Baseball," in Peter M. Rutkoff, ed., *The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture: 1997* (Jackie Robinson) (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2000), 123-135; *Indianapolis Clowns Souvenir Program and Funbook*, n.d., c. 1958, Indianapolis Clowns File, National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.

²⁷ *Baltimore Afro-American*, 22 July 1939; *Indianapolis Recorder*, 22 July 1939; *Chicago Defender*, 29 July 1939.

²⁸ *Indianapolis Recorder*, 5 October 1940; Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons*, 120-136.

²⁹ *Indianapolis Recorder*, 5 October 1940; Alan Pollock interview, 30 July 1998; Neil Lanctot, *Fair Dealing and Clean Playing: The Hilldale Club and the Development of Black Professional Baseball, 1910-1932* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 1994), 194-195.

³⁰ *Indianapolis Recorder*, 3 January 1942; *Chicago Defender*, 3 January 1942; *Baltimore Afro-American*, 3 January, 21 February, 7 March 1942; *Philadelphia Tribune*, 28 February 1942; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 4 April 1942.

³¹ *Baltimore Afro-American*, 10 January, 30 May 1942.

³² *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 March 1942; *Chicago Defender*, 28 March, 16 May 1942; *Indianapolis Recorder*, 28 March, 1 April, 23 May 1942; Alan Pollock interview, 30 July 1998.

³³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 28 March, 4 April 1942. Syndicated columnist A. E. White also continued a parallel attack on Saperstein, Pollock, and the Clowns. See *Indianapolis Recorder*, 8 August 1942.

³⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 16 May 1942. On the newspaper's campaign to break down the major league color barrier, see Bill L. Weaver, "The Black Press and the Assault on Professional Baseball's 'Color Line,' October 1945-April 1947," *Phylon*, 40 (Winter 1979), 303-317; David K. Wiggins, "Wendell Smith, the *Pittsburgh Courier-Journal* and the Campaign to Include Blacks in Organized Baseball, 1933-1945," *Journal of Sport History*, 10 (Summer 1983), 5-29. On the controversy over the *Amos n' Andy* show, see Melvin Ely, *The Adventures of Amos n' Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomenon* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 160-193; William Barlow, *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 35-46; Joseph Boskin, *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 166-175.

³⁵ On racial change during World War II, see Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," *Journal of American History*, 55 (June 1968), 90-106; Harvard Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War," *Journal of American History*, 58 (December 1971), 661-681; Lee Finkle, "The Conservative Aims of Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest during World War II," *Journal of American History*, 60 (December 1973), 692-713; Peter J. Kellogg, "Civil Rights Consciousness in the 1940s," *The Historian*, 42 (November 1979), 18-41; John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 182-220; Patrick S. Washburn, "The

Pittsburgh Courier's Double V Campaign in 1942," *American Journalism*, 3 (1986), 73-86.

³⁶ *Indianapolis Recorder*, 28 March, 11 April, 18 July, September 1942.

³⁷ *Indianapolis Recorder*, 2 January, 13 February, 10 April, 31 July, 2 October 1943, 8 April, 15 April, 8 July 1944.

³⁸ *Florida Sentinel*, 27 April, 4 May, 21 September 1946, 29 March, 12 April 1947. On Aaron and the Clowns, see Joel H. Cohen, *Hammerin' Hank of the Braves* (New York: Scholastic Book Services, Inc., 1971), 19-28; Hank Aaron with Lonnie Wheeler, *I Had a Hammer: The Hank Aaron Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 23-39; Hank Aaron with Dick Schaap, *Home Run: My Life in Pictures* (New York: Total Sports, 1999), 23, 34-35, 38-39, 188-191.

³⁹ "Baseball's Comedy Kings," *Ebony*, 14 (September 1959), 67-70; "Indianapolis Clowns: The Funny Men of Baseball," *Sepia*, 14 (August 1965), 60-64; Al Harvin, "Clowning Helps Keep Indianapolis Clowns Integrated," *New York Times*, 30 May 1971; Bill Heward with Dimitri V. Gat, *Some Are Called Clowns: A Season with the Last of the Great Barnstorming Baseball Teams* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1974); *Indianapolis Clowns Souvenir Program and Funbook*, 1958, unpaginated.

⁴⁰ P. Mills, "Clowning in the Negro Leagues: A Disgrace or Grand Tradition?" *Black Ball News* (October 1999), available on the internet at: <http://www.negroleaguebaseball.com/1999/October/clowning.htm>