

BASEBALL DIPLOMACY, BASEBALL DEPLOYMENT:
THE NATIONAL PASTIME IN
U.S.-CUBA RELATIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

The game of baseball, a shared cultural affinity linking Cuba and the United States, has played a significant part in the relationship between those nations. Having arrived in Cuba as a symbol of growing American influence during the late nineteenth century, baseball would come to reflect the political and economic connections that developed into the 1900s. By the middle of the twentieth century, a significant baseball exchange saw talented Cuban players channeled into Major League Baseball, and American professionals compete in Cuba's Winter League.

The 1959 Cuban Revolution permanently changed this relationship. Baseball's politicization as a symbol of the Revolution, coupled with political antagonism, an economic embargo, and an end to diplomatic ties between the Washington and Havana governments largely destroyed the U.S.-Cuba baseball exchange. By the end of the 1960s, Cuban and American baseball interactions were limited to a few international amateur competitions, and political hardball nearly ended some of these.

During the 1970s, Cold War détente and the success of Ping Pong Diplomacy with China sparked American efforts to use baseball's common ground as a basis for improving U.S.-Cuba relations. Baseball diplomacy, as the idea came to be called, was designed to be a means toward coexistence and normalization with the Castro government. Ultimately, despite a taking few swings during that decade, baseball diplomacy—unable to surmount the obstacles, either within politics or within professional baseball—failed to produce any actual games between Cuban and Major League Baseball teams.

As Cold War *détente* evaporated into the 1980s, baseball's role in the U.S.-Cuba political relationship changed. Efforts to boost Cuban exposure to Major League Baseball developed as part of a general policy to use American culture and influence to erode Communism. This practice of deploying baseball as a political weapon continued into the 1990s. Unlike earlier efforts at baseball diplomacy, which were designed to improve U.S.-Cuba relations, baseball deployment aimed to provoke a democratic regime change in Cuba. This dissertation examines how politics have complicated U.S.-Cuba baseball exchanges, and traces the sport's contradictory use through baseball diplomacy and baseball deployment.

DEDICATION

For my family...

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INTRODUCTION

Cuba has always occupied a significant place in American foreign policy. From the early history of the United States, Cuba served as a point of legal trade and illegal smuggling for the nearby colonies in British North America. In the early decades after American independence, U.S. presidents and policymakers, looking to defend their young republic against European aggression, kept a watchful eye on Cuba—then a Spanish colony. The most notable statement of American foreign policy during this time, the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, though delivered as a broad policy against European colonization in the hemisphere, was chiefly geared toward keeping Great Britain from acquiring Cuba.¹

American interest in acquiring this Caribbean neighbor as an important strategic point also derived from this era. Initially, both sides had a mutual interest in annexation. Cuban sugar planters, who depended on slavery and feared for that institution's future amidst declining Spanish power, began seeking to join the United States, which maintained a similar plantation labor system in its southern states. Though slavery's abolition in the 1860s in the United States nullified this consideration, increasing American economic ties during the latter nineteenth century perpetuated a relationship characterized by U.S. dominance and Cuban subservience. The United States' role in Cuban independence, beginning in 1898, and the ensuing 1903 Platt Amendment, cemented this relationship for first half of the twentieth century.²

¹ Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 411.

² Rex A. Hudson, ed., *Cuba: A Country Study*, Fourth Edition (Washington, Government Printing Office, 2002), 20.

In the late 1950s, the Cuban Revolution sought to destroy this power dynamic. Being a quasi-colony to the United States generated economic frustration and political mismanagement, and enabled Fidel Castro's January 1959 ascension to power. Under Castro, Cuba took steps to free itself of American influence, while simultaneously transforming the U.S-Cuba relationship from one of cooperative dependence to one of antagonism. As post-Revolutionary economic policies damaged American-owned enterprises, Castro committed the ultimate sin, from the American perspective, by strengthening Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union. As a result, Cuba-U.S. ties became a casualty of the Cold War.

Today, Cuba is one of the United States' last remaining Cold War foes. In the two decades since the breakdown of the Eastern Bloc, the reunification of East and West Germany, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union ending the Cold War, both Russia and China have developed into significant trading partners, if uneasy American political allies. Cuba, along with Bhutan, Iran, and North Korea, make up the four nations worldwide that do not have diplomatic relations with the United States, and of those four, Cuba is the only nation to which the United States government restricts travel.³

Washington's lingering hostility toward Cuba hinges on the Castro regime's perpetuation. Though Fidel ceded power to his brother Raúl in 2008, the fact that a Castro remains in charge of Cuba, combined with resistance from the powerful Cuban exile political lobby in the United States, diminishes any hope of reconciliation in the near future. Since the 1960s, with a few limited exceptions, the United States has focused its Cuban policy toward regime change. Though the measures employed for this purpose have varied in scope—the most

³ "Cuba Country Specific Information," United States Department of State, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1097.html#entry_requirements.

direct being the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion and the Central Intelligence Agency's efforts to assassinate Castro through Operation Mongoose and other programs involving the Mafia—economic sanctions have been the primary weapon.

Begun under the Eisenhower administration, which in October 1960 announced prohibitions against trade with Cuba, and officially instituted by President John F. Kennedy in February 1962, the embargo has become the centerpiece of the United States' Cuba policy and continues to define the relationships, not only between the governments in Washington and Havana, but between all Cubans and Americans. The embargo is designed to topple the Castro regime by bringing economic pressure on Cuba through a policy of isolation. Despite some modifications over the past half-century, the basic principle of the embargo remains in place: with limited exceptions, Americans may not travel to Cuba, purchase Cuban goods, or spend any money which could help the Cuban government.

The embargo has stood as an obstacle to diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba. It has also obstructed relationships and exchanges between most Americans and Cubans. Because of geographical proximity and historical economic ties, the United States and Cuba participated in a healthy cultural exchange prior to the Cuban Revolution. Perhaps the most significant component of this trade was baseball. The sport played a critical role in the development of national identity in the United States. The same is true for baseball in Cuba. Called the "national pastime" in the United States, baseball in Cuba is unequivocally known as the national passion.

The baseball relationship, moreover, mirrors in many ways the historical relationship between Cuba and the United States. Having developed into a popular form of entertainment and recreation in the United States during the nineteenth century, baseball made its way into

Cuba by the end of the century, joining the growing numbers of American dollars invested in the island. As the nineteenth century concluded, American imperialism reached a watershed moment. In 1898, the Spanish-American War won the United States its first overseas territory in the Philippines, while establishing a greater thrust of power in the Caribbean by bringing Puerto Rico into the American fold and winning independence from Spain for Cuba. The 1903 Platt Amendment ensured that the Havana government would remain in a close, dependent relationship with Washington. At the same time, the predominance of the American League and National League in the United States meant that developing professional leagues in the Caribbean region, including those in Cuba, remained in a close, dependent relationship with U.S.-controlled Organized Baseball.

The breakdown of the U.S.-Cuba political relationship, which began in 1959, also necessitated a breakdown in the baseball relationship. Severed diplomatic ties, coupled with the embargo, greatly restricted the baseball exchange, and afterward the sport developed more autonomously in each nation, overlapping in fewer instances. In the United States, baseball continued its growth in a dualistic role: part recreation, part enterprise. While Little League baseball represents the former, Major League Baseball embodies the latter. The sport's entertainment value allowed it to grow into a multi-billion dollar industry in the United States, and prices, team revenue, and player salaries have continued on an upward trend. In Cuba, baseball became both a weapon and a reward of the revolution. The state heralded the sport as a right of the people, both in its recreational and entertainment value. Cuba developed a national recreation system to provide fields and equipment to the public, while also abolishing professional leagues in favor of a state-run circuit stocked with "amateur" athletes.

Baseball has thus developed in worlds apart since the Cuban Revolution. Prior to 1959, both sides participated in an extensive, if uneven, baseball exchange. Cuban players regularly competed in the American major leagues, and many American players visited Cuba for spring training and to participate in Caribbean winter leagues. Much of this came to an end after 1960, however, and a dynamic of competition, rather than cooperation, came to characterize U.S.-Cuba baseball exchanges. Politics has shaped the baseball relationship between Cuba and the United States ever since. On one hand, diminishing baseball exchanges represent a casualty of the Cuban Revolution and the Cold War. Baseball as a part of culture, however, also signifies a lingering connection and source of mutual affection between two nations that have precious few ties. Because of baseball's popularity in both countries, the sport has provided opportunities for exchanges between Washington and Havana, and interactions connecting Americans and Cubans.

This dissertation examines baseball's saga within the larger context of U.S.-Cuba diplomacy. Doing so reveals how international politics has complicated the baseball relationship and manipulated athletic exchanges between Cuba and the United States. The sport has often found itself cast as both carrot and stick in the U.S.-Cuba divide. Baseball has, conversely, been employed as a medium of cultural exchange in attempts to encourage diplomacy between two governments at odds with one another, while also being deployed as a propaganda weapon to demonstrate the superiority of one political system over another.

Taken separately, the U.S.-Cuba relationship, Cuba's baseball history and influence in American professional baseball, and the overlap between sports and politics have received ample attention in print. There are a multitude of works that shed light on the complicated political relationship between the United States and Cuba. Louis Pérez, Jr. provides an excellent

overview of the pre-Revolutionary U.S.-Cuba relationship in his book *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* and continues this narrative into the post-Cold War era in his recent work, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*. Pérez's *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* also highlights baseball's role in establishing Cuban cultural allegiance to the United States. Richard Gott's recent work, *Cuba: A New History*, also provides a helpful summation of Cuban history and where this history has overlapped with the United States. Books on the Cuban Revolution abound, and among the many excellent volumes are Jorge Ibarra's *Prologue to Revolution: Cuba, 1898-1958*, Marifelli Pérez-Stable's *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, Aviva Chomsky's *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, and Samuel Farber's *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered*. Lars Schoultz provides a comprehensive overview of U.S.-Cuba developments since the Revolution in his recent book, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*. Silvia Pedraza's volume, *Political Disaffection in Cuba's Revolution and Exodus*, outlines some of Cuba's political challenges stemming from the active exile community in the United States. A number of outstanding volumes exist on the more notable episodes in U.S.-Cuba relations, such as the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Cuban baseball—because it is relatively unknown to the American public and maintains an aura of mystique thanks to the Castro regime's secretive nature and the team's prolific success in amateur international competition—has been a popular topic for sports writers, baseball enthusiasts, and historians. Peter C. Bjarkman is the preeminent authority on Cuba's baseball history, having written a number of volumes chronicling the sport's development on the island. Bjarkman followed up his 1994 book on baseball in the Caribbean, *Baseball with a Latin Beat*, with a more nuanced 1999 account of Cuban baseball history, *Smoke: The Romance and Lore of Cuban Baseball*. His comprehensive 2007 work, *A History of Cuban Baseball*, is a definitive

account, encompassing the stories of pre and post-Revolutionary baseball leagues, Cuba's dominance as an international baseball powerhouse, as well as recounting some of the overlap between baseball and politics. Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría's 1999 book, *The Pride of Havana*, focuses on Cuban baseball on the eve of the Revolution. Two works published in 2000, Milton Jamail's *Full Count* and S.L. Price's *Pitching Around Fidel*, examine baseball's development in Cuba since the Revolution, putting particular attention on how the Castro regime uses the sport as a political tool, and how the end of the Cold War created challenges for the baseball status quo in Cuba. More generally, scholars have recently devoted greater attention to Latin American influence in American professional baseball. Two volumes released in 2011, *Latinos in U.S. Sport*, a combined effort from Jorge Iber, Samuel Regalado, José Alamillo, and Arnolde De León, as well as Lou Hernández's *The Rise of the Latin American Baseball Leagues*, reflect this trend.

Scholars have also explored the relationship between sports and politics. Most of the literature to this end focuses on U.S.-Soviet competition, and in particular the Cold War's impact on the Olympics and other international competitions that pitted east against west. While U.S.-Cuba exchanges are not as emphasized, these books establish the same theme, linking sports achievement with political propaganda and victory with political justification, which both sides eagerly embraced during the Cold War. At the forefront of this literature are James Riordan's *Sport, politics, and communism*, Barrie Houlihan's *Sport and International Politics*, Alfred Erich Senn's *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games*, and *The International Politics of Sport in the Twentieth Century*, a collection of essays.

To date, however, there have been no full-volume accounts that place the U.S.-Cuba baseball relationship entirely within the context of the U.S.-Cuba political relationship. Though

some of the general overviews of U.S.-Cuba diplomacy note the importance of baseball as a long-standing cultural link between these estranged nations, the sport's development amidst the backdrop of U.S-Cuba history is not a major focus. Similarly, many of the outstanding recent works on Cuba's baseball history are geared more toward detailing the history and influence of the sport for its own sake, rather than tracing the political impact on baseball's development, or efforts to employ baseball exchanges as political tools. This dissertation seeks to be the first complete volume on U.S.-Cuba "baseball diplomacy" and "baseball deployment." The former term was first used in the 1970s to describe specific efforts at using high-profile exhibition baseball games to generate political goodwill between the Washington and Havana governments. Though this term was revived in the late 1990s and used to describe a 1999 exhibition series between the Baltimore Orioles and Cuba's national baseball team, the latter label, "baseball deployment," more accurately describes that exchange. Beginning in the 1980s and continuing through the 1990s, the United States looked to deploy cultural connections, including baseball, to generate discontent against the Castro regime. Between the United States and Cuba, baseball, diplomacy, and politics have been intimately linked since the sport's inception.

Chapter one provides a brief history of U.S.-Cuba relations leading up to the mid-twentieth century, and examines how baseball came to be a part of the economic and cultural exchanges between these two nations. It culminates with Cuba becoming a part of American Organized Baseball and participating in the minor league system that channels talented players into Major League Baseball. Chapter two examines Cuba's role as a minor league outpost in the context of growing political and economic turmoil, which culminated in the Cuban Revolution. Chapter three discusses the consequences that severed political ties had for the baseball exchange and explores how the sport changed from a cooperative to competitive venture between the

United States and Cuba during the 1960s. Chapters four and five focus on the Cold War détente of the 1970s, and reveal multiple failed efforts to use baseball diplomacy to improve the U.S.-Cuba political relationship. Chapter six explores how the end of détente and the reemergence of Cold War antagonism in the 1980s ended hopes for baseball diplomacy and began to transform baseball into a weapon, deployed against the Castro government. Chapter seven examines how the end of the Cold War solidified the concept of baseball deployment. Under the belief that Castro's downfall was immanent, U.S. policies during the 1990s sought to accelerate the Post-Cold War economic crisis in Cuba and use growing baseball goodwill and interactions between Cuba and the United States to undermine Cuba's government. This would lead increasing numbers of its ballplayers to defect to the American major leagues—defections that did little to endear the United States to the Castro regime. Chapter eight describes the 1999 exhibition series between the Baltimore Orioles and Cuba's national baseball team as the culmination of baseball deployment. A short epilogue assesses the U.S.-Cuba relationship, through baseball and politics, since 2000.

CHAPTER ONE

Stitches that Bind: Political and Cultural Linkages Prior to the Cuban Revolution

The ties linking Cuba and the United States are older than either nation. Commercial exchanges, beginning in earnest during the eighteenth century while both were colonies of European kingdoms, laid the foundation for the political ties that developed later. Much of this initial trade, in fact, was illicit, as merchants from the respective British and Spanish colonies circumvented navigation laws and took advantage of sporadic enforcement to make money through smuggling. Such commerce ensured a market in the north for the surplus of Cuban exports—in particular beef and leather—that the Spanish colonial system could not consume unilaterally.¹

Cuba-North American trade received a major boost during the Seven Years' War when British forces in 1762 seized control of Spanish-held Havana. The ensuing occupation, which lasted until 1763, temporarily abolished Spanish restrictions. An economic free-for-all resulted as American and British merchants flooded the island and strengthened commerce between Cuba and North America. This also ensured an influx of slave labor that, in turn, expanded production of Cuban sugar—soon to be the most notable export. A little more than a decade later, the American Revolution further enhanced trade as Spain opened Cuban ports to American vessels with the hopes of financially capitalizing on trade with the rebelling colonies while also

¹ Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University, 2004), 30.

politically undermining the British. The liberal approach did not last, however, and by the middle of the 1780s Spain had reverted to its former ways, prohibiting most trade in Cuba outside of the Spanish realm. The United States, having lost easy access to Cuban commercial posts, shifted much of its trade with neighboring Haiti, then the French colony of Saint-Domingue. Beginning in 1791, the Haitian slave rebellion devastated that island's economy and, along with Spain's relaxing its restrictions, created an opportunity to rekindle trade ties between Cuba and the United States. Despite hefty Spanish tariffs, Cuba shot to the front of the Caribbean sugar industry and this trade generated a lasting financial link with North America. By 1850, the United States had become Cuba's top trading partner. Much of the island's consumer goods were being imported from North America, and by the 1830s, U.S. citizens settling in Havana had become a conspicuous presence.²

I

In a reversal of Henry Cabot Lodge's 1895 promise that "commerce follows the flag," U.S. political involvement in Cuba flowed from financial interests. As a young republic, the United States sought to ensure its own survival by diluting European power in the hemisphere. Cuba was important to U.S. interests for its economic value as a trading partner and for its strategic value, due to its geographical position at the crossroads of the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. In his book, *Cuba in the American Imagination*, Louis A. Pérez, Jr. argues for the island's prominence in early American development: "Americans developed a sense of nationhood that almost from the outset envisioned the inclusion of Cuba as part of the national territory." Early in the nineteenth century, the United States had already demonstrated an

² Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1997), 1-12; Gott, *New History*, 67-68.

opportunistic eye for territorial expansion, having added the Louisiana Territory (1803) and Florida (1819) to its domain.³

U.S. expansionist zeal soon focused on Cuba. Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison sent representatives to the island to gauge local interest in annexation during the early nineteenth century. While Cubans were initially lukewarm to this idea, by the 1820s concerns over slavery drove both nations to reexamine this question. Slave commerce between Cuba and the American South had intensified since the American Revolution, and geography meant that such southern ports as New Orleans, Louisiana and Mobile, Alabama were important to Cuban commercial ties. American southerners understood that Cuba's annexation would boost the political power of their region by adding another slave-holding state to the Union. Cuban plantation owners likewise believed that joining the United States was the surest way to preserve slavery in their homeland. Great Britain, which had banned the slave trade among its own colonies in 1807, convinced Spain to do the same in 1817. This was a foreboding sign to pro-slavery Cubans, who feared that Spain's slave-trade prohibition would eventually extend to slavery itself. That annexation would also remove cumbersome Spanish tariffs and allow for free trade with the United States was an enticing bonus.⁴

The annexation push subsided in the United States, however, once American leaders considered the total cost. Though the prospect of dislodging Cuba from Spain was appealing, the United States could not expect to do so without a fight. If annexation went forward, war with Spain was a certainty and war with Britain, whose leaders hoped to stem American power in the

³ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2008), 25.

⁴ Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 13-43; Thomas M. Leonard, *Encyclopedia of Cuban-United States Relations* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2004), 249; Lawrence A. Clayton, "Bridging the Gulf: The Alabama-Cuba Connection," *Alabama Heritage* (Winter 2005) 12-13; Hudson, *Country Study*, 20

Caribbean, was a possibility. Considering these contingencies, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams concluded in 1821 that the United States was better off accepting Spanish control of Cuba and the peace that accompanied it, rather than going to war to acquire the territory. Adams couched his appeal on the “ripe fruit” theory, which held that when the time was right, Cuba would fall into the American orbit.⁵

The American focus thus shifted from annexation to perpetuating the status quo. Believing Cuba incapable of self-government, and fearful that an independence movement could arouse a slave rebellion that may spread to the American South, the United States sought to ensure that Cuba would not come under the rule of any nation except Spain. The surge of Manifest Destiny during the 1840s did revive hopes for acquiring Cuba. The United States made two major thrusts to purchase the island—the first in 1848 by President James K. Polk and the second through the 1854 Ostend Manifesto—but Spain rejected both offers. Soon after, the growing anti-slavery movement and the ensuing Civil War in the United States killed any remaining chances of acquiring Cuba.⁶

With annexation a failure, Cuba continued to languish as a Spanish colony into the mid-nineteenth century. Political upheaval across the Atlantic brought about a return of rigid trade restrictions that hurt Cuban trade with North America. Combined with an economic depression, steep tariffs incensed Cubans and led to the first major struggle for independence from Spain, the Ten Years’ War. Though the Cuban effort was unsuccessful, at the end of the war in 1878 Cuba’s economy needed a massive infusion of new capital to help rebuild industries that had decayed in the preceding decade. The American dollar flow to the island accelerated and many

⁵ Clayton, “Alabama-Cuba,” 13.

⁶ Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 38-45; Leonard, *Encyclopedia*, 1-3, 249-250.

Cuban plantation owners, formerly independent proprietors, found themselves bought out by American corporate interests. By the 1890s, U.S. investment in Cuba's sugar industry had surpassed \$30 million. Economic turmoil and warfare drove more Cubans to migrate to the United States (an estimated 100,000 left the island during the first year of the war), while the increase of American dollars brought more Americans to Cuba. Cultural exchanges were a natural outgrowth of these other interactions, and baseball was one such currency of trade.⁷

Baseball's exact origins in the United States have long been the subject of debate. The traditional narrative held that a future-U.S. Army general named Abner Doubleday developed baseball in Cooperstown, New York during the late-1830s. Today, most historians discount the Doubleday narrative as an unfounded myth. Baseball appears to have derived from two English sports: cricket, which dates to the Late Middle Ages, and rounders, which is thought to have developed in the 1700s. The oldest known printed reference to "base-ball" also comes from England, in a 1744 pocket book. Elements of these bat and ball games appear in America's past as early as the eighteenth century. The first printed reference to "base ball" in America came in 1791 from Pittsfield, Massachusetts, courtesy of a town bylaw. This prohibition banned "base ball," along with cricket and any game involving a ball, within eighty yards of the town meeting hall, presumably to prevent broken windows.⁸

Baseball in America grew with urbanization and industrialization, serving initially as an enjoyable way for men in cities to spend their free time. The game's notoriety increased thanks to newspaper coverage, most famously from Henry Chadwick, and by the 1840s organized leagues and teams developed. The first squad, the New York Knickerbocker Club, played their

⁷ Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 49-54; Leonard, *Encyclopedia*, 250; Gott, *New History*, 79; Williams, *Columbus to Castro*, 364.

⁸ National Baseball Hall of Fame Museum, Cooperstown, NY.

inaugural game in 1842, and three years later published the first set of official rules. The sport developed a significant fan following by the next decade and clubs began charging admission to watch games.

The introduction of money transformed the sport into an enterprise and 1858 witnessed the establishment of the National Association of Base Ball Players, whose membership grew to over sixty clubs in two years. Though this organization tried to maintain the game as an amateur competition, by the 1860s more and more teams were recruiting and paying the best players they could find for their services. Clubs had already figured out that the best players drew the largest numbers of spectators. This transformation toward professional sport culminated in 1876, when William A. Hulbert of Chicago formed the National League, which standardized schedules and player contracts, and created an organized structure for baseball in the United States.⁹

The Doubleday story, though debunked, nonetheless plays an important role in baseball's long-standing identity as an American institution. In *Ambassadors in Pinstripes*, Thomas Zeiler details how sporting goods magnate Albert Spalding, one of the most powerful forces in the game at the turn of the twentieth century, used the Doubleday story to forge an identity for baseball that was distinctly American. With the support of Major League Baseball, Spalding funded an investigative panel to confirm the sport's American roots. The Mills Commission, as it has come to be known, argued that baseball did not develop out of any "foreign game," and credited Doubleday with inventing the sport. Spalding gained further notoriety for sponsoring the 1888-1889 World Baseball Tour that bore his name. The tour sought to expand the global appeal of this "American" game. Spalding was also concerned that other nations were playing

⁹ David Nemecek, et al., *The Baseball Chronicle: Year-By-Year History of Major League Baseball* (Lincolnwood: Publications International, 2001), 8-9; Frank Ceresi and Carol McMains, "The Origins of Baseball," <http://www.baseball-almanac.com>; Rick Wolff et al., ed., *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 9th edition, (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 1-13.

the sport by slightly different rules, so he printed non-English editions of his *Spalding Guide*, with the league-approved version of baseball rules. Because of the efforts of men like Spalding, baseball's American identity has overshadowed its English origins and the sport has long been associated, worldwide, with the United States.¹⁰

Having become so popular in North America, baseball inevitably made its way to Cuba by traveling along the same lines that economic ties had established. By the middle of the eighteenth century, well-to-do Cubans were regularly sending their children off to school in the United States, which offered more opportunities in higher education than could be found at home. One such Cuban student, Nemesio Guilló, brought baseball back to the island with him. Guilló left Cuba in 1858 to attend Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama. When he returned home six years later, he carried with him a bat and ball. Guilló began organizing games with other classmates returning from the United States and these contests, played in public areas, attracted curious attention and eventually drew in others. By 1868, Guilló had helped found the Havana Base Ball Club and was playing as the team's right fielder. That same year, the club traveled to Matanzas and played a game, which they won, against the crew of an American ship docked in the port for repairs. Though not political in nature, this game loosely constitutes the first documented episode of U.S.-Cuba "baseball diplomacy." As the numbers of American crewman in Cuba grew, these types of baseball contests became a regular occurrence.¹¹

The end of the Ten Years' War in 1878 provided baseball in Cuba with another boost. Many Cubans who had moved to the United States to seek refuge from the fighting became

¹⁰ Thomas W. Zeiler, *Ambassadors in Pinstripes: The Spalding World Baseball Tour and the Birth of the American Empire* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 157-160, 188.

¹¹ Roberto González Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball* (New York: Oxford University, 1999), 90-92; Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868-1898," *Journal of American History* 81 (September 1994): 504.

baseball players and baseball fans while abroad. Their return meant an influx of enthusiastic baseball participants to Cuba. The game's development on the island mirrored, in many ways, its growth in the United States. Increased participation brought increased attention, both from fans and from the newspapers that publicized the sport, and professional leagues formed soon afterward.¹²

As in the United States, baseball in Cuba developed major cultural significance and became ingrained in the island's identity. Many Cubans held an affinity for American imports, and Cubans enthusiastically adopted baseball. Historian Louis Pérez, Jr. describes how the sport held particular significance in the island's struggle to be free. By the late nineteenth century, reformers and revolutionaries viewed baseball's growth as a positive omen. Cubans saw baseball as a symbol of progress and taking part in games made one a part of this progress, as the sport served as a demonstration of forward thinking and a reflection of the vanguard. It allowed Cubans to become agents in the march toward the future—a future they hoped would bring freedom.¹³

Playing and attending baseball games was a political act at the end of the nineteenth century. Cubans' embrace of the American game reflected a deep-seated preference for their North American neighbor over their colonial lords. That Cubans also rejected bullfighting—a Spanish import—further exemplifies this preference. For Cubans disillusioned with Spain, bullfighting reflected the worst of Cuba under colonial rule. The sport was a relic of a past many Cubans wished to leave behind: it was elitist and individualist, it showcased violence and bloodlust, and attendance at bullfights was strictly a male affair. Baseball, on the other hand,

¹² Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999), 76; -----, "Baseball and Bullfighting," 497-500.

¹³ Pérez, Jr., "Baseball and Bullfighting," 505.

was cooperative and emphasized teamwork. It was civilized and wholesome. It was democratic and open to Cubans of all classes and both sexes. By taking up baseball and shunning bullfighting, Cubans were refusing to accept the identity that colonialism attempted to force upon them. The American game, Pérez asserts, “sharpened the distinctions between Cubans and Spaniards when those distinctions were increasingly assuming political implications.”¹⁴

American investment and the United States’ importance to Cuba as a trading partner continued to stitch together Cuban and American interests toward the end of the nineteenth century. By the 1890s, Americans had invested an estimated fifty million dollars in Cuba. Economic trouble during that decade, however, once again prompted political upheaval. While the United States had expanded free trade with Cuba through the 1891 McKinley Tariff, the economic downturn two years later prompted a backlash of protectionism. The following year, the Wilson-Gorman Tariff reestablished the tax on imported Cuban sugar. When Spain responded in kind by raising rates on American imports, Cuba found itself caught in the middle. Frustration over the deteriorating financial picture brought about a resurgence of the *Cuba Libre* movement that had languished beneath the surface since the end of the Ten Years’ War. Armed struggle soon resumed in earnest, as Cuba once again fought to cast off Spanish rule.¹⁵

The outbreak of Cuba’s war for independence in 1895 challenged the United States’ long-standing policy toward its southern neighbor. American officials had committed to the status quo in Cuba, believing Spanish rule to be the best way to protect American interests. Though the United States initially supported Spain’s effort to retain its colony, it had become clear that Spain would be unable to control Cuba in perpetuity. Spain attempted to pacify the

¹⁴ Ibid., 505-509.

¹⁵ Leonard, *Encyclopedia*, 2, 250; Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 73-81.

independence movement with liberal reforms, but to no avail. The United States, along with most wealthy Cuban landowners, opposed independence for fear that a new political system would bring economic upheaval. Spain, however, refused to cede the territory to the United States, leaving intervention as the latter's only option for avoiding outright Cuban autonomy. The Spanish-American War became a springboard for the developing American empire. The United States used the conflict to seize its first territories outside of North America in Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. Though the Teller Amendment, passed in 1898, prevented the United States from acquiring Cuba, the war significantly strengthened their political ties. U.S. military forces occupying Cuba worked with Washington officials to develop and implement policies that would shape Cuba in the American mold. The 1903 Platt Amendment, which authorized American intervention in Cuban affairs, ensured a close and subservient political relationship for the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁶

The Spanish-American War and resulting U.S. Empire were the culmination of a growing American imperialist movement during the second half of the nineteenth century, and baseball had already followed the flag to other parts of the world. The game became a part of the "civilizing mission" that underlined U.S. imperialist sentiments and was used as a hallmark of American culture. Following Commodore Matthew Perry's 1853 visit to Japan, which opened that nation to the United States, baseball soon became one of America's exports. Americans in Japan began playing and promoting the game during the 1860s and organized teams of Japanese players developed there in the next decade. Elsewhere, in Latin America, numerous U.S. military operations spread baseball across the Caribbean. The sport first came to Panama following an 1856 American intervention, and its growth increased markedly at the end of the

¹⁶ Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 84-94; Kyle Longley, *In The Eagle's Shadow: The United States and Latin America* (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 2002), 112.

century when the Panama Canal project expanded the American presence there. Baseball's development in Nicaragua started after American military forces intervened there in 1887 in the interest of the United Fruit Company and increased during the following decade as Nicaraguan students who studied in the United States brought baseball back home with them. In Mexico, despite a persistent myth that Doubleday introduced the sport while occupying Mexico City as an officer during the Mexican War (which includes a claim that Santa Ana's captured wooden leg once served as a bat), baseball crossed the Rio Grande through growing economic connections to the United States. The American employees of the Mexican National and Mexican Central railroads were particularly important in transmitting the sport across the border, and Spalding's sporting goods empire reaching Mexico in the late 1880s helped solidify baseball's popularity.¹⁷

The Spanish-American War also accelerated the baseball relationship between Cuba and the United States. The game's political significance had not gone unnoticed by Spanish authorities, who, since the 1870s, had imposed off-and-on bans against baseball and dissolved teams whose club names carried revolutionary connotations. Spanish rulers re-imposed the baseball prohibition at the outbreak of the war for independence in 1895. U.S. military operations, on the other hand, increased the pace at which baseball integrated itself into Cuban culture. Historians once thought, in fact, that baseball had not come to Cuba until American servicemen brought it there during the Spanish-American War. While American forces occupied Cuba, baseball teams developed among soldiers and sailors, and these teams formed impromptu leagues that competed against one another, and against nearby Cuban clubs. Strengthening political ties between the United States and Cuba increased the levels of baseball exchanges as

¹⁷ Robert Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out: How Baseball Sold U.S. Foreign Policy and Promoted the American Way Abroad* (New York: New Press, 2010), 28-33; William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1987), 17-21.

well. More American teams began traveling to Cuba to play games, and Cuban teams began traveling north on similar baseball tours in the United States. The sport also proved to be useful in pacifying a nation beset by years of struggle and warfare. Baseball, one American minister to Cuba noted, provided young people with a distraction. It kept their minds on the game and off of revolution and upheaval. Baseball's popularity meant that Cubans spent more time on the playing fields and less time on the battlefields.¹⁸

Close political and economic ties linking Cuba to the United States, coupled with the sport's popularity in both countries, would result in frequent baseball exchanges. A number of American Major League Baseball teams and professional players had already visited Cuba by the turn of the twentieth century. The Philadelphia Athletics were the first, coming to Cuba on a baseball tour in 1886. Four years later, the New York Giants spent part of the winter between the 1890 and 1891 seasons playing games in Cuba. During that same offseason, a team comprised of American players from various major league clubs visited the island. Called the "All Americans," the squad swept the five games it played against Cuban opponents. Another American professional composite team by the same name visited the island in 1899. In 1900, the Brooklyn Dodgers, fresh off winning the National League pennant, traveled to Cuba along with the rival New York Giants to play a number of exhibition games against one another, as well as to play friendly contests against a Cuban all-star team. These early exchanges were not one-way only, as in the same year a Cuban team traveled to New York to play baseball against American teams, and the following year another all-Cuban team played games in Florida. Nor were the teams visiting from the United States stocked only with white men. The Cuban X-Giants, then one of the most dominant teams in the American Negro Leagues, also came to Cuba in 1900.

¹⁸ Pérez, Jr., "Baseball and Bullfighting," 511-517.

The X-Giants played ten games against various Cuban professional teams and lost only twice on the trip to an all-star team of Cuban players. A professional women's team from the United States participated in the early baseball exchange as well. Though the name of this team and the identity of its players are unknown, the club arrived in Cuba in 1893 and played against a local men's team from Almendares.¹⁹

II

The developing baseball exchange accelerated in the early twentieth century, mirroring the economic and political ties between Cuba and the United States. The island became a popular destination for baseball players during the winter months, as it offered them the opportunity to make additional money, along with warmer weather. American professional clubs visited Cuba with more frequency, partaking in what were commonly called “barnstorming” tours. The National League's Cincinnati Reds started a spate of such visits from American clubs in 1908, along with the Negro League Brooklyn Royal Giants who visited the same year. The Detroit Tigers played offseason games in Cuba in 1910 and 1911, and the latter year also saw Cuba host the Philadelphia Phillies, the Brooklyn Dodgers, and the New York Giants. The Giants returned in 1920 for a well-documented series of exhibitions against Cuban teams. A number of teams also based their Spring Training activities in Cuba at one time or another, including the Giants (1937), the Dodgers (1941, 1942, 1947), and the Pittsburgh Pirates (1953).

Some of the details of these visits reveal a number of things about the U.S.-Cuba baseball relationship, and how baseball politics in the United States complicated the game in Cuba. Just as the United States and Cuba existed in a quasi-colonial political and economic relationship

¹⁹ Peter C. Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball, 1864-2006* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2007), 136, 424; González Echeverría, *Pride*, 112-120; Elias, *Empire*, 31; Milton Jamail, *Full Count: Inside Cuban Baseball* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2000), 18-21; Pérez, Jr., “Baseball and Bullfighting,” 503, 516.

during the early twentieth century, American Major League Baseball used Cuba as a potential pool of player talent. The increased presence of U.S. professional teams in Cuba led to the signing and exportation of Cuban players to American professional teams. The Cincinnati Reds started this trend following their 1908 barnstorming tour. Just three years later the club signed two Cubans—Raphael Almeida and Armando Marsans—who became the first from their country to play in the American major leagues. While Almeida and Marsans had solid, but not spectacular careers, Cincinnati would also sign Major League Baseball's first star Cuban player: Adolfo Luque. As a pitcher, Luque won at least ten games in every season from 1918 to 1929, peaking in 1923 with a record of 27-8 and a 1.93 earned run average. Clark Griffith, who was a scout for the Reds at this time, would later become owner of the Washington Senators and under his leadership the team featured over thirty Cuban players during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.²⁰

The environment that developed out of recruiting and signing Cuban players was sometimes exploitative. In his article "Latin Players on the Cheap," Samuel Regalado reveals how baseball officials adopted a "neocolonial" approach to baseball talent in the Caribbean, using the high rate of poverty, the *laissez-faire* business environment, and the lack of labor laws to their advantage. While teams such as Clark Griffith's Senators gave dozens of the players the opportunity to play professional baseball in the United States, they also scouted and discarded hundreds more—many of them only teenagers—by relying on a loose arrangement called a "desk contract." This agreement, developed originally by future Dodgers executive Branch Rickey, meant that clubs signed large numbers of players to contingency contracts for little to no upfront money. Once they had inked a prospect to such a contract they had the assurance that no other team would be able to sign the player. They also gained the time necessary to study the signed player more meticulously to better determine the likelihood that the prospect could

²⁰ Bjarkman, *History*, 42-43, 137, 326-327.

develop into a major-leaguer. Those who, upon further review, did not pass the muster, were cut loose and often not given any travel money for the trip back home. Teams could thus mine extensively for talent with very little investment costs. Joe Cambria, probably the best-known pre-revolutionary talent scout for Griffith's Senators in Cuba, is believed to have signed roughly 400 players from the 1930s to the 1950s. One columnist, writing in the midst of the Cuban Revolution in 1958, opined that Cambria "sent more Cubans to the United States than Fidel Castro." The Senators had a reputation for cost-cutting and keeping player payroll at a minimum, and Cambria mirrored his organization's frugality as a scout. A 1962 newspaper article recalling the preponderance of major league scouts in Cuba prior to the Revolution mentioned that Cambria could allegedly land players for "a hot tamale and a handshake." As noted above, however, most of those recruited did not develop into major league prospects.²¹

Signing Cuban players to major league contracts was also complicated, prior to 1947, by the color-barrier that kept black players out of white American baseball. Latin American players, many from both Hispanic and African origins and with a wide array of skin complexions, found themselves at the mercy of an ambiguous law. Because the color barrier was primarily aimed against American blacks, Hispanics were often able to integrate white leagues. Their competing against white players did prompt questions, however. When the Reds signed Cuban players Raphael Almeida and Armando Marsans in 1911, the players' racial heritage came into question. While Almeida was light-skinned, Marsans' darker complexion was of particular concern. Club officials, worried about the public's reaction to the two new, non-white Reds, took steps to ensure that Almeida and Marsans would be considered Hispanic,

²¹ "Bob Addie's Column," *Washington Post*, 3 December 1958, C2; Bob Addie, "Country Stores Pay Off," *Washington Post*, 23 March 1966, E1; Samuel O. Regalado, "Latin Players on the Cheap: Professional Baseball Recruitment in Latin America and the Neocolonialist Tradition," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 8 (Fall 2000): 9-20.

and not African. The team requested that Cuban officials in Havana send documentation proving the players' Spanish heritage, and once this paperwork arrived a Cincinnati newspaper reassured a nervous public that Almeida and Marsans were "two of the purest bars of Castilian soap ever floated to these shores."²²

For many Cubans, racial ambiguity provided a loop-hole against the major league color barrier. A number of Cuban players, in fact, were able to straddle the law and compete on both white and black teams. Howie Haak, who was a scout for the Pittsburgh Pirates and was stationed in Cuba during the 1940s, admitted to having players falsify club forms that attested to their heritage as being completely Hispanic. While such claims and lighter skin complexion typically allowed Cubans to pass as white and play in the major leagues, their almost certain African heritage let them compete in American Negro Leagues as well. Both Almeida and Marsans played on Negro League teams prior to their debuts with the Reds. The same is true for two early Cuban signees of the Senators: Jacinto "Jack" Calvo and José Acosta, both of whom played for Washington in the early 1920s, having developed their skills on Negro League teams during the 1910s. Even Adolfo Luque, the most famous pre-revolutionary Cuban to play in the United States, completed two seasons of Negro League baseball prior to his two decades in the major leagues. Of the thirty-eight Cubans who played in Major League Baseball prior to 1959, sixteen also played in the Negro Leagues at some point.²³

In light of the crossover allowed to some Cuban players, many baseball historians argue that baseball's color barrier was actually broken before Jackie Robinson's heralded 1947 debut with the Dodgers. Peter Bjarkman details how during the 1944 season a dark-skinned Cuban

²² Bjarkman, *History*, 326-328.

²³ Bjarkman, *History*, 134-135, 326-327; González Echevarría, *Pride*, 45.

pitcher named Tommy de la Cruz hurled almost 200 innings for the Reds. De la Cruz's ebony complexion put the club on the defensive over inquisitions about his race. Cincinnati argued that its pitcher was Hispanic, and World War II likely kept intense scrutiny out of the newspapers, but de la Cruz was not invited back the following season, perhaps indicating concerns within the organization over the racial questions.²⁴

Another black Cuban pitcher, Silvio Garcia, nearly beat both Robinson and de la Cruz into the major leagues. The Dodgers scouted Garcia in 1943, but the Cuban never played in the major leagues. There are conflicting accounts over what stood in his way. Originally, some claimed that Dodgers boss Branch Rickey intended to use Garcia to challenge baseball's color barrier, and offered him a contract only to discover that the Cuban had been drafted into the army. That Garcia is thought to have played baseball in Mexico during the 1940s seems to discount the army story, however. More recent scholarship suggests that Rickey deemed Garcia unfit for the Dodgers, either because he was fearful that the Cuban would react violently to racial insults in the United States, or over concerns about Garcia's drinking. According to stories in Cuba, when Rickey asked what he would do if an American fan spit at him, Garcia responded that he would get a knife and stab the offending spectator: "Saco la navaja y lo pico." Garcia thus lacked what an anonymous Cuban scout claimed was essential for early black Cuban players who hoped to play in the United States, "the right attitude...disposition to tolerate racism and accept white rule in baseball" (la actitud correcta...disposición de tolerar el racismo y de aceptar el dominio blanco del béisbol).²⁵

²⁴ Bjarkman, *History*, 148.

²⁵ Peter C. Bjarkman, *Baseball With a Latin Beat: A History of the Latin American Game* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1994), 148; Lisa Brock and Otis Cunningham, "Los afroamericanos, los cubanos y el béisbol," in *Culturas Encontradas: Cuba y los Estados Unidos*, Rafael Hernandez, ed. (Havana: Center for Research and Development of Cuban Culture, 2001), 222.

Not all Cuban players could overcome the color barrier in American professional baseball. Indeed, many of those believed to be among Cuba's best all-time players never had the opportunity to compete in the all-white American major leagues because of their dark complexion. Prior to 1947, many of these black Cuban stars had successful careers in the American Negro Leagues, as well as in Cuban and Mexican professional leagues (which were integrated), where they tallied impressive statistics but received far less recognition in the mainstream press.

One of the earliest examples is José Méndez. Considered the first Cuban star ballplayer to become a fixture in American baseball, Méndez helped the Negro National League's Kansas City Monarchs win three consecutive pennants during the 1920s as a pitcher and shortstop. He also compiled a won-lost record of 72-26 in the Cuban League during his eighteen year career, earning the nickname of "El Diamante Negro" (The Black Diamond). Slugging Cuban outfielder Cristóbal Torriente also starred in the American Negro Leagues. Playing with the Chicago American Giants, Torriente brought excellent defense and power hitting to a club that won the league pennant three times consecutively from 1920-1922.²⁶

Martin Dihigo may have been the best player Cuba ever produced. Known as "El Maestro," Dihigo played every position on the field and batted .305 over the course of his twenty-five year career in Cuba, Mexico and the United States. His most outstanding work was as a pitcher, however. Dihigo posted a career won-lost record of 288-142, and his .670 win percentage as a professional beats a number of all-time greats from the major leagues, including Christy Mathewson and Sandy Koufax.²⁷

²⁶ Bjarkman, *History*, 140-142; National Baseball Hall of Fame Museum, Cooperstown, NY.

²⁷ Bjarkman, *History*, 26-28; National Baseball Hall of Fame Museum, Cooperstown, NY.

Race kept black Cuban stars out of the American major leagues and out of most mainstream American newspapers. Until the 1970s, it also kept them out of Baseball Hall of Fame. Beginning in 1971, the Hall of Fame assembled a Negro Leagues committee to recognize the careers of black baseball players. Dihigo's accomplishments in the American Negro Leagues did earn him induction into the museum in 1977. In 2006, Méndez and Torriente joined Dihigo and today, with Reds star Tony Pérez, they are the only Cuban-born players enshrined in Cooperstown. Of the four, only Pérez played in Major League Baseball. Dihigo, Méndez, and Torriente were shut out because their skin was black.²⁸

That racial identity and racism were less ingrained in Cuban culture did, however, make the island a unique environment for baseball. More liberal restrictions on race meant that Cuba was one of the few places where white players from the major leagues competed against black players. The major league barnstorming tours that became common during the early twentieth century provided rare opportunities for desegregated baseball, and gave black Cuban players a chance to gauge their talents against some of the biggest names in baseball.

In fact, much of the fame surrounding Cuban greats Jose Méndez and Cristóbal Torriente involves their legendary performances against visiting major leaguers. Méndez seemingly made a habit out of spoiling barnstorming players' island vacations. Facing the visiting Reds during their 1908 tour, Méndez threw twenty five consecutive shut-out innings in appearances over three games, including a one-hitter in his first outing. Two years later, he won a contest against the newly crowned World Series champion Philadelphia Athletics. The following year, in 1911, Méndez defeated another American club, this time the National League champion New York Giants. The Black Diamond outshined Giants ace pitcher Christy Mathewson, winning a 4-3

²⁸ Bjarkman, *History*, 140-142; National Baseball Hall of Fame Museum, Cooperstown, NY.

decision and drawing the attention of New York manager John McGraw, who expressed regret that the color barrier prevented him from signing the Cuban pitcher to a contract. The interest in Méndez, coupled with the Reds' recent signings of Cuban players Raphael Almeida and Armando Marsans, actually prompted hopeful speculation from some newspapers that integration would soon follow, with Cuban players of increasingly darker complexions allowing teams to transition to American black players. Such hopes proved to be premature.²⁹

Torriente also gained fame through heroics against barnstorming major league teams. McGraw and the Giants returned to Cuba ten years later, following the 1920 season, for a series of games against Cuban clubs. By this point, touring American teams attracted considerable fanfare in Cuba and the anticipation for this Giants tour was especially high. A Cuban baseball promoter named Abel Linares paid a massive sum (some sources estimate \$20,000) to New York Yankees star Babe Ruth to travel to Cuba and play alongside the Giants. The New Yorkers faced the Almendares team on November 5 in a game that matched Ruth against Torriente, who by then was known around the island as the "Cuban Babe Ruth." Although Ruth had hit a record-setting fifty four home runs during the previous major league season, he went hitless against Almendares, while his Cuban counterpart, Torriente, hit three home runs.³⁰

It bears noting that the mythology surrounding this game seems to have surpassed the history. By most accounts, Torriente's career day at the plate came against a Giants first baseman who was pitching because some of the team's regular starters had not made the trip. Moreover, Ruth and the Giants appear to have been more interested in enjoying the Cuban

²⁹ Bjarkman, *History*, 138-139; González Echevarría, *Pride*, 129-135; Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball was White: A History of Legendary Black Players and All-Black Professional Teams Before Black Men Played in the Major Leagues* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984), 61-62.

³⁰ Bjarkman, *History*, 139; González Echevarría, *Pride*, 157-159; Yuyo Ruiz, The Bambino visits Cuba, 1920: unedited notes regarding the visit of Babe Ruth to Cuba in 1920, National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, NY.

nightlife than playing baseball. The Yankees slugger arrived for the tour two weeks late, and is reported to have lost thousands of dollars on the trip from gambling in Havana. One Cuban newspaper account that appeared the day after Torriente's big game argued that some of the Giants players were still drunk from the prior evening's festivities.³¹

Nonetheless, success against barnstorming white American professionals clearly held high value for Cuban ballplayers, whose exploits became the stuff of legends in their homeland. For black Cubans, barnstorming tours provided their only opportunity to compete against major league opposition. Furthermore, contests pitting American teams against Cuban clubs held political significance that was not lost on the local population. The triumphs of Méndez, Torriente, and others were especially sweet for Cubans, coming on the heels of the 1901 Platt Amendment, the United States' military occupation of the island from 1906-1909, and in the face of increasing political encroachment by their northern neighbors. Cuban scholar Ambrosio Fornet explains that "Subsequent clashes between island teams and their American counterparts...contributed in no small way to reinforce the symbolism of baseball as a ripe area for settling disputes between the two countries" (Posteriores enfrentamientos entre equipos de la isla y sus homólogos estadounidenses ... contribuyeron de modo no desdeñable a reforzar el simbolismo del béisbol como zona pródiga para dirimir disputas entre los dos países).³²

These integrated contests, which were a regular part of major league barnstorming tours in Cuba, came to an end in 1923. That mixed Cuban teams were beating white American clubs drew concern from Major League Baseball Commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis. With an eye toward protecting the league's brand as the premier level in professional baseball, Landis in

³¹Bjarkman, *History*, 139; González Echevarría, *Pride*, 160-162; Ruiz, "Bambino Visits Cuba."

³² Bjarkman, *History*, 138; González Echevarría, *Pride*, 131; Ambrosio Fornet, "Los Gigantes Vencidos," in *La esfera y el tiempo*, Félix Julio Alfonso López, ed., (Havana: Editorial Unicornio, 2007), 87.

1923 banned major league teams from playing against black or integrated teams. Individual major league players still competed on mixed Cuban teams in winter league play, but high-profile match-ups like the one pitting Ruth against Torriente were no more.³³

Cuba persisted as something of a haven for interracial baseball, however. The island continued to field integrated teams for its professional leagues, and some of the biggest American Negro League stars played in Cuba during the winter months. Oscar Charleston, who some believe is baseball's all-time greatest player, competed with the winter circuit Santa Clara club during the early 1920s and led the league in stolen bases and runs scored. James "Cool Papa" Bell also starred in the Cuban winter leagues later in the decade, becoming the first player in a Cuban professional league to ever hit three home runs in a single game. Cuban players also made major contributions in the United States. In addition to Méndez, Torriente and Dihigo—discussed above—over 200 Cubans played in the American Negro Leagues. Cuba's imprint upon black baseball in the United States was so notorious that a handful of Negro League teams incorporated "Cuba" or "Cuban" into their names, including the "All Cubans", the "Cuban X-Giants", the "Cuban Stars", and the "New York Cubans." While the Cuban Giants of the early twentieth century do not appear to have had any native Cuban players on their roster, their name indicates the presence of Cuban players in local leagues, and some historians speculate that the Giants used the Cuban moniker as an attempt to pass themselves off as Hispanic and avoid discrimination.³⁴

When baseball's color barrier finally fell, Cuba also played an important role. Although Jackie Robinson did not make his famous debut with the Dodgers until April 1947, Dodgers president Branch Rickey signed Robinson in October 1945. Like most players, Robinson started

³³ Bjarkman, *History*, 139-140.

³⁴ Bjarkman, *History*, 140-150, 434-441; González Echevarría, *Pride*, 120-121.

in the minor leagues, and began the next season with the Dodgers' farm team in Montreal, the Royals. Controversy over his presence in the Dodgers' 1946 spring training camp in Daytona Beach, Florida prompted changes the following year. Wendell Smith, a sports columnist with the *Pittsburgh Courier* and close friend of Robinson, detailed how resistance from local politicians forced the Dodgers to cancel roughly ten preseason games in Jacksonville, Savannah and Sanford. Frustrated and not wanting to forfeit more money from lost ticket sales, Rickey decided by the end of spring training to move the Dodgers out of Florida for the following season. In 1941 and 1942, the Dodgers had held spring training in Cuba, but had moved to Florida starting in 1943 to ease game scheduling, as several other clubs were already based there. In light of Robinson's presence, however, and because of softer racial prejudices on the island, Rickey selected Cuba to host the Dodgers' camp in 1947. Whereas some Florida cities had sought to keep Robinson from playing during the previous year, Smith reported that a Cuban baseball promoter offered the Dodgers \$25,000 for Robinson to appear in an exhibition against a Cuban team. Although Robinson and the three other black players in the Dodgers' camp were not permitted to stay in the same hotels as their white teammates, spending the preseason in Cuba provided a buffer against Jim Crow laws in the south and the potential distraction from media coverage in the United States.³⁵

Robinson's 1947 debut and the American major leagues' ensuing integration was also part of a changing baseball relationship between Cuba and the United States. With players of all skin complexions now eligible for signing, the conglomerate of U.S. professional leagues known as Organized Baseball accelerated efforts to ensure its teams access to the best talent by reigning

³⁵ Wendell Smith, "The Sports Beat: Them 'Bums' Are Headed for Cuba," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 28 July 1946, Wendell Smith Papers, National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, NY; Wendell Smith, "The Sports Beat: Robinson's Present Status," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 18 January 1947, Wendell Smith Papers, National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, NY.

in Latin American leagues and establishing quasi-colonial dependencies with Caribbean baseball. As a part of this movement, Cuban professional baseball developed into a feeder-system for the American major leagues. U.S. clubs began using the winter leagues to scout Cuban players, as well as to develop young American talent.

The immediate spark for this consolidation originated from the controversy over the Mexican League. Jorge Pasquel, who controlled professional baseball in Mexico, sought to boost the appeal of his circuit by hiring away ballplayers from American professional leagues. Since early in the 1940s, Pasquel's league had imported a number of players—Cubans and Americans—from the Negro Leagues. Notable black ballplayers—including “Cool Papa” Bell and Martin Dihigo—flocked to Mexico under the lure of higher paychecks and a refuge from the segregation and discrimination in the United States. Pasquel's challenge to American professional baseball became more serious, however, when he began targeting white players. Beginning in 1946, he began encouraging high profile major league players to break their professional contracts in the United States and sign with Mexican clubs. For American players, the Mexican League's appeal came from promises of higher pay and an opportunity to escape the reserve clause, which kept them perpetually tied to their teams and gave clubs the upper hand in contract negotiations. While the biggest American major league stars stayed put, a number of them were able to use Pasquel's offers as leverage in dealing with their teams, and about two dozen players did break their American contracts to sign in Mexico.³⁶

The dispute with between Major League Baseball and Pasquel's Mexican League endangered the upcoming Cuban winter season. Responding to Pasquel's player-siphoning, American baseball swung back with its full weight, blackballing those who had left for Mexico,

³⁶ Elias, *Empire*, 165-168.

and threatening to ban those playing with or against players who had jumped their contracts in the United States. This posture was a blatant effort to strong-arm professional leagues in Latin America, and it put Cuba's Winter League in a difficult predicament. While negotiations with American Organized Baseball continued through the 1946-7 winter season, concern over jeopardizing their standing with their American clubs prompted Gil Torres, Fermín Guerra, and a handful of other Cuban ballplayers to form an alternate winter league. Two circuits of teams played winter baseball in Cuba during the 1946-7 season, as Cuba contemplated its future with American professional baseball.³⁷

Ultimately, Cuban baseball yielded to the dominant power to the north. Major league Commissioner Happy Chandler used the Mexican challenge to subjugate Cuba's professional leagues, as well as those in Puerto Rico, Panama, and Venezuela, under the structure of Organized Baseball. In June 1947, Cuba signed a pact that changed the landscape of Cuban professional baseball. The Cuban circuits began to function more like winterized farm clubs, as American professional teams would assign players to the Caribbean to develop certain skills or to learn a new position. At the behest of Organized Baseball, the emphasis in the Cuban Winter League after 1947 was on individual player development and scouting, rather than team success. Winter League clubs also lost control over team rosters. Organized Baseball only allowed players with limited or no major league experience to play on Cuban teams, and an effort by Cuban team owners to hire veteran major leaguers for brief tours as attendance boosts was also struck down, as Commissioner Chandler was fearful that American professionals with bad outings in Cuba would tarnish the image of Major League Baseball. Beginning in 1947,

³⁷ Bjarkman, *History*, 97; González Echevarría, *Pride*, 44-50; Lou Hernández, *The Rise of the Latin American Baseball Leagues, 1947-1961* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), 94-100.

professional baseball in Cuba was made to serve the needs of Organized Baseball in the United States.³⁸

The reward for this voluntary subjugation came from participation in Minor League Baseball, continued economic support from the United States, and incorporation into the most prestigious baseball organization in the world. In the decade leading up to the Revolution, Cuba's quasi-colonial baseball relationship with the United States intensified and the island played a significant role in American Organized Baseball and the baseball exchange.

The unequal relationship that developed around baseball mirrored the subordinate political relationship between Cuba and the United States that had taken shape by the middle of the twentieth century. Cuban baseball leaders chose to retain ties to American Organized Baseball because they believed that the potential benefits of this alliance outweighed the costs and because they could conceive of no better alternative. Likewise, Cuban political leaders opted to continue ties to the United States because they felt that, under the circumstances, doing so was in their best interest. Thus, through the 1950s, Cuba remained subjugated to American power in the political arena as well as on the baseball diamond.

³⁸ González Echevarría, *Pride*, 45-50.

CHAPTER TWO

Toiling in the Minors: Cuba's '50s Farm Teams and the Path to Revolution

Cuba's development as a Minor League Baseball outpost in many ways mirrored its economic and political relationship with the United States by the 1950s. Changes during the 1940s, culminating in the agreement with Organized Baseball, pledged Cuba to serving American needs while protecting Major League Baseball. In much the same way, the United States sought to ensure that Cuba's economy and politics benefitted American interests. Through the early twentieth century, backed by the Platt Amendment, the United States retained strong influence over Cuban political affairs. By the early 1930s, American meddling in the hemisphere, in Cuba as elsewhere in Latin America, had generated enough ill will to warrant attempts at reconciliation. President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to reset relations with the American republics by announcing in March 1933 the Good Neighbor Policy, swearing off unilateral military intervention as an American action.

I

A crisis over the failed regime of Cuban leader Gerardo Machado soon tested the United States' restraint, however. Machado, who had first been elected in 1924, ran for reelection in 1928 and forced a controversial change to Cuba's constitution that extended presidential terms from four years to six. Machado's second term, now lengthened because of this change, faced

the economic collapse of the Great Depression, and opposition to the regime festered among those hit hardest by the economic struggles. Cuban sugar production, valued at \$200 million in 1929, had dropped to \$40 million by 1932. This newly discontented faction joined forces with Machado's long-standing opponents among pro-labor and pro-nationalism groups. Machado's background as director of a U.S. electrical subsidiary in Cuba had long been a point of criticism for Cuban nationalists. By 1933, the United States grew fearful that Machado's rising unpopularity would prompt a revolution, which could unleash social forces—nationalism and communism, in particular—that would threaten American economic interests on the island. Despite pressure from U.S. ambassador Sumner Welles, however, Machado refused to yield power to a U.S.-approved coalition government, instead daring the United States to force his ouster through military intervention.¹

The specter of an American invasion prompted those around Machado to consider the likely outcome of a war with the United States. Cuban army leadership decided that such a fight could not be won, and instead overthrew the Machado regime in August. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, who replaced Machado as president, lasted only three weeks before falling victim to another army instigated uprising. This time it was the “Sergeants’ Revolt,” led by Fulgencio Batista, on September 4. Though the Cuban presidency initially passed to Ramón Grau San Martín, concerns over the number of pro-labor laws immediately enacted under his regime led the United States to put off recognizing Cuba's new government. Weakened by the lack of legitimacy that non-recognition carried, Grau's government was short-lived. In January 1934, Batista struck again, shifting army support to a new president, Carlos Mendieta.²

¹ Leonard, *Encyclopedia*, 123-125; Gott, *New History*, 130, 134; Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 177-193.

² Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 192-201.

Mendieta's government, which the United States recognized, quickly established a close relationship with its neighbor to the north. In exchange for granting the United States perpetual use of the Guantanamo Bay naval station, Cuba received the abrogation of the Platt Amendment. Economic ties grew closer as well, particularly with the Jones-Costigan Act. The law removed U.S. tariffs on Cuban sugar, but replaced the tax with a quota system—a set percentage of the U.S. sugar market that the United States would purchase from Cuba. By substituting the quota system for the old tariff on sugar, the United States was ensuring that Cuban sugar would be available to meet the needs of the American market while also taking steps to protect American sugar growers from Cuban competition.³

Economic ties continued to strengthen into the 1940s. American investments in Cuba increased, and U.S. companies such as Colgate, Proctor and Gamble, Woolworth's, and Coca-Cola expanded their presence in Cuban markets, avoiding import tariffs by establishing subsidiary enterprises on the island. Such favorable economic positioning, combined with geographical proximity, meant that U.S. products dominated Cuba's marketplace. By the end of the decade, U.S.-Cuba trade constituted over seventy percent of the island's foreign commerce, and American dollars dominated the island's major industries such as utilities, railroads, and oil. Even sugar, Cuba's most significant export, drew heavy foreign investment. A 1956 U.S. Department of Commerce study found that American ownership constituted just over forty percent of the island's sugar industry. Because the United States consumed roughly the same percentage of Cuba's annual sugar crop, Cuba could ill afford to alienate its largest trading partner and remained committed to the status quo.⁴

³ Leonard, *Encyclopedia*, 198-199; Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 202.

⁴ Leonard, *Encyclopedia*, 199; Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 202-205, 218-220.

Baseball ties between Cuba and the United States had likewise grown stronger. The breaking of the color barrier in 1947 opened up the American major leagues to Cuban talent of all complexions. That same year also featured the settlement with Major League Baseball over the Mexican League and ineligible players. While solidifying its ties with American Organized Baseball produced, on the one hand, a loss of autonomy, Cuban capitulation demonstrated the lure of American dollars, as well as the aura of the American major leagues. For a number of Cubans, joining forces with Organized Baseball reinforced the idea that Cuban baseball was on par with the major league level and further encouraged hopes that Cuba would one day be home to a major league franchise of its own. Stronger ties between Cuban and American leagues also boosted the baseball exchange, although Organized Baseball's hierarchy, which favored U.S. leagues, meant that these exchanges were increasingly one way. Already a proven pool of player talent, Cuba would export more baseball players to the American major leagues through the developing minor league farm system, of which it had remained a part thanks to the 1947 settlement. Largely due to the island's minor league farm clubs, which fed talent to big league clubs in the United States, more Cuban players debuted in Major League Baseball during the 1950s than any other decade before or since.

Cuba's part in Minor League Baseball began during the critical 1940s decade. In 1946, just as the issues between Organized Baseball and Jorge Pasquel's Mexican League were peaking, the Havana Cubans began play in the Class C-level Florida International League. The ballclub's foundation reflected the growing American baseball interests in Cuba. One of the team's original owners was none other than Washington Senators scout Joe Cambria, who by the 1940s had already discovered a handful of major leaguers in the island's amateur circuits. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Cubans were established as a minor league affiliate team for the

Senators, and this relationship enhanced the channel connecting the Washington franchise to Cuba. Havana's having a direct pipeline to Major League Baseball helped to ease the transition to the big leagues for homegrown talent. With the Cubans playing in a Florida-based league, native players could spend a significant portion of their seasons developing their skills amidst the familiar surroundings of home, and even those Cubans playing with other clubs in Havana's circuit were assured of periodic road trips to Cuba.⁵

The Havana Cubans were an important link to Organized Baseball. The Florida International League approved adding the Havana club late in 1945 and the team played its first season against the league's seven Florida-based franchises in 1946. As the Mexican League controversy developed, and as negotiations between Cuba's Sports Ministry and Organized Baseball continued through the ensuing 1946-47 Cuban Winter League season, Havana's standing as a part of Minor League Baseball was crucial. Both Gil Torres and Fermín Guerra, two of the players who started the alternative Cuban winter league in 1946, were Senator signees and played with the Havana Cubans. Torres and Guerra declined to play in Cuba's regular winter circuit because they did not want to jeopardize their careers in Organized Baseball by ignoring Commissioner Happy Chandler's warnings and competing against ineligible players. That the Havana club featured so many of the island's top players also drove Cuban leaders to defer to the United States. As Organized Baseball pressed Cuban Sports Minister Luis Rodríguez over the issues of contract breaches and ineligible players, American officials understood that Cuba's minor league ties through the Havana team would likely secure its consent against Pasquel and the Mexican League. Visiting the island in March 1946 for a spring training game between his club and the Boston Red Sox, Senators owner Clark Griffith implored

⁵ González Echevarría, *Pride*, 295-296.

Cubans to help Organized Baseball in putting the “outlaw Mexican League” out of business. Chandler, who had traveled to Cuba to take in the Senators’ game as well as to meet with Rodríguez, expressed confidence upon his return that the island would capitulate to the major league agenda. The commissioner surmised that Cubans wanted to be a part of Organized Baseball and that “if they refuse to use outlaw players they’ll be walking in the right direction.”⁶

Havana’s on-field success also confirmed the potential that Cuba held as a talent pipeline for the major leagues. The team, stocked with talent from Cuba’s thriving amateur leagues, was superior to the other teams in its Class C circuit. The Cubans finished first in the league standings in each of their first five seasons, including an incredible 105-45 record (a .700 win percentage) in 1947. The club captured the league’s post-season championship in 1947 and 1948 and reached the final round in each of the next two seasons. A number of future major-leaguers, including soon-to-be Senators Conrad Marrero and Julio Moreno, starred on the Cubans’ roster before joining the big leagues, and Marrero pitched a perfect game with the team during the dominant 1947 season.⁷

The Cubans also carried their nation’s banner and pride as the island’s premier team. Whereas competition among Cuban League teams divided the island along local and provincial lines, the Cubans, though based in Havana, were the home team throughout Cuba. Multiple radio stations broadcasted the club’s games, and Cuba’s biggest newspapers carried stories that detailed the team’s fortunes through the season. Despite playing a summer schedule, which, because of the heat, is not the regular baseball season in Cuba, fans flocked to the stands and the Cubans drew more than 200,000 in total attendance in each of their first four years. With a roster

⁶ González Echevarría, *Pride*, 49; “Cuban Gold Medal To Clark Griffith,” *New York Times*, 11 March 1946, 20; Wendell Smith, “The Sports Beat: The Commissioner Shows Up,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 March 1946, Wendell Smith Papers, National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, NY.

⁷ Bjarkman, *History*, 102.

loaded with homegrown talent and as the island's lone representative within Organized Baseball, the Cubans boosted the hopes of a nation seeking to break through into the venerated American major leagues.⁸

National pride swelled as the Havana club continued to win games and Cuba's stock in Organized Baseball rose. After the 1948 season, the Florida International League moved up a level to Class B status. Although the club's performance during its last three seasons (1951-1953) did not match its earlier dominance, Cuba's ambitions within Organized Baseball continued to climb. After the 1953 season, the Havana Cubans gave way to progress. In 1954, Havana acquired a Triple-A franchise—the highest classification in the minor leagues—as its new team, the Cuban Sugar Kings, replaced the Cubans and joined the International League. Team owner Bobby Maduro, who had also been part-owner of the defunct Cubans club, had grand ambitions for the new franchise and for baseball in Cuba. When the International League voted to add the Havana club to its circuit, Maduro declared that all of Cuba was excited over the Sugar Kings' debut. He also called Cuba's hosting a Triple-A baseball team “the first step toward eventually becoming a part of Major League Baseball.” The team's slogan, “One more step and we get there,” reflected its mission—and Maduro was willing to pay a hefty price to fulfill this dream. Because the other clubs in the International League—including the Ottawa and Toronto franchises that had originally justified the circuit's name—were grouped together in the northeast, the Sugar Kings agreed to cover the plane fare for visiting teams traveling to Havana.⁹

⁸ Bjarkman, *History*, 102; González Echevarría, *Pride*, 295-296.

⁹ González Echevarría, *Pride*, 336; Roscoe McGowen, “International League Openers Slated for Richmond and Havana April 20,” *New York Times*, 13 January 1954, 35; “International Loop May Go So. Of Border,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 15 January 1954, 3.

The Sugar Kings embodied the ties between Cuba and the United States, both on and off the baseball field. Though erroneously referred to as the “Havana Sugar Kings” in a number of contemporary and reference sources, the club adopted the moniker “Cuban Sugar Kings” to highlight the team’s national identity, and to cite Cuba’s linkage with American baseball, as various Negro League clubs had played under the “Cuban” name. That the club became the Reds’ highest minor league affiliate was also fitting, as that franchise had signed Cuba’s first two major league exports—Raphael Almeida and Armando Marsans—as well as Cuba’s most famous major leaguer to that point, Adolfo Luque.¹⁰ That America’s pastime had developed abroad to such maturity also seemed a good omen for the United States’ global standing. A *New York Times* editorial appearing just after the opening of the 1954 season heralded the Sugar Kings’ debut as a boost in international goodwill. Noting that the distance between International League cities Ottawa and Havana was greater than that of any two cities in Major League Baseball, it surmised that “in another sense, the distance between Cuba, the United States and Canada is now shorter,” concluding that the Sugar Kings participation was “good for hemisphere relations.” The club’s political significance was apparent at its opening day game in Havana against the Toronto Maple Leafs. Canadian ambassador Harry Scott and U.S. ambassador Arthur Gardner participated in the ceremonial first pitch.¹¹

In a larger sense, Havana’s minor league club also reflected the depth of Cuba’s ties to the United States by the 1950s. Despite disadvantages and lacking any other viable alternatives, Cuba had remained politically and economically close to its northern neighbor. North American

¹⁰ González Echevarría, *Pride*, 336.

¹¹ “The Sugar Kings,” *New York Times*, 24 April 1954, 16; “Ole! The Sugar Kings of Havana Make New League Debut Tonight: Crowd of 25,000 Expected in Gran Stadium for International Opener With Maple Leafs—Ambassadors to Start Game,” *New York Times*, 20 April 1954, 37.

prosperity continued to serve as a goal for middle-class Cubans and hopes for attaining this dream prompted Cuba to accept a subordinate relationship with the United States. The same was true in baseball. The 1947 pact with Organized Baseball admittedly imposed limitations on Cuba's domestic leagues, but by accepting the ban on ineligible players and relinquishing control over their winter baseball leagues for use in player development, Cubans with major league dreams preserved the possibility of realizing their hopes.

Such self-interest and weighing of consequences drove a number of decisions in politics, economics, and baseball. American leaders—U.S. ambassador Sumner Welles in 1933 and Baseball Commissioner Happy Chandler in 1946—pressed their advantages into ultimatums. In many cases, Cubans sided with the United States not because it was a perfect choice, but because it was simply the best choice they had. This was certainly the case in the political upheaval of the early-1930s. The 1933 crisis over Machado's presidency, the subsequent Sergeants' Revolt, and the ensuing ouster of Grau—each forced Batista and other officers in the Cuban army to consider their own interests within the terms of the U.S.-Cuba division. In the end, in every circumstance, these elites, who stood to lose much in a war with the United States, decided that a military coup and continued acquiescence to their northern neighbor was a better option. The same was true with regard to the economic relationship with the United States. Though the Jones-Costigan Act and the 1934 Reciprocity Agreement created a favorable Cuban market for U.S. imports at the expense of domestic enterprises, Cuba could not afford to sacrifice its most valuable export by not guaranteeing itself a sugar market in North America. Homegrown efforts at reform and economic diversification could not overcome this reality.¹²

¹² Merifelli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy* (New York: Oxford University, 1993), 20.

A similar scenario developed in the U.S-Cuba baseball relationship. The 1946 Mexican League challenge forced Cubans to take sides. Those who could not afford to jeopardize their positions with American Organized Baseball sided with the United States. Such was the case for Gil Torres and Fermín Guerra, whose contracts with the Senators, hopes for making the major leagues, and fear of receiving a ban that would prevent them from doing so, caused them to form an alternate Cuban winter league, free of ineligible players, during the 1946-47 season. The same was true for Bobby Maduro and the ownership of the Havana Cubans. Existing ties with baseball in the United States and ambitions for one day joining Major League Baseball prompted Cuba's baseball leaders to accept a role—a subordinate one, but a role nonetheless—in Organized Baseball.

Having accepted this part, Cuban baseball continued to pursue its major league ambitions during the 1950s, with the Sugar Kings, starting in 1954, as torch-bearer. Though the team did not dominate its league the way the Havana Cubans did in the Florida International League, the Sugar Kings performed admirably on the field, finishing fifth, third, and sixth in the standings, respectively, during their first three seasons. They did even better at the ticket window, drawing an average of over 275,000 total fans for each the first three years, including a high of 313,000 in their second season. The Sugar Kings, like the Havana Cubans, represented Cuba's baseball identity. Though the club had a number of American players throughout its seven-year existence, the team's identity was distinctly Cuban. It was led by a Cuban owner in Maduro, and coached by a line of Cuban baseball heroes, including Reggie Otero and Tony Pacheco, as well as Preston Gómez, who had played with the Washington Senators. The roster also featured several Cuban stars on both sides of their career arcs. Former big-leaguers Conrad Marrero and Pedro Formental spent time with the Sugar Kings near the conclusion of their professional

tenures, and future Reds players Octavio “Cookie” Rojas, Leo Cárdenas, and Orlando Peña made their way to the major leagues through the Havana club.¹³

Cuba, likewise, continued to serve as a major league market in a number of functions. Through the 1950s, talented prospects drew scouts from North American clubs. Branch Rickey, who had used Cuba as a sanctuary for Jackie Robinson prior to the 1947 season, made repeat visits in the following decade to mine for potential major leaguers. The former Dodgers president, who had left that club to become general manager for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1950, scouted Cuban baseball leagues and sent frequent reports, scribbled on hotel stationery, from Cuba back to the United States. He also sought Maduro’s council on prospects, knowing that the Sugar Kings owner was well-informed on Cuban baseball talent. In a 1955 letter noting Maduro’s “complete coverage” of the island’s baseball circles, Rickey even lamented that “no one else will get any prospective young players out of Cuba except as crumbs as they fall from Bob’s table,” and predicted that the Reds, as the Sugar Kings’ parent club, would soon have a monopoly on the nation’s talent.¹⁴

U.S. teams continued to use Cuba as a spring training site and Cuba’s Sports Ministry eagerly encouraged such visits. Rickey took the Pirates to Cuba for their 1953 preseason training camp after securing an agreement with Cuba’s government. A 1952 contract laid out the arrangement, pledging the Pirates to a minimum five-week stay on the island, as well as committing the team to play up to five exhibition games per week against other big league teams and local Cuban teams. For hosting the Pirates, the Cuban government agreed to pay \$52,000 to the Pittsburgh club and to cover the costs of its exhibition games, and in exchange received the

¹³ Bjarkman, *History*, 102-103, González Echevarría, *Pride*, 337-340.

¹⁴ Branch Rickey, Letter to Branch Rickey, Jr., January 20, 1955, Branch Rickey Correspondence, National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, NY.

ticket sales to the Pirates' spring games, as well as broadcast rights for the contests. Cuba's government made arrangements for the Pirates' travel, lodging, and meals while in Cuba, including providing government planes to transport the team from the United States. Pittsburgh agreed to repay a portion of the \$52,000 back to Cuba in exchange for these accommodations. The Pirates' agreement with Cuba was originally intended to last for three consecutive seasons. Pittsburgh encountered a number of problems during their 1953 stay, however, including sparsely attended games, trouble in scheduling exhibition opponents, and player complaints about lodging, so the club terminated the deal after one year.¹⁵

Pittsburgh's experience notwithstanding, Cuban fans generally provided an eager baseball audience in the 1950s, following the sport in both their own land as well as in the United States. While the Sugar Kings were drawing well in the middle of the decade, baseball also was able to use new technology to tap into Cuba's passion for the sport at the minor league and major league levels. By 1956, a Cuban television station was broadcasting four Sugar Kings games per week, and fans who did not have televisions sought out neighbors who did, as group gatherings to watch games became common. In October, attention turned north, as Cuban fans followed the World Series. Major League Baseball's championship was first broadcast to Cuba on television in 1955 and for the first two years this required considerable innovation. Because there were initially no direct television or telephone lines linking the United States and Cuba, a high-altitude aircraft relayed the on-air television signal from Miami to Cuba during the 1955 and 1956 World Series. For the 1957 World Series, Cubans could enjoy the game via direct telecast for the first time, a product of the close economic ties between Cuba and the United

¹⁵ Agreement between Pittsburgh Athletic Club, Inc. (Pittsburgh Baseball Club) and the Republic of Cuba, May 1, 1952, *Ibid.*; "Pirates Give Up Training In Cuba On Friendly Terms," *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 May 1953, 14; "Pirates May Move 1954 Spring Base," *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 April 1953, 10.

States. In that year, the Cuban Telephone Company, working with its parent American company International Telephone and Telegraph, completed service linking the island to North America.¹⁶

II

By the late 1950s, however, political trouble in Cuba began to undermine its baseball relationship with the United States. Economic turmoil stemming from Cuba's integration with the North American system drove unrest over the course of the decade. Historian Louis Pérez, Jr. notes Cuba's unique predicament as the United States' closest trading partner in Latin America. As discussed above, American industries and enterprises had come to dominate the Cuban marketplace by the 1950s, which created a consumer culture on the island that, Pérez notes, was unmatched anywhere else in the region. On the surface, this had proven to be a relatively beneficial relationship. By the late 1950s, Cuba's standard of living topped that of nearly every other Latin American nation. Average household income in Cuba, at \$374 per year, beat every country except Venezuela, and Cubans enjoyed unparalleled access to utilities and transportation. For most other Latin American nations, Cuba's standing would have prompted envy. As a result of Cuba's being so wed to the American economic system, however, Cubans viewed their economic standing not in relation to their neighbors in Latin America, but to their northern neighbor, the United States.¹⁷

When compared to North American prosperity, Cuba's economy could not keep up. Cubans could not escape the influence of the United States' economy, either. Because the

¹⁶ Charles Friedman, "Picnic For Announcers: Cuban Viewers Like Baseball Telecasts That Have Dramatic Narration," *New York Times*, 15 July 1956, 73; Walter Winchell, "...Of New York: Man in a Hurry," *Washington Post*, 6 October 1956, 29; "Telecast Of Game Grips Cuba's Fans," *New York Times*, 3 October 1957, 35.

¹⁷ Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 226-227.

United States consumed so much of Cuba's top export, and because sugar made up such an overwhelming majority of the island's export trade, the United States exercised enormous power over Cuba's economy through annual adjustments to the sugar quota. At the same time, the 1934 Reciprocal Trade Agreement had established conditions that benefitted American companies in Cuba while hampering domestic industrial development. As a result, U.S. companies dominated Cuba's consumer marketplace and limited competitive choices. This means that Cuban prosperity has to be viewed through North American conditions, rather than those in Latin America, because Cubans were paying North American rates for their purchases. Pérez affirms that because of taxes and distribution costs Cubans paid, on average, thirty-five percent more for the same items than Americans did in the United States. Thus, while Cuba's annual per capita income of \$374 was impressive, it could not compare to the \$2,000 average per capita income enjoyed by Americans. Moreover, despite Cuban export prices having increased sixty six percent since the 1920s, they could not keep pace with import prices, which had gone up eighty five percent. Cuba continued to lose ground, financially.¹⁸

Failure to live up to North American standards generated frustration among Cuba's aspiring middle class, and an economy that grew stagnant over the course of the decade exacerbated the tension. By 1958, per capita income remained where it had been a decade earlier, but prices on food, housing, and consumer goods had risen. Downturns in the sugar market reduced Cuban purchasing power, and increases in the cost of living made Havana one of the most expensive cities in the world. Unemployment was also up. By the end of the decade, nearly one-third of Cuba's population was either out of work or could not find enough work. Amidst this economic decline, Havana began to show other troubling signs. Pérez notes how the

¹⁸ Ibid., 227-230. Pérez-Stable, *Cuban Revolution*, 16.

uptick in North American tourism had generated “commercialized vice” in the form of drug and alcohol consumption, prostitution, and gambling. The last enterprise also brought the presence of American organized crime syndicates, who proceeded to peddle graft and corruption among government officials and contributed to dissatisfaction with the status quo. Outside of the capital, rural Cubans were even worse off. While unemployment rates were slightly lower in the countryside, rural Cubans faced illiteracy rates that were four times higher than the city, had far less access to health care, and were an overwhelming majority lived in homes without running water (eighty five percent) and electricity (ninety three percent).¹⁹

At the same time, Cuba’s relationship with American Organized Baseball was becoming less fulfilling. A number of baseball issues that developed during the 1950s indicated problems within the U.S.-Cuba baseball exchange and stemmed from the 1947 pact that integrated Cuban baseball into the American framework. One such issue was over major league players competing in Cuban leagues. Prior to 1947, American players regularly barnstormed in Cuba as a way to make additional money and hone their skills during the winter months. Because American major leaguers sometimes approached their Cuban sojourns as more of a vacation than a job, however, their level of play was not always stellar. American Organized Baseball, meanwhile, was especially concerned with protecting its image as professional baseball’s premier league, particularly in light of Jorge Pasquel’s effort to steal away players for his Mexican League. Just as Commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis had put an end to integrated barnstorming games featuring major league players in 1923, Organized Baseball set limitations on major league players participating in winter leagues in the 1947 pact with Cuba.

¹⁹ Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 221-225, 230-233; Pérez-Stable, *Cuban Revolution*, 27-29; Alan McPherson, *Yankee No!: Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2003), 51.

The agreement with Organized Baseball changed the composition of Cuban winter baseball. The Winter League agreement went through a number of small changes over the course of the 1940s and 1950s, but limitations on who could play in Cuba remained a constant. Initially, only players with two years or less experience in professional baseball were allowed to play winter ball. Though native Cubans were excluded from the ban, this rule meant that Cuban fans would now be denied visits by veteran major league stars—visits that had been commonplace in the years before. The rule was amended slightly in 1949, allowing all minor league players to participate, but limiting major league participation to those with forty-five days or less on a major league roster. As Roberto González Echevarría argues, player limitation rules necessitated a high level of turnover on Winter League rosters from one year to the next, as those players who acquired too much major league experience had to be replaced. This disrupted team continuity and had a negative impact on the overall quality of the league's on-field product. Furthermore, although the revised agreement did not impose arbitrary limits on Cuban major leaguers from playing winter baseball in their homeland, it did defer to major league clubs for permission. Because the Cuban Winter League was a part of Organized Baseball, Cuban clubs wishing to sign major league Cuban players for winter play had to negotiate contracts with the players' major league teams, and the latter had the right to bar any of their players from participating. Thus, American teams had the power to deny Cuban fans the opportunity to see their home-grown baseball heroes, and the 1954-55 Cuban winter season was marred by the absence of Minnie Minoso, Mike Fornieles, Sandy Consuegra, and Camilo Pascual because their major league teams denied them permission to play. Furthermore, because the agreement with Organized Baseball made Cuba's winter circuit into a developmental league for the major leagues, teams were stocked with raw talents—many of whom struggled or did not pan out—

while native Cuban veterans competed for fewer spots. González Echevarría contends that Cuban fans, who had grown accustomed to seeing a higher level of play, were often disappointed with Winter League baseball under the new arrangement.²⁰

Frustration over the Winter League agreement with Organized Baseball prompted efforts to revise the pact. When Major League Baseball held its annual summer meetings during the 1954 All-Star Game break, the topic of Winter League participation topped the agenda. Caribbean circuits wanted to sign whatever players they could to help bolster their leagues. As expected, players wanted the system to provide them with as much freedom and autonomy as possible. They proposed eliminating the limit on the number of players per team who could participate in winter baseball (At the time it was five players—two rookies and three veterans), as well as allowing players to negotiate contracts with winter teams independent of their major league clubs. Neither of these proposals passed and the revised pact set limitations on how many games per week major leaguers could play in winter leagues and decreed that all Caribbean winter leagues would end their seasons by February 15. That major league teams retained power to keep their players out of winter baseball allowed the Chicago White Sox to keep Minoso, Fornieles, and Consuegra stateside for the ensuing winter season. Major league clubs like the White Sox were singularly interested in their own team's performance, and had grown concerned that players who competed in winter baseball leagues were more susceptible to injury and fatigue as the major league season wore on.²¹

²⁰ González Echevarría, *Pride*, 306-321.

²¹ "Major Leagues Meet Tomorrow: Games Between Loops, Draft Law and Winter Baseball to Be Discussed Here," *New York Times*, 25 July 1954, S3; Roscoe McGowen, "Majors Bar Drills Until March 1; All-Star Game Goes to Milwaukee," *New York Times*, 27 July 1954, 24; "Baseball Accord Reached By Frick," *New York Times*, 28 July 1954, 15; Wendell Smith, "Sports Beat: They're Hot About Winter League Ball Now....," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 August 1955, 22.

By the following year, Caribbean winter baseball leagues sought to take matters into their own hands. The embargo from Winter League play of the three White Sox players, along with the Senators' Pascual, by American major league clubs upset Cuban fans and team owners. That the White Sox had allegedly paid their Cuban players not to participate in their homeland's winter season especially irked Cuban baseball officials, who proposed leveling a four-year suspension from Cuban professional baseball on any native players who did not participate in the Winter League. When the Caribbean Professional Baseball Confederation met in July 1955, its member nations (Cuba, Panama, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela) agreed to a three-year ban against non-participating native players.²²

This action prompted Major League Baseball to revisit the issue. Commissioner Ford Frick met with Caribbean baseball officials in July and August to discuss changes to the winter agreements. Cuban official Monchy De Arcos expressed to Frick just how dire the situation had become for the winter leagues, warning that player restrictions threatened to “kill baseball in the Caribbean and impair relations between the United States and the Caribbean countries.” Minoso, who had first hand experience with the restrictions of the winter agreement, expressed Cuban fans' anxiety in rhetorically asking: “What would American fans say if stars like Ted Williams, Stan Musial, Jackie Robinson and [Roy] Campanella were told they couldn't play in the majors?”²³

Fear of a fallout with Caribbean baseball prompted concessions. Major League Baseball agreed to restructure its winter rules to allow native players more freedom to play in their home

²² Smith, “Sports Beat,” 22; “Winter Ball Defended: Caribbean Group Asks Frick for Meeting on Problem,” *New York Times*, 10 July 1955, S3; “Reaching for Stars: Winter Leagues Want Right to Latin-Americans in Majors,” *New York Times*, 11 July 1955, 26.

²³ Smith, “Sports Beat,” 22; “Players' Plan Studied: Frick Ponders Proposal for Unrestricted Winter Ball,” *New York Times*, 19 July 1955, 33.

nations, while also tightening access to American major leaguers. The revised agreement cut the number of players per major league team who could play winter baseball down to four from five, and also limited the major league experience for any winter league participant to two years. To pacify leagues frustrated at losing their native heroes, however, the agreement granted exceptions allowing all current native-born players to play in their home leagues regardless of experience. In an attempt to cut down on the number of Caribbean players contracted to two clubs (one native team and one major league team), the 1955 deal also established the process through which major league teams would have to purchase a player's contract from his native club before signing him to play in the majors.²⁴

Though the package was an effort at compromise between Major League Baseball and the Caribbean winter leagues, it did not resolve all issues. American team officials bemoaned their star players competing in winter circuits. Frustration with a group of Latin American players prompted Cleveland Indians General Manager Frank Lane to lash out in 1958. Once again, Cuban Minnie Minoso, who by then was playing for Cleveland, was in the middle of the dispute. Minoso, along with Venezuelan Chico Carrasquel and Mexican Bobby Avila, delayed reporting to spring camp that season because they were holding out for better contracts. Lane complained that Latin players who went home for winter baseball were too exhausted for spring training and disputed their contracts as a ploy to get more time off. He chaffed that native Caribbean players “think because they’re natives they can dictate to the clubs,” and were “taking unfair advantage of the rules.” The Indians general manager vowed to propose a ban on winter baseball for any major leaguers, including natives, making more than \$15,000 per year, but it is

²⁴ “Majors and Caribbean Circuits Compromise on Winter Baseball: 4 Big League Players From Each Club Will Be Permitted to Participate—Natives Not Affected By Pact,” *New York Times*, 13 August 1955, 8; “Majors Set New Winter Ball Rules,” *Washington Post*, 13 August 1955, 14.

unclear if he ever actually did so.²⁵ American teams were not alone in their complaints. The 1955 agreement, which prohibited players with more than two years' experience in the major leagues, grandfathered in native players who were already in the American big leagues. By the end of the decade, however, Caribbean leagues once again faced the prospect of their new professionals, who had come up since the agreement was passed, being kept out of their native circuits.²⁶

The shine had also worn off of the crown jewel of the U.S.-Cuba baseball relationship, the Sugar Kings. Although drawing well over 200,000 total fans for each of their first three seasons, the Sugar Kings saw a precipitous drop-off in attendance thereafter. In 1957, the team drew just below 85,000 and per-game attendance had fallen to 1,100, which was down from over 4,000 just two years earlier. The team's status as an also-ran within the International League did little to generate ticket sales. After finishing third in the standings in 1955, the Kings dropped to sixth in 1956 and finished there again in 1957.²⁷ González Echevarría offers a number of explanations for the Sugar Kings' decline over the end of the decade. That the team played home games in the oppressive heat of Cuba's summer months (not the island's regular baseball season) likely kept a number of fans out of the ballpark. Moreover, the nature of baseball's minor leagues proved frustrating. Sugar Kings fans were only able to see the team's stars either on the ascent or descent of their careers. Talented young players were snatched out of Havana midseason by the parent-club Reds, who were more than willing to sacrifice the Sugar Kings' season for the sake of their own. Struggling players could not easily be dispatched, or even

²⁵ "Lane Ready to Ask For Winter Ball Ban," *Washington Post*, 23 February 1958, C3.

²⁶ John Drebing, "Baseball Has Problems: Frick Seeks Action From Owners on Caribbean Situation This Month," *New York Times*, 3 January 1959, 13.

²⁷ Bjarkman, *History*, 102-103.

benched, since the Reds controlled personnel decisions. Though the team featured a handful of homegrown stars, such as Conrad Marrero, they were typically beyond their major league playing days and abilities. As a result, González Echevarría contends that the Cuban Winter League, which mixed top minor and major league players, usually put forth a better on-field product than the Sugar Kings could within the minor league structure. Cuban fans, used to a higher level of play, “did not suffer gladly mediocre minor-league players.”²⁸

The political upheaval that engulfed Cuba in the late-1950s further impaired the Sugar Kings’ hopes for success. After participating in the 1933 Sergeants’ Revolt against Carlos Manuel de Céspedes and engineering Grau’s ouster in 1934, Fulgencio Batista continued to influence Cuban politics into the 1940s. Serving as president himself from 1940 to 1944, Batista presided over Cuba during the prosperous World War II era. After a four-year retirement to the United States, he returned to Cuba in 1948 to oppose President Carlos Prío Socarrás. Rather than accept likely defeat in the 1952 election, Batista forced himself into power, leading a coup of army officers against Prío and seizing the presidency. The United States, which disliked Prío’s social programs and his ties to Cuban organized labor, welcomed Batista’s return and his ensuing business-friendly administration that curtailed economic reform and bolstered foreign investments by offering favorable tax credits. Among the Cuban population, however, anxiety lingered that would ultimately lead to revolution.²⁹

Batista was able to keep American investors content during the 1950s, but he could not vanquish the economic stagnation that frustrated Cubans and contributed to a rising nationalist tide. Opposition to Batista’s regime took violent forms from the early years of his presidency.

²⁸ González Echevarría, 339.

²⁹ Leonard, *Encyclopedia*, 19, 164-165; Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 233-234; Pérez-Stable, *Cuban Revolution*, 26.

In 1953, an attack against Cuban military barracks revealed the first crack in the foundation. Hoping to incite a rebellion against Batista, Fidel Castro led a group of followers captured by government forces after an abortive raid on the Moncado base in Santiago de Cuba on July 26. Imprisoned until 1955 and then exiled to Mexico, Fidel and his brother Raúl, along with fellow revolutionary Ernesto “Ché” Guevara, returned to Cuba in late-1956 to resume the revolution against Batista as the 26th of July Movement. Though focusing on the Cuban dictator, Castro’s movement railed against the old political guard (derisively called the “viejos políticos,” or old politicians) as well as North American dominance on the island. This attack on the status quo created an ideological alliance between the movement and growing Communist supporters, and Castro had significant contacts with a number of Communist party leaders, even prior to the Moncada attack. Castro’s forces also drew support from fellow opposition groups united by their desire to unseat Batista, and the 26th of July Movement began a guerilla war in the mountains of eastern Cuba.³⁰

As the island tumbled toward revolution and violence, baseball was not immune to the political upheaval. Signs of trouble first sprang up in 1954, when a student protest interrupted a Cuban League game. During the second game of a televised Sunday double-header between Cuba’s top rivals, the Habana Lions and the Almendares Blues, a group of about twenty students ran across the field shouting “Down with Batista!” and carrying a banner denouncing the Cuban president. Police forces inside the park roughly silenced the protestors and Batista issued a statement later that evening promising to put down future insurrections. That the ballgame, which boasted such a high-profile match-up, had been targeted as a demonstration site and that

³⁰ Leonard, *Encyclopedia*, 20, 43; Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 234; Herbert L. Matthews, “Cuban Rebel Is Visited in Hideout: Castro Is Still Alive and Still Fighting in Mountains,” *New York Times*, 24 February 1957, 1; Mario Llerena, *The Unsuspected Revolution: The Birth and Rise of Castroism* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1978), 61. Lionel Martin, *The Early Fidel: Roots of Castro’s Communism* (Secaucus, New Jersey: Lyle Stuart, 1978), 123.

the contest—and protest—was carried live on two television stations were ominous signs for baseball, and Batista, amid the Revolution.³¹

As Castro's 26th of July Movement gained strength in the Sierra Maestra Mountains, Cuban baseball continued to find itself in the crossfire. Concerns over political unrest and the violence it spawned were palpable by the 1958 season. Violence had reached Havana the previous year, as successive days in late-February had witnessed a bomb explosion and the discovery of a bullet-ridden body behind the city's baseball stadium.³² The summer of discontent that followed bore especially bad news for the Sugar Kings. Though baseball issues such as sub-par play and the limitations of the minor league structure contributed to the team's decline over the end of the 1950s, the danger posed by revolutionary violence was certainly its chief cause. The Sugar Kings' attendance plummeted to its lowest point during the 1957 season. By October, talk of moving the team out of Cuba was already stirring. That month the International League acted to secure claims to Jersey City, New Jersey as a future site for a league team. Though no plans to relocate the Sugar Kings were imminent at that time, League President Frank Shaughnessy confirmed speculation that either the Cuban team or the circuit's franchise in Miami would be the likeliest candidates for relocation. Citing low ticket sales as a factor, Shaughnessy also blamed the Revolution for the Kings' ailing fortunes, noting that "people were afraid to come out at night in Havana" the previous season.³³

³¹ González Echevarría, *Pride*, 325-326; "Clash At Cuban Game: Police Halt Demonstration by Students in Ball Park," *New York Times*, 5 December 1955, 12.

³² "Havana Bomb Injures 2: Woman and Youth Are Struck—Man Shot to Death," *New York Times*, 21 February 1957, 9.

³³ "International League Claims Jersey City as Step Toward Third Major Loop: Miami Or Havana Slated To Shift," *New York Times*, 18 October 1957, 38.

Just before the 1958 season started in April, the political situation in Cuba prompted baseball officials to revisit the question of keeping the Kings in Havana. International League officials met early in the month to consider moving the team temporarily after other clubs aired concerns about player safety. John C. Stiglmeier, president of the Buffalo Bisons, was the first to come forward. Stiglmeier's team had been scheduled to open the season against the Sugar Kings in Havana, and in the weeks leading up to the trip the Bisons' president publicly stated his reservations over the team being used, in his words, as "guinea pigs." Buffalo was not alone. The Montreal Royals, another International League club, cancelled its visit to Cuba for a scheduled preseason exhibition series against the Sugar Kings. League fears forced Kings owner Bobby Maduro to try and control the damage to save his franchise. He downplayed the danger, noting that the revolutionary forces were 750 miles from Havana and that visiting teams would be safe from violence. Maduro managed to retain the faith of his colleagues and when International League leaders met to discuss the situation in Cuba, they voted unanimously in support of the Sugar Kings. On April 6, Shaughnessy announced that "unless conditions materially change," the 1958 season would open in Cuba as scheduled. The league president expressed confidence that the violence in Cuba was at a lull, but promised to keep close watch over the situation and confessed that, should matters deteriorate, the league could relocate the Sugar Kings to Jersey City "tomorrow."³⁴

The April 6 vote did not settle the issue, however, as concerns within the league over traveling to Cuba reemerged just a few days later. Although Bisons president Stiglmeier had participated in the April 6 meeting and had voted in favor of keeping the Sugar Kings in Cuba to

³⁴ "Batista Decrees Cubans May Kill Strike Inciters: Drastic Measures Invoked Against Walkout Planned by Castro's Rebels," *New York Times*, 4 April 1958, 1; "Havana Baseball Shift to Jersey City Considered Because of Crisis in Cuba," *New York Times*, 4 April 1958, 28; "Havana Will Play April 16," *Washington Post*, 7 April 1958, A15.

start the season, it seems that Buffalo's players were still balking at their scheduled road trip to Cuba. The following week, after International League officials met again and reaffirmed their decision to stay in Cuba for the time being, the Bisons' president re-aired his club's objections to playing in Havana. On April 13, Stiglmeier, who did not attend the second meeting, announced that his team would not play in Cuba. In response, International League President Shaughnessy threatened the Bisons with a host of penalties that included forfeits and fines for every missed game, but Stiglmeier relented only after the league agreed to assume liability for player safety in Havana and after receiving a phone call from Earl E. T. Smith, U.S. ambassador to Cuba, assuring him that the island was safe for visiting baseball teams. That a Bisons player representative promised legal action against the International League should any of them meet harm in Havana seems to indicate that most of the grumbling was coming from within the team's clubhouse rather than its front office. Nonetheless, the Revolution in Cuba had put the Sugar Kings' future in jeopardy.³⁵

While the Sugar Kings survived 1958, Fulgencio Batista did not. Castro's 26th of July Movement sustained its guerilla war across the Cuban countryside, evading Batista's armed forces. Angst in Cuba intensified over the course of the year following the movement's campaign, beginning in February, to undermine Batista's government by targeting Cuba's industrial infrastructure. In addition to destroying public utilities, oil refineries, and transportation networks, Castro's forces destroyed an estimated two million tons of Cuban sugar during the ensuing spring season.³⁶ As a result, Cuba's economic misery, which had been

³⁵ "Cuba Simmers Down," *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 April 1958, 3; "Buffalo Refuses to Play Ball in Cuba Despite League's Threat of Penalties," *New York Times*, 14 April 1958, 30; "Bisons Say They Won't Play In Havana Despite Int Order," *Cumberland Evening Times*, 14 April 1958, 11; "Bisons Agree To Open Loop Play In Cuba," *Cumberland Evening Times*, 15 April 1958, 12.

³⁶ Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 234.

building over the course of the decade, grew worse. General dissatisfaction against the Batista regime spread, and groups that were not aligned with the 26th of July Movement lashed out at Cuba's leader. Batista had nearly been killed the previous year, when a Havana student group attacked the presidential palace. The Cuban president sought to keep himself in power by using military might—the same weapon that had placed him in power—but the crackdown, combined with growing economic decay, only brought further disillusionment.

By March 1958, the United States was beginning to lose faith in Batista as well. Concerned about the damage that political upheaval had done to American investments and businesses on the island and frustrated with Batista's inability to stop the destruction, the government announced a freeze on military assistance to Cuba's leader. The arms embargo was the first public vote of no confidence in Batista's leadership, and one that the Cuban leader would later blame for destroying his forces' morale and making his collapse inevitable. This was a consequence that state department officials understood at the time, but felt was necessary in light of his crackdown on liberties and intensified use of force to suppress dissent. Though they realized that Castro would pose a threat to whatever government replaced Batista's, American embassy officials in Havana speculated that regime change would ultimately dissolve the 26th of July Movement.³⁷

With support around him crumbling, Batista made one last attempt to retain power the following autumn. Finally relenting to pressure to hold elections in November, Batista could not fully extricate himself from political power and after his chosen successor, Andrés Rivero

³⁷ Samuel Farber, *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 73-74; Telegram From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, March 14, 1958, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Volume VI: Cuba* (Washington: GPO, 1991), 59-60; Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Cuba, March 14, 1958, *Ibid.*, 60; Telegram From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, *Ibid.*, 61; Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Cuba, *Ibid.*, 71-72.

Agüero, won the contest in a runaway, cries of fraud overwhelmed the outcome. The rigged vote undermined remaining Batista supporters, who had hoped that elections would quell the violence but were finding it more and more difficult to defend their president. It also failed to restore U.S. confidence, as the state department refused post-election Cuban overtures to resume military assistance and demurred on publicly embracing Agüero as president-elect. In December, the United States, believing that regime change in Cuba could not wait until Agüero's scheduled February inauguration, offered Batista a retirement home in Florida and pressed him to abdicate, but the Cuban leader refused. A little over three weeks later, he was forced out.³⁸

III

Batista fled Havana in late-December 1958, and Fidel Castro led his forces triumphantly into the city just days later in January 1959. The Revolution prompted questions about the future of the U.S.-Cuba political relationship. It also provoked uncertainty over the U.S.-Cuba baseball relationship. As Castro's forces swept into Havana, worries over the island's safety again confronted American Organized Baseball. The roughly two-dozen major league players who were competing in the Cuban Winter League as Castro's victory unfolded were of immediate concern. Their fate fell to Major League Baseball Commissioner Ford Frick. Organized Baseball's pact with the Caribbean leagues included a "peril clause" to ensure player safety in situations like the Cuban Revolution. Though he did not issue a blanket order calling all major leaguers back to the United States, believing such an act to be too hasty, Frick announced that

³⁸ Leonard, *Encyclopedia*, 20; Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 236-237; Telegram From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, November 6, 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol. VI*, 251-252; Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, November 22, 1958, *Ibid.*, 262-264; Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Cuba, November 26, 1958, *Ibid.*, 270-271; Memorandum From the Acting Secretary of State to the President, December 23, 1958, *Ibid.*, 304-307.

individual teams had the authority to recall their American players from Cuba, and those that did would have the commissioner's backing in potential contract disputes with Cuban teams. Frick's decision nonetheless put the burden of responsibility on individual team owners. Calvin Griffith, who had succeeded his uncle Clark Griffith at the helm of the Senators, had a particular personal interest. During the 1959 Cuban winter season, the Senators had nine players on the island, including four Americans. Griffith conferred with the commissioner's office, as well as the state department, to determine the best course of action. The state department assured the Senators' owner that as long as his players did not take "an active part" in the Revolution, they would be safe. Though a newspaper columnist simplified this to mean that players had to "stay off the streets" and called it "scant assurance," Griffith decided to keep his players in Cuba, and no other team forced its athletes to return. It is questionable if a player recall would have been possible in light of the situation on the ground in Cuba. One minor leaguer who was in Cuba at the time confessed that though he was not concerned about his safety, the lack of planes prevented anyone from leaving anyway.³⁹

While American players were not summoned home, the Revolution did not lack immediate consequences for baseball. The Cuban Winter League, in midseason by early January, canceled several contests in the days following Batista's ouster. The uncertainty of the situation also prompted advance cancellation of some future baseball events. The Senators were scheduled to play a series of exhibition games in Cuba during their upcoming spring training. While Griffith opted against recalling his Winter League players, he immediately canceled the team's spring junket, losing an estimated \$40,000 in guarantees as a result. Even major league

³⁹ "Players In Cuba Can Be Recalled: Majors Held Free to Order Athletes, Except Natives, Back During Revolution," *New York Times*, 3 January 1959, 13; Bob Addie, "Nats Not Planning To Withdraw Players From Cuban League," *Washington Post*, 3 January 1959, A8; Shirley Povich, "This Morning...: To Whom It May Concern:" *Washington Post*, 4 January 1959, C1.

teams that did not plan on spring training in Cuba felt the Revolution's impact. When the Cleveland Indians opened their spring camp in Mesa, Arizona on March 4, they discovered that one of their players was absent. Cuban star Minnie Minoso did not make it to Cleveland's spring facility until five days later, incurring a \$500 fine as a result. Minoso, who had come over to Cleveland from the White Sox before the previous season, blamed Castro and the Revolution for his tardiness. He claimed that the new Cuban leader had made him a lieutenant and sent him to Venezuela as a goodwill ambassador during the baseball Caribbean Series played there. He also attested that the political disarray delayed the exit visa process for a fellow Cuban and prospective player whom he had been instructed to bring along to spring training for further evaluation. Though the Revolution likely did make leaving Cuba more complicated, it should be noted that Minoso had a history of missing spring training, having given White Sox General Manager Frank Lane fits for holding out on his contract back in 1958.⁴⁰

The most significant baseball related threat that the Revolution posed was to the Cuban Sugar Kings. Violence had nearly forced the team's relocation for the 1958 season and continuing unrest in Havana put the 1959 season in doubt as well. Speculation over the Sugar Kings' fate started in December during Batista's last days in power. International League officials met that month and developed an emergency plan to move the Havana franchise out of Cuba if the situation warranted before the following spring. By early January, league president Frank Shaughnessy admitted that the future of the Havana franchise depended on the political status in Cuba, though he confessed that he was uncertain what that status would be by the spring. A January 4 *New York Times* article detailing the Sugar Kings' delicate situation proclaimed that the club's relocation to Jersey City was "likely." That same day, Shaughnessy

⁴⁰ "Bob Addie's Column," *Washington Post*, 4 January 1959, C2; "Minoso Blames Castro For Reporting Late," *Washington Post*, 10 March 1959, A20.

called it “too early to tell” if the team would be able to stay in Cuba. Just four days later, however, Shaughnessy abruptly ended speculation and made public the International League’s plans to open the season with the Sugar Kings in Havana, as scheduled.⁴¹

Castro’s support may have been what saved the Sugar Kings’ 1959 season. The new Cuban leader had already drawn attention as a baseball fan and occasional player. A *Washington Post* article in early January noted Castro as “sports-minded” and revealed that he had been voted best all-around athlete in high school. A few weeks later, an article on Castro’s early efforts at agrarian reform featured a headlining photo that showed the new president, in his usual fatigues, participating in a street game of baseball while a crowd of children watched nearby. Castro himself made a point to lay out the welcome mat for Americans to return to Cuba. In a January 18 *New York Times* piece on the revival of Cuban tourism, Castro promised that U.S. visitors would “be welcomed by all citizens of Cuba.” As a sign that Cuba was returning to normal, the article mentioned that Winter League baseball games, which featured American players, had resumed the previous week. Castro’s baseball acumen again made news later that month. When Buck Canel, a broadcaster who provided commentary of major sports events to Spanish-speaking audiences in Latin America, met with Cuba’s new leader in January, Castro greeted him by inquiring about a controversial pitching move from the previous World Series. The New York Yankees had defeated the Milwaukee Braves in seven games. The controversy came from Braves manager Fred Haley’s decision to use his best pitcher, Warren Spahn, in the sixth game—though this would mean a shortened rest period from his previous start—rather than

⁴¹ “International Makes Plans to Shift Havana,” *Washington Post*, 14 December 1958, C6; Fred Down, “Baseball Men Keep Watch On Cuban Revolt,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 4 January 1959, 8; “Baseball Looms For Jersey City: Replacement of Havana in International League Is Likely This Season,” *New York Times*, 4 January 1959, S16; “Havana To Stay In Loop: International League Lists Opener There on April 14,” *New York Times*, 8 January 1959, 36.

holding him for a potential decisive seventh game. Castro wanted Canel's opinion on why Haley had rushed Spahn into the sixth game: the sort of question an informed baseball fan would ask.⁴²

Cuba's new leader went to bat, both figuratively and literally, for Havana's minor league franchise. Sugar Kings' owner Bobby Maduro understood that keeping his team in Cuba depended greatly on the island's pacification, as attendance had fallen significantly during the previous two war-torn seasons. He reached out to Castro just a few weeks after the Cuban leader's arrival in Havana, and found a receptive audience. After speaking with Castro, Maduro expressed confidence that the new Cuban premier loved baseball and that the government would cooperate to ensure that the team's future remained in Cuba. He also announced that Castro had accepted the club's invitation to deliver the ceremonial first pitch for the season's opening game in April. A major spectacle preceded the Sugar Kings' first game of the season. A pre-game ceremony featured a symbolic pigeon release, as well as fireworks that spelled out "Viva Cuba Libre." More than 20,000 fans stood and applauded when Castro, accompanied by ambassadors from the United States and Canada, took the field and threw out the first ball. These were hopeful signs that the upheaval of the previous few years had passed, and along with it the threat to the Sugar Kings. Just a few days later, while in Washington, Castro met with Pedro Ramos—a Cuban pitcher with the Senators. During the talk with Ramos, Castro revealed that, like Maduro and a host of other Cubans, he hoped that Cuba would one day have a major league team of its own.⁴³

⁴² Shirley Povich, "This Morning...: To Whom It May Concern," *Washington Post*, 4 January 1959, C1; R. Hart Philips, "Castro To Begin Giving Out Land: Squatters of Sierra to Get Parcels Promised Them During Civil War," *New York Times*, 30 January 1959, 7; ----, "New Cuba Invites Tourists: Casinos to Open Again For Visitors Only – Havana Seems Normal," *New York Times*, 18 January 1959, XX22; Steve Snider, "The Sports Patrol," *Atlanta Daily World*, 27 January 1959, 4.

⁴³ "Fidel Castro Opens Season for Havana," *Washington Post*, 31 January 1959, A12; "Castro Makes A Pitch: Premier Opens International League Season in Havana," *New York Times*, 15 April 1959, 38; "Fidel Castro Talks Baseball With Ramos," *Washington Post*, 17 April 1959, D3.

In the meantime, Castro continued to support the Sugar Kings. On April 23 he sat down for a lengthy meeting with Maduro to discuss the future of the Havana franchise. Maduro emerged from the conference once again satisfied with Castro's support for baseball, and declared that the Sugar Kings, with the government's backing, would be able to remain in Cuba "permanently." Questions about the team's future continued when Castro visited the United Nations at the end of the month. Asked about them at a UN correspondents' luncheon, Cuba's leader pledged unconditional support for the Sugar Kings and even offered to pitch for the team if it would boost attendance and keep them afloat. The government's vote of confidence helped steady the team's prospects in Cuba, and financial support soon followed. At the end of April, the Cuban Sugar Stabilization Institute, which represented the island's sugar industry, announced that it would donate \$20,000 to the baseball team.⁴⁴

The Sugar Kings had survived the early season turmoil, but trouble surfaced again in late July. Leading up to the nation's first official 26th of July commemoration, Castro once again made a high-profile appearance at a baseball game. The Sugar Kings had a home series against the Rochester Red Wings scheduled for the holiday weekend, and the baseball games were a part of the festival atmosphere that swept through Havana during the last days of July. The celebration started that Friday, July 24, with an exhibition baseball game that preceded the Sugar Kings' contest. The five-inning first game was a friendly competition between a military police team and a Cuban army team that also featured Castro.

Having temporarily (and largely symbolically) resigned his position as Cuban premier the previous week, Castro decided to pitch the first two innings of the exhibition game for the army

⁴⁴ Marion E. Jackson, "Sports Of The World," *Atlanta Daily World*, 24 April 1959, 7; "Havana Team To Stay: Sugar Kings Will Remain in Cuba, Says Club President," *New York Times*, 24 April 1959, 33; "Castro May Pitch For Sugar Kings," *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 April 1959, 14; "Cuban Sugar Kings Baseball Team Gets \$20,000 Contribution," *Atlanta Daily World*, 30 April 1959, 3.

squad, which called itself, aptly, “Los Barbudos,” meaning “Bearded Ones.” Proceeds from the contest were to assist in Cuba’s agrarian reform program and Castro used the publicity of this and other appearances throughout the celebratory weekend to reassume control of Cuba’s top political office, propelled by the apparent popular demand for his return. One story from the game helped reinforce Castro’s status as Cuba’s leader. Camilo Cienfuegos, an army major who was supposed to pitch for the team playing against Castro, instead switched sides and played for Castro’s team. Cienfuegos attributed the change to a personal rule of his to “never oppose Fidel in anything, including baseball.”⁴⁵

Castro’s two innings of pitching also helped to earn him a lifetime of mythological embellishment, as the reports of his baseball prowess have always been greatly exaggerated. Peter Bjarkman sets the record straight on Castro’s real baseball career. Contrary to myth, he was never a serious major league prospect, nor was he ever offered a contract with a big league team. He did play baseball for his high school team, but failed to make it on the University of Havana’s squad. In truth, Castro was an above-average high school athlete, though he excelled at basketball more than baseball. He was never more than an average talent in the latter sport, comparable to any high school player in the United States. Nonetheless, photos of Castro in his “Barbudos” uniform—which he only donned once, in July 1959—made press in the United States and was mistakenly interpreted as indicating frequent pitching appearances. His reputation as a baseball player has since outgrown the reality.⁴⁶

Although Castro’s brief stint on the mound did the Sugar Kings no harm, some of the weekend’s other festivities again raised the issue of player safety. The following evening, July

⁴⁵ “Castro to Demonstrate Pitch,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 July 1959, 10; Tad Szulc, “Castro Foe Caught As Plane Is Downed: Enemy Of Castro Downed In Plane,” *New York Times*, 26 July 1959, 1; Bjarkman, *History*, 307.

⁴⁶ Bjarkman, *History*, 299-313.

25, the Red Wings and the Sugar Kings played an extra-innings contest that went deep into the night. As midnight arrived, and with it July 26, the game paused while Cuba's anthem played in triumphant commemoration. Among the stadium crowd of 35,000, and in the streets surrounding the Havana ballpark, some took to firing guns into the air in celebration. The game continued briefly amidst the sounds of the guns, but was soon halted after stray bullets struck the Sugar Kings' shortstop and the Red Wings' third base coach. With two participants wounded, the other players and coaches ran for safety and the umpires suspended the game. The incident shook the Red Wings, who remained apprehensive even after arriving back at their hotel. Despite Maduro's pleas, the team refused to return to the stadium the following day to play a scheduled double-header. One newspaper columnist made light of the incident, comparing the gunfire to the firecrackers and rotten vegetables that Brooklyn baseball fans used to hurl at opponents. International League President Shaughnessy, however, sided with the Red Wings, citing player safety concerns for permitting them to skip the games without forfeit. Things calmed down after the weekend and the Sugar Kings were able to remain in Cuba for the rest of the 1959 season. The July incident was a dark omen for the club's future however, as the shootings appeared to be manifestations of the concerns over player safety that had dogged the team since the Revolution began.⁴⁷

Despite the unsettled situation at home, or perhaps assisted by the unusual home-field advantage it provided, the Sugar Kings had their most successful season in 1959. Attendance rebounded north of the 200,000 mark for the year and the club finished the regular season third in the standings, advancing to the playoffs. The Sugar Kings peaked at the opportune moment

⁴⁷ Tad Szulc, "Gay Cubans Hail Castro's Triumph: Hugh Throgs Cheer Rebel Army in a Carefree day of Anniversary Fetes," *New York Times*, 27 July 1959, 3; "Bob Addie's Column," *Washington Post*, 29 July 1959, C3; "Game Called: Gunfire; Opposing Players Hit," *Washington Post*, 27 July 1959, A16.

and went on a September roll through the postseason. They swept the Columbus Jets in four straight games to win their first round series and then won the International League Championship with a 4-2 series win over the Richmond Virginians. Castro, who had established himself as a Sugar Kings fan and occasionally attended their games, was among the crowd that watched the decisive contest in Havana. That the team was hitting its stride in the year of the Revolution was no mere coincidence to *fidelistas*.

The Cuban club next advanced to the Junior World Series to face the Minneapolis Millers, champions of the American Association—a fellow triple-A minor league. The Millers and the Sugar Kings split the first two games, which were played in Minnesota. The third game, also scheduled to take place in the Millers' home park, was postponed and ultimately moved because of inclement weather. Officials shifted the final five games of the series to Havana, which was enjoying regular 80-degree days in late-September. Castro did not shy away from the spotlight of hosting Minor League Baseball's championship. The Cuban leader attended every game in Havana, and threw out the ceremonial first pitch for the opening contest there. Castro and the other Cuban fans in the sold-out stadium were treated to an exciting series that went down to the wire. The Sugar Kings pulled out extra-innings wins in each of the first two Havana games to take a 3-1 series lead. The Millers fought back, however, winning the next two nights and forcing a decisive seventh game. It seemed that Cuba's dream season would come to a heartbreaking conclusion, as Minneapolis held a 2-0 lead going into the bottom of the eighth inning of game seven. An unlikely comeback then began, however. The Sugar Kings tied the

game at 2-2 in the eighth, then won it with a two-out, game-winning hit in the ninth for a 3-2 win, to cap a 4-3 series victory.⁴⁸

For Cubans, the Sugar Kings' triumph was a fitting tribute to the Revolution's success. Even though the team had a number of American players, the club's fans and its identity were undeniably Cuban. An essay from Cuban writer Carlos Reig Romero called the championship a "success that enhance[d] national sentiment" (éxito que enaltece el sentimiento nacional), having been "supported by the presence of the major figures of the Revolution" (apoyado con la presencia de las principales figuras de la Revolución). Because of this, and because of their most high-profile supporter, the team became a symbol of the Revolution in 1959. Before the series resumed in Havana, a Cuban newspaper had noted that Castro's throwing out the game's first pitch was a good omen for the Sugar Kings, as he had brought the club good luck in his previous appearances. When Castro arrived at the Little World Series for the pre-game ceremony, he declined the crowd's requests for a speech, but proclaimed his confidence that the Sugar Kings would prevail just as the Revolution had prevailed.⁴⁹ As Cuban fans poured onto the field to celebrate the team's victory, some also surrounded Castro's private box and began chanting his name. In their eyes, the win represented something more than a baseball victory.

The Sugar Kings' unlikely comeback capped off what had been an unlikely year in Cuba.

In victory, the Havana franchise had delivered two symbolic triumphs. By winning Minor

⁴⁸ "Sports Front Briefs: Baseball," *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 September 1959, 11; "Castro to Throw Out First Ball," *Christian Science Monitor*, 1 October 1959, 17; "Havana, 3-2 Victor, Takes Series, 4 to 3," *New York Times*, 7 October 1959, 54.

⁴⁹ Carlos E. Reig Romero, "Primer inning del béisbol revolucionario," in *Con las bases llenas...: béisbol, historia, y revolución*, Félix Julio Alfonso López, ed. (Havana: Editorial Científico-Técnica, 2008), 4; González Echevarría, 341.

League Baseball's crown, Cuba had proven its worth within Organized Baseball. By defeating an American team, Cuba had proven its worth within the hemisphere. Ironically, the 1959 season would prove to be the Sugar Kings' last in Havana.

CHAPTER THREE

Cut Fastballs: Cancellations, Relocations, Provocations, and Politicization during the 1960s

In October 1959, the Cuban Sugar Kings won Minor League Baseball's highest prize, the Junior World Series. The championship season marked the crescendo of Cuba's role in American Organized Baseball and reflected the peak of the U.S.-Cuba baseball exchange. Nine months later, the team was gone. 1959 had witnessed great baseball in Cuba, but it had also witnessed a revolution. This political upheaval, the culmination of economic frustration and rising nationalism during the latter part of the decade, would soon lead to major changes in U.S.-Cuba ties. It would also permanently alter the nature and the tone of baseball exchanges between Cuba and the United States. As the Revolution developed at the end of the 1950s, it was already having an impact on baseball on the island. Concerns over rising violence and questions of player safety prompted baseball officials, in numerous instances, to consider canceling games, recalling players, and relocating the Sugar Kings.

I

Organized Baseball's unease tended to focus on the immediate danger that the developing Revolution posed to players and teams. The United States government, however, was worried about the long-term consequences of the Cuban Revolution. Because the Batista regime, despite its obvious problems, had always maintained a favorable economic environment for American interests in Cuba, the Revolution and ensuing regime change prompted anxiety over what kind of

government would develop and how that government would react to the United States. Indeed, the United States only withdrew its support from Batista because his regime had grown incapable of restoring order and continued association with such an unpopular ruler had the potential to harm American interests. Of primary concern to American policymakers was ensuring that the new Cuban government would guard the status quo in relation to the U.S. economic role on the island.

Due to Cold War geopolitical considerations, the United States also feared the possibility of a Marxist revolution in Cuba. Questions about Castro's ties, and ties of those within the 26th of July Movement, to Communism arose quickly as the Revolution intensified. As early as February 1958, Batista began warning American officials in Cuba that Castro's movement contained Communist elements. By July, Batista claimed that Cuba's Communists numbered more than 100,000. It is true, of course, that Batista's personal stake in the Revolution must be accounted for in assessing such warnings. The timing of these assertions, first when Batista attempted to forestall U.S. pressure to hold open elections, and again in his efforts to bring an end to the United States' military embargo against his regime, is especially convenient. Overstating the threat of the Revolution and the potential consequences for a regime change was in Batista's best interests at the time, as anything that increased American assistance and kept him in power was to his benefit. His assertions cannot be taken at face value and American officials did not accept them as undisputed fact.¹

There were warnings, beyond those from Batista, of Communism within Castro's forces. A February 1958 *New York Times* article on Ché Guevara inquired about his history with Marxism and state department communication revealed questions over Castro's own feelings on

¹ Telegram From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, February 20, 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol. VI*, 28-29; Despatch From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, July 24, 1958, *Ibid.*, 160-161.

Communism. By July, the Central Intelligence Agency reported a “strong possibility” of “Communist influences” within the 26th of July Movement, and Ambassador Earl E.T. Smith noted that Communist publications in Cuba were declaring support for Castro’s group. Though this did not automatically indicate the presence of Communists within the movement, much less that Castro himself was a Communist, it did, as Smith noted, reflect the reality that Castro and the Communists had a common enemy in Batista. By September, the state department was actively trying to ascertain Communist levels within Castro’s group and by the end the year it had evidence of high-ranking Marxists within the Revolutionary Army.²

Once Castro swept into power, concerns over Communism colored the United States’ early relationship with his government. American officials closely watched the Castro regime’s first actions as litmus tests for the new Cuban leader’s ideology. In early January 1959, a state department note to the White House indicated the former’s belief that Castro, despite previous associations with Communists, was not himself a Communist or Communist sympathizer. The following week, however, inter-department communication discussing the Castro regime’s trials and executions of former Batista officials noted that Communist newspapers outspokenly supported the purge. In February, an analysis of the Revolution and the United States’ position toward it perceived a three-way division within the new regime. It argued that the Guevara and Raúl Castro-led radical element within the 26th of July Movement had split from the moderate wing, with Castro now occupying the ground between these groups. By April, however, the American embassy in Havana observed that “under the benevolent tolerance of Fidel Castro,”

² Despatch From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, March 3, 1958, *Ibid.*, 46-48; Despatch From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, July 24, 1958, *Ibid.*, 160-161; Memorandum From the Chief of the Division of Research and Analysis for American Republics to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Special Assistant, September 25, 1958, *Ibid.*, 216-217; Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Cuba, December 30, 1958, *Ibid.*, 322.

Communism was spreading in Cuba. The following month, the Castro government announced an Agrarian Reform Law, which placed acreage limitations on land ownership and nationalized all private property that surpassed the maximum level allowed under the new restrictions. The embassy's analysis of the new law concluded that it was similar to one that the radicals had proposed and therefore anticipated Communist involvement with its implementation. This law, coming on top of recent government acts that cut utility rates and raised wages—both to the detriment of American enterprises in Cuba—was an inauspicious start for the United States' relationship with the Revolution. By the end of the summer, more than 2.5 million acres of land had been confiscated under the Agrarian Reform Law and as the state department pressed Cuba on compensation for affected American businesses, more members of Cuba's Communist Party were taking positions within the Castro government.³

Thus, while the Sugar Kings had survived through 1959 in spite of the Revolution's violence and upheaval, the seeds for their demise—the deteriorating relationship between governments in Washington and Havana—were just beginning to germinate. The Sugar Kings' enthralling October 1959 victory in the Junior World Series had not removed all questions about their future in Cuba. About a month later, the International League met to consider the club's situation and ultimately deferred action. President Frank Shaughnessy announced the league's plans to “just ride along for the present and see what happens,” and expressed their desire to

³ White House Special Staff Note, January 13, 1959, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol. VI*, 356; Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom) to the Secretary of State, January 19, 1959, *Ibid.*, 369; Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs' Special Assistant (Hill), February 6, 1959, *Ibid.*, 395-397; Memorandum From the Director of the Office of Mexican and Caribbean Affairs (Wieland) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom), February 19, 1959, *Ibid.*, 404-406; Despatch From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, April 14, 1959, *Ibid.*, 458-466; Telegram From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, May 19, 1959, *Ibid.*, 509-510; Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 238-241.

avoid relocating the franchise unless they “absolutely had to.”⁴ The wait-and-see approach continued into 1960. The league put off a final decision on the Sugar Kings’ fate again at a meeting in late January and did not confirm that the team would begin the season in Havana as scheduled until March 11. Even then, the issue had not been settled, as later that month officials in Norfolk, Virginia contacted the International League to offer their city as a replacement site should moving the team prove necessary.⁵

That the U.S.-Cuba political relationship continued to deteriorate throughout the baseball offseason kept the Sugar Kings’ fate unknown. In the autumn of 1959, Cuban exiles began air raids against Castro’s government in an effort to destabilize it and turn back the Revolution. Many of the planes used in these raids were taking off from and returning to Florida, though they did not have official U.S. support, Washington did not take any steps to halt them. By late October, just a few weeks after the Havana club captured the championship in the Junior World Series, Castro had implicated American complicity, if not outright assistance, in the counterrevolutionary struggle. In an October 26 address, Castro wondered how the United States government could be so ignorant of the air raids, as it claimed to be, and how it could be so powerless to stop them. He also asked rhetorically if the United States would permit Russian immigrants in Alaska to carry out raids against the Soviet Union and, referencing the Pearl Harbor attack, appealed to the American people to condemn the strikes against Cuba. Castro also opined that, since the Batista government had used American military equipment to fight

⁴ John Drebing, “One Word Heard As Minors Gather: It’s ‘Expansion’ of Majors, and Leaders Fear It Will Finish Farm Clubs,” *New York Times*, 30 November 1959, 37.

⁵ John Drebing, “Berra Signs 4 Yankee Contracts: 3 Are Meaningless, but the Other Is Worth \$50,000,” *New York Times*, 29 January 1960, 18; “Baseball Clubs to Play in Cuba,” *New York Times*, 12 March 1960, 16; Cal Jacox, “From the: Press Box,” *New Journal and Guide*, 26 March 1960, 16.

against Cuban revolutionaries, the United States should take particular care not to support further attacks.⁶

Castro's tough rhetoric, which did little to endear the Cuban Revolutionary Government to the United States, continued into 1960. Cuba's leader appeared on "Meet the Press" in February 1960 and announced that the wreckage from an exile plane that had exploded over Cuba during a failed bombing raid contained a U.S. passport and flight record. He blamed these air strikes for the decaying relationship with the United States and again called on American officials to crack down on exile raids. Four days later, Castro expressed scant faith in U.S. assurances to stop the bombings. Though he did not go as far as to allege American involvement, he argued that "if the U.S. does not want them to take place, if the U.S. had mobilized hundreds of agents to prevent them as it says—and still cannot prevent them, it is a sign that some service is functioning very poorly over there." Castro revealed similar suspicions of U.S. intentions the next month. On March 4, a munitions ship mysteriously exploded in Havana harbor. Speaking at a funeral for those killed in the incident, Castro denounced the explosion as an act of sabotage and an attack by enemies of the Revolution. Again, he indirectly impugned the United States. Though he did not accuse the American government of perpetrating the attack, he argued that "those interested in [Cuba] not getting explosives are the enemies of [Cuba's] revolution," in noting that the United States had recently pressured Great Britain and Belgium to not sell weapons to Cuba. Later that month, in a March 27 speech, Castro warned that the Cuban Revolution was "being attacked by the big United States interests." On April 18,

⁶ Pérez-Stable, *Cuban Revolution*, 79; Fidel Castro, "Speech to the People of Cuba at Loyalty Rally," October 26, 1959, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>.

just days before the Minor League Baseball season resumed, Castro charged that American forces at the Guantanamo Bay naval base were conspiring with counterrevolutionaries.⁷

As the Sugar Kings' 1960 season began, it did so under the pall of this political tension. The tentativeness of the U.S.-Cuba relationship was on display in the team's season-opening game in Havana. The club received the Governor's Cup for winning the 1959 International League championship in a pre-game ceremony where Castro was once again on hand to throw out the season's ceremonial first pitch. Newspaper accounts of the affair noted that Cuba's leader, despite arriving thirty minutes late, received "wildly-enthusiastic applause and cheers" from those in attendance. Cuban fans appear to have been magnanimous with their praise, however, as the American flag also received cheers when it was raised prior to the contest. Though indicating that these Cuban fans harbored no ill will toward their northern neighbor, another story from this game perhaps demonstrates the growing rift between the American and Cuban governments. Castro was not the only political official on hand at the Havana ballpark that evening. U.S. Ambassador Philip Bonsal and Canadian Ambassador Allan Anderson were also in attendance, though according to accounts they did not meet with the Cuban premier. Though physical distance may have contributed to this, as Bonsal and Anderson were reportedly seated about seventy-five yards away from Castro, the seating arrangement itself may indeed have indicated growing political distance between the Cuban and American governments.⁸

⁷ "Castro Gives Replies to Radio Interview," February 19, 1960, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>; "Castro Seeks Revenue Sources For Housing," February 23, 1959, Ibid.; "Castro at Funeral for Victims of Mar. 4 Ship Explosion," March 7, 1960, Ibid.; Fidel Castro, "Occasion of the Militia Parade," March 27, 1960, Ibid.; Bertram B. Johansson, "Maneuver Seen in Castro Blast at U.S. Base: Guantanamo Bay," *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 April 1960, 6.

⁸ "Anti-Red Labor Leader In Cuba Faces Ouster," *Washington Post*, 22 April 1960, A4; "At Havana Opener: Even Castro Takes Back Seat To Big Luke Easter," *New Journal and Guide*, 23 April 1960, B1.

By the start of the minor league season, rising political tension stemming from the Revolution was also threatening Cuba's participation in American Organized Baseball. The island had long been a spring training destination for major league teams, and the Cincinnati Reds—parent club of the Sugar Kings—had played a spring game against the Los Angeles Dodgers in Havana in March 1959 after heavy rains in Florida forced them to temporarily relocate to Cuba. The Reds also scheduled a Havana exhibition series against the Baltimore Orioles for late March 1960. Rising anti-American rhetoric from the Castro regime over the last few months in 1959 became a concern for Orioles officials, however. As early as January 1960, Baltimore president Lee MacPhail admitted that the team was considering canceling the three game series because, in his words, it was “beginning to look like they don't want Americans down there.” Though he called the likelihood of the trip “very doubtful” at that time, MacPhail waited until just before the series was supposed to begin to officially withdraw his club. The last-minute cancelation added further sting to what was already an upsetting slight for Cuban baseball fans. The Cuban government newspaper *Revolución* chastised MacPhail as “Public enemy no. 1 of Cuban baseball,” and Bobby Maduro argued that the Orioles' insistence on shifting the games to Miami had “no justification.” MacPhail claimed that some of Baltimore's players had expressed fear about traveling to Cuba. An article in *Revolución* blamed the Orioles' decision on two Baltimore players' unpaid bills from their winter baseball stint in Cuba. Whatever the reason, a number of American newspapers surmised that the baseball cancelation had “further strained” an already “delicate” relationship between Cuba and the United States.⁹

⁹ “Orioles May Cancel Spring Game in Cuba,” *Washington Post*, 25 January 1960, 17; “Sports Front Briefs: Football Baseball Golf Tennis General,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 March 1960, 14; “Orioles Cancel Series, Anger Havana Writers,” *New York Times*, 29 March 1960, 48; “Orioles Shun Havana, Cuba Writers Protest,” *Washington Post*, 29 March 1960, A18; González Echevarría, *Encyclopedia*, 345.

Indeed, as the 1960 season began, media outlets noted the connections between politics and baseball in the U.S.-Cuba relationship. Just as writers and commentators lamented the Red Sox-Orioles cancellation as a lost opportunity, they also highlighted baseball's potential for repairing the political rifts between the Washington and Havana governments. As the baseball season resumed with spring training in 1960, *Washington Post* columnist Bob Addie cited the proliferation of Cuban players in the major leagues and in particular the fact that the Senators' spring roster included seven from the island. Addie posited that Washington's club could mend U.S.-Cuba ties because there were "more Cubans on the baseball team than in the embassy." A Cuban radio station also observed the clash between baseball and politics at the start of the major league season. The network offered a statement of appreciation to President Eisenhower for attending the Senators' season-opening contest, which featured Washington's top pitcher and Cuban national Camilo Pascual. The network editorialized that though Eisenhower had insulted Cuba, his attendance at the game had been "generous" and lamented the "pity that the President does not continue his cooperation beyond sports."¹⁰

Eisenhower was not willing to cooperate beyond the realm of baseball, and by the time the season opened in April 1960 his administration had long ago taken a significant turn against Cuba. The National Security Council, considering the Castro regime the previous summer, had concluded in June 1959 that the Cuban government's goals were incompatible with American interests, and decided to support regime change in Cuba. Though these plans were temporarily put on hold that autumn when American companies reported improving working relationships with the Castro government, by November Secretary of State Christian Herter confirmed in a

¹⁰ "Bob Addie's Column," *Washington Post*, 26 February 1960, D2; "Bob Addie's Column," *Washington Post*, 3 March 1960, D2; "Random Notes in Washington: Finding a Needle in a Ball Game: Cuba 'Thanks' President for Watching," *New York Times*, 25 April 1960, 19.

memo to the president that opposition to the Castro regime was the foundation for U.S. policy toward Cuba. In a January 13 meeting, Eisenhower explored ways to accelerate Castro's downfall. Presented with plans to induce economic pressure by sabotaging sugar refineries in Cuba, Eisenhower expressed his desire for a plan that went "beyond pure harassment." He authorized the CIA to devise a way of overthrowing Castro. The agency returned with such a plan two months later. Titled "A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime," the CIA plan, which would ultimately produce the Bay of Pigs invasion, not to mention a number of other failed attempts to assassinate Castro, received the president's approval on March 17, 1960.¹¹

While planning for this covert operation was underway, the Eisenhower administration also offered overt responses to Cuban developments through economic antagonism. After Cuba concluded a deal with the Soviet Union to trade sugar for oil, it ordered American refineries to begin processing incoming Soviet crude. With the Eisenhower administration's encouragement, the American oil companies refused to comply. Castro responded by nationalizing the petroleum industry in late June. The United States swung back and on July 6, 1960, Eisenhower, who by this time was privately referring to Castro as a "little Hitler," announced an immediate reduction to the sugar quota, effectively stopping purchases of Cuban sugar for the rest of the year. This retaliatory measure prompted Castro to expand nationalization to other American enterprises, including utilities and banks operating in Cuba. With U.S. economic interests under full assault, the Eisenhower administration in October adopted an embargo against Cuba—an idea the

¹¹ Memorandum From the Secretary of State to the President, November 5, 1959, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol. VI*, 656-658; Memorandum of Discussion at the 432nd Meeting of the National Security Council, January 14, 1960, *Ibid.*, 740-746; Paper Prepared by the 5412 Committee, March 16, 1960, *Ibid.*, 850-851; Richard Bissell, *Reflections of a Cold Warrior: From Yalta to the Bay of Pigs* (New Haven: Yale University, 1996), 152-153; Piero Gleijeses, "Ships in the Night: The CIA, the White House and the Bay of Pigs," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27, No. 1 (February 1995): 3-4; Philip Taubman, *Secret Empire: Eisenhower, the CIA, and the Hidden Story of America's Space Espionage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 303.

president first mentioned in the January NSC meeting—which banned almost every American export to the island.¹²

II

With such open hostility between the Cuban and American governments by the end of 1960, there was no way that U.S.-Cuba baseball ties would escape unscathed. The Cuban Sugar Kings became one of the first casualties in this battle. Though the franchise had survived the previous spells of political upheaval, the increasing tension during the summer months of 1960 proved too much to overcome. Some of the details surrounding the end of Cuba's part in Minor League Baseball remain the subject of speculation and debate, but there are a number of indisputable facts. In early July, the Sugar Kings departed on a scheduled two-week road trip. As it turned out, they would not play another game in Cuba. On July 7, International League President Frank Shaughnessy announced that the Havana team would relocate to the United States. The league met the following week to approve the move, sending the franchise to Jersey City, New Jersey for the remainder of the season. Havana's Sugar Kings thus became the Jersey City Jerseys—the name selected after local leaders vetoed the club's ironic first choice of Jersey City Reds (after their major league parent club) for its Communist connotation.¹³

Although the deteriorating political conditions were the underlying cause, it is unclear exactly what and who prompted the Sugar Kings' relocation. In announcing the move, Shaughnessy cited league concerns over player safety and indicated growing resistance from other clubs over taking their teams to Cuba. Said Shaughnessy:

¹² Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), 379; Jim Newton, *Eisenhower: The White House Years* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 306.

¹³ "Jersey City Leases Bowl to Sugar Kings," *The Bedford Gazette*, 13 July 1960, 6.

We have to protect our players and the only way to do it is get them out of there. The league decided last winter that if a situation arose in which there was any danger to our personnel I was to have the authority to move the franchise.

Shaughnessy's justification thus conforms with the player safety concerns cited previously. This issue did not appear for the first time in July 1960, but had been raised in a number of instances over the late 1950s as Cuba dealt with violence and political upheaval.¹⁴

Some historians contend that state department pressure forced Organized Baseball's hand in revoking Cuba's minor league franchise. Howard Senzel appears to have been the first to make this claim. In his 1977 work *Baseball and the Cold War*, which reads as part history and part memoir, Senzel cites a July 1960 article from *Sporting News* that refers to a meeting between Secretary of State Christian Herter and Major League Baseball Commissioner Ford Frick on the fate of baseball in Cuba. Senzel thus argues that the United States government forced Organized Baseball to move the club. Milton Jamail makes a similar claim in his book, *Full Count*, and Robert Elias cites Senzel's contention in *The Empire Strikes Out*. The lingering problem with these claims of government interference is that there seem to be no documents to support them, other than the 1960 *Sporting News* account that Senzel invokes. Adding to the confusion, the *Sporting News* article, which is reprinted in Senzel's book, only refers to a meeting between Herter and baseball officials--at the latter's request--that spring near the start of the 1960 season, at which Herter indicated optimism that the Cuban situation was improving and would render the relocation issue moot. In fact, despite claims that Herter pressured baseball to move the team in July, newspaper accounts reveal that the secretary of state was actually away

¹⁴ "Havana Will Lose Its Baseball Club: Decision Due Today on Shift by International League—Jersey City Seeks Team," *New York Times*, 8 July 1960, 24; "Meeting Is Planned," *New York Times*, 8 July 1960, 24; "Havana Baseball Franchise Goes to Jersey City," *New York Times*, 9 July 1960, 14.

from Washington on vacation the week that the International League announced the decision.¹⁵

No other accounts from those involved in the Sugar Kings' relocation mention government pressure as a factor. As noted above, Shaughnessy only referenced worries over player safety when he announced the move. If Frick was intricately involved in the decision, it is not apparent from the various newspaper articles at the time, which only mention Shaughnessy's role. Gabe Paul, who was then serving as General Manager for the Sugar Kings' parent club, the Cincinnati Reds, was directly involved in the relocation process and had met with International League and Jersey City officials in July to make arrangements. In November 1960, Paul, who had just left the Reds for the same position with the Cleveland Indians, wrote a letter to his successor in Cincinnati, Bill DeWitt, that referenced the Sugar Kings' move. In the note, Paul appealed to DeWitt to continue assisting Bobby Maduro—by then the former Sugar Kings owner—in light of how things had ended in Cuba. In making the case for Maduro, Paul contends that “it was not our [the Reds'] decision, nor that of Bob Maduro nor the Havana club to move the franchise to Jersey City.” Paul continues, “that action was instituted by the League in July because of the refusal of some of the clubs to play in Havana.” Paul's letter, like Shaughnessy's statements, makes no reference to the United States government playing a part in the decision.¹⁶

This does not preclude the possibility that the government pressured the relocation, but it seems logical that those involved would have cited this in justifying their actions. Shaughnessy

¹⁵ Howard Senzel, *Baseball and the Cold War: Being a Soliloquy on the Necessity of Baseball* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Javanovich: 1977), 123; Jamail, *Full Count*, 123; Elias, *Empire*, 196; “Ike to Confer with Herter,” *Daily Telegram* (Lincoln, Nebraska), 8 July 1960, 1.

¹⁶ “Terms Approved For Rest Of 1960: Lease Contains Options for Renewal by Havana Club—TV and Radio Planned,” *New York Times*, 12 July 1960, 43; Gabe Paul, Letter to William O. DeWitt, November 14, 1960, Correspondence: Paul, Gabriel T., National League Papers, National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, NY.

received considerable criticism for moving the team. If this was a decision imposed upon him, either by Frick—his superior in Organized Baseball—or Herter, why would he not have used this to deflect some of the blame? Likewise, if government pressure had factored into the decision to move the Sugar Kings, it seems that a high-ranking team official like Gabe Paul would have known about it, and would have included it in pleading his case for Maduro's lack of control over the situation.

This is not to say that politics played no part in the move. Obviously, if the economic and political ties linking Cuba to the United States had remained harmonious following the Cuban Revolution, there would have been no reason to shift the team's home games to Jersey City in the middle of the 1960 season. Indeed, the timing itself indicates that politics was a factor. Shaughnessy announced the team's pending relocation on July 7, just one day after Eisenhower made known that the United States was slashing the remainder of the sugar quota. Furthermore, NSC meetings in the weeks and months that led up to July 1960 indicated concerns over protecting American citizens in Cuba should the political relationship radically decline, so it is indeed possible that American officials relayed these fears to baseball leaders and that this prompted the move.¹⁷ Nonetheless, acknowledging that political considerations factored into the decision to relocate the Sugar Kings is quite different than arguing that political figures directed the act. Certainly political decisions had a consequence for the future of U.S.-Cuba baseball exchanges, but there is a lack of evidence to indicate that revoking the Havana franchise was an act of government hostility.

¹⁷ Memorandum of Discussion at the 436th Meeting of the National Security Council, March 10, 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol. VI*, 832-837; Memorandum of Discussion at the 450th Meeting of the National Security Council, July 7, 1960, *Ibid.*, 980-991.

The declining political relationship between Cuba and the United States contributed to the Sugar Kings' relocation, and the political symbolism involved in the move was also readily apparent. Cuban scholar Félix Julio Alfonso López notes that the move came "In the heat of nationalist revolutionary government measures, and the covert war launched by the U.S. government" (Al calor de las medidas nacionalistas de gobierno revolucionario, y de la guerra encubierta iniciada por el gobierno norteamericano). Fellow Cuban baseball historian Jorge Figueredo called the team's relocation an "unjust debacle" (injusta debacle).¹⁸

A number of prominent Cubans blasted the decision, with Castro leading the criticism. The Cuban leader, citing his nation's prior contributions to baseball, denounced the Sugar Kings' demise as part of a "series of attacks," along with trimming the sugar quota, that the imperialistic American government had instigated. Team owner Bobby Maduro also vented his frustration over losing the team and with it his hopes for Cuba one day joining Major League Baseball. Maduro rejected Shaughnessy's concerns over player safety, calling them "ridiculous," and lamenting that the strong baseball ties that had formed part of the cultural linkage between Cubans and Americans had been broken. He declined to follow the club to its new home. The team had struggled to stay financially afloat, and Maduro had taken out a \$100,000 loan in Cuba at the start of the season. He argued that if he was to continue to lose money, he would prefer to do so in Cuba.¹⁹

¹⁸ Félix Julio Alfonso López, *La Letra en el diamante* (Santa Clara, Cuba: Editorial Caprio, 2005), 81; Jorge S. Figueredo, *Beisbol Cubano: a un paso de las grandes ligas* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2005), 472.

¹⁹ "Castro Interviewed on TV," July 11, 1960, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>; R. Hart Phillips, "Castro Attacks Sugar Quota Cut AS 'Imperialism': Defies U.S. in Bitter Speech," *New York Times*, 8 July 1960, 1; ----, "Havana Rejects Seizure Protest: Says U.S. Used Refineries in 'Aggression'—Castro Proclaims Victories," *New York Times*, 9 July 1960, 3; "Havana Team Shift Called 'Big Mistake': Cubans Set to Quit," *Washington Post*, 9 July 1960, A13; "International Loop Moves Havana Club to Jersey City," *Abilene Reporter-News*, 9 July 1960, 12A.

Moving the club to the United States so suddenly also put the team's eleven Cuban players in an awkward predicament. Though about half of them initially threatened to quit and return to Cuba, ultimately every player—most likely not wanting to sacrifice his chance at earning major league money at the next level by jeopardizing his standing in Organized Baseball—chose to remain in the United States with the new team, and some began the process of moving their families out of Cuba as well. A handful of Cuban coaches, including manager Tony Castaño, did resign their positions in protest, however, and went home to Cuba. Napoleón Reyes, a Cuban who agreed to take over following Castaño's departure, was labeled in Cuba's press as the "Díaz Lanz of baseball"—a reference to Cuba's former air force head who had defected to the United States. That the Sugar Kings' relocation provoked such hostility prompted concerns in Jersey City over violent reprisals against the team from Castro sympathizers. As a result, the team hired extra security forces for the first two games in their new home, including two bodyguards specifically for Reyes.²⁰

The fallout from the July 1960 turmoil had lasting consequences for the U.S.-Cuba baseball exchange. From this point, interactions between Cubans and Americans through baseball became a much rarer occurrence, as political antagonism began to stunt sports interactions within the professional and amateur realm. The increasing hostility between Washington and Havana aborted a proposed youth baseball exchange between Cuban and American youths set for that summer. Dick Reynolds, a Providence, Rhode Island journalist, began working during the spring of 1960 to take an American team to Cuba for a series of games, and to host a Cuban youth team in the United States on a similar tour. Reynolds found

²⁰ "Cubans Change Stand: All Havana Players Agree to Switch to Jersey City," *New York Times*, 14 July 1960, 30; "Bob Addie's Column," *Washington Post*, 18 July 1960, A14; Joseph O. Haffs, "Ex-Sugar Kings Get a Noisy Welcome in New Home," *New York Times*, 16 July 1960, 11; Robert L. Teagues, "Jerseys Lose But Fans Love 'Em: Jets Gain 4-2 Victory with 4-Run Rally in 7th Inning," *New York Times*, 17 July 1960, 145.

financial support through the People-to-People Program, a Peace Corps-like program which President Eisenhower had started in 1956 to promote international cultural exchanges. He also found receptive officials in Cuba. Enrique Aguilar, head of Cuba's amateur sports division, corresponded with Reynolds several times to handle planning the exchange, ending each response with the division's Revolutionary motto: "Más Deporte y Menos Vicio" (More Sport And Less Vice). Cuba offered to bear the cost of housing the American team for their visit, and was willing to postpone a major amateur tournament to allow the trip to take place in July. After the declining political situation forced the American team to reluctantly cancel, Aguilar lamented to Reynolds that the Cubans "were sure that this exchange would be a success in every way" (estábamos seguros que ese intercambio sería un éxito en todos los sentidos) and expressed his hopes that a similar effort could take place in the future. He also reassured Reynolds that he understood that the situation had been beyond their control and that he did not hold them responsible for the cancellation, nor the recent loss of the Sugar Kings, a decision which he called "desafortunada" (unfortunate).²¹

With the loss of the Sugar Kings, Cuba's place within Organized Baseball was also declining. As the political relationship with the United States deteriorated through the summer and fall, Cuba's winter baseball league faced the next challenge. In early September, Major League Baseball Commissioner Ford Frick began suggesting that teams not allow their American players to compete in Cuba's winter circuit for the upcoming season. Cuba's Sports Commission, which had taken pains to ensure that finances would be available to pay incoming

²¹ Letter From Dick Reynolds To Senator John Pastore, May 19, 1975, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1975, Box 87D, Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, MD; Letter from Edward Eagen to Dick Reynolds, May 25, 1960, Ibid.; Letter from Enrique Aguilar to Dick Reynolds, April 25, 1960, Ibid.; Letter from Enrique Aguilar to Dick Reynolds, May 17, 1960, Ibid.; Letter from Enrique Aguilar to Dick Reynolds, June 9, 1960, Ibid.; Letter from Enrique Aguilar to Dick Reynolds, August 1, 1960, Ibid..

players, responded by issuing a ban on American players for the upcoming season, thus violating the pact with American Organized Baseball. Frick, in turn, transformed his previous suggestion to an ultimatum the following month, barring clubs from contracting their American players out to Cuban teams, though the ban did not apply to Cuban natives. The commissioner also pressured Puerto Rico's winter circuit to withdraw from the upcoming Caribbean Series, which was scheduled to take place in Havana that February.²²

When Cuba's Winter League began play in October, it did so under these unusual circumstances. The first game of the season was delayed two hours because Castro, who was once again scheduled to throw out the first pitch, arrived late from delivering a three-hour televised speech. For the first time since the 1910 season, the league featured no American players, though it was not without major leaguers, as Red Sox pitcher and Cuban Mike Fornieles started the opening contest. Just a few days into the 1960 winter season, Cuba found itself under the weight of two American embargos. Frick had barred U.S. players from competing in Cuba that year—because, according to the Cuban Cultural Ministry, “those in power in Washington increased pressure on Major League owners” (los gobernantes de turno en Washington incrementaron las presiones sobre los magnates de las Ligas Mayores). And on October 19, the Eisenhower administration announced a trade embargo against Cuba. Both of these restrictions had severe consequences for Cuban baseball. The trade embargo nearly imperiled the entire season, since American companies had previously provided the bulk of Cuba's baseball equipment. Prior to the trading ban, Cuba had placed an order with U.S.-based Rawlings Sporting Goods for about 500-dozen baseballs. Because payment was en route from Cuba at the

²² González Echevarría, *Pride*, 346; Edel Casas et al., *Viva Y En Juego* (Havana: Editorial Científico Técnica, 1986), 103; “Ford Frick Requests Clubs Not To Approve Bids To Play In Cuba,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 1 September 1960, 5; “Sports Front Briefs: Baseball Golf General,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 1 October 1960, 16; “Frick Suggests Caribbean Series Be Transferred,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 October 1960; 16.

time that the American government announced the embargo, Rawlings had to petition the state department to allow the shipment to go through as scheduled. As it turned out, baseballs were one of the last American consumer items to slip into Cuba before the trade stoppage, and one of the first indicators of Cuba's future problems with the embargo. The potential shortage of baseballs led to a new rule that year forcing fans to return all foul balls hit into the stands.²³

One month into the season, the Cuban Winter League was showing signs of strain from the hindrances that the political turmoil imposed. Getting fans to come to the ballpark was a problem from the beginning. The season's opening game, which had featured Castro's appearance, only drew a half-filled stadium. Newspaper accounts in the United States took notice by early November that the Cuban League was on the verge of collapse due to poor attendance, and cited myriad reasons for the fans staying away. One issue was the lack of American professional players. Frick's ban meant that Cuban fans would not have the opportunity to see as many major league players as they had become accustomed to. Though Cuban media outlets had initially attempted to promote the winter season as a nationalistic escape from traditional American interference and optimistically noted that more Cuban players would get opportunities because of the lack of foreign competition, this enthusiasm did not translate into ticket sales. Economic turmoil and emigration were also problems. Castro's economic policies diminished the ranks of Cuba's elite by confiscating property from the island's wealthiest and driving many away. More than 60,000 Cubans, primarily from the middle and upper classes, left Cuba in 1960 alone. Those that stayed generally found themselves poorer, as the flow of American dollars ceased with the departure of American businesses.²⁴

²³ "Castro Opens Season With a Delayed Pitch," *New York Times*, 17 October 1960, 37; Phil Casey, "Cuban Baseball? Yes Indeed, Thanks To Lenient Interpretation of Embargo," *Washington Post*, 30 October 1960, A1.

²⁴ Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States*, 244-245.

Thus, many Cubans could no longer afford a night at the ballpark, and in response to lackluster attendance, the league cut its prices by forty percent during the 1960 season. General anxiety may have also contributed to the lack of fans. As the political tension between Cuba and the United States intensified, Cuban news outlets reported imminent threats of an American invasion. Fear of violence and upheaval during the Revolution certainly hurt the Sugar Kings' attendance in 1957 and 1958, and it is possible that unrest contributed to the Cuban League's problems in 1960 as well.²⁵

The 1960 crisis forced the league to make changes and to seek outside assistance in order to sustain Cuban baseball. Already forced to lower ticket prices and compel fans to return balls hit into the stands, league owners next tried to cut costs by asking players to take an additional twenty-five percent pay cut on salaries that were already lower than usual. Minnie Minoso of the White Sox, one of the Cuban major leaguers still permitted to play in the winter circuit, saw a drastic pay decrease from the previous year. Though Minoso had made \$2,500 dollars in Cuba during the 1959 season, he was only expecting about \$400 for 1960. The financial crisis also prompted the Cuban League to seek government assistance. Owners petitioned Cuba's Sports Ministry for an \$80,000 subsidy for the year, which was denied. They did find some respite, however. In early November, a number of Cuban labor unions announced that they would purchase seating blocks for some contests. Cuban media outlets also embarked on a public campaign to encourage audiences to buy baseball tickets. Promotional spots connected Cuban

²⁵ "Cuban Baseball League Faced With Collapse," *Washington Post*, 4 November 1960, C3; R. Hart Phillips, "Baseball Is Dying In Castro's Cuba: Ball Parks Are Empty and the Winter League Is Failing—Regime Urges Attendance," *New York Times*, 11 November 1960, 2.

baseball games, which were now free of American imperialism, to Revolutionary nationalism and featured the slogan: “Be a patriot and go to the ball games.”²⁶

Political trouble between Cuba and the United States damaged the baseball exchange between them. It did not completely destroy this exchange, however. A number of developments indicated that the animosity between the Washington and Havana governments was not shared among the Cuban and American people. That Cuban fans were going to the ballparks with less frequency did not indicate that Cuba’s passion for baseball was subsiding. Nor did Cubans’ hatred of U.S. government policy necessarily mean a hatred for American baseball. While their governments clashed, Cubans and Americans, at least for the time, continued to approach baseball absent political prejudices. On July 4, 1960, amidst growing Havana-Washington tension, and only days before the International League moved the Sugar Kings and the Eisenhower administration slashed the sugar quota, a Cuban baseball team played a friendly game with an American military squad on the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. This was the same base that Castro had alleged in April was providing assistance to counterrevolutionary forces. In October, despite having lost the Sugar Kings, after Ford Frick had announced that American players would not be permitted to play in Cuba’s Winter League, and just weeks before the United States enacted the trade embargo, Cuban fans continued to follow American baseball. Though the World Series was not broadcast on Cuban television that year, multiple radio networks carried the games. Cuban fan interest was reportedly high, as it typically was for the October series, and was boosted by Cuban pitcher Luis Arroyo’s presence with the participating New York Yankees. Columnist Bob Addie noted the irony in the fact that the razor

²⁶ “Cuban Baseball League Faced With Collapse,” C3; “Castro’s Unions Move To Save Cuban Baseball: Lack U.S. Talent,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 11 November 1960, 7; “Baseball Aided In Cuba: Labor Unions to Pitch In With Purchases of Box Seats,” *New York Times*, 12 November 1960, 6; “Psychopath’s Delight,” *Washington Post*, 15 November 1960, A18.

company Gillette, which sponsored the series' broadcasts, would likely not find much of a market in Cuba due to the popularity of beards.²⁷

Nonetheless, as U.S.-Cuba political ties continued to decay, the future of the baseball exchange came into question. Of particular concern was the fate of Cuban players in Major League Baseball. After the International League moved the Sugar Kings out of Havana, Castro criticized the overt political nature of the decision and noted that Cuba had not withdrawn its players from American teams despite the growing disputes between governments. Cuba continued this policy initially, but the status of its players remained a source of uncertainty. Writing just after the Sugar Kings' relocation in July 1960, Washington columnist Bob Addie predicted considerable hardship for the town's Senators team—which featured four Cuban players—should the Cuban government recall its nationals. Addie suggested baseball may need its own Monroe Doctrine to ensure continuity. The October embargo seemed to be another foreboding sign for Cuban major leaguers. Castro, however, continued to promise that Cuba would not prevent its players from resuming their careers in the United States. Columnist Shirley Povich drolly argued that, with Castro's word, fans could rest easy over the fate of Cuban players, since the bearded Cuban leader was “unable to tell a bare-faced lie.”²⁸

III

²⁷ Hanson W. Baldwin, “Clouds Over Guantanamo: A military expert describes the mood of the Navy base in Castro's Cuba today, and explains why we cannot afford to lose it,” *New York Times*, 21 August 1960, SM20; Bertram B. Johnson, “Maneuver Seen in Castro Blast at U.S. Base: Guantanamo Bay,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 April 1960, 6; “Yankee ‘Aggression’ in Series Wins Cheers of Havana Fans,” *New York Times*, 8 October 1960, 17; “Bob Addie's Column,” *Washington Post*, 13 October 1960, D2.

²⁸ “Bob Addie's Column,” *Washington Post*, 18 July 1960, A14; Shirley Povich, “This Morning...: To Whom It May Concern,” *Washington Post*, 30 October 1960, C1.

In January 1961, the Cuba-United States political relationship culminated in collapse when the Eisenhower administration severed diplomatic ties. The move again provoked unease over the upcoming Major League Baseball season and what effect the political fight would have on the baseball relationship. American media outlets speculated that Castro would retaliate for the diplomatic break by preventing Cuban baseball players from returning to their U.S. teams that season. Commissioner Ford Frick, who had banned American players from Cuban baseball leagues the previous fall, expressed consternation in early January and warned that baseball's predicament "could become pretty serious if the situation doesn't improve." Losing Cuban players, Frick said, would mean a number of teams "would be hit rather hard and [the league] certainly would have to make some provisions for meeting this new emergency." One of those hit hardest, as Addie had noted the year before, would be former Senators' owner Calvin Griffith. The Washington franchise had relocated to Minneapolis after the 1960 season, becoming the Minnesota Twins, but still carried three Cuban players. Though a boycott would have cost Griffith two of his best pitchers, Camilo Pascual and Pedro Ramos, the Twins' owner was optimistic in early January that that club would "be able to get Castro's permission, and then visas, for all [the team's] Cuban ball players." Griffith cited the fact that Castro had never previously denied players permission to play elsewhere, and revealed conversations from an inside source in Cuba—baseball scout Joe Cambria, who was still mining the island for talent—that boosted his confidence for the upcoming season.²⁹

²⁹ John Drebing, "Baseball Fears Action by Castro to Prevent Cubans From Playing in U.S.: American League Faces Major Loss," *New York Times*, 5 January 1961, 36; "Cuban Players' Futures Up to Premier Castro," *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 January 1961, 10; Bob Addie, "Cubans Expected to Play: Griffith Feels Sure Ramos, Pascual Will Be Allowed to Return," *Washington Post*, 5 January 1961, D1; Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times: The Decision Is Castro's," *New York Times*, 6 January 1961, 31.

Griffith's faith proved justified and Organized Baseball soon breathed a collective sigh of relief. The Cuban Foreign Ministry announced on January 6 that it would grant ballplayer requests for exit visas. The American state department likewise assured teams that it would allow Cuban players to enter the United States. Nonetheless, the loss of diplomatic ties in 1961 meant that getting Cuban players to the United States would now be a more difficult process for American teams. Although flights continued between the United States and Havana, the two nations no longer maintained embassies and legal travel between the United States and Cuba required a third nation to serve as intermediary. Thus, Cuban players could not simply obtain an exit visa from their country to the United States, as the state department did not validate Cuban documentation. A departing Cuban now had to seek a travel visa to a third nation, such as Mexico, and from there obtain a visa to travel to the United States. Though the state department pledged cooperation in approving visa applications from Cuban players, these applications still had to originate from a third nation. Players could seek refugee status and travel directly to the United States from Cuba, but doing so meant that the player could not return to his homeland after the season. The diplomatic issues forced major league teams with Cuban players to make arrangements with other nations—most commonly Mexico and Canada—to get their players into the United States.³⁰

The political break also took a toll on the players. While new travel arrangements presented an inconvenience for American team officials, Cuban players suffered significant and often permanent consequences because of the United States-Cuba split. Some of the stories of

³⁰ "Cuban Players' Futures Up to Premier Castro," 10; Alvin Shuster, "Diplomatic Break Often Harmless: Soviet, Red China and Spain Exemplify Lack of Impact From Non-Recognition," *New York Times*, 5 January 1961, 6; R. Hart Phillips, "Cuba Suspending Exit From Island; Seizes A Church: Americans Allowed to Leave Country, but Permit Ban Halts Most Others," *New York Times*, 7 January 1961, 1; "Cuban Baseball Players Told They Can Join Teams in U.S.: 'No Trouble' in Obtaining Exit Permits Is Promised by Havana Official—Arrangements for Visas Slated," *New York Times*, 7 January 1961, 14; "Ball Clubs Ponder Cuban Entry Route," *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 February 1961, 12; "Mexico Helps Cubans Obtain U.S. Visas," *Washington Post*, 7 February 1961, A20.

these players reveal the personal impact that is often overlooked in considering the political and diplomatic relationships between two governments. A number of Cuban major leaguers arrived late to their 1961 spring training camps in the United States because of travel complications. The Senators' Hector Maestri, who traveled from Havana through Mexico City on his way to the team's facility in Pompano Beach, Florida, was two weeks behind schedule. The delayed arrival of Los Angeles Angels' first baseman Julio Becquer even caught the attention of one prominent American official. President Eisenhower paid a visit to the team's spring camp in Palm Springs, California and inquired of the Cuban player's whereabouts. When an Angels' official confessed that the team was unsure when Becquer would arrive, but jokingly speculated that the Cuban may be leading a Revolution against Castro, Eisenhower responded that "Either way, he's going to have rooters."³¹

The political situation forced several Cuban players to make difficult choices. White Sox outfielder Minnie Minoso, who had to obtain a visa from Canada prior to the 1961 season, signed a new contract paying him \$50,000 per year. Cuban efforts to seize wealth, combined with an increasingly hostile relationship between the Washington and Havana governments, prompted the star Cuban player to relocate permanently to the United States, and he moved his family out of Cuba and to Chicago that same season.³²

Minoso had an easier time than many of his fellow countrymen. Twins pitcher Pedro Ramos found himself conflicted over continuing his baseball career or returning home to Cuba to

³¹ Bob Addie, "Nats Begin Drills With 16 in Camp," *Washington Post*, 23 February 1961, A16; "Maestri Finally Arrives in Nats Camp With Money Problem," *Washington Post*, 9 March 1961, B7; "Good-Humored Ike Kids With Ballplayers," *Washington Post*, 2 March 1961, B7.

³² "Minoso Signs for Highest Chisox Salary in History: Outfielder Hiked to \$50,000," *Washington Post*, 28 January 1961, A16; "'Shocked' By Trade: Minnie Minoso To Quit Rather Than Join Cards?," *New Journal and Guide*, 9 December 1961, 18; "Wendell Smith's Sports Beat: Confiscation of Minoso's Nest Egg By Castro Ends Retirement Dreams," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 27 July 1963, 23.

fight. Ramos had spoken out against Castro early in the Cuban leader's term and on the eve of the 1961 season indicated that he was considering going back to Cuba to partake in the counterrevolutionary movement. After the Cuban pitcher defeated the Yankees in a dominant opening day performance, a Washington writer opined that Ramos "pitched like a man anxious to get his affairs tidied up early in case he might be called home to Cuba for a revolution." Although he ultimately opted to forego fighting in favor of baseball, Ramos still felt an impact from those who did return to Cuba to contest Castro's rule. In April 1961, only days into the baseball season, the CIA unleashed its ill-conceived plan to topple the Cuban regime through an exile invasion in the Bay of Pigs. The plan, of course, was hardly top secret. Newspaper articles published in the days leading up to the invasion noted anti-Castro exiles training in Miami and revealed that these forces could be easily recognized thanks to the blue baseball caps that were a part of their standard issue uniforms. For Ramos, the failed effort at expelling Castro once again raised trepidations about home and, in particular, his parents who remained in Cuba. Ramos, like Minoso, eventually chose to remain in the United States permanently, and began the process of becoming a citizen after the following season.³³

Zoilo Versalles, one of Ramos's fellow Cubans and teammates with the Twins, also had a difficult time during the season. Fear for his family's well-being brought on a bout of homesickness. The Cuban shortstop actually left the team for two weeks in the middle of the season while he pondered quitting baseball. Versalles's career stabilized over the 1962 and 1963

³³ Shirley Povich, "This Morning...: To Whom It May Concern," *Washington Post*, 9 April 1961, C1; John Drebing, "Minnesota Breaks Into Majors With a Three-Hit Shutout Over Yanks Here: Ramos Of Twins Beats Ford, 6-0," *New York Times*, 12 April 1961, 50; "New York Opener; Red Smith's Column," *Washington Post*, 12 April 1961, C5; "Snead Grows Sensative (sic); Bob Addie's Column," *Washington Post*, 27 February 1963, B2; James Buchanan, "Miami 'Staging Areas' Send Out Recruits of Anti-Castro Army," *Washington Post*, 14 April 1961, B11; Tad Szulc, "Cuban Rebels' HQ: Miami Provides Strange Backdrop For Conspiracy and Plotting," *New York Times*, 16 April 1961, E5; "Twins Claim Past; Bob Addie's Column," *Washington Post*, 23 April 1961, C3.

seasons only after he managed to get his wife, parents, and brother out of Cuba as well—the last on the phony premise that he was signing with an American baseball team.³⁴

The challenges that confronted Cuban players in 1961 persisted through the remainder of the decade. Perhaps no story better exemplifies the impact of the complicated U.S.-Cuba post-revolutionary baseball relationship than that of Rogelio Álvarez. Prior to the 1963 season, the Cincinnati Reds, who had used Alvarez only sparingly the previous year, traded him to the Washington Senators. Álvarez, who returned to Cuba during the baseball offseason, encountered incredible difficulty making it back to the United States. The process began in February, when Álvarez first tried to depart. As was customary for Cuban players heading to the United States, he applied for a travel visa through Mexico. A delay in processing his application meant that the Cuban first baseman was absent when the Senators began spring training in late February. Though the Mexican embassy ultimately expedited his visa and apparently granted him permission to travel directly to the United States, Álvarez was still unable to leave because he could not obtain an exit visa from Cuba. Daily visits to Havana's airport yielded no progress through the end of March. The venture was becoming an expensive one for the Senators, who on three occasions wired Álvarez transportation money—which kept mysteriously disappearing in Cuba. The team also sent copies of their player's visa to the Mexican embassy on three separate occasions.³⁵

³⁴ “Twins’ Zorro No Longer Homesick,” *Washington Post*, 8 April 1962, C3; “Versalles Owes Success to Wife,” *Washington Post*, 4 June 1963, A21.

³⁵ Bob Addie, “Cheney’s Three-Quarter Speed Catches Rusty Batters Off Balance,” *Washington Post*, 28 February 1963, D1; ----, “Selkirk, Yanks Again Talk Trade: Dodgers, Braves Also Contacted,” *Washington Post*, 6 March 1963, B9; Shirley Povich, “This Morning...: To Whom It May Concern,” *Washington Post*, 17 March 1963, C1; ----, “This Morning...: To Whom It May Concern,” *Washington Post*, 27 March 1963, D8; “Nats Bring Tom Brown Here for Opening Game,” *Washington Post*, 31 March 1963, C3.

Álvarez's absence quickly became fodder for Washington newspaper columnists. The *Post's* Bill Gold suggested that the Senators may have better luck with the Cuban government if they "tell Castro that we need our first baseman for our fight against the gringo Damyankees" (sic). Colleagues Shirley Povich and Bob Addie also weighed in on the Alvarez situation. Povich connected the ballplayer's struggle to ongoing hostilities involving Cuban exiles, noting that "every anti-Castro raid on Cuba sets back the Senators' hopes of an emigration visa." Addie made reference to the American trade embargo against Cuba in offering a solution for the baseball problem. Writing about Washington General Manager George Selkirk's ordeal in trying to get his player out of Havana, Addie suggested that "Selkirk should have sent all the aspirin he's taken for the Álvarez headache to Cuba for ransom."³⁶

Though the story made for humorous observations, it had serious consequences for Álvarez. The would-be Senator did not arrive in the United States until mid May, after he and a group of Cuban minor leaguers appealed directly to Castro for their release. An American Red Cross vessel transported the roughly twenty-five ballplayers out of Havana. Although expected to be a major contributor for the Washington club, Álvarez found his career derailed by the travel delay. By the time he made it to the United States, his trade to the Senators had been voided, and the Reds had relegated him to their minor league system. Álvarez never made it back to the major leagues.³⁷

³⁶ Bill Gold, "The District Line: The Rude Awakening Comes Later," *Washington Post*, 21 March 1963, B18; Shirley Povich, "This Morning...: To Whom It May Concern," *Washington Post*, 7 April 1963, C1; "The Baseball Opener; Bob Addie's Column," *Washington Post*, 9 April 1963, C2.

³⁷ Bob Addie, "Kennedy, Rudolph, Barber Hurl: New Nats In Lineup," *Washington Post*, 8 April 1963, A18; "Nats End Mystery Chase For Alvarez, Take Cash," *Washington Post*, 21 April 1963, C1; "It's Reds' Turn to Play 'Waiting for Rogelio'," *Washington Post*, 22 April 1963, A21; "Cuba Ready To 'Liberate' Ball Players," *Washington Post*, 22 May 1963, D2; Shirley Povich, "This Morning...: To Whom It May Concern," *Washington Post*, 30 June 1963, C1.

Hardening U.S.-Cuba animosity beginning in 1961 also had consequences for Cuban baseball. As discussed above, baseball had long reflected political realities in Cuba. Upon its inception in the late nineteenth century, it represented modernity and the Cuban preference for American over Spanish cultural imports. By the mid-twentieth century, Cuba's place with Organized Baseball reflected the close economic and political ties to the United States through a quasi-colonial relationship. Beginning in the 1960s, political change from the Revolution meant changes in baseball's politicization continued. Indeed, as Cuba's ties to the United States languished and its connections with the Soviet Union flourished, the Castro government attempted to change Cuban sports preferences as well. In 1961, the regime evidently decided that baseball, indicating Cuba's past with the United States, should be shunned in favor of soccer, a Soviet import. Newspaper articles reveal that Castro's forces began using some baseball stadiums as mass prisons instead of athletic venues in order to suppress dissent following the failed Bay of Pigs uprising. Though Cuba hosted a prominent Soviet soccer team to boost that sport's profile and Cuban media downplayed baseball coverage to promote the European game, the change never really took hold. Unable to divert Cuban fans to soccer, Castro attempted to revise baseball's history to make it more suited for a Revolutionary embrace. Taking another page from the Soviet Union, which had made similar boasts of inventing the sport, Castro began claiming in 1963 that baseball was not a North American innovation, but in fact had first been played by pre-Colombian Cubans as a game called *batos*. A piece in *The Christian Science Monitor*, humorously titled "Señor Comrade Doubleday" after baseball's mythological American inventor, surmised that such a ridiculous claim from Cuba was a surefire indication that the island had earned its Communist credentials.³⁸

³⁸ Max Frankel, "Case Study of a Police State: Castro's Cuba is a prime example of how demagoguery and confusion can cloak the implacable maneuvers of a dictator bent on absolute power over his country." *New York*

The Castro regime also sought to use baseball as a tool in the Revolution. To do this, however, the regime had to first make baseball fit the Revolution. Thus, Cuba's traditional baseball circuit, the professional Winter League, which had for so long been a contributing cog to American Organized Baseball's machine, was abolished and replaced with a new Cuban League.

In February 1961, the Cuban government created the National Institution of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (INDER). This was the Castro regime's controlling arm for athletics in Cuba. One month later, in March, INDER banned professional sports in Cuba and replaced the Winter League with the new, island-wide amateur baseball league. In doing so, INDER banished from baseball all the American, capitalist-inspired innovations that it claimed had previously plagued the sport. For Cuban athletes, baseball was no longer their vocation, but their hobby, as players received paychecks for their day jobs but merely respect and accolades from the people (along with occasional, under the table perks for star players) for athletic success.³⁹

While the Cuban Winter League had been a Havana-centered series, INDER began the mission of transforming baseball into a national endeavor. The regime constructed new stadiums and built playing fields across the island, and created amateur teams in each of Cuba's six provinces that were comprised only from the provinces' local population. No trades were

Times, 30 April 1961, SM7; Shirley Povich, "This Morning...: To Whom It May Concern," *Washington Post*, 11 June 1961, C1; R. Hart Phillips, "Castro's Cuba Described As Isle of Fear and Hate," *New York Times*, 20 May 1961, 1; Robert Berrellez, "G-2 Agents in Havana Jailed Over 147,500," *Washington Post*, 21 May 1961, A8; "Americans Hand On in Cuba," *Christian Science Monitor*, 31 July 1962, 6; "Cuba Adds Her Claim As Home of Baseball," *New York Times*, 12 March 1962, 36; "Señor Comrade Doubleday," *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 March 1962, 16

³⁹ Bjarkman, *History*, 235-240; Juan de Onis, "Baseball Is Still Baseball In Cuba: The Only Socialist League in World Has No Pros," *New York Times*, 18 February 1964, 41; "Baseball Still Top Sport in Cuba, But Its Changed Under Castro," *Washington Post*, 8 January 1967, C3.

allowed, and free agency did not exist as players were not to be treated like commodities, as they were in American Organized Baseball. INDER proclaimed sports, including baseball, as the right of the people and sold amateur athletics as one of the gifts of the Revolution. Accordingly, Cuba's new baseball leagues were not permitted to charge admission for fans, as the game was not to be used as a commercial enterprise. An American newspaper article from 1967 captured some of the changes that the Revolution brought to Cuban baseball and noted the comments of an anonymous Cuban writer who argued that the sport had "been rescued in all its purity from the filthy clutches of capitalism by the revolution." The Cuban Cultural Ministry called abolishing professional baseball "an end to nearly eight years of unjust exploitation" (su fin cerca de ochenta años de injusta explotación).⁴⁰

IV

Transformed by the Revolution, baseball in Cuba could now serve the Revolution. Cuba's government co-opted the sport's popularity to boost its own appeal by embracing baseball and claiming it as a part of the comprehensive Cuban system that the Revolution had created. By building baseball stadiums and providing free admission, the state had a highly visible and highly popular symbol of the Revolution to which it could point when extolling its own virtues. The Castro regime also began using baseball to serve larger needs. To ensure a military force capable of defending the revolution, Cuba's government instituted mandatory conscription in 1963, requiring three years of military service from men and draft registration for women. Because the state expected every Cuban to serve in the armed forces if necessary, INDER worked to promote sports participation as a means of ensuring a healthy, athletic

⁴⁰ Ibid.; Casas et al., *Juego*, 95.

population. A 1964 *New York Times* article carried a photo of Castro regime propaganda that showed Cuba's leader swimming and playing golf and baseball to encourage Cuba's youth to stay active.⁴¹

Castro himself also readily used baseball as a political platform. Inside Cuban ballparks, Communist slogans on outfield walls replaced commercial advertisements from the pre-Revolutionary era. When the new Cuban League began play in 1962, Castro's mere presence symbolized the link between baseball and the state. Cuba's leader demonstrated the depth of this connection by going beyond the custom of throwing out a ceremonial first pitch and instead opting to step up to the plate as a hitter and take the first swings of the season—a practice he continued through future decades, not only at season-opening games but at random contests throughout the year. In early 1964, with rumors swirling that he had been assassinated, Castro proved that he was indeed alive and well by appearing at a baseball game in Havana. Later that year, Castro incorporated the sport into the 26th of July celebration by hosting a massive baseball demonstration featuring over 600 Cuban athletes on the eve of the anniversary. He even recognized baseball's use in mending bridges, and on the same day pitched in a pick-up game that featured a number of American media correspondents and made appeals for reconciliation with the United States. Baseball also served to strengthen Cuba's ties to fellow Communist states. Cuba began baseball exchanges with the Soviet Union, who sent athletic experts to the island to study the game, and with China and North Vietnam, who learned baseball from Cuban instructors who visited their countries.⁴²

⁴¹ "Cuban Baseball Had Own Style," *Washington Post*, 30 January 1966, C3; "Cuba Emphasizes Youth Training," *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 December 1963, 3; Richard Eder, "The Student in Havana: A Life of Pressure: Students of Havana University Under a Variety of Pressure," *New York Times*, 25 May 1964, 1; "Other Foreign News: Rebels Attack Congo Town With Bows, Arrows, Knives," *Washington Post*, 3 February 1964, A16.

⁴² Thomas Hamilton, "Castro Leads Cubans in a Rally For His 26th of July Anniversary," *New York Times*, 26 July 1964, 16; Philip Geyelin, "Fidel's Message: All's Well in Cuba Yet He'd Like U.S. Reconciliation," *Wall Street*

By making baseball a part of the Revolution, however, Cuba's government also politicized baseball. Because the sport was now associated with the state, international baseball games were now loaded with political undertones. Starting in the 1960s, baseball found itself in the same Cold War current that colored other athletic competitions between the United States and Communist bloc nations. After the Soviet Union began participating in the Olympic Games in 1952, their athletes' successes demonstrated the effectiveness of the nation's massive sports programs. The positive publicity that sports success generated for Marxist totalitarianism prompted the United States to put more emphasis on sports development with the hope of winning victories for its own system in athletic venues. Thus, sports became a battlefield for Cold War ideology.

Cold War considerations had major impact on post-Revolutionary baseball exchanges between Cuba and the United States. Prior to the 1960s, both nations participated in international baseball competitions such as the Amateur World Series and the Pan American Games. During that time, wins and losses carried no major overtones beyond the playing field. After the Revolution, however, baseball games pitting Cuban teams against American clubs took on political significance, as baseball players, in the eyes of many, came to carry the banners not only of their nations, but their nations' governments.

The 1961 Amateur World Series, the first international competition for Cuba's post-Revolutionary baseball team, was a harbinger of the politicization that characterized athletics through the rest of the decade. When the Cuban team arrived in Costa Rica to compete in the Latin American tournament, airport officials confiscated pro-Castro propaganda sent with the ballplayers. A few weeks later the team witnessed the first of what would become a notable part

Journal, 27 July 1964, 1; Juan de Onis, "Cuba to Start Teaching Baseball To Soviet Union and Red China," *New York Times*, 13 December 1964, S2.

of the post-Revolutionary baseball exchange when four Cuban baseball players left the team and sought political asylum in Costa Rica.⁴³ The next year, Cuba sent a delegation of athletes to the multi-sport Caribbean Games with expressed hopes that success would draw attention to the nation's athletic program and demonstrate the superiority of the socialist system. Learning from the airport confiscations and the defections from the year before, Cuba's government ordered its athletes not to carry propaganda and warned that opposition groups would try to lure them into disloyal acts. Despite these precautions, defections continued. On the eve of the Caribbean Games, Cuban pitcher Enrique Hernández fled Cuba for the United States after reports surfaced that he was planning to sabotage Cuba's effort by announcing that he was a professional and having his nation disqualified. Cuba also lost its entire weightlifting team when the four athletes defected while in Jamaica. The team's coach, who also defected, claimed that they did so because they "could not represent a system that has caused the ruin of [their] country." Violence at a baseball game between Cuba and Puerto Rico demonstrated the political tension that underscored the Caribbean Games. Puerto Rican fans, among them a significant number of Cuban exiles, fought with pro-Castro Cuban fans when a rain delay sent both groups into a crowded stadium tunnel.⁴⁴

Politics continued to affect athletic contests later in the 1960s. The first display of U.S.-Cuba political animosity playing out in athletic venues came during the 1963 Pan American Games in Brazil. The fight began before the games did, as administrative issues nearly kept

⁴³ "Cuban Tracts Seized," *Washington Post*, 7 April 1961, D9; "Cubans Get Asylum," *Washington Post*, 26 April 1961, C2.

⁴⁴ "Cuba Acts to Prevent Desertion Of Athletes at Caribbean Games: Government Fears Groups in Jamaica Will Try to Buy Disloyalty—Uniforms of Military Nature Barred on Trip," *New York Times*, 9 August 1962, 29; "Hurler, 17, Flees Cuba in Boat In Hopes of Tryout With Indians," *New York Times*, 12 August 1962, S3; "World Sports In Brief," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 August 1962, 5; "Cuban Nine Loses After Fans Riot: Puerto Rico Is 4-3 Victor in Caribbean Games," *New York Times*, 15 August 1962, 27.

Cuba out of the competition. Cuba's participation was in question until just before the April event started, because the International Olympic Committee, the governing body for the multi-nation competition, claimed that Cuban sports officials had neglected to respond to paperwork confirming their intention to take part. Cuba claimed that it had not ignored the committee's requests, but had responded by asking for clarification. Castro, meanwhile, alleged that the paperwork snafu was part of a U.S.-led plot to keep Cuba out of the Pan American Games. Cuba's leader met with his nation's athletic delegation prior to their April 15 departure and accused the United States of using "tricks and illegal actions," because, he argued, Cuban support in Brazil would be greater than U.S. support. Indeed, though it is unknown if the United States government actively sought to keep Cuba out of the games in 1963, American media outlets took note of the political significance in the athletic competitions. A *New York Times* article recapping the opening ceremonies mentioned in the first paragraph that the crowd in Brazil gave the American delegation a louder cheer than it had given the Cuban athletes.⁴⁵

As expected, with the sport's importance in both nations and with the political rift dividing them, U.S.-Cuba baseball clashes at the 1963 Pan American Games were particularly intriguing. Both teams entered the competition harboring gold medal hopes. Cuba had already established itself as an international baseball power, having won the Pan American Games in 1951, and the Amateur World Series eight times, including most recently in 1961. The United States had won silver at the first two Pan American Games in 1951 and 1955, bronze in 1959, and hoped to finally capture the championship in 1963 with a mixed squad of players from American colleges and the armed forces. Their first game of the competition, which came

⁴⁵ "Castro Addresses Brazil Bound Athletes," April 15, 1963, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>; "Castro Charges U.S. Schemes To Keep Cubans Out of Games," *New York Times*, 16 April 1963, 41; Juan de Onis, "Colorful Ceremonies Open 4th Pan-American Games," *New York Times*, 21 April 1963, S1.

against Cuba, was a bitter dose of reality. The Cuban team pounded out 15 hits in a 13-1 thrashing that demonstrated the competitive advantage that Cuba enjoyed under its new system. Because the state had abolished professional sports, Cuba's international team brought together the best collection of players from the island. Furthermore, unlike the American team, which every year lost its best amateur players to the professional ranks, Cuba's roster remained mostly the same from year to year, providing an edge in continuity that even Cuba's manager, former Washington Senator Gilberto Torres, admitted after the opening win over the United States.⁴⁶

That the United States and Cuba had different definitions of "amateur" status among their athletes changed the nature of sports competitions between them. In exactly the same way that Americans came to denounce the Soviet Union for sending older, veteran athletes to international amateur competitions like the Olympics, the United States also began criticizing Cuba's broadened amateur status. This debate over amateurs versus professional athletes in international competitions was at the core of Cold War era athletic contests. It also created a unique situation whereby the United States, able to assume a moral high road for sending primarily collegiate athletes instead of players from major professional leagues, could position itself as the sympathetic underdog, rather than the despised favorite. Baseball thus provided the only scenario where the United States could claim to be the metaphorical David while painting Cuba as Goliath.

Claims that Cuba gained an unfair edge by using players who should be considered professionals began after the opening game. U.S. Coach Archie Allen stopped short of directly accusing the Cubans of cheating following the lopsided 13-1 game, but buried a subtle slight in

⁴⁶ "Both Managers Sure Of Victory: U.S. to Play Cuban Nine in Opener—Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela Also Entered," *New York Times*, 21 April 1963, S7; Juan de Onis, "Cubans' 15 Hits Rout U.S., 13-1, As Tourney Opens in Sao Paulo," *New York Times*, 22 April 1963, 34.

his post-game remarks. While praising the team as being “head and shoulders above” the rest of the competition, Allen continued that Cuba had “four boys in there that look just too good to be amateurs.” The Cuban team spent the remainder of the tournament refuting accusations of unfairly using pros, and after fans of the Brazil team harassed Cuban players with shouts of “professionalism” throughout their game, a fight between partisans erupted outside the stadium. Cuba ultimately prevailed in the tournament and its players danced on the field after they beat the United States’ team for the second time to clinch the gold medal. That politics had injected bad blood into baseball competitions was apparent by the end of the Pan American Games. Despite winning the silver medal in baseball, the United States team did not attend the medal ceremony.⁴⁷

The dispute carried over into the 1965 Amateur World Series and the 1966 Caribbean Games. Colombia, which hosted the Amateur World Series, had severed diplomatic ties with the Castro regime in 1961 and refused to issue visas to Cuba’s baseball team. Cuba protested the move but was rebuffed and denied the chance to defend its title from four years earlier. Though Houston Astros scout and Cuban native Tony Pacheco expressed his interest in forming a “Free Cuba” team comprised of exiles to take to Colombia, ultimately no squad representing Cuba appeared in the 1965 tournament. Politics was beginning to overshadow athletics. The visa issue also threatened to keep Cuba out of the Caribbean Games the following year. Because Puerto Rico was serving as host, the American state department announced in 1965 its intentions to keep Cuba out of the competition by denying its athletes visas. Cuba denounced the move,

⁴⁷ “Cubans Drub U.S. in Pan-Am Baseball, 13 to 1: Yanks Win In Judo, Swimming,” *Washington Post*, 22 April 1963, A22; “U.S. ‘Hoards’ Gold Medals,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 April 1963, 10; “Clash at Pan-Am Cubans, Brazilians,” *Washington Post*, 29 April 1963, A22; “Cuba Again Beats U.S. in Pan-American Baseball: Yanks Pick Up 3 More Gold Medals,” *Washington Post*, 27 April 1963, D21; “McArdle, Martin Set Pan-American Records: Baseball Team Booed Over Snub,” *Washington Post*, 2 May 1963, F4.

arguing that the American-led “sports quarantine” was part of a counterrevolutionary plot. As they had done the year before over the Amateur World Series exclusion, Cuban officials appealed to Avery Brundage, president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Brundage in 1965 had written to the Baseball Federation and argued that international sports should be free from political antagonism, but because his organization did not govern the Amateur World Series there was nothing he could do to force Cuba’s entry. The IOC did govern the Caribbean Games, however, so Brundage in 1966 could take decisive action on Cuba’s behalf. After the IOC threatened to move the games out of Puerto Rico, the state department relented and agreed to offer visas to the Cuban contingent.⁴⁸

Though Cuba had been assured a spot in the games, this did not put the political antagonism to rest. Regarding travel to Puerto Rico, the United States refused to allow Cuba to fly its athletes directly into San Juan from Havana, forcing them instead to fly from a third nation. Cuba also had to appeal to Jamaica to issue visas for its athletes because of the lack of diplomatic ties with the United States. Delays over the visa issue caused much of Cuba’s delegation to miss the opening ceremony. There were also concerns of violent encounters between the visiting athletes and the roughly 25,000 Cuban exiles who had immigrated to Puerto Rico. Cuban officials, who called Puerto Rico an “imperialist colony” and claimed to relish competing in such a hostile environment, helped to fan the flames in the days leading up to the Caribbean Games. Though the baseball competition remained peaceful once the games began,

⁴⁸ Paul Hoffman, “Baseball Rebuff Enrages Cubans: Colombia’s Ban on Team Has Island in an Uproar,” *New York Times*, 11 February 1965, 50; “Free Cuba Team,” *Anderson Daily Bulletin*, 6 February 1965, 6; Michael Arkus, “‘Sports Blockade’ Draws Loud Protest From Cuba,” *Washington Post*, 27 May 1965, D23; “Olympic Recognition of Cuba Clouds Puerto Rican Games,” *New York Times*, 29 August 1965, S4; “San Juan Event To Attract 1500,” *Washington Post*, 2 January 1966, C5.

there was nearly a riot at a Cuba-Puerto Rico basketball game after a fan inside the arena tried to pull down the Cuban flag.⁴⁹

By the end of the decade, politics had become an entrenched part of U.S.-Cuba sports interactions. At the 1967 Pan American Games, intrigue from the political undercurrent drove unprecedented advance ticket sales for the baseball games that pitted the Cold War foes against one another. A *Washington Post* article previewing the tournament warned that “relations between the two nations being what they are, the encounter on the diamond could be marked by emotional fireworks,” and noted that Cuba had the advantage of retaining the same team from the previous games, while the United States had lost seventeen of its players to the Major League Baseball draft since the year before. On the field, it initially looked as though Cuba would continue to dominate, as they beat the American squad in both preliminary round contests. The United States team rebounded, however, and qualified for the best-of-three championship series, giving it another shot at its arch nemesis Cuba. After splitting the first two games, the Americans captured their first baseball gold medal at the Pan American Games by winning the decisive game three. U.S. Olympic Committee director Arthur Lentz, who referred to the Cuban squad as the “Castro Commandos,” hailed the victory as the highlight of the entire competition. The feeling was not universal. Having been booed in absentia for skipping the medal ceremony four years earlier in Brazil, the United States team was booed again upon receiving its gold medals, this time by a group of Cuban pilots charged with flying their team back home.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ “Cuba Rejects U.S. Visa Plan For Games in Puerto Rico,” *New York Times*, 23 April 1966, 23; Mike Segarra, “Athletes Take Over In Puerto Rico,” *New York Times*, 8 May 1966, 56; “Cuban Athletes Aroused Over Caribbean Games,” *Washington Post*, 29 May 1966, C5; “Charter Flights to Games Permitted to Cuban Teams,” *New York Times*, 10 June 1966, 77; “Puerto Rico Five Wins; Game Ends in Outburst,” *New York Times*, 22 June 1966, 51.

⁵⁰ John M. Lee, “Winnipeg Bustles to Stage Pan-American Games,” *New York Times*, 16 July 1967, 149; “Oppressive Heat Lingers At Pan Am Games Site,” *Washington Post*, 22 July 1967, D1; “Cuba Defeats U.S., 4 to 3, In Pan-American Baseball,” *New York Times*, 25 July 1967, 40; “Isasi Paces Cuban Nine To Games Victory Over U.S.,” *New York Times*, 30 July 1967, 150; “Harvard 8-Oared Crew Beats Canada by 1 1/2 Lengths in Pan-

Cuba would have its revenge two years later, winning the 1969 Amateur World Series by defeating the United States in the championship game. Political implications were apparent throughout this tournament as well, as anti-American sentiment stemming from the 1965 U.S. military intervention in the host nation Dominican Republic prompted additional security measures for the American baseball team. Partisan Dominican fans provided a de facto home atmosphere for the Cuban squad by cheering them and booing the American players throughout the competition. Following Cuba's victory, Castro gloated that the United States, which was fresh off the Apollo 11 triumph (another event loaded with Cold War significance) the month before "was able to conquer the moon but it couldn't win the tournament."⁵¹

By the end of the 1960s, the Revolution and the development of a Cold War political relationship between Cuba and the United States had transformed the baseball relationship once shared by the two nations. Even after the Castro regime came to power, Cuba initially remained a part of American Organized Baseball. Cuban players continued to compete in the American major leagues and Cuba's most visible baseball link to the United States, the Havana-based Sugar Kings, reached its zenith in 1959 by winning the Junior World Series of the minor leagues. A number of Cuban baseball leaders, most notably Sugar Kings owner Bobby Maduro, had

American Games: Collegian Shell Leads From Start," *New York Times*, 4 August 1967, S22; "Seven Pan-American Records Established by U.S. Track Stars at Winnipeg," *New York Times*, 5 August 1967, S18; "Clocking is 0:39: American Athletes Turn In Sterling (and Gold) Performances in Pan-Am," *New York Times*, 6 August 1967, 153; "High Camp Set to Train Olympians," *Washington Post*, 24 August 1967, B7; "Dejected Cubans Boo U.S. Victory in Baseball," *Washington Post*, 7 August 1967, D5.

⁵¹ "U.S. Baseball Team Picked For World Tournament Play," *Atlanta Daily World*, 15 November 1970, 6; "U.S. Nine Jeered At Santo Domingo: Collegians Play Cuba Today for Tournament Title," *New York Times*, 26 August 1969, 49; "Dominicans Cheer U.S. Loss to Cuba," *Washington Post*, 28 August 1969, H4; "Ulster Catholics Mob British Home Secretary: Around the World," *Washington Post*, 29 August 1969, A17.

hoped that Havana would one day be home to a major league franchise. Though this dream may not have been realized even if the Revolution had not occurred, it is true that up until the 1960s baseball had provided an important cultural link between Cubans and Americans. As tension between Washington and Havana escalated, however, U.S.-Cuba baseball ties became a casualty in the fight. Against the backdrop of the embargo, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and perpetual American attempts, beginning in November 1961 through Operation Mongoose, to assassinate Castro and sabotage Cuba agricultural and infrastructure, baseball exchanges languished. American Organized Baseball relocated the Sugar Kings to Jersey City and a number of Cuban major leaguers, who sometimes found themselves caught in the middle of the political rift, began confronting difficult choices over home, family, and career.⁵²

Over the course of the 1960s, baseball ceased serving as common ground in the U.S.-Cuba dispute, and instead became a medium for waging political wars by proxy. Castro made baseball a part of the Revolution and drew connections between sport and state through a nationwide sports initiative and numerous public appearances. The United States also used the sport as a political weapon, broadcasting American baseball games as propaganda to Cuban listeners over radio waves from Guantanamo Bay under Operation Mongoose.⁵³ In international competitions, baseball diamonds became Cold War battlefields. Sports, designed as they were to reflect cultures and societies, took the place of actual fighting in many observers' eyes. What happened on and off the field reinforced the political positions of both nations. Cubans decried American attempts to keep them out of competitions by blocking visas as a sports embargo,

⁵² Jim Rasenberger, *The Brilliant Disaster: JFK, Castro, and America's Doomed Invasion of Cuba's Bay of Pigs* (New York: Scribner, 2011), 360.

⁵³ Memorandum From the Department of Defense Operations Officer for Operation Mongoose (Harris) to the Chief of Operations, Operation Mongoose (Lansdale), July 23, 1962, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume X: Cuba, 1961-1963* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1997), 866.

equally imperialist to the trade embargo that already existed. On the other hand, disputes over amateur and professional status allowed the United States to reverse roles with Cuba, embrace the underdog position, portray Cuba as the unfair superpower, and ensure itself against losing face should it lose a game.

Baseball's politicization during the decade also hindered any hopes for reconciliation. U.S.-Cuba antagonism broke briefly during the early months of Lyndon Johnson's presidency, as the administration abandoned efforts to assassinate Castro and attempted to exploit a perceived Havana-Moscow rift stemming from the Cuban Missile Crisis. The short-lived effort at finding common ground fell by the wayside, however, thanks to mutual distrust. The United States blamed Castro for rising anti-Americanism in Venezuela and Panama, while Castro was leery of American intervention in the Dominican Republic. That the United States began antagonizing Cuba through trying to keep its athletes out of international competitions did nothing to dispel these hard feelings, nor did Castro's co-opting Cuban sports victories for the Revolution's glory.⁵⁴

Still, the fact that both nations shared a common love for baseball held out the possibility that the sport may someday help to repair ties between the Havana and Washington governments by bringing Cubans and Americans back together. The next decade brought about the political and baseball opportunities for doing so, at least temporarily. During the 1970s, amidst Cold War détente, the idea of U.S.-Cuba "baseball diplomacy" took its first swings.

⁵⁴ William O. Walker, "The Struggle for the Americas: The Johnson Administration and Cuba," in *The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson: Beyond Vietnam*, H.W. Brands, ed. (College Station: Texas A&M University, 1999), 66-72.

CHAPTER FOUR

'70s Innings Stretches: Cold War Détente and the Origins of Baseball Diplomacy, Part One

By the end of the 1960s, political developments had transformed the baseball ties linking Cuba to the United States. Cold War tension severed not only diplomatic links, but athletic ones as well. U.S.-Cuba cooperation within the Organized Baseball structure gave way to politicized competition within international sporting venues. Baseball diamonds became Cold War battlefields, as the ideological fight between capitalism and Communism was waged by proxy over nine inning contests between ballplayers. Though the sport remained an important part of both countries' athletic cultures, as well as their national cultural identities, U.S. baseball and Cuban baseball by the 1960s existed in distinctly separate worlds.

Just as political tension had directed the U.S-Cuba baseball exchange during the 1960s, so would the changing political landscape of the 1970s prompt new opportunities for baseball in that decade. Whereas the 1960s saw Cold War apprehension peak, the 1970s ushered in an era of détente that created new avenues for cooperation between East and West. Though most of the benefits from this denouement ultimately went to improving U.S.-China and U.S.-Soviet ties, détente permitted American policy-makers to reconsider their position on Cuba as well. The island had in fact played a significant role in creating an environment for détente, as going to the

brink of nuclear war over the Cuban Missile Crisis had produced a sobering effect on both sides, prompting East and West to pursue avenues of peace in the decade since.¹

In seeking to repair the overall Washington-Havana relationship, U.S. officials sought to find common ground on smaller issues. Baseball thus became an important part of détente, as Cubans and Americans shared a mutual affinity for the sport. As noted above, U.S.-Cuba political issues had shaped baseball long before the 1970s. At no other time, however, were baseball and politics so interwoven as they were in that decade. During the 1970s, the idea of using baseball as a diplomatic balm in the contentious U.S.-Cuba political relationship first took flight.

I

The initial steps for 1970s baseball diplomacy began at the end of the previous decade. In early 1969, new leadership came to the helm in both politics and baseball. Richard Nixon became president on January 20, 1969. Just over two weeks later, on February 4, Bowie Kuhn began his term as commissioner of Major League Baseball. Both men would play significant parts in creating an environment ripe for baseball diplomacy. Cold War détente began with the Nixon administration's opening diplomatic channels to China in 1971 and concluding the Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty (SALT) with the Soviet Union in 1972. In this setting, the United States began to reassess its standing with regard to Cuba, and baseball emerged as a potential tool for improving that relationship.

Upon taking the lead post within Organized Baseball, Bowie Kuhn harbored grand hopes for America's pastime. In a 1969 newspaper interview, he laid out his ambitious goals for

¹ Richard W. Stevenson, *The Rise and Fall of Détente* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1985), 191.

globalizing baseball and extending the reach of the game's highest circuit. The upcoming season was Major League Baseball's first to reach across international boundaries, as the Montreal Expos joined the National League that year. For the commissioner, however, Canada was only a starting point for expansion. Kuhn declared that with the airplane shortening travel times, he hoped to one day see major league teams in places where baseball's popularity was already entrenched, such as Mexico, South America and Japan, as well as areas where baseball's popularity was beginning to grow, such as Europe.²

Kuhn also expressed optimistic hopes for baseball with regard to Cuba. In citing the political situation as an obstacle, Kuhn speculated that, "if things were different, Havana, Cuba might now be in our majors." In an interview on the CBS program "Face the Nation," Kuhn revealed his grandiose beliefs in baseball's potential for settling geopolitical problems. The commissioner, citing Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, spoke of his own dream for baseball: that the sport could help to alleviate racism and "build a bridge between people of all colors." He also argued that baseball could improve U.S. relations and "build a bridge between countries," highlighting the game's potential impact on the Cold War:

I think you can even build a bridge between ideologies. I am fascinated by the fact that there is, according to my reports, tremendous listenership in Cuba to radio broadcasts of baseball today. And I wonder if this can't, in some way, begin to build a bridge between the United States and Cuba.³

Serving as Baseball Commissioner until 1984, Kuhn would preside over the numerous efforts to use baseball as a diplomatic bridge to Cuba during the 1970s détente.

² Ed Rumill, "Kuhn sights global baseball: High-speed air travel, Careful promotion needed, 'America loves the underdog'," *Christian Science Monitor*, 31 July 1969, 10.

³ Cited in "Notable & Quotable," *Wall Street Journal*, 10 April 1969, 18.

Nixon's eventual role in détente and, by extension, baseball diplomacy seemed far less likely upon the start of his presidency. Though Nixon also expressed high hopes in his January 1969 inaugural address, claiming that the United States, "after a period of confrontation," was entering "an era of negotiation," the new president's political credentials were decidedly those of a Cold War hawk. His had first gained national attention while serving on the House Un-American Activities Committee and had used his reputation as a staunch anti-Communist to springboard onto the Eisenhower ticket in the 1952 election. There was little to indicate that President Nixon would relent in his opposition to Communism. In campaigning for the presidency in 1968, his platform foreshadowed building up the armed forces and pledged to "restore the pre-eminence of U.S. military strength." It also advocated reaffirming the Monroe Doctrine and bemoaned the fact that Cuban people, "still cruelly suffer under Communist tyranny."⁴

Nixon had personal reasons for begrudging the Castro regime, as the Cuban issue had twice doused his political hopes. In 1960, Nixon lost a close election for the presidency in part thanks to Kennedy's criticism over Communism having developed in Cuba under the Eisenhower administration's watch. Two years later, Kennedy's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis provided just enough political coattails to carry fellow Democrat Pat Brown to a reelection victory in the California gubernatorial race. Brown barely beat his Republican challenger: Richard Nixon.⁵

⁴ First Inaugural Address of Richard Milhous Nixon, January 20, 1969, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/nixon1.asp; Republican Party Platform of 1968, August 5, 1968, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25841#axzz1tAdO2PWW>.

⁵ Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners In Power* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 28-29.

Upon taking office, however, the Nixon administration took to reassessing the Cold War and this, in turn, prompted new considerations over Cuba. During the spring of 1969, signals from Castro indicated a possibility for progress. In early February, he met with Swiss Ambassador Alfred Fischli and asked him to relay a message to the United States. The Cuban leader indicated his willingness to discuss a number of contentious issues, including Latin American intervention, exile raids, and refugees being received at the Guantanamo Bay naval station. In delivering the information, Fischli noted that high-ranking Cuban officials had also hinted at improving ties with the United States and that Castro seemed willing to work toward this goal. The Cuban leader had even confessed, when faced with similar charges after he objected to American intervention in the hemisphere that, “we [both nations] should all stop interfering.” That Cuba used the Swiss embassy to communicate with the United States was significant in its own right. Though Cuba typically sent messages through fellow Communist state Czechoslovakia, sending correspondence through Switzerland likely meant that Castro did not want to risk the Soviet Union getting wind of his U.S. overtures.⁶

The Nixon administration opted to pursue the Cuban overtures, while at the same time reconsidering its policy toward Cuba. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger sent an April 4 memo to the president about the Cuban signals and suggested that the United States respond by inquiring further about Castro’s plans. From the beginning, Nixon seemed hesitant to pursue any change on Cuba. In heeding Kissinger’s advice to hear out the Cubans, Nixon noted on the memo that he would back only “a *very very* cautious probe” on the matter.⁷

⁶ Department of State Memorandum of Conversation, March 11, 1969; Political Affairs, Cuba, United States; Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park.

⁷ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs to President Nixon, April 4, 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Vol. E-10: American Republics*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10>.

Nonetheless, Castro's unexpected overture and Nixon's tacit approval allowed the administration to consider a new direction. In late April, the 303 Committee of the NSC concluded a study of various covert operations against Cuba in attempting to ascertain the best course of action. It concluded that Castro was firmly entrenched in Cuba and that Soviet support had bolstered his power. The study also surmised that the United States' best hope for undermining the Castro regime was through economic pressure and backing small scale exile raids on the Cuban coastline, as these operations wasted Cuban resources by detracting from its primary focus on the sugar harvest.⁸

That the committee did not address the possibility of détente with Castro perhaps indicates just how hesitant the administration was to pursue a different course. This caution may have derived from Cuba's perceived value in the Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union. A May 9 state department memorandum from the Bureau of Intelligence and Research detailed the Soviet perception of Cuba, noting that aid to the latter was costing the Soviet Union more than \$1 million per day and that Castro's aggressive policies within Latin America further strained the partnership. The report concluded that the Soviet Union may actually favor a dénouement of hostility between the United States and Cuba, as it could lessen the burden of monetary aid, force Castro to moderate his actions in Latin America, and ensure Communism's survival in the hemisphere. Casting U.S.-Cuba détente as a potential victory for the Soviet Union certainly did little to enhance its standing as policy within the Nixon administration.⁹

Overall, U.S. officials adopted an initial Cuba policy defined by caution above all else. While the president was not willing to embrace Castro's hints at détente with open arms, neither

⁸ Memorandum Prepared for the 303 Committee, April 26, 1969, Ibid.

⁹ Abstract of Research Memorandum RSE-39 From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to Secretary of State Rogers, May 9, 1969, Ibid.

did the administration seek to increase antagonism toward Cuba. In June 1969, the White House internally floated the idea of creating and recognizing a provisional Cuban government comprised of exiles. Undersecretary of State Elliot Richardson threw cold water on this suggestion, however, in a June 16 memo to Kissinger. Such a move, Richardson cautioned, “would be tantamount to a declaration of war against Castro Cuba,” and would endanger the United States’ status in Guantanamo Bay and relationships in Latin America. A NSC study completed on July 2 also rejected escalation. Assessing U.S. policy toward Cuba and examining potential avenues for future approaches, the study argued that further covert assistance for “harassing and spoiling operations” was not feasible. It also detailed the drawback to staging a direct and unilateral military intervention to dislodge the Castro regime. Though contending that the 1962 post-missile crisis agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union—whereby the former agreed not to attack Cuba—could be circumvented under the technicality that Castro had not allowed for United Nations verification that missiles had been removed as was agreed upon, it cautioned that direct intervention in Cuba could lead to a confrontation with the Soviet Union, undermine U.S. support in the UN and the Organization of American States, and simply “would not be worth the costs, side effects, and consequences involved.”¹⁰

By autumn 1969, the Nixon administration appeared to have come to several conclusions about its Cuba policy. Unilateral normalization—simply lifting sanctions against Cuba with the hopes that Castro would respond favorably—had been rejected. So, too, had direct military intervention and other actions that would threaten to escalate U.S.-Cuba tension by antagonizing the Castro regime. Reassessment of the United States’ Cuba policy during the first eight months

¹⁰ Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State (Richardson) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), June 16, 1969, *Ibid.*; Study Prepared in Response to National Security Study Memorandum 32, July 2, 1969, *Ibid.*

of Nixon's presidency had essentially brought about reaffirmation of the status quo, with some minor caveats.

The Nixon administration understood that a number of issues complicated détente with Cuba. The July NSC study also noted the potential challenges that would confront efforts to build a better relationship with the Castro regime. Questions over the flood of Cuban refugees to the United States, the status of the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, and lingering property claims from American companies dislodged by the Cuban Revolution all presented barriers, though the study concluded that none of these were insurmountable. The United States' continuing involvement in Vietnam also created problems, as Castro had repeatedly denounced this most visible and most active arena of the Cold War and offered moral support to North Vietnam. Nixon also suspected Cuban involvement in the spate of campus antiwar protests in the United States by organizations like Students for Democratic Society, though the administration could find no evidence to support this hunch.¹¹

At the same time, American officials confirmed the credibility of hints from Cuba indicating that détente was a possibility. In a September 1969 intelligence estimate, CIA Director Richard Helms claimed that Castro had begun to reassess Cuba's standing in the hemisphere and had slowed efforts to spread Marxist revolutions in Latin America. While Helms argued that Castro would likely "be very cautious about making gestures of substance," he conceded that "there have been some indications of an interest in reduced US-Cuban tensions," in arguing that the best chances for improving the relationship with Cuba would "probably come on peripheral issues and at a very slow pace." The NSC had likewise highlighted signals of Cuba's softening line in the July study. The paper cited reduced anti-

¹¹ Study Prepared in Response to National Security Study Memorandum 32, July 2, 1969, Ibid; Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 133-134.

American propaganda emanating from Cuba, as well as Castro's restraint in not contesting American U-2 reconnaissance flights over Cuba nor demanding the return of Cuban refugees who fled to Guantanamo Bay and sought U.S. asylum. It also noted Cuba's cooperation with regard to a growing issue: that of airplane hijackings.¹²

Ultimately, hijackings provided the first such "peripheral issue" on which the United States and Cuba could substantially cooperate. Airplane seizures had been a part of the complicated U.S.-Cuba relationship since the early 1960s. Whereas the earliest hijackings involved Cuban planes being commandeered and diverted to the United States by refugees seeking asylum, over the course of the 1960s more and more American flights were being hijacked and redirected to Cuba by fugitive criminals hoping to escape prosecution. By the end of the decade, skyjackings had become so frequent that *Time* magazine published an article offering instructions for American passengers aboard captured planes. The piece noted that American pilots had begun carrying maps of Havana's Jose Martí Airport—just in case—and urged potential captives to cooperate with the hijackers and to make the most of their unexpected visit to Havana. The issue of airplanes being diverted to Cuba even affected baseball. A February 1969 article in the *New York Amsterdam News* mentioned concerns from Commissioner Bowie Kuhn over the recent spate of airplane takeovers, given the amount of time that ballplayers spend in the air over the course of a season. Kuhn's fears were in fact realized following the 1969 season. In October, three major league players and one coach who were traveling from the United States to Venezuela to compete in a winter baseball league were on

¹² National Intelligence Estimate, NIE 85-69, September 2, 1969, *Ibid.*; Study Prepared in Response to National Security Study Memorandum 32, July 2, 1969, *Ibid.*

board a flight that was hijacked and redirected to Cuba. After the unexpected three-hour layover in Havana, the plane was allowed to depart and the players and coach landed safely in Miami.¹³

President Nixon sought to curb the hijacking problem from his first days in office. As early as February, White House documents reveal cooperative efforts with Cuba over hijacking. A February 7 memo from Kissinger to the president disclosed that the administration was “making progress in obtaining Cuban Government cooperation” on the return of seized passengers, crews and planes, though it conceded that Cuba would be unlikely to agree to a formal bilateral agreement, or to guarantee the return of hijacking suspects to face charges in the United States. In April, the state department received similar information from the Swiss embassy, which had been acting as an intermediary between the nations. In a recent visit with the Swiss delegation, Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticós, had signaled that while Cuba “did not envisage any formal arrangement...something might be done through informal measures” and implied that if the United States was willing to cooperate on the refugee problem at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba would increase its punitive measures against airplane hijackers who landed in Cuba.¹⁴

The following autumn, Cuba sent an even stronger indication of its willingness to cooperate. In September, Cuba passed a new law that provided for expanded prosecution and in some cases even extradition of hijacking suspects and those who violated immigration laws. NSC member Viron Vaky sent a memo to Kissinger informing him of the development.

¹³ Judy Rumerman, “Aviation Security,” U.S. Centennial of Flight Commission, http://www.centennialofflight.gov/essay/Government_Role/security/POL18.htm; “What to Do When The Hijacker Comes,” *Time*, 6 December 1968, 82; Leslie Matthews, “The Sports Whirl,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 22 February 1969, 33; “3 Baseball Players On Hijacked Plane,” *New York Times*, 10 October 1969, 95; Robert H. Estabrook, “U.N. Puts Air Hijacks On Agenda: Jet With 70 Aboard Hijacked to Havana,” *Washington Post*, 10 October 1969, A29.

¹⁴ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, February 7, 1969, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. E-10*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10>; Department of State Memorandum of Conversation, April 11, 1969, *Ibid*.

Although the law limited extradition to nations with whom Cuba held bilateral agreements and preserved its right to offer political asylum to anyone it deemed fit, Vaky argued that the law seemed to be a gesture of good faith from Cuba toward building a working relationship with the United States on certain issues. Other Nixon administration officials agreed and encouraged the president to explore the possibility of a hijacking agreement with Cuba. Transportation Secretary John Volpe called the Cuban law “a significant move” in an October letter to Secretary of State William P. Rogers and urged the administration to “explore to the fullest extent possible the means by which Cuba’s announcement may be translated into actions resulting in the return of hijackers.” Rogers concurred, as did Kissinger, and both men recommended to Nixon that the United States offer to return Cuban hijackers on a reciprocal basis, excepting instances of asylum.¹⁵

Nixon approved of these recommendations, and this began three years of negotiations that would ultimately produce a bilateral anti-hijacking agreement between the United States and Cuba in January 1973. Despite being favorable to the hijacking issue, the president clearly had reservations about making overtures to Cuba and was careful that the public perception of the U.S.-Cuba relationship did not change. As noted above, Nixon had only cautiously greeted the Cuban signals sent through the Swiss delegation at the start of his term. He responded in a similarly guarded fashion to the developing hijacking negotiations. Shortly after Cuba announced the new September 1969 law that cracked down on hijacking, a news report appeared in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* which detailed the law and quoted a Cuban official who deemed it

¹⁵ Memorandum From Viron P. Vaky of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), September 23, 1969, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. E-10*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10>; Letter from Secretary of Transportation Volpe to Secretary of State Rogers, October 21, 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1: Global Issues, 1969-1972*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve01>; Memorandum from Secretary of State Rogers to President Nixon, October 31, 1969, *Ibid.*

the start of a new relationship with the United States. After the president reviewed the article and noticed the quote, he sent an unsolicited response to the state department through his assistant, Ken Cole, and put his reaction to the Cuban speculation in no uncertain terms: “Absolutely not.” No doubt realizing that initiating talks would require some persuasion, Kissinger made clear in a November 12 appeal to the president that negotiating with the Cubans would not signal a change in direction. Kissinger cited the 1965 refugee agreement with Cuba and a 1955 bilateral agreement involving prisoner exchanges with China as precedents in dealing with non-recognized countries and declared the “chances that [a hijacking agreement] would be misunderstood as portending an intention to regularize relations with Cuba are small.”¹⁶

The president and the administration remained cautious on Cuba. On a number of occasions, the United States set out to reaffirm its long-standing policies. To counter growing media reports of rapprochement between Washington and Havana, the state department sent a memo to all diplomatic posts in February 1970. The message stated bluntly that speculation in the news had “no basis,” that the nation’s Cuba policy “remains unaltered,” and that “there are no rpt [repeat] no conversations underway or contemplated...concerning a mediation of the present relationship.” In late 1972, just as negotiations were nearing completion on the bilateral hijacking agreement, the state department once again sought to clarify that U.S.-Cuba relations had not significantly changed. A December 7 state department telegram to the United States’ United Nations delegation mentioned “considerable press speculation” that the hijacking arrangements foreshadowed general changes in U.S. policy and instructed the UN team to

¹⁶ Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Cole) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) September 25, 1969, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. E-10*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10>; Memorandum from the President’s Assistant For National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, November 12, 1969, *Ibid.*

respond to such inquiries that “absolutely no change of general U.S. policy toward Cuba is involved or contemplated.”¹⁷

Nixon made similar blanket declarations on Cuba. At the American Society of Newspaper Editors’ convention in April 1971, Nixon responded to a question about normalizing relations by declaring that it was not possible in the short-term and that any long-term change would depend on Cuba’s position. The president noted Castro’s continuing anti-U.S. posture and attempts to spread Marxism in Latin America, asserting that as long as such activity continued “we are certainly not going to normalize our relations with Castro.” Nixon repeated this policy the following year, during his February 1972 foreign policy report to Congress. In addressing recent efforts from some OAS member nations to lift the collective economic sanctions against Cuba that had been in place since 1962, Nixon countered that Cuba had “not abandoned its promotion of subversive violence” and pledged that “the United States will consider supporting a change in the OAS sanctions against Cuba only when the evidence demonstrates a real change in Cuba’s policies.” The president expressed similar pessimism on the hopes for a Cuban détente in private. During a December 1971 meeting with British Prime Minister Edward Heath, Nixon admitted that there were no signs of Castro coming to favorable terms with the United States.¹⁸

The Nixon administration had reasons for remaining skeptical of détente with Cuba. The Castro regime, through its words and its deeds, seemed to be doing little to endear itself to the

¹⁷ Telegram 23858 From the Department of State to All ARA Diplomatic Posts, February 17, 1970, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. E-10*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10>; Telegram 221538 From the Department of State to the Mission to the United Nations, December 7, 1972, *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Panel Interview at the Annual Convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 16, 1971, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2982&st=Cuba&st1=#axzz1wqYz1irR>; Third Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy, February 9, 1972, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3736&st=Cuba&st1=#axzz1wqYz1irR>; Henry A. Kissinger, Memorandum for the President’s File Re: The President’s Private Meeting with British Prime Minister Edward Heath, December 20 and 21, 1971, Memcons – The President and PM Heath December 20-21, 1971, President – HAK Memcons, Box 1025, National Security Council Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

United States. Even as negotiations were ongoing toward the bilateral hijacking agreement, antagonism between the Washington and Havana governments continued to diminish chances at détente. Cuban complicity in Soviet aggression in the Caribbean played a significant part in this.

In 1970, the United States learned that the Soviet Union was building a naval base to house submarines near Cienfuegos, Cuba. Though U-2 surveillance did not prove the base's existence until September, the CIA had warned the Nixon administration in June that the Soviet Union was looking to extend its naval presence in the Caribbean. American officials first suspected Soviet involvement in the Cienfuegos base when August surveillance photos revealed new construction at the site, including a number of athletic fields. The nature of these fields proved significant. As CIA Director Helms noted in a September 1970 NSC meeting, that the base contained soccer fields, but not baseball diamonds, "suggest[ed] Soviet occupation rather than Cuba" at the Cienfuegos facility. Rather than risk a repeat of the Cuban Missile Crisis from eight years earlier, the Nixon administration decided to handle the base issue privately by presenting the evidence to Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin and insisting on a withdraw. The Soviet Union backed down and the crisis did not escalate into a major showdown, but the episode was a clear rebuke to any efforts at détente with Cuba.¹⁹

Cuban signals also seemed to dispel the perception that the regime was softening.

Despite the 1969 Swiss overtures, Castro continued to denounce the United States in public

¹⁹ Memorandum From Viron P. Vaky of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), June 17, 1970, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. E-10*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10>; Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, September 18, 1970, *Ibid.*; Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council, September 23, 1970, *Ibid.*; Memorandum of Conversation between President Nixon, President Pompidou, Mr. Constantin and Major General V. A. Walters, November 12, 1970, Presidential/HAK Memcons, Box 1024, National Security Council Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, CA; Memocon – The President and President Pompidou, November 12, 1970, *Ibid.*; Daniel Rapoport, "Cuba Soccer Field Scared U.S. in '70: Told of New Facilities," *Washington Post*, 26 September 1971, A3; Robert S. Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine: American Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Stability, 1969-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984), 101.

addresses, delivering two critical speeches in 1971. In April, the Cuban leader used the tenth anniversary of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion to lambast the United States for meddling in Latin America and maintaining the embargo. The following July, Castro closed a speech commemorating the 26th of July Movement by vowing “not to make a single concession to imperialism” in promising liberation for every Latin American nation. Such rhetoric garnered attention among Nixon administration officials. On the heels of the April speech, a CIA estimate offered grim prospects for improving the U.S.-Cuba relationship, concluding that “Castro has made it clear that he will not take any steps to bring about a reconciliation with the U.S. and at present there is little likelihood that he would respond favorably to any U.S. overtures to bring this about.” An October state department study cited the Cuban leader’s hostility in his April and July speeches and contended that though Castro may respond favorably to small gestures on the part of the United States, “he fears, and would probably reject full reconciliation.”²⁰

II

The timing of Castro’s April 1971 speech was particularly important, as it likely also doomed the first attempt at baseball diplomacy. “Ping Pong Diplomacy” between the United States and China had successfully used sports as an avenue for breaking a diplomatic impasse in April 1971, when the United States table tennis team became the first Americans to visit communist China in over two decades. The trip ultimately set the stage for President Nixon’s

²⁰ “Castro’s Bay of Pigs Anniversary Speech,” April 20, 1971, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>; “26 July Anniversary,” July 26, 1971, Ibid.; Special National Intelligence Estimate 85-71, April 29, 1971, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. E-10*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10>; Abstract of Research Study Produced in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, October 1, 1971, Ibid.

historic visit to China the following February, and was one of the first steps in reestablishing U.S.-China diplomatic channels. Using Ping Pong Diplomacy as a model, those hoping to improve U.S.-Cuba ties looked to baseball as one way to rekindle connections and improve relations between Washington and Havana.

In May 1971, just one month after the table tennis trip to China, Cuban native and San Diego Padres manager Preston Gómez announced his intentions to carry out a similar goodwill mission by taking a team of Major League Baseball all-stars to Cuba. Gómez, who managed the Cuban Sugar Kings to their 1959 Junior World Series victory, had received permission from the Cuban government to visit his homeland in 1970 to see his ailing father. While there, the Padres' manager and Castro acquaintance had engaged in some personal baseball diplomacy, meeting with the Cuban leader to discuss the island's baseball system, offering his opinion on Cuba's talent, and conducting three instructional baseball clinics. Now, he hoped to stage a more visible baseball exchange by taking a team stocked with Cuban-born professionals in the American ranks back to Cuba with him. Gómez claimed to have the blessing of Major League Baseball Commissioner Kuhn—who had declared his hopes for using baseball to mend bridges with Cuba upon taking office—and expressed optimism that Castro, as a well-known baseball enthusiast, would support the trip as well.²¹

The state department, however, was not behind this effort and refused to grant permission for the tour. Without question, given the Soviet base dispute and Castro's public denunciations, such a high profile baseball interaction with Cuba in 1971 would have put the Nixon administration in the politically difficult position of having to justify efforts at détente with an

²¹ Jamail, *Full Count*, 123; "Ball Stars' Tour of Cuba is Sought," *New York Times*, 2 May 1971, S6; Murray Chass, "Gomez Finds Cuban Baseball Ails," *New York Times*, 22 February 1970, S2.

apparently outspoken enemy. It is not surprising, therefore, that this first foray at baseball diplomacy was unsuccessful.

Gómez's aborted effort was not the only baseball exchange to fall victim to political dispute that year. The Padres' manager was attempting to take a team of Major League Baseball players to Cuba for the first time since 1959. While in amateur baseball, on the other hand, competitions between Cuban and American teams had been a regular occurrence before and after the Cuban Revolution, no American team had visited Cuba since the 1942 Amateur World Series.

By the early 1970s, politics was also threatening amateur competitions. In 1970, the International Baseball Federation awarded Cuba hosting rights for the 1971 Amateur World Series. Citing myriad excuses ranging from finances to politics, the United States balked at sending a team to the competition. According to a November 1970 newspaper article, when the vote was cast for Cuba to host, American baseball officials pledged that they would boycott the competition due to political differences. The United States Baseball Federation made good on this threat, deciding in its June 1971 meetings to skip the event because of the "delicate political situation." In the months leading up to the event, the Federation stood by its decision, but offered other reasons to justify the American absence. Instead of laying all the blame on the political situation, U.S. Baseball President Jim Fehring cited the prohibitive costs of sending a team abroad for two international competitions in one year (the American squad had already taken part in the Pan Am Games in Colombia earlier in 1971, winning the silver medal while Cuba won the gold.) Fehring also attempted to downplay the event. He spoke of the

Federation's aim of making baseball an Olympic sport and argued that the volume of international amateur competitions undermined this effort.²²

By skipping the 1971 Amateur World Series, American baseball officials missed an opportunity to send the second U.S. team to Cuba for an athletic competition that year. In August, the United States Men's Volleyball team traveled to Havana to participate in a regional qualifying tournament for the 1972 Olympic Games. The twenty-member delegation constituted the highest-profile visit by a group of Americans since 1961 and one newspaper article facetiously noted that, unlike some recent visitors to Cuba, the volleyball team did not arrive on board a hijacked plane.²³

The volleyball visit, coming on the heels of the American table tennis team's visit to China, again drew attention to sports' potential for overcoming political barriers and bringing about international change. A *New York Times* piece published just after the volleyball trip cited the "cordial, if detached setting" the Cuban fans provided for the American visitors, noting that they "outwardly cheered quality performance, even when their hearts may cry for restraint." It proclaimed that even though "sports cannot change the face of international politics...a growing awareness has begun to set in about the implied nature of sport, and its effect on the status quo," and deemed the Cuban trip, along with the table tennis junket to China, "graphic proof that the game of politics is played over the heads of the [sports] participants." Speaking on the eve of the Americans' arrival, Castro was careful to distinguish the visiting athletes from politicians. He implored his countrymen to politely welcome the team, reminding them that the volleyball

²² "Rocky Road In Colombia," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 27 November 1970, 55; Neil Amdur, "Close but No Cigar: It's Only 90 Miles to Havana, Too Far for U.S. to Send a Baseball Team," *New York Times*, 19 September 1971, S5; "U.S. nine to skip world test in Cuba," *Christian Science Monitor*, 20 September 1971, 10.

²³ Neil Amdur, "U.S. Seeks to Visit Cuba for Volleyball," *New York Times*, 5 August 1971, 39; -----, "U.S. Volleyballers Arrive In Cuba for Olympic Trials," *New York Times*, 14 August 1971, 1.

players “are representatives of the North American people, not the North American Government.” Manuel González Guerra, president of the Cuban Olympic Committee, hoped the volleyball visit would serve as an example for healing the impasse over the upcoming Amateur World Series in Cuba. He questioned why, “if the North Americans can compete in volleyball in Havana...the baseball team cannot play” and called upon the United States to “lift all barriers that prevent North American sportsmen from playing in Cuba.”²⁴

Contrary to this sentiment, however, volleyball diplomacy did not lead to baseball diplomacy. Though the volleyball trip received considerable media attention, the sport’s lack of mainstream popularity likely weakened its potential for having a major impact. In a *New York Times* commentary praising the sports exchange, writer Robert Lipsyte admitted volleyball’s limitations in the United States as a sport “generally considered an exercise for nudists and middle-aged boys” that “los[es] the greatest potential stars to basketball.” Though the sport’s relative anonymity did not hamper table tennis from opening diplomatic channels with China, the fact that the visiting Americans were the first to set foot in far away China in over two decades added a layer of mystery and intrigue that an excursion to Cuba, so close and for so long a regular American vacation spot, could not match. That an American volleyball team visited Cuba in August 1971 was a notable feat, but it failed to procure additional sports exchanges and did not significantly alter the diplomatic status quo.²⁵

In fact, by 1971 athletic competitions between Cuba and the United States seemed to be fostering more hostility than goodwill. Though the volleyball team was well received in Cuba,

²⁴ “Peking and Havana: Sports as a Political Exercise,” *New York Times*, 22 August 1971, S1; Neil Amdur, “Castro Hails Upsets Over U.S. Athletes: Castro Hails Cuban Stars For Upsets of U.S. Squads,” *New York Times*, 16 August 1971, 19; Hubert Mizell, “U.S. Athletes Increase Gold Medal Production,” *The Daily Mail* (Hagerstown, MD), 6 August 1971, 13.

²⁵ Robert Lipsyte, “The Racquet Is Cheaper Than the Gun,” *New York Times*, 26 August 1971, 47.

other American teams that traveled abroad were encountering unfriendliness from foreign fans and athletes. A newspaper account from the August 1971 Pan Am Games noted the scorn that greeted the U.S. team in Colombia, as fans sent what the writer called a “Yanqui go home” message to the visiting athletes through booing and jeering. Crowds at the major venues “appear[ed] to be heavily pro-Cuban,” and fans at the opening ceremonies had given the visiting Cuban athletes a louder ovation than their U.S. counterparts. The antagonism even turned violent in a couple of instances. One U.S. official was hit with a rock thrown by a disgruntled spectator after a controversial boxing match, and a few Cuban track and field athletes got into a scuffle with a group of newspaper reporters over the distribution of political literature.²⁶

That athletic venues were becoming de facto political battlegrounds diminished the chances for sports to generate diplomatic détente. Since the 1960s, the Castro regime had been actively involved in Cuban athletics, replacing the former professional system with a state organization (INDER) that claimed to be amateur and open to all. Cuba’s government heralded sports as a right of the people. Castro proclaimed that “from the outset, sports were one of the objectives of the revolution” and argued that access to athletic competition, as a participant or a spectator, “has to do with man’s well-being” and is therefore just as much a state responsibility “as education, health, material living conditions, human dignity, feeling and man’s spiritual values.”²⁷

The high level of government involvement, however, meant that sports competitions took on Cold War tones. By the 1970s, Americans had taken note that the close political and

²⁶ “Americans Tiring of Brickbats: Ovation for Cubans,” *Washington Post*, 4 August 1971, D4; Mizell, “U.S. Athletes Increase Gold Medal Production,” 13.

²⁷ “Castro Holds Press Conference Before Leaving Chile,” December 3, 1971, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>; “Peking and Havana,” S1.

ideological alliance between Cuba and the Soviet Union had produced greater cooperation in athletic endeavors. An August 3 *Washington Post* article on Cuba's success at the 1971 Pan Am Games cited the abundance of "Iron Curtain specialists," in the form of coaches and trainers from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, working with Cuban athletes. An unnamed U.S. official quoted in the article labeled the growing Communist sports program "a propaganda vehicle to cut into the United States' prestige." Clifford Buck, president of the United States Olympic Committee blasted Cuba's use of "trainers from Iron Curtain countries" as "a new and formidable menace in international sports."²⁸

Even newspaper articles that praised efforts at sports diplomacy admitted to the political undercurrent of such competitions. An August 1971 *New York Times* commentary noted that Cuba's surprising runner-up finish in the Pan-Am Games "provided a vital spiritual boost for the country, not to mention the propaganda value inherent in such heroic effort." It rhetorically asked "What better place to propagandize the merits of the socialistic system than by embarrassing one's Western counterpart?" Sports victories, the piece argued, are also financially efficient for developing Marxist nations, since "it is far easier and cheaper to teach already talented athletes how to improve technique than it is to show an unskilled laborer how to mine bauxite." Lipsyte's editorial echoed this sentiment, asserting that "because winning armies are expensive to assemble and risky to maintain, a country's best propaganda tool—pound for pound and dollar for dollar—is a successful world class athletic team."²⁹

²⁸ "Cuban Victories Show Influence of Russians: Iceberg Curtain Still Up," *Washington Post*, 3 August 1971, D3; Martin Schram, "Castro Chides U.S. Over Triumphs by Cuban Sport Team," *Washington Post*, 17 August 1971, A13.

²⁹ "Peking and Havana," S1; Lipsyte, "The Racquet Is Cheaper Than the Gun," 47.

Castro's own rhetoric did nothing to dispel the notion that Communist countries were using sports to bolster their political systems. The Cuban leader rarely missed an opportunity to gloat about his nation's athletic successes, especially those that came against U.S. competition. Following the Pan Am Games in August, Castro appeared at a massive rally to celebrate Cuba's strong showing. He welcomed home the returning athletes with an hour-long address that likened their performance to the American failure at the Bay of Pigs: "the story of Giron repeated at the games." Castro also noted the shrinking disparity in the medal count between the United States and other participating nations as a sign of imperialism's pending demise and extolled his athletes for attaining "a victory for [Cuba] and a victory for Latin America." He was especially proud of recent Cuban victories over the United States in baseball, and used them as a regular talking point during his late autumn trip to Chile. In several speeches, Castro made a point of noting that even though the United States had invented baseball, Cuba had beaten the Americans at their own game by abolishing professional sports and relying on athletes who were, in his words, "strongly motivated by the revolutionary spirit." The Cuban leader was equally critical of the controversial U.S. decision to sit out the Amateur World Series in Havana that year, blaming it on a concerted effort at political sabotage as well as "cowardice" and "fear of being beaten."³⁰

That U.S.-Cuba sports exchanges had taken on such a tone by 1971 doomed most early chances for baseball diplomacy. Preston Gómez's effort at taking an all-star team of major leaguers did not materialize, and the United States Baseball Federation stuck with its decision to bypass the 1971 Amateur World Series. Even a less publicized effort at baseball diplomacy met its demise amidst the hardening lines of politics and sports. Ben Lynch, director of a small semi-

³⁰ Schram, "Castro Chides U.S. Over Triumphs," A13; Neil Amdur, "Castro Hails Upsets Over U.S. Athletes," *New York Times*, 16 August 1971, 19; "Tour of Chuquicamata," November 11, 1971, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1971/19711114.html>; "Punta Arenas Students," November 26, 1971, Ibid.; "Rally in Valparaiso," December 1, 1971, Ibid.; "CDR Main Event," September 29, 1971, Ibid.

professional baseball tournament in Bridgeton, New Jersey, sparked a minor controversy in August 1971 by extending an invitation to Cuba's national baseball team to enter the competition the following year. Though Lynch defended the move as an attempt to attract the best teams possible, the gesture prompted a group of Cuban refugees in the New York/New Jersey area to petition the White House, and in light of the uproar Bridgeton mayor Bertram Aitken retracted the Cuban invitation just a few days later.³¹

A slight glimmer of hope countered this trend in early 1972. In a small episode of baseball diplomacy that received scant attention at the time and has been overlooked since, Major League Baseball manager Frank Lucchesi went to Cuba for a goodwill visit in January. Lucchesi, then managing the Philadelphia Phillies and with no personal connection to the island, was asked by team officials and Major League Baseball leaders to make the trip, though he did not know why he was selected for the role.³²

After being briefed before departure by Preston Gómez, the Phillies' skipper spent four days in Cuba, during which time he attended three Cuban League games, conducted a baseball clinic, and met with a high-ranking INDER official who asked Lucchesi for his assessment of Cuba's baseball talent (Lucchesi did not meet with Castro, who was in Poland at the time of his visit.). He spoke highly of Cuba's enthusiasm for the sport upon his return to the United States, and equated its players as being on par with American minor leaguers, though he noted that a dearth of equipment hindered baseball on the island. A shortage of baseball equipment was not the only thing that Lucchesi had noticed lacking, and when he realized that the driver who had been chauffeuring him around Cuba did not own a watch, Lucchesi took his off and gave it to the

³¹ "Baseball Invitation Protested," *New York Times*, 20 August 1971, 30; "Jersey Mayor Retracts Invitation to Cuba Nine," *New York Times*, 22 August 1971, S25.

³² Frank Lucchesi, with son Bryan Lucchesi, Telephone Interview with author, June 2011.

Cuban, who hesitated at accepting the gift until receiving a nod from an accompanying state official. After returning stateside, Lucchesi was contacted by CIA officials, who questioned him about the Soviet military presence in Cuba (he recalled seeing a few Russian soldiers). Though an account of his visit appeared in newspapers at the time, none linked the visit with other efforts at baseball diplomacy with Cuba, and the trip did not lead to any other immediate measures to connect the two countries through higher-profile baseball exchanges. Perhaps the most lasting symbol of Lucchesi's trip to Cuba are the two Cuban baseball gloves that he brought back with him, which are still in the family's possession four decades later.³³

Lucchesi's isolated success at baseball diplomacy notwithstanding, the United States and Cuba appeared to be moving in opposite directions on the athletic front during the early 1970s. In baseball, Cuba continued to frustrate the United States, defeating the Americans to capture the Amateur World Series championship in 1972. The loss to Cuba capped a year of growing sports antagonism between the United States and Communist-bloc nations, as the 1972 Munich Olympic Games had witnessed the controversial gold medal basketball game in which the Soviet Union defeated the Americans after a clock issue gave the Soviets three opportunities to convert a game-winning shot at the buzzer. After U.S. officials lost an appeal protest that broke along Cold War lines—with Hungary, Poland, and Cuba voting to uphold the result and Italy and Puerto Rico voting in favor of the appeal—the American basketball team refused to accept its silver medals, which remained unclaimed to this day.³⁴

³³ Ibid.; "Lucchesi Visits Cuba, Finds Sports Key to Life," *Washington Post*, 21 January 1972, D2.

³⁴ "Cuba Tops U.S., Nears Fourth Baseball Title," *Washington Post*, 3 December 1972, C12; "Three Bizarre Seconds End a 36-Year Reign of U.S. Quintet," *New York Times*, 11 September 1972, 49; William Gildea, "Olympic Group Disallows U.S. Basketball Protest," *Washington Post*, 11 September 1972, D1.

Disputes were also spreading to baseball. Growing frustration with Caribbean power led to a split in amateur baseball as the International Baseball Federation (FIBA) lost some of its members to a rival organization, the World Federation of Amateur Baseball, or FEMBA. Though not overtly political, the FIBA-FEMBA split occurred against the backdrop of hardening Cold War athletic lines in the early 1970s. The divorce began in May 1973, when FIBA's executive committee voted to move that year's championship from Nicaragua to Cuba, following the suspension of Nicaragua official Carlos Garcin. Canadian delegate Ron Hayter, joined by some European and Asian delegates, decried disproportionate Cuban and, in general, Latin American influence over the executive committee, and called for their countries, along with the United States, to break from FIBA. The departing countries that made up the rival FEMBA staged their own Amateur World Series in December of that year. The United States defeated host nation Nicaragua in the championship game of the FEMBA tournament, while Cuba once again won FIBA's Amateur World Series, held in Havana. That the United States claimed two championships during the split seemed to rancor the Cubans. A book on Cuban baseball from the Cuban Cultural Ministry discussed the temporary division and scoffed "in this arbitrary way...the United States managed to capture their first pennants in the 1974 and 1975 contests" (fue de esta arbitraria manera... los Estados Unidos consiguió anexarse sus primeros gallardetes en los certámenes de 1974 y 1975). Though the FIBA-FEMBA split was resolved in 1976, for three years even U.S.-Cuba amateur baseball exchanges were stifled by those nations competing in separate tournaments.³⁵

³⁵ "Baseball Federation Criticized," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 29 May 1973, 36; "Sports News Briefs," *New York Times*, 7 December 1973, 53; "Cuba Captures Baseball Title," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 December 1973, 52; "Amateur Baseball Has World Unit," *New York Times*, 6 January 1976, 43; Bjarkman, *History*, 172, 202-203; Edel Casas et al., *Viva Y En Juego* (Havana: Editorial Científico Técnica, 1986), 103.

Despite the success of Ping Pong Diplomacy and the Nixon administration's efforts at détente with China, there seemed to be little hope of such moves being repeated with Cuba during the early 1970s. U.S.-Cuba sports exchanges had taken on the same undercurrent of antagonism that plagued the political relationship during the Cold War. Furthermore, any conciliatory gestures on the part of the United States government would have been predicated on Cuba moving away from Soviet influence, which was not happening in the early years of the decade. Indeed, Cuba appeared to be reinforcing its Soviet ties in both the political and athletic realms, through complicity in constructing a Soviet naval base at Cienfuegos, and openly employing Eastern Bloc sports coaches and trainers. In late 1971, Nixon himself signaled that no move toward reconciliation with Cuba was in the foreseeable future. The president lashed out at Kissinger in a December 9 conversation about Brazil's continuing support of the American effort to keep Cuba out of the OAS. When Kissinger informed Nixon that the Brazilians requested advance notification on any policy changes with regard to Cuba, the president responded definitively: "I'm not changing the policy towards Castro as long as I'm alive. That's absolute. Final. No appeal whatever. I never want you to raise it with me again." Nixon qualified his position slightly, but largely echoed this same sentiment following his reelection to a second term the following year. Though he conceded that "none of our policies are going to be sacred cows," the president reiterated that the United States' stance on Cuba would remain unaltered until Castro "changes his policy toward Latin America and the United States," which he admitted was unlikely to happen. On the Cuban side, Castro was equally steadfast. While visiting Poland in January 1972, Castro was asked about Nixon's upcoming trips to China and the Soviet Union and whether he would extend an invitation for the American president to visit

Havana. “Never,” he replied. Efforts at Cuban détente would have to wait for another president.³⁶

III

As it turned out, the Watergate episode brought along a new president sooner than expected and on August 9, 1974, Gerald Ford took Nixon’s place in the Oval Office. The Nixon administration had started a spotty and uneven effort at détente with Cuba over the previous five years, with the highlight being the 1973 hijacking agreement. During Nixon’s final year in office, the United States had begun to signal a possible change on Cuba. Kissinger recalls in the final volume of his memoirs how the administration sought to reassess its stance on Latin America beginning in January 1974 with an approach, called the “New Dialogue,” which held out hope for improving the relationship with Cuba provided that country “pursued a more restrained international course.” The United States, not wanting to give Castro the opportunity for a public rejection, found someone from outside the administration to deliver this signal to Havana in Frank Mankiewicz, a Cuba-bound journalist who, because of his former ties to the Kennedys, could act as a covert messenger for Nixon. Mankiewicz, who was scheduled to interview Castro while in Cuba, relayed the administration’s message that the United States was “in principle prepared to improve relations on the basis of reciprocal measures.” Castro responded favorably if vaguely, but nothing further developed until after Nixon’s resignation.³⁷

³⁶ Conversation Between President Nixon and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), December 9, 1971, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. E-10*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10>; Murrey Marder, “Foreign Affairs High Priority, President Says,” *Washington Post*, 10 November 1972, A6; James F. Clarity, “Castro Visit Leaves Poles Vexed,” *New York Times*, 14 June 1972, 53.

³⁷ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 772-774.

The unfinished business of Cuban détente thus fell to the Ford White House. The new president, however, faced major domestic challenges such as rising economic inflation and a growing culture of cynicism and mistrust on the part of the American public toward Washington, and was not eager to embark on a new course toward Cuba. The difficulty posed by the transition of power from Nixon to Ford was apparent regarding efforts at Cuban détente.

Ford administration officials were cautious to continue Nixon's policies and avoid anything that would seem like a direct rebuke of the former president in the realm of foreign affairs. NSC member Stephen Low commented in an August memo to Kissinger that "with the change in the Presidency, each isolated action in this area is taken by the press and foreign observers as a straw in the wind pointing to a new policy." The minor episode involving the World Energy Conference demonstrated the hesitancy that initially beset the Ford administration. In July 1974, President Nixon had declined a request from organizers to grant visas to Cuban delegates to the conference's September meeting in Detroit. Typically, visas were only granted for Cuban delegations attending UN-sanctioned events. Following Nixon's resignation in August, World Energy Conference President Walker Cisler appealed to the new president to make an exception and allow Cuban participation in the Detroit meeting (at which Ford would be delivering a speech). Although the state department recommended granting the visas, Kissinger and some NSC members did not. The secretary of state put his objections in a memo to Ford, arguing that "your reversing a decision associated with President Nixon would draw wide attention and be taken as a clear signal that we were preparing a fundamental change in policy towards Cuba." Kissinger warned that authorizing the Cuban visas "would be misunderstood and create serious foreign policy problems." Ford upheld Nixon's decision.³⁸

³⁸ Department of State Memorandum, Joseph J. Sisco to the President, June 21, 1974; Letter, Walker Cisler to the President, August 23, 1974, Folder: Cuba 1, Box 3, National Security Advisor Presidential Country Files for Latin

Pressure was building from outside of the administration, however, to revisit the Cuba question. In late 1973, Kissinger had reluctantly agreed to a Senate Foreign Relations Committee request to grant a travel visa to chief of staff Pat M. Holt for an exploratory visit in July 1974. Upon his return, Holt reported that U.S. efforts to isolate Cuba had failed and “a new policy should be devised.” The Watergate controversy had created a wedge between the executive branch and Congress, as some Republicans had sought to distance themselves from the scandal-plagued administration. By the time President Ford took office in August 1974, a number of congressional Republicans were calling to revise the Cuba policy. In January 1973, a group of twelve Republican legislators had issued a report, titled “A Détente with Cuba,” that called for lifting the embargo and normalizing relations with Castro’s government. Pressure from Republican legislators grew more public in September, when Senator Jacob Javits of New York visited Cuba, met with Castro, and began calling on the Ford administration to take proactive steps toward normalization. Javits, who traveled with Democratic Senator Claiborne Pell to give the visit a bipartisan tone, argued “someday, someday, somehow, somewhere, some normalization of relations has to take place and the time does seem to be propitious.” Pressure on the American Cuba policy was also increasing within the OAS, as a majority of member nations voted at a November session to lift sanctions against Cuba. Though the move lacked the two-thirds approval necessary, it was a clear sign of a changing hemispheric attitude on the perceived danger posed by the Castro regime.³⁹

America, 1974-77, Gerald R. Ford Library; Department of State Memorandum, George Springsteen to Brent Scowcroft, September 5, 1974, Ibid.; National Security Council Memorandum, Stephen Low to Secretary Kissinger, September 5, 1974, Ibid.; White House Memorandum on Visas for Cuban Delegation to the Ninth World Energy Conference, Secretary Kissinger to the President, Undated, Ibid.

³⁹ U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Cuba*, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, August 4, 1974, Folder: Cuba – Congressional 1, Box 2, National Security Advisor NSC Latin American Affairs Staff Files, 1974-1977, Gerald R. Ford Library; Charles W. Whalen et al., “A Détente With Cuba,” January 29, 1973, Folder: Cuba, Box 140, Vice

That overtures to Cuba had already begun, combined with growing pressure from outside of the Ford administration, obligated the president to at least explore the possibility of relaxing tensions with Cuba. Stephen Low's August 30 memo to Kissinger noted that "events are now forcing [the administration] to make piecemeal decisions relating to our sanctions policy" and called for a more comprehensive plan of action. By late 1974, some administration officials had resigned themselves to the coming demise of OAS sanctions against Cuba, and advocated negotiating with the Castro government for concessions in exchange for gradually reducing the embargo. During an October meeting with Algerian president Houari Boumediene that turned to a discussion of Cuba, Kissinger admitted that "in principle, if [the United States] can normalize relations with Peking, there is no reason we cannot do it with Cuba." When Cuban officials sent a request for a face to face meeting through Mankiewicz in January 1975, Kissinger dispatched career foreign service officer Larry Eagleburger, who met with a two man Cuban delegation in a La Guardia Airport cafeteria. This initial meeting failed to yield much common ground, however, as the Cubans indicated that Castro would insist on the embargo's cession as a precondition of formal negotiations.⁴⁰

Against this backdrop, efforts at baseball diplomacy continued. A few ill-fated proposals involving U.S.-Cuba baseball exchanges emerged in 1974, as individuals continued to look to the sport as a bridge between the political differences dividing Havana and Washington. The most ambitious plan—the World Baseball Association—never came to fruition. In April 1974, Sean

Presidential Papers, Gerald R. Ford Library; "Javits, Pell wage U.S.-Cuba talks," *Bucks County Courier Times*, 29 September 1974, A11.

⁴⁰ National Security Council Memorandum, Stephen Low to Secretary Kissinger, August 30, 1974, Folder: Cuba 1, Box 3, National Security Advisor Presidential Country Files for Latin America, 1974-77, Gerald R. Ford Library; National Security Council Memorandum, Stephen Low to Brent Scowcroft, September 14, 1974, Ibid.; White House Memorandum of Conversation, President Houari Boumediene and Henry A. Kissinger, October 14, 1974, Kissinger Transcripts, Digital National Security Archive; Kissinger, *Renewal*, 775.

Downey, Jr., an investor in the American Basketball Association who would later gain notoriety as talk show host Morton Downey, Jr., announced plans to develop an international baseball league to begin play the following year. Downey hoped to build the circuit from teams in U.S. cities lacking Major League Baseball clubs—such as New Orleans, Memphis, and Tampa—as well as international clubs from Mexico, Japan, the Philippines, Venezuela, and even Cuba. Questions over Cuba’s interest in joining such a league, and the likelihood that the World Baseball Association could have overcome the political hurdles and included a Cuban franchise, remain unanswered, as Downey’s proposed league never played a game. Given similar efforts later that year, however, the latter seems unlikely.⁴¹

In September 1974, Donald Walker, a Portland attorney who had performed legal work for that city’s minor league baseball franchise, wrote to President Ford suggesting that baseball “serve as an ambassador of good will” to Cuba. Similar to Downey’s plan, Walker proposed creating a new baseball league with teams in American cities like Portland, Seattle, Washington, D.C., Miami, and international sites such as Vancouver, Mexico City, and Havana. The White House nixed the idea, however. A staff member replied to Walker in November that “existing legislation and regulations...preclude the issuance of visas which would be required for travel involved if Havana were to be included.”⁴²

An additional attempt at baseball diplomacy through including a Cuban team in an American league met defeat in 1974. With Major League Baseball considering expanding its number of franchises during the 1970s, a Washington lawyer and baseball diplomacy advocate

⁴¹ George Solomon, “Orange Baseball Dawns,” *Washington Post*, 4 April 1974, D1; Bob Addie, “WBA Negotiating for RFK,” *Washington Post*, 17 April 1974, C6.

⁴² Donald C. Walker, Letter to the President, September 11, 1974, Folder: CO 39 Cuba 11/1/74-12/31/74, Box 15, White House Central Subject Files, Gerald R. Ford Library; Letter from Roland L. Elliott to Donald C. Walker, November 4, 1974, *Ibid.*;

named Joseph Gebhardt made a creative, if futile, proposal to the state department to give Cuba a major league franchise as a means of improving the political relationship. Though Gebhardt cited the success of Ping Pong Diplomacy in opening channels with China, the state department refused his request, which would not have guaranteed a team to Cuba anyway, since Major League Baseball is a private enterprise. Indirectly, baseball did help to serve as an ice breaker in 1974. When ABC Sports broadcasted the World Amateur Boxing Championships from Cuba in September, announcer Keith Jackson managed to win an interview with Castro thanks, Jackson believes, to a Los Angeles Dodgers uniform and some books on baseball that he brought along as a gift to Cuba's most high profile baseball fan.⁴³

Another major effort at baseball diplomacy emerged in 1975, when Commissioner Kuhn and Preston Gómez again tried to schedule exhibition games between American major league players and teams from Cuba. Kuhn had first broached the subject to Kissinger at a dinner party in December 1973, and the secretary had asked the commissioner to contact him if plans for a game began to develop. In January, Kuhn wrote a letter to Kissinger to open talks with the state department. According to Kuhn's letter, Gómez had recently met with INDER director Jorge Garcia Bango and Cuban officials had expressed strong interest in scheduling a series of baseball games in Havana in March 1975. Bango had also invited Kuhn to meet with him the next week in Mexico City to discuss the proposal. Kuhn informed Kissinger of these developments and sought his advice.⁴⁴

⁴³ Nancy Scannell, "Baseball's Owners Meet On Monday: Owners Gather In Bearish Mood," *Washington Post*, 1 December 1974, C1; "ABC Sports Goes to Cuba," *Clovis News-Journal* (New Mexico), 26 September 1974, 12.

⁴⁴ Letter from Bowie Kuhn to Henry Kissinger, January 14, 1975, "Béisbol Diplomacy with Cuba," National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB12/nsaebb12.htm>

This latest effort appeared to have some potential, as Kuhn's letter found a sympathetic ear within the state department. Kissinger delegated the response to Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs William D. Rogers, of whom Kuhn had previously been a client. It is unclear what instructions Kissinger gave Rogers regarding the baseball proposal, but it seems as though the two were initially not on the same page. In a January 18 memo to Kissinger, Rogers mentioned the baseball proposal, along with another upcoming trip to Cuba by Frank Mankiewicz, who was still serving as an intermediary between Washington and Havana officials. The state department planned to send along a statement with Mankiewicz regarding travel assurances for the Cuban delegation's upcoming visit and a La Guardia Airport meeting with Eagleburger. Rogers also proposed that this message include approval for a Cuban baseball team to visit the United States in the near future.⁴⁵

Kissinger, however, was not willing to take so large a step at that point, and declined to approve the baseball exchange. Beside the paragraph discussing the baseball plan, Kissinger wrote "No" and at the end of the document initialed instructions to redraft the statement--presumably, based on his margin notes, to remove the baseball passage. Three days later, on the morning of January 21, he made his feelings on the proposal clear in a phone conversation with Rogers in which he flatly stated his current opposition. Kissinger left open the possibility for future baseball diplomacy, claiming that he was "for a baseball team going eventually," but did not support it at that time because of Cuba's failure to make any conciliatory gestures toward the United States. Indeed, based on the other developments at the time, Kissinger appeared open to improving the relationship between Washington and Havana, either through baseball or some other avenue, but efforts had quickly reached a stalemate over Cuban insistence that the blockade

⁴⁵ Department of State Interdepartmental Communication to William Rogers from Kissinger aide, January 16, 1975, Ibid.; Department of State Action Memorandum from William Rogers to Henry Kissinger, January 18, 1975, Ibid.

be lifted and American calls for clear concessions from Cuba before anything could go forward. At the end of the phone conversation Kissinger ordered Rogers to “straighten out this Bowie Kuhn thing.”⁴⁶

Baseball diplomacy, once again, seemed dead for the time being. That afternoon, Rogers informed Kuhn of the state department’s stance and advised him that he “should not complete arrangements for a Major League March trip to Cuba at this time.” Kuhn understood the state department position, but persisted in lobbying for baseball diplomacy. He told Rogers that he still planned to meet with INDER the next month in Mexico City, and that he hoped the Cuba plans could go forward, “for baseball’s sake,” in light of past cooperation with the government. On January 30, just before departing for the Mexico City meeting, the commissioner reached out to Rogers again in a letter expressing his optimism that the Mexico City meeting would produce an agreement for a baseball game with Cuba, which would then only lack state department approval.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Department of State Action Memorandum from William Rogers to Henry Kissinger, January 18, 1975, Ibid.; Telephone Conversation between William Rogers and Henry Kissinger, January 21, 1975, 8:20 am, Ibid.

⁴⁷ Department of State Briefing Memorandum from William Rogers to Henry Kissinger, 21 January 1975, Ibid.; Letter from Bowie Kuhn to William Rogers, 30 January 1975, Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

'70s Innings Stretches: Cold War Détente and the Origins of Baseball Diplomacy, Part Two

Kuhn's persistence resurrected baseball diplomacy's chances in early February 1975. The Mexico City meeting, as he had anticipated, was indeed successful and shortly after returning he called Rogers to discuss details for a possible baseball game in Cuba. On February 13, Rogers sent another memo to Kissinger describing the phone conversation with the commissioner and the specifics of the baseball trip. As proposed, a squad of major league players was to travel to Cuba on Friday, March 28, during the major league spring training season. They would conduct a clinic for Cuban players that afternoon, play an exhibition game against a Cuban team the next day, and fly home that Saturday night following the contest. Kuhn argued that the game would boost Cuban players' relationship with American professional baseball by fueling their hopes of someday playing in the major leagues. He also highlighted baseball's importance in American culture, as well as its "magic value in projecting a positive image of the U.S."¹

I

¹ Department of State Memorandum from William Rogers to Henry Kissinger, 13 February 1975, "Béisbol Diplomacy with Cuba," National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB12/nsaebb12.htm>.

Rogers joined the commissioner in backing baseball diplomacy. Serving as Kuhn's advocate inside the state department, he heralded the baseball game's political potential and assured Kissinger that it would "reawaken memories of [Kissinger's] China moves" and have a "symbolic significance not limited to the sports pages." He even proposed having President Ford formally announce the plans for the baseball exchange. Tying politics to the game appears to have hampered its chances of approval, however, as Kissinger opposed such a high profile event without an accompanying political gesture from the Cuban government. Rogers admitted in the memo that he had "seen nothing on the Cuban side that could be taken as a move to which the baseball game might be considered a responsive gesture." Ironically, an article in that same day's *Washington Post* reported that the Cuban government had recently released three Americans who had been held for four years on narcotics trafficking charges. Rogers either missed this news, or did not consider it a sizable enough act of Cuban goodwill to justify the baseball game.²

Nonetheless, the state department appeared determined to use the game as a diplomatic carrot. The lack of a Cuban concession in exchange for baseball remained a sticking point. Rogers opined near the end of the memo that Cuba may have failed to offer a political gesture because "the sports effort is a somewhat discoordinated [sic] step by a ministry not entirely related to political objectives and strategies." It is ironic that although the state department was unable or unwilling to downplay the politics of the baseball game, it could conceive of Cuba doing so.³

² Ibid.; "Cuba Releases 3 U.S. Citizens," *Washington Post*, 13 February 1975, A33.

³ Department of State Memorandum from William Rogers to Henry Kissinger, 13 February 1975, "Béisbol Diplomacy with Cuba," National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB12/nsaebb12.htm>.

Still wanting a goodwill gesture from Havana, Kissinger reaffirmed his opposition to the proposed baseball trip. On February 15, he sent a note to Rogers that reiterated his original stance, but asked Rogers to offer his reasons for supporting the proposal. That Kissinger wanted to hear the arguments for baseball diplomacy with Cuba seems to indicate his willingness to support such a trip in the future, as he had originally mentioned to Rogers in the January 21 phone conversation. It appears, however, that Kissinger envisioned a baseball exchange as resulting from an improved diplomatic climate, not as a catalyst for creating an improved climate.⁴

Rogers tried to persuade his boss with a lengthy memo that highlighted the perceived benefits of baseball diplomacy. He first addressed the American public's growing skepticism of antagonistic policies toward Cuba. Rogers also referenced recent news reports that characterized the Castro regime as stable, and the overall quality of life in Cuba as dreary, but with better social services than other nations in Latin America. These same reports, he noted, speculated that Castro would soon be willing to normalize relations with the United States and predicted that the OAS would move in April to lift its sanctions against Cuba. By supporting baseball diplomacy, Rogers contended, the state department could "correct some distortions in the public mind about our Cuban policy—shifting the emphasis to a non-political and non-controversial area." He also argued that baseball diplomacy would be a safe move in terms of domestic politics. In the same way that Ping Pong Diplomacy met widespread support in the American public, Rogers argued, so could baseball with Cuba "serve a similar purpose in bridging the gap between the Bay of Pigs and a new relationship with Castro." Agreeing to the game, he asserted, would provide President Ford with a "sturdy platform" for commenting on Cuban policy during

⁴ Department of State Telegram from Henry Kissinger to William Rogers and Lawrence Eagleburger, 15 February 1975, Ibid.

his visit to Miami, an area heavily populated with Cuban Americans, the next week. Rogers argued that Cuban exiles, who generally opposed any diplomacy with Cuba, were less likely to dispute a simple baseball game. Moreover, the likelihood of an American victory would bolster citizens who were “depressed by the regimented victories of the Communists in Olympic games”--most likely a reference to the controversial gold medal basketball game between the United States and the Soviet Union at the 1972 Munich Games.⁵

Rogers also highlighted how the game could influence Castro and Cuba. He noted that prior to the revolution, Cuba was the “most Americanized of any Latin American country in terms of baseball, hot-dogs, and coco-cola [sic].” Though Castro wanted to acquire American technology, his fear of American influence on Cuba’s population hindered normalization. Rogers contended that the baseball game could undermine anti-American propaganda in Cuba. Even though other American athletes had previously traveled to Cuba for competitions, baseball diplomacy would convey a stronger message--sending a prominent baseball team would be a political gesture in Castro’s eyes.⁶

Rogers’ appeals failed to persuade Kissinger, who still felt that the timing was not right for such a high profile baseball exchange between Cuba and the United States. On February 24, five days after the long memo, Rogers informed Kissinger that he had contacted Kuhn to reject the baseball game. For the second time in as many months, a major league effort at baseball diplomacy had swung and missed.⁷

⁵ Department of State Memorandum from William Rogers to Henry Kissinger, 19 February 1979, Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Department of State Memorandum from William Rogers to Henry Kissinger, 24 February 1975, Ibid.

Encouraged by favorable signs during the spring of 1975, baseball diplomacy did not remain dormant for long. On March 1, Kissinger gave a major address in Houston on Latin American policy that came to be known as the “New Opportunities” speech. In it, he discussed the possibility of a thaw in U.S.-Cuba relations, sparked by likely amendments to the Rio Treaty within the OAS, which would prompt the United States to “consider changes in its bilateral relations with Cuba.” Though Kissinger proclaimed that the administration saw “no virtue in perpetual antagonism,” and was “prepared to move in a new direction,” he hinged such changes on Cuba’s response, insisting that “fundamental change cannot come...unless Cuba demonstrates a readiness to assume the mutuality of obligation and regard upon which a new relationship must be founded.”⁸

Behind the scenes, the Ford administration continued taking steps toward a détente with Cuba. OAS sanctions against Cuba, which had been nearly revoked in 1974, stood in the way of the Ford administration’s efforts at shoring up hemispheric relations. Rather than continue to antagonize Latin American allies, Kissinger had by January 1975 resigned to giving up the sanctions, and the state department began a face-saving effort to dismantle them by agreeing to abolish the obstacle that kept the sanctions in place: the two-thirds majority needed to revoke them. At a July meeting in Costa Rica (a special meeting called to avoid having the sanctions lifted at the scheduled meeting in Washington in May), the OAS voted first to allow sanctions to be lifted by a simple majority, then voted to revoke the collective sanctions against Cuba. In another concession to foreign allies, as well as to business, the administration loosened the embargo by allowing foreign subsidiaries of American companies to trade with Cuba. A

⁸ Terry Shaw, “U.S. Eyes Cuban Détente,” *Washington Post*, 2 March 1975, A1; White House Memorandum of Conversation between President Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft, February 28, 1975, Kissinger Transcripts, Digital National Security Archive; Kissinger, *Renewal*, 777.

February memo from the NSC Undersecretaries Committee noted increased pressure on American companies from foreign governments and urged President Ford to relax restrictions on Cuban trade. The next month, the state department allowed a Mexican branch of Chrysler permission to sell vehicles at a trade show in Havana. By April, Kissinger had granted similar exemptions to Canadian subsidiaries of American companies to sell furniture and stationary. In August, the state department issued a blanket policy allowing all foreign subsidiaries to trade with Cuba.⁹

Other developments kept the Cuba question in the public realm. Some members of Congress continued to push for reconciliation. Senators Javits and Pell, following their September visit and on the heels of Kissinger's "New Opportunities" speech, introduced a resolution in early March urging the Ford administration to improve ties with Cuba. Senator John Sparkman, a Democrat from Alabama and chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, wrote in a February critique that the United States should restore normal diplomatic relations and end "the futile economic boycott." The most visible congressional effort at shoring up U.S.-Cuba ties came from Senator George McGovern. On May 7, the South Dakota Democrat embarked on a goodwill trip to Cuba, taking a lengthy tour of the island nation and conducting a nine-hour interview with Castro. The chat garnered particular attention in the American press, as Castro pledged that Cuba wanted "friendship" and argued that the two divided countries "owe it to ourselves to live in peace," though he reiterated that the embargo needed to be lifted as a first step in the process. McGovern's visit also provided a boost for baseball diplomacy, as the

⁹; White House Memorandum of Conversation, Henry Kissinger and Abd al-Halim Khaddam, March 15, 1975, Kissinger Transcripts, Digital National Security Archive; Department of State, NSC Under Secretaries Committee Memorandum For The President, February 25, 1975, Folder: Cuba 3, Box 3, NSA Presidential Country Files for Latin America, Gerald R. Ford Library; Department of State Memorandum from William Rogers to The Secretary, Ibid.; Department of State, The Secretary's Principals and Regionals Staff Meeting, April 23, 1975, Kissinger Transcripts, Digital National Security Archive; Kissinger, *Renewal*, 728, 778.

senator suggested that baseball and basketball exchanges between Cuba and the United States be used as diplomatic ice-breakers. Castro agreed, and the next month began the process of securing the required permission from the International Amateur Baseball Federation for an amateur Cuban team to play against a professional squad from the United States.¹⁰

No doubt following these developments closely, Kuhn sprang back into action, once again broaching the subject of baseball diplomacy to the state department. The commissioner wrote another letter to Rogers on May 13 that mentioned Castro's "invitation" to host an American baseball team and inquired about formally announcing plans for a game to take place in the spring of 1976. Rogers suggested Kuhn send the department a formal proposal with the details of the baseball trip, which the commissioner did the following month. The plan called for one or two exhibition games in Cuba the following March, with all-star players from the American and National League teams that hold spring training exercises in Florida making up the American squad. The major leaguers would face a Cuban team of all-stars in a game "to engender cordial relations" with "no political aspect or purpose." Broadcast rights for the exhibition would be sold to an American network, and the television revenue split evenly with INDER.¹¹

Conciliatory gestures from Cuba further enhanced prospects for baseball diplomacy. In late May, Cuba announced plans to dial down revolutionary activities in Latin American. Prime

¹⁰ "Javits, Pell introduce Cuba relations resolution," *St. Petersburg Times*, 5 March 1975, 5A; "Sparkman on Foreign Policy," *Wall Street Journal*, 13 February 1975, 16; "U.S., Soviets Back Nuclear Pact Again," *Washington Post*, 7 May 1975, A43; Jules Witcover, "Castro Hints At Thaw," *Washington Post*, 9 May 1975, A1; "McGovern's Plan Scores With Cubans," *New York Times*, 9 May 1975, 2; "Castro Accompanies Senator McGovern on Tour," May 8, 1975, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>; "Sports News Briefs: Cuban Pitch to U.S. Reported," *New York Times*, 16 April 1975, 73.

¹¹ Letter from Bowie Kuhn to William Rogers, May 13, 1975, "Béisbol Diplomacy with Cuba," National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB12/nsaebb12.htm>; Department of State Memorandum from Culver Gleysteen to William Rogers, June 12, 1975, *Ibid.*; Outline of Cuban Game Proposal, June 13, 1975, *Ibid.*

Minister Carlos Rafael Rodriguez declared that Cuba would discontinue aiding rebels in hemispheric guerilla struggles and that efforts to dispose of regimes in Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay would shift from military aid to support for progressive political reform. In early June, Cuba returned three persons accused of hijacking American planes in 1971 to the Federal Bureau of Investigation--the first such prisoners that Cuba had turned over to U.S. custody under the terms of the 1973 anti-hijacking agreement. Another positive gesture came two weeks later, when Castro announced the return of a \$2 million ransom that had been confiscated following the November 1972 hijacking of a Southern Airways flight out of Birmingham, Alabama. Returning the ransom money grew directly out of the May meeting with McGovern; the senator had suggested it to Castro as a show of good faith.¹²

With things seemingly headed in a more positive direction, Rogers again lobbied Kissinger to approve Kuhn's proposal. In a June 21 memo, Rogers mentioned the ransom money and suggested that "a baseball visit might be a tidy and apolitical gesture in response." He inquired whether the state department should allow Kuhn to make a public announcement that the exhibition baseball games would take place the following year "as a response to the Southern Airways ransom payment." This time, Kissinger seemed more receptive to baseball diplomacy, allowing the efforts to stage contests in Cuba to continue. Going forward with a public announcement at that point, however, was apparently a bridge too far. As he indicated in the margin of Rogers' memo, Kissinger preferred that Kuhn continue to make the plans for the

¹² Hugh O'Shaughnessy, "Cuba Stresses Shift From Aiding Rebels," *Washington Post*, 31 May 1975, A9; "Cuba Returns 3 Accused U.S. Hijackers," *Washington Post*, 3 June 1975, A3; "Castro Will Return \$2 Million Ransom," *Washington Post*, 17 June 1975, A7.

baseball trip in secret, putting off any formal announcements of pending baseball diplomacy for the time being.¹³

Though hopes ran high in June 1975, major issues continued to complicate the U.S.-Cuba relationship. The McGovern trip had opened a dialogue with Castro, but it also introduced a decidedly partisan element to the debate over détente with Cuba, since McGovern was a prominent Democrat. Thus, as Kissinger lamented, while Castro made the sort of gesture that the Ford administration was looking for in returning the \$2 million hijacking ransom, he did so “in a way that gave credit to Cuba’s friends in Congress,” rather than to the executive branch. Asked about improvements in the Cuban relationship by Algeria’s foreign minister, Kissinger argued that Castro’s efforts at extending an olive branch would be better received if it was delivered to administration officials, rather than political opponents: “Senators...get them publicity but not reciprocity. And if they do it with Democratic Senators...”¹⁴ Furthermore, at the same time that efforts at détente with Cuba appeared, increased focus on prior American attempts to antagonize Castro surfaced. During the spring of 1975, the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (the so-called Church Committee) began investigating CIA involvement in political assassinations. Specifically, the committee drew attention to CIA contributions in the killings of Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic and Patrice Lumumba of the Congo Republic, as well as multiple attempts to assassinate Castro from 1959 to 1965. Of the at least eight different schemes the CIA concocted

¹³ Department of State Action Memorandum from William Rogers to Henry Kissinger, June 21, 1975, “Béisbol Diplomacy with Cuba,” National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB12/nsaebb12.htm>.

¹⁴ Kissinger, *Renewal*, 778; Department of State, The Secretary’s Principals’ and Regionals’ Staff Meeting, May 9, 1975, Kissinger Transcripts, Digital National Security Archive; White House Memorandum of Conversation between President Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft, May 12, 1975, *Ibid.*; White House Memorandum of Conversation between Henry Kissinger and Abdelaziz Bouteflika, October 1, 1975, *Ibid.*

for the last, the most scandalous involved commissioning Mafia bosses John Roselli and Sam Giancana to carry out the task. To make matters worse, from a public relations standpoint, Castro himself discussed these alleged assassination attempts with McGovern during the senator's visit to Cuba, claiming that in one attempt a CIA operative tried to kill him by having the Cuban leader play catch with an exploding baseball. Though the Church Committee did not verify that particular episode—which would have been an altogether different version of baseball diplomacy—it did confirm many of Castro's allegations.¹⁵

Coupled with the shocking and embarrassing revelations of CIA behavior in Cuba and Latin America were protests from many in the Cuban American community over any attempt to reconcile with Castro. On May 10, amid speculation that the OAS would relax its sanctions against Cuba, a crowd of over 1,000 Cuban Americans staged a protest march from the Lincoln Memorial to the Pan American Building. Among the demonstrators was Juanita Castro, Fidel's sister. Other protests were less peaceful. On the same day of the march, a small bomb exploded at the Mexican embassy in Washington. In light of speculation that Mexico would formally propose the amendments that would lift the OAS sanctions, authorities suspected that anti-Castro forces were responsible for the blast.¹⁶

Dissent from Cuban Americans grew louder and more violent near the end of the summer. Following the Ford administration's August announcement that, to reflect OAS

¹⁵ Howard Jones, *The Bay of Pigs* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 4-5; William Greider, "CIA Is Reported To Fear Link To Three Assassination Plots," *Washington Post*, 6 March 1975, A1; George Lardner Jr., "Hill Panel Asks Ford for CIA Report," *Washington Post*, 13 March 1975, A3; "CIA Death-Plot Probe Denied," *Washington Post*, 16 March 1975, A4; Spencer Rich, "Killings Denied By Colby," *Washington Post*, 17 March 1975, A1; Lardner Jr., "Colby Said to Concede CIA Involvement in Death Plots," *Washington Post*, 22 May 1975, A8; Lardner Jr., "Plotting On Castro Confirmed," *Washington Post*, 7 June 1975, A1; Lardner Jr., "Panel Probing 16-Year Span of CIA Plots," *Washington Post*, 14 June 1975, A1; Lawrence Meyer, "Giancana, Linked to CIA Plot, Slain," *Washington Post*, 21 June 1975, A1; Lardner, Jr., "Mafioso Confirms CIA Plot on Castro," *Washington Post*, 25 June 1975, A1; Lardner Jr., "McGovern Gets Data," *Washington Post*, 31 July 1975, A1.

¹⁶ Stephen Lynton, "Cubans Protest Move Toward Castro Accord," *Washington Post*, 11 May 1975, A8; Judy Luce Mann, "Bombs Explode at 2 Buildings," *Washington Post*, 11 May 1975, A25.

actions, it was easing the embargo to permit foreign subsidiaries of American companies to sell goods to Cuba, the Cuban exile community denounced the measures and some of the more radical groups reacted violently. In November, Rolando Masferrer, a former Army leader in Cuba under Fulgencio Batista, was killed in Miami when his car exploded. A Cuban terrorist group known as “Zero” took responsibility for the explosion, dubbing it an example to those who oppose Cuba’s liberation. Six more explosions rocked various government offices and the police department in Miami during the first week of December as two groups, the “New Black Revolutionary Front” and the “Cuban Youth Group,” took credit for the bombs. The latter group was also tied to a bombing at the University of Miami the week before in protest of Washington’s conciliatory gestures toward Cuba. One Cuban American blamed the Miami violence on a recent visit by Assistant Secretary of State Rogers—one of the leading advocates for baseball diplomacy—whom he called “public enemy number one of the freedom of Cuba.”¹⁷

Adding to the trouble, covert efforts to negotiate with Cuba had failed to prosper. In July—the same month that the OAS sanctions fell—Cuban officials reached out to the Ford administration to request another meeting through Larry Eagleburger, who had first met with a Cuban delegation at La Guardia Airport back in January. As a result, Kissinger dispatched Eagleburger and Rogers to the Pierre Hotel in New York for a July 9 face to face. Though the secretary instructed the American delegation to convey a positive signal to the Cubans that the United States is “moving in a new direction,” they found an unreceptive audience. The state department proposed an incremental process for removing the embargo and restoring normal diplomatic relations, asking in return for Cuba to release some American prisoners, loosen

¹⁷ Murray Marder, “US Relaxes Cuban Trade Curbs,” *Washington Post*, 22 August 1975, A1; “Easing of Embargo Disappoints Cuban Exiles,” *Washington Post*, 26 August 1975, A15; John Goshko, “Bomb Becoming Favored Tool of US Terrorists,” *Washington Post*, 2 November 1975, A10; “Terrorist Unit Says It Killed Exile,” *Washington Post*, 5 November 1975, A4; “More Blasts Hit Miami Buildings,” *Washington Post*, 12 December 1975, B17.

restrictions on family visits, cut back on Soviet military ties, dial down rhetoric on Puerto Rican independence, agree to nonintervention in the hemisphere, and settle expropriated property claims dating from the Revolution. The Cuban delegation rebuffed these overtures in their entirety, responding that until the embargo was lifted “Cuba and the United States cannot deal with each other as equals and consequently cannot negotiate.” They also indicated that, even without the embargo, compliance on the American requests was unlikely. A state department offer for a September meeting at the United Nations between Kissinger and Cuba’s foreign minister went unanswered.¹⁸

II

Chances for a Cuban détente were dwindling, and by autumn 1975 Castro had stopped trying to win popularity points in the United States. In August, intelligence reports revealed that Cuban military agents had attempted to extract strategic information from naval officers in Portugal, which was in the midst of a Communist revolution. The Cubans purportedly sought North Atlantic Treaty Organization secrets—to which Portugal had access as a member nation—as well as information on U.S. naval procedures in the Caribbean. That same month, Cuba renewed tension with the United States by placing Puerto Rico’s independence on the agenda of a special session of the UN Committee on Colonialism and Castro called for a September international conference in Havana on the same subject. By November, U.S. intelligence gathered that Cuba was collaborating with the Soviet Union on terrorist attacks, aimed at Puerto Rico, designed to disrupt the upcoming bicentennial celebration in the United States.¹⁹

¹⁸ Kissinger, *Renewal*, 778-782.

¹⁹ Jack Anderson, “Cuba Unit Pumps Lisbon on NATO,” *Washington Post*, 28 August 1975, B19; “Cuba Role Cited in Terrorist Plots,” *Washington Post*, 29 November 1975, A6.

A more devastating development also emerged that autumn as the United States learned of Cuba's involvement in the Angolan Civil War. The state department first received news in October that Cuban troops were landing in Africa and providing direct military assistance to the leftist Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in its fight to control the state. Cuban ties to MPLA had blossomed at the "Tricontinental" conference in Havana in 1966, and Castro was eager, a decade later, to help his allies in Africa. Kissinger, upon receiving word, concluded that Cuba's behavior by the fall of 1975 seemed to be "getting nastier." Castro's rhetoric also grew more antagonistic toward the United States. Speaking at the Communist Party Conference in Havana that December, Castro further damaged hopes for improving ties with Washington in a lengthy address that defended Cuba's stance and reiterated support for Angola—which he accused the United States of planning to conquer—as well as Puerto Rican independence. He denounced U.S. terms for opening negotiations with Cuba, claiming that the American price for normalization was "a return to the past." Castro also ripped the CIA and its various efforts toward his assassination. The temporary thaw between Washington and Havana appeared over by the end of December, as Ford responded to Castro's rhetoric by condemning Cuban and Soviet involvement in Angola. Castro, in turn, demanded a public apology from the United States for attempting to assassinate him.²⁰

As tension rose between Cuba and the United States, the prospects for baseball diplomacy, or any diplomacy at all, diminished. After receiving confirmation during a

²⁰ Department of State, The Secretary's Staff Meeting, October 10, 1975, Kissinger Transcripts, Digital National Security Archive; "Frelimo, Cuba Said to Aid Angolans," 13 November 1975, A20; Fidel Castro, *Fidel Castro Speeches: Cuba's Internationalist Foreign Policy, 1975-80*, Michael Taber, ed. (New York: Pathfinder, 1981), 81; Joanne Omang, "Thaw Vanishes as Castro Blasts US," *Washington Post*, 20 December 1975, A11; Lou Cannon, "Ford Assails Cuba, Russia Over Angola," *Washington Post*, 21 December 1975, A1; Omang, "Cuba Demands Ford Apology on CIA Acts," *Washington Post*, 23 December 1975, A3; Fernando Andresen Guimaraes, *The Origins of the Angolan Civil War: Foreign Intervention and Domestic Political Conflict* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 73; Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington: Brookings Institute, 1985), 508-514.

November 5 staff meeting that Cuban soldiers and ships had landed in Angola, Kissinger pulled back on the next year's planned exhibition games in Havana, remarking that the state department "better get that baseball team turned off for the time being." By early December, the uncertainty of the spring 1976 games became public knowledge. A December 3 *Washington Post* article revealed that Kissinger had postponed the games in retaliation for Cuba's involvement in Angola and suspected meddling in Puerto Rico. Two days later, Barry Jagoda, a former television producer who had worked to secure broadcast rights for the games to ABC Sports, expressed hope that disagreements between Washington and Havana could be resolved in time to save the games.²¹

Kissinger's records make clear, however, that the Angolan conflict was a deal breaker. In a December 22 meeting with President Ford and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Kissinger proclaimed that the United States, "cannot tolerate the intervention of continental powers" (referring to Cuba and the Soviet Union) in Angola. During a January visit to the Soviet Union, Kissinger pressed Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev on the Angola issue, and warned Soviet ambassadors that the United States "can never accept 8,000 Cuban troops in Angola." Cuba's continued defiance brought an end to the Ford administration's foray at baseball diplomacy. Cuban troop levels in Angola, nearing 10,000 at the end of 1975, grew to 14,000 early in 1979. On January 7, 1976, the state department formally canceled the spring exhibition games, citing Cuba's involvement in the Angolan Civil War.²²

²¹ Department of State, The Secretary's 8:00 a.m. Staff Meeting, November 5, 1975, Kissinger Transcripts, Digital National Security Archive; "Politics Squelch Cuba Trip," *Washington Post*, 3 December 1975, D3; Bob Addie, "US Baseball Series with Cuba Still Hopeful," *Washington Post*, 5 December 1975, C2.

²² White House Memorandum of Conversation between President Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, Donald Rumsfeld, and Brent Snowcroft, December 22, 1975, Kissinger Transcripts, Digital National Security Archive; White House Memorandum of Conversation between Leonid Brezhnev, Andrei Gromyko and Henry Kissinger, January 22, 1976, *Ibid.*; White House Memorandum of Conversation between Andrei Gromyko and Henry Kissinger, January 23,

Political considerations played a major role in the demise. After the Church Committee hearings had aired the CIA's dirty laundry, public support for international intervention languished and Congress voted to cease funding the agency's efforts in Angola in December 1975. Baseball thus became one of the administration's few remaining weapons for fighting Cuban influence in Africa.²³

President Ford, who was completing Nixon's second term, faced a looming fight for reelection in 1976. Not only did Ford have to overcome a sluggish economy, a hangover effect from the Watergate scandal, and his controversial decision to pardon Nixon, the president was coming under increased criticism from his own party for making friendly overtures to Castro. Cuban-American Republicans were particularly vocal about their displeasure with the Ford administration's efforts at détente with Cuba. A group of Cuban Americans at the March 1975 Republican Leadership Conference in Washington passed a resolution declaring "that relations with Cuba or the lifting of any existing sanction against Castro will not be accepted nor condoned." The group also denounced Assistant Secretary of State Rogers, one of the major advocates for détente, as having "a proven record of erroneous policies." In a December 1975 letter, the Florida chair of the Republican National Hispanic Assembly urged Ford to "end speculation on coexistence with the Cuban communist government." The administration had also come under fire back in September, when Fernando De Baca, Ford's special assistant for

1976, *Ibid.*; Les Brown, "US Cancels Cuban Baseball Telecast," *New York Times*, 7 January 1976, 56; Stevenson, *Rise and Fall*, 514; Guimaraes, *Angolan Civil War*, 147.

²³ Yanek Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 286-287.

Hispanic affairs, caused a controversy by claiming that while Cuban American leaders were fiercely opposed to normalization, rank-and-file Cuban Americans were willing to accept it.²⁴

That efforts at Cuban détente were creating a tangible rift among Hispanic Republicans was of particular concern for Ford, who had to overcome a formidable challenge from Ronald Reagan for the party's nomination in 1976. The administration learned from a December 1975 *New York Times* article that Reagan had met with Manola Reyes, leader of a prominent Cuban exile group, in Boca Raton, Florida and expressed the hope that Reyes could one day lead a free Cuba. Ford's credibility problem among Cuban American voters became clear in a March 1976 primary in Dade County, Florida, where exit polls indicated that Reagan beat out the president 71 percent to 29 percent in that group. Though Ford prevailed over Reagan, he lost the November election to Democratic challenger Jimmy Carter.²⁵

While it would be overly simplistic to blame Ford's defeat solely on the Cuban issue, and indeed it is difficult to speculate on how much this issue contributed to the president's demise, it seems fair to say that efforts at bringing about a Cuban détente provided him with little to no discernible boost. The Ford administration seemed to understand this reality, and as a result had been less committed to Cuban détente than to détente with the Soviet Union. Though the

²⁴ Letter from Jose Manuel Casanova to President Ford, March 17, 1975, Folder: U.S. Cuban Relations – Correspondence, Box 5, Fernando De Baca Files, 1974-1976, Gerald R. Ford Library; Letter from Jose Manuel Casanova to President Ford, December 10, 1975, Folder: Republican National Hispanic Assembly 1, Box 28, Robert T. Hartmann Files, 1974-77, Gerald R. Ford Library; Phil Gailey, "Exiles Reconciled to Cuba Ties?", *Miami Herald*, 3 September 1975, 1; -----, "Protests Pouring In: Ford's Latin Affairs Aide Misread on Cuba Statement," *Miami Herald*, 21 September 1975; Letter from Phil Gaily to Fernando De Baca, September 15, 1975, Folder: U.S. Cuban Relations 1, Box 5, Fernando De Baca Files, 1974-1976, Gerald R. Ford Library; "Détente Criticism Behind Ford Talk," *Washington Post*, 20 August 1975, A1.

²⁵ David Binder, "Reagan Met Panamanian and Cuban Exile Leaders in Florida," *New York Times*, 14 December 1975, 54; National Security Council Memorandum For Brent Scowcroft From Stephen Low, December 16, 1975, Folder: CO 39 Cuba 6/1/75-12/31/75, Box 15, White House Central Subject Files CO 39 Cuba, Gerald R. Ford Library; Memo to President Ford from Lillian M. Giberga, April 6, 1976, Folder: Cuba Policy 2, Box 3, Thomas Aranda Files, 1976-77, Gerald R. Ford Library; "Latin Vote for Reagan Stirs Ford Aides," *New York Times*, 28 March 1976, Ibid.

Angolan issue killed the baseball series in January 1976, it did not prevent the United States from continuing the SALT II negotiations with the Soviet Union—believed inside the Ford White House to be culpable for the Cuban adventure in Angola—the very same month. In the end, the reality of Cold War politics complicated and ultimately doomed the first major efforts at baseball diplomacy.²⁶

As it turned out, the only evidence of baseball diplomacy in 1975 came from the personal story of Luis Tiant, a fourteen-year major league veteran who was pitching for the Boston Red Sox at this time. Born in Cuba, he had not returned to his homeland since 1961, when he stayed in the United States to pursue his baseball career after the Castro regime began imposing strict limits on emigration. By 1975, Tiant had not seen his father since he left Cuba, and had seen his mother only one time, eight years earlier, in Mexico. Worried that his parents, who were nearing seventy years old, would never see him play ball, Tiant reached out to Massachusetts Senator Edward Brooke, who sent an appeal to Castro with George McGovern on his trip to Cuba. McGovern managed to secure Castro's acquiescence to exit visas for Tiant's parents and they arrived in the United States that August. Tiant's father, a former pitcher in the American Negro Leagues, threw out the ceremonial first pitch before seeing his son play in the major leagues for the first time.²⁷

The family reunion lasted through October, which saw Tiant's Red Sox face the Cincinnati Reds in the World Series. Though the 1975 Series is probably best remembered for Carlton Fisk's game six home run—which he emphatically urged to stay fair by waving his arms

²⁶ Litwak, *Nixon Doctrine*, 188-189.

²⁷ "People in Sports: Tiant Awaiting Family Reunion," *New York Times*, 20 August 1975, 20; Deane McGowen, "Tiant's Best Fans See Him Lose, 8-2," *New York Times*, 27 August 1975, 48; Thomas Boswell, "Life Is No Picnic For Magical Tiant," *Washington Post*, 8 October 1975, A15.

to the right as the ball sailed over the left field wall—and for being one of many customary October disappointments for the Red Sox, Tiant’s dramatic story resonated with fans and the Boston pitcher further endeared himself by winning games one and four in the series. That the Cuban expatriate Tiant, with his parents looking on, faced a menacing Cincinnati club dubbed the “Big Red Machine” (who had a Cuban star of their own in first basemen Tony Pérez) in the 1975 World Series was an ironic twist. It proved to be a highlight in Tiant’s personal and professional life as his parents, who never returned to Cuba, both died in December 1976. Though this small success story for baseball diplomacy did not overcome the lingering issues that remained between the United States and Cuba, it certainly made a world of difference for the Tiant family.²⁸

Though chances for a détente with Cuba had faded by the end of 1975 and baseball diplomacy failed to take flight during the Ford administration, the idea had not yet taken its last swings in the 1970s. Proposals of using baseball to shore up U.S.-Cuba relations reemerged later in the decade when President Carter sought to improve hemispheric ties. Feelings of disenchantment among the American public with recent U.S. foreign policy gave Carter greater flexibility to reconsider the status quo. As Robert Strong bluntly notes in his book on the administration’s foreign policy, by the late 1970s “the United States had friendships with a rather long list of international sons of bitches, and Carter was elected, in part, for his promise to distance the United States from some of its more unsavory and less essential allies.” It could also explore new directions. The Carter administration pursued its own effort at a Cuban

²⁸ Joseph Durso, “Series Opens in Boston Today; Reds Up Against Wall and Tiant,” *New York Times*, 11 October 1975, 19; -----, “Red Sox Win Series Opener, 6-0, on 6-Run 7th,” *New York Times*, 12 October 1975, 1; “Week In Review,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 October 1975, 14; “Tiant’s Mother Dies 2 Days After Father,” *Washington Post*, 14 December 1976, D3; Joseph Durso, “Luis Tiant’s Reunion Ends,” *New York Times*, 17 December 1976, 39.

détente, which brought about a thaw in the winter and spring of 1977 and once again raised baseball diplomacy's prospects.²⁹

Shortly after the new president took office in January 1977, the Carter administration began taking actions which increased the chances of normalization between Cuba and the United States. In early February, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance announced a likely meeting between U.S. and Cuban officials to discuss renewing the 1973 mutual agreement against airline hijacking, which was set to expire in April. While he conceded that "difficult issues" remained, the secretary expressed hope that they could begin moving toward normalizing relations, which the administration ultimately hoped to achieve with all countries. Vance had been advocating a fresh approach on Cuba since prior to taking office, and had sent an October memorandum to Carter suggesting the United States lift the embargo on food and medicine. The Angola situation remained a potential roadblock in 1977, as Cuba still maintained a heavy military force there. Vance declared that the state department was willing to engage in discussions with Cuba, however, and suggested that withdrawal from Africa would no longer be a prerequisite to negotiation. During a question and answer session two weeks later, Carter revealed hopeful signals that Cuba was removing its troops from Angola, which he said would be "a step toward normalization." Though reports of the withdrawal proved premature, Cuba appeared to be receptive to early rhetoric from the Carter administration. In an interview with CBS news that aired in February, Castro praised the new American president as having a "sense of morals," and

²⁹ Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2000), 84.

said that he would “with pleasure talk to him” if the administration wanted to open negotiations.³⁰

III

With the U.S.-Cuba political relationship apparently on the mend, the U.S.-Cuba baseball relationship grew stronger in 1977. The year opened with a symbolic gesture that had little to do with improving U.S.-Cuba ties, but was appropriate given their improving tone. In February, the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown announced that Martin Dihigo, the Cuban-born pitcher who starred in the American Negro Leagues but was kept out of Major League Baseball by the color barrier, would be inducted into the museum. Dihigo’s posthumous enshrinement was the first for any Cuban player.³¹

With the prospect of normalized relations once more on the horizon, the idea of baseball diplomacy surfaced again. Initial discussions in early 1977 focused on the New York Yankees, the defending American League champions, traveling to Havana to play an exhibition game against a Cuban team. This effort dated back to the 1975 season, when the Yankees invited some members of Cuba’s UN delegation to attend a game at their temporary home, Shea Stadium (where they played while Yankee Stadium was undergoing renovations). The Yankees’ front office also had connections to Cuban baseball from prior to the Revolution,

³⁰ Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 116; Juan de Onis, “U.S. Nationalists in Panama Canal Zone Resists Turnover of Control,” *New York Times*, 19 January 1977, A2; Graham Hovey, “Possibility is Raised of U.S.-Cuba Meeting,” *New York Times*, 4 February 1977, A6; “Castro, Praising Carter, Sees a Prospect of Ties,” *New York Times*, 9 February 1977, A12; David Binder, “The Nation: The 90 Miles to Cuba Is No Longer So Far Away,” *New York Times*, 13 February 1977, E5; -----, “Carter Says Cubans May Leave Angola, Is Receptive On Ties,” *New York Times*, 17 February 1977, 1; Jimmy Carter, Department of Agriculture Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Department Employees, February 16, 1977, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7988&st=Cuba&st1=#axzz1mZ39PnEW>.

³¹ “Lloyd, Dihigo Inducted Into Hall Of Fame,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 19 February 1977, C3; Red Smith, “The Last Outcasts: Sports of The Times,” *New York Times*, 6 February 1977, S3.

through team president Gabe Paul. He had previously served as general manager for the Cincinnati Reds—the last American team to play a baseball game in Cuba back in 1959—and had been involved in the relocation of the Cuban Sugar Kings in 1960. In December 1976, Paul wrote to INDER director Jorge Garcia Bango proposing that the New York club visit Cuba, and in a January television interview, Castro mentioned his excitement at potentially hosting the famous Yankees.³²

Previous efforts at sending a team to Cuba had been hampered by lackluster support from Washington. The Yankees' chances in 1977 received a considerable boost, however, from the Carter administration's decision to back their trip. Having already expressed a willingness to open negotiations with the Castro regime, the administration viewed a baseball exchange like the Yankees' proposed trip as a useful ice breaker. Asked about the Yankees' efforts during a March 4 press conference, Secretary Vance offered state department support, calling the potential baseball game "constructive." President Carter voiced similar, if more guarded, support. Fielding phone-in questions during a March 5 appearance with Walter Cronkite on the CBS radio network, the president was asked specifically about the proposed baseball trip by a caller from New York. Carter reiterated his hope to "ease tension" with Cuba, calling for the anti-hijacking agreement to be reestablished and hinting that visitation restrictions to Cuba would be lifted. He also called the Yankees' visit a "possibility." *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis suggested that Carter's tentative response was designed as a test of public opinion. The game, it seemed, could serve as a litmus test on U.S.-Cuba normalization.³³

³² Chico Renfroe, "Major League Baseball Beware," *Atlanta Daily World*, 20 February 1977, 7; "Yankee Game In Cuba Eyed," *Washington Post*, 5 March 1977, A7; Murray Chass, "Behind the Kuhn-Cuba Tangle," *New York Times*, 12 March 1977, 28.

³³ "State Department Not Opposed to Yanks Visiting Cuba," *New York Times*, 4 March 1977, A23; Charles Mohr, "Carter Discusses Problems and Policies With Telephone Callers From 26 States," *New York Times*, 6 March 1977, 1; "Ask President Carter" – Remarks During a Telephone Call-in Program on the CBS Radio Network," March 6,

Details for the Yankees' trip to Cuba came together quickly. The team looked to travel to Havana for three exhibition games in late March or early April, just before the start of the upcoming major league season. Yankees principle owner George Steinbrenner was eager to take his club abroad, opining that the exhibition showcase would "further relations between United States and Cuban baseball." Yankee players, likewise, were willing if not excited to play in Cuba. Catcher Ellie Hendricks, who had played in Cuba with Puerto Rico's team during the 1959 Caribbean Series, looked forward to returning, calling the country "beautiful" and their Cuban opponents "big competition." He also hoped that the trip would help to spark reconnections between Cuban Americans and their estranged families. Though reporters peppered players with questions about security concerns and the possibility that the team would be detained in Cuba, their responses indicate that if they had worries they kept a sense of humor about them. Assuming that Castro would want to take some swings against major league pitching, third baseman Graig Nettles joked that the team "may be over there longer than we think if Fidel doesn't get a hit." Being held hostage did not seem to bother Nettles, however, who facetiously noted that he typically "[didn't] start hitting until May anyway." Yankee players' opinions were divided on the possibility of meeting Castro. Outfielder Paul Blair likened the opportunity to "meeting Muhammad or the President." Other players appeared less enthusiastic. Fellow outfielder Ron Blomberg argued that meeting Castro would pale in comparison to playing beside Yankees teammate Reggie Jackson.³⁴

1977, The American Presidency Project,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7119&st=Cuba&st1=#axzz1mZ39PnEW>.

³⁴ Murray Chass, "Steinbrenner, Paul Going to Cuba," *New York Times*, 17 March 1977, 106; -----, "Yankees Like Idea of Cuban Trip, But a Few Prefer to Duck Castro," *New York Times*, 8 March 1977, A51.

With Castro's enthusiasm, the Yankees' willingness, and the state department's backing, all of the pieces in baseball diplomacy's elusive puzzle seemed to have fallen into place. Ironically, an unexpected source dashed the plans for the Yankees-Cuba series: baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn. Though long an advocate for using baseball to boost U.S.-Cuba ties, Kuhn had previously supported efforts that involved sending an all-star team composed of players from multiple major league teams. With the Carter administration showing signs of normalizing relations with Cuba, officials within Major League Baseball anticipated that Cuba's stockpile of talent would soon be opened up to American clubs. Walter O'Malley, of the Los Angeles Dodgers, joined with a few fellow owners who protested to Kuhn that allowing the Yankees to travel to Cuba would give the club an unfair advantage in scouting and networking. Kuhn agreed with them and refused to approve the trip, declaring that "an all-star team is the only team we're [Major League Baseball] interested in sending."³⁵

The commissioner's veto derailed the Yankees' plans. Cuba, which had planned to postpone its own baseball season to accommodate the exhibition games, grew aggravated with the delays from Kuhn's office and rescinded the Yankees' invitation in mid March. The runaround provoked frustration within the Yankees' organization as well, and most of the vitriol was directed at the commissioner. Gabe Paul disagreed with Kuhn's assertion that a unilateral Yankees' trip would not be "good for baseball," contending that the Yankees were "prepared to do what's good for the country." Billy Martin, the Yankees' short-tempered manager, questioned whether the commissioner had proper authority to dictate a club's spring training schedule, and warned that Kuhn's stubbornness could worsen U.S.-Cuba tension and "might get

³⁵ Murray Chass, "Yanks Upset as Kuhn Vetoes Their Cuba Trip," *New York Times*, 9 March 1977, A17; -----, "Kuhn-Cuba Tangle," A28. -----, "Going to Cuba," 106; Ross Atkin, "Castro to Yankees: 'Play Ball!' but Kuhn balks," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 March 1977, 6; Paul L. Montgomery, "Alston Doubles in Debut to Start Deciding Rally," *New York Times*, 18 May 1977, A19.

us in a war.” Nettles bemoaned that “whenever there’s a right decision to be made [Kuhn] makes the wrong one.” He also noted that, contrary to Kuhn’s efforts, Castro had specifically invited the Yankees to play in Cuba, wittily surmising that Cincinnati had been bypassed because “they have enough Reds down there.”³⁶

Kuhn continued to back sending a composite team of major league players to Cuba, as had been proposed during the Ford administration, and efforts to this end were ongoing. This method of baseball diplomacy had been revived thanks to a fortuitous connection inside the Carter administration. Barry Jagoda, who had advocated earlier attempts at baseball diplomacy and who, while working for ABC Sports, had helped to secure broadcasting rights to the planned 1976 baseball exhibition series in Havana, joined Carter’s presidential campaign as media advisor. Two weeks after the election, Jagoda sent a memo to the president-elect briefing him of the aborted 1976 effort, and notifying him of new developments. Just a few days earlier, Kuhn had reached out to Jagoda to broach the subject of Cuban baseball diplomacy with the incoming administration. Jagoda advised Carter that using baseball to improve ties with Cuba “might be your first major foreign policy triumph.” The proposal gained steam early in Carter’s first term, as in February 1977 Roone Arledge, President of ABC Sports, wrote to Jagoda about continuing plans for the baseball series and asking him to “give this project a new thrust” within the administration. One week later, Jagoda sent a memo to National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, informing him that all the proposed baseball exchange lacked was the

³⁶ Lionel Martin, “Cuba Bid On Series Withdrawn,” *Washington Post*, 13 March 1977, 41; Chass, “Yanks Upset,” 106.

administration's approval, and urging him to consider green-lighting this "contemporary version of 'ping-pong diplomacy'".³⁷

Like the Yankees' attempt to play baseball in Cuba, Kuhn's plans for sending a major league all-star team also received the Carter administration's support. On March 7, Secretary Vance informed the baseball commissioner that the state department "would have no objection" to such a trip. At that time, unconfirmed reports were already circulating that the Carter administration was on the verge of lifting the travel restrictions that prohibited U.S. citizens from visiting Cuba. Just a few days later, the state department confirmed this development, which cleared another hurdle blocking baseball diplomacy. Once more, a high profile U.S.-Cuba baseball exchange was on the verge of becoming a reality. Once more, plans were dashed.³⁸

Cuba, it seemed, was set on hosting the Yankees in 1977 and balked at Kuhn's alternative proposal. Time constraints posed a particular challenge. On the major league side, the opening of the regular season in early April meant that the trip would have to take place by the end of March. For Cuba, hosting an American team required putting their own regular season on hiatus. There were also concerns about preparation time. INDER director Jorge Bango argued, astutely, that facing an all-star team would be an even more daunting challenge than facing the Yankees, and that the small window before the start of the Major League Baseball season did not allow the Cubans adequate time to prepare. As a result, negotiations for a spring 1977 all-star baseball

³⁷ Memorandum From Barry Jagoda To Governor Carter, November 15, 1976, Folder: Cuba and Baseball, Box 1, Barry Jagoda Collection, Jimmy Carter Library; Letter From Boone Arledge To Barry Jagoda, February 16, 1977, Ibid.; White House Memorandum For Dr. Brzezinski From Barry Jagoda, February 24, 1977, Ibid.

³⁸ Graham Hovey, "State Department Is Expected to Lift the Ban on Travel to Cuba and 3 Asian Communist Countries Soon," *New York Times*, 8 March 1977, 9; "'No Objection' To Cuba Trip," *Washington Post*, 8 March 1977, D1; James Nelson Goodsell, "'Baseball diplomacy' for U.S.-Cuban thaw," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 March 1977, 1.

exhibition in Cuba reached a stalemate, and nothing further developed before the season began in April.³⁹

Though the all-star trip was put on ice, by loosening travel restrictions the Carter administration sparked a wave of sports and cultural exchanges between Cubans and Americans in 1977 and 1978. A basketball exchange was the first to develop. In early March 1977, the state department agreed to allow a team of collegiate basketball players from the University of South Dakota and South Dakota State University to travel to Havana and compete against amateur Cuban teams. Senator McGovern, who had first proposed the exchange during his May 1975 visit, traveled his home state team on their early April excursion. Though other amateur teams from the United States had played in Cuba for Olympic qualifying events, the South Dakota basketball trip was the first exhibition designed specifically to foster goodwill. One columnist did joke, however, that the team was invading Cuba as a response to Castro's forays into Africa. South Dakota Senator James Abourezk, also part of the American delegation, facetiously observed that it was "the largest group of Americans to be [in Cuba] since the Bay of Pigs." The basketball team did not meet Fidel Castro, who was in Moscow at the time of their visit, but his brother Raul did attend one of the games and praised the goodwill trip. On the court, the South Dakotans received a drubbing at the hands of the bigger, more experienced Cuban national team, losing both contests by nineteen points. The experience did not leave the Americans soured on "basketball diplomacy," however. The Cuban team returned the visit to the United States in November, playing exhibition games against a handful of colleges and

³⁹ "Trip to Cuba By Starts Hits 'Time' Snag," *Washington Post*, 9 March 1977, D1; Chass, "Kuhn-Cuba Tangle," 28.

universities including South Dakota, South Dakota State, and defending college champion Marquette, who only managed a 13-point victory over the Cubans.⁴⁰

Over the next several months, similar exchanges followed basketball diplomacy. Shortly after the state department lifted the travel ban, boxing promoter Don King announced plans to stage a heavyweight fight in Cuba. King planned to move the May 1977 championship bout between Muhammad Ali and challenger Alfio Rhighetti from New York to Havana. It seems that King was unable to reach a satisfactory financial settlement for the fight, however. Though he planned to offer free admission to the Cuban public, King declared that “Castro would have to come up with some money” in order to host the event. The professional bout never took place, though a U.S. amateur boxing team did travel to Havana in February 1978 to take on a squad of Cuban boxers. Tennis was also proposed as a medium of exchange between Cubans and Americans. In early 1978, the Association of Tennis Professionals began planning a tour of Cuba, hoping to regenerate on the island the sport that had produced a few star players prior to the Revolution. Exchanges were not limited to sports. In April 1977, Cuba granted permission for two members of its national ballet to travel to the United States and perform with a dance theater in New York.⁴¹

Unrestricted travel to Cuba also boosted baseball exchanges. Even though efforts at staging exhibition baseball games against Cuban teams had not come to fruition, many within

⁴⁰ “No Objection,” D1; “South Dakotans Will Play A Cuban Quintet in Havana,” *New York Times*, 16 March 1977, 50; Paul L. Montgomery, “South Dakotans Set Game Plan for Cuba: Patience, Good Will, and a Zone Defense,” *New York Times*, 31 March 1977, 89; ----, “S. Dakotans Warmly Greeted in Cuba,” *New York Times*, 5 April 1977, 27; Alan Abelson, “Up & Down Wall Street,” *Barron’s National Business and Financial Weekly*, 4 April 1977, 1; “Raul Castro Says U.S. Team’s Visit Is Step Forward,” *New York Times*, 9 April 1977, A3; “Cuban Quintet to Open Tour Against Marquette,” *New York Times*, 21 September 1977, 45.

⁴¹ “King Wants An Ali Bout In Havana,” *New York Times*, 19 March 1977, 31; “Boxing: Cuba Beats U.S., 8 to 3,” *New York Times*, 13 February 1978, C3; Charles Friedman, “U.S. Is Urged to Approve Tennis Tour of Cuba,” *New York Times*, 22 January 1978, S8; “Cuba To Send Dancers to U.S.,” *Washington Post*, 23 April 1977, C7; “Cubans Dance In Ailey Gala,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 30 April 1977, D21.

Major League Baseball still hoped that the improving political relationship between Washington and Havana would bring forth access to Cuban players. After Commissioner Kuhn had blocked the Yankees' attempt to play baseball games in Havana, team officials used the freedom of the new travel law to visit Cuba. In May 1977, George Steinbrenner, Gabe Paul, and former pitcher Whitey Ford embarked on a two-day trip to Havana, where they took in some local baseball games, observed Cuba's training program, and met with Castro. Their main intent, however, appears to have been to establish contacts should Cuba allow its players to join the major leagues, and Steinbrenner reportedly irked his hosts by repeatedly inquiring about "buying" Cuban players, though doing so would have been against league rules at the time. The Yankees were not the only club interested in foreign talent. Later that month, Chicago White Sox owner Bill Veeck left on an unannounced trip to Cuba. While there, he discussed the possibility of his team playing an exhibition game in Havana and hosting a Cuban team in Chicago the following spring. He also scouted for talent and broached the subject of acquiring Cuban players for his club. Learning from Steinbrenner's faux pas, however, Veeck endeared himself to the Cuban officials by labeling the wealthy Yankees owner as "the Batista of baseball," championing the White Sox as "the peoples' team," and offering to lease players and pay their salaries to the Cuban League, so that they could retain their amateur status.⁴²

Toward the end of 1977, Kuhn and Major League Baseball resumed efforts to send an all-star team to Cuba. Castro had extended the invitation to host a major league all-star team following discussions with Senator McGovern during the basketball visit that spring. Optimistic

⁴² Jennie Paul and Henry Paul (Children of Gabe Paul), Telephone interview with author, February 2012; Chass, "Steinbrenner, Paul Going to Cuba," 106; Paul L. Montgomery, "Alston Doubles in Debut to Start Deciding Rally," *New York Times*, 18 May 1977, A19; "Veeck Leaves Quietly To Scout in Cuba," *New York Times*, 26 May 1977, 91; Byron Rosen, "Veeck Si, Yanquis No, Cuba Nada," *Washington Post*, 1 June 1977, C3; Frank Mankiewicz, "Waiting For Rain: Outbatting The Batista Of Baseball," *Washington Post*, 31 July 1977, 262.

that games would finally take place the following spring, officials from both sides again met in Mexico City in late December 1977.⁴³

Once again, however, baseball diplomacy failed to pan out. The negotiations appeared to break down over several issues. Logistically, they could not seem to settle on the duration and location of the series. Though both sides agreed on playing a game in Havana, Cuba refused to schedule a return contest in the United States. Baseball economics also proved to be a stumbling block. Unnamed sources quoted in a number of reports revealed that Kuhn halted planning for the exhibition baseball games after INDER director Jorge Bango refused to make Cuban players available for export to the major leagues. Another possible explanation was fear of violent retaliation from Cuban Americans opposed to the Castro regime. Former Cuban Sugar Kings owner Robert Maduro, who in 1977 was working in Kuhn's office as Director of Inter-American Affairs, had voiced concerns that participants in U.S.-Cuba baseball diplomacy could become targets for exile groups. Citing past violence against Cuban Americans who had voiced support for normalization, Maduro warned that "if any Cuban players go, their lives might be in danger." Indeed, a state department telegram circulated among offices in February 1978 revealed that a Cuban-American terrorist organization known as "El Condor" had made threats on Kuhn's life, and threatened to blow up airplanes carrying players to Cuba.⁴⁴

⁴³ Paul L. Montgomery, "Castro Invites Baseball Stars, Would Send Cuban Five to U.S.," *New York Times*, 12 April 1977, 50; "Sports News Briefs: Baseball Meeting Today Will Explore Cuba Trip," *New York Times*, 22 December 1977, 76.

⁴⁴ "No Decision in Mexico," *New York Times*, 23 December 1977, 30; Murray Chass, "Kuhn Reportedly Vetoes Plans for a Game in Cuba," *New York Times*, 15 January 1978, S1; ----, "Kuhn Allows Met Bonus for Matlack," *New York Times*, 17 January 1978, 23; ----, "Cuba Hits Kuhn Ban On Game," *New York Times*, 26 January 1978, D13; ----, "Kuhn, Feeney Deny Cuban Charges," *New York Times*, 27 January 1978, A18; Dave Anderson, "The Peril Behind Going to Cuba," *New York Times*, 22 March 1977, 50; Department of State, Telegram from Buenos Aires to Asuncion, February 3, 1978, U.S. Department of State FOIA Electronic Reading Room, <http://www.state.gov/m/a/ips/c22790.htm>.

The rift between Kuhn and Cuban baseball officials appears to have torpedoed baseball diplomacy at the major league level. In the spring of 1978, the Cleveland Indians tried to develop a baseball exchange with Cuba. Gabe Paul, who had left the Yankees' front office after the 1977 season to become the Indians' president, contacted the commissioner in early March about playing a Cuban team during spring training. Rather than traveling to Cuba, the Cleveland club only planned to host a Cuban opponent at its spring training home in Tucson, Arizona. Instead of rejecting it outright, Kuhn referred the Indians' proposal to the league's executive council for discussion. Several weeks passed without response, essentially giving the series a "pocket veto" by closing the window of opportunity to play the exhibition game before the start of the season. Castro once again made headlines that autumn. Following the Yankees' 1978 World Series victory over the Dodgers, he boasted that a Cuban all-star team could defeat the New York club, and challenged them to a game to "see who the real champions are." Though a spokesman for Kuhn hinted at the possibility, reiterating that the commissioner was "always ready to sit down and talk about the situation," there is no evidence that any negotiations ever took place.⁴⁵

As a result, there were no high profile baseball exchanges during the 1970s. The closest thing to baseball diplomacy at the major league level occurred in late 1977, when a delegation of Houston Astros coaches and players, without informing Kuhn or seeking permission from Major League Baseball, traveled to Havana and conducted a series of informal clinics. The Astros did not play any games against Cuban competition and did not meet with Castro, and the trip received scant attention. At the amateur baseball level, there was one notable consequence of the

⁴⁵ "Indians Seeking To Play Cubans," *New York Times*, 2 March 1978, D18; "Indians vs. Cuba Series Snagged," *New York Times*, 24 March 1978, A19; Mark Asher, "Castro Challenges Yankees," *Washington Post*, 24 October 1978, E5.

efforts at Cuban détente. In October 1979, a United States team traveled to Havana to compete in the International Cup tournament, becoming the first American squad to play baseball in Cuba since the Sugar Kings relocated in 1960. The team finished second with Cuba, as usual, winning the competition.⁴⁶

Thus, despite multiple windows of opportunity and a couple of very close calls, baseball diplomacy could never produce any actual baseball games during the 1970s. Whereas the Nixon and Ford-era efforts at baseball diplomacy had fallen through over political disputes, the failures of baseball diplomacy in the last years of the decade appear to have come strictly from baseball disputes. Political support was never an issue during Carter's presidency, and as late as July 1979 the NSC was encouraging baseball games as a part of its Cuba policy. Major League Baseball, however, appeared uninterested in such efforts without the promise of harvesting Cuban baseball talent. Though the administration, by the end of the decade, had lifted travel restrictions to Cuba and opened non-official embassies called "interests sections" in Washington and Havana, baseball was unable to play the part in bridging the Cold War political divide that many had believed it could.⁴⁷

By the end of the decade, in fact, the U.S.-Cuba baseball exchange was once again reverting to the antagonistic posture that had defined it prior to the 1970s détente. An indirectly baseball-related discovery in 1979 threatened to escalate tension between Washington in Havana.

⁴⁶ Jamail, 126-7; "U.S., Japan and Cuba Vie in Baseball Cup," *Washington Post*, 6 October 1979, D3; "U.S. College Stars Lose To Cuba in Baseball Finale," *New York Times*, 28 October 1979, S4.

⁴⁷ National Security Council Memorandum From Robert Pastor To Zbigniew Brzezinski, July 19, 1979, Folder: Cuba 8, Robert Pastor Collection, Jimmy Carter Library; National Security Council Discussion Paper, "U.S. Strategy to Cuba," July 31, 1979, *Ibid.*

While American officials had long known that Soviet troops kept a visible presence in Cuba, U.S. intelligence reports in September confirmed that Cuba housed an entire Soviet combat brigade. The discovery was aided by satellite photos revealing a high number of soccer fields rather than the customary baseball diamonds, at military bases. In response, the United States boosted its forces at Guantanamo Bay. Thus Cuba, which had been at the center of détente's origins from the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the ensuing shift toward peace in Moscow and Washington, was now once again present in détente's demise. The Soviet base issue came on top of Cuba's lingering presence in Angola and its troop build-up in Ethiopia. The following year, most of the remaining goodwill generated by the Carter administration's overtures to Cuba would be undone by the controversy of the Mariel Boatlift. By the 1980s, baseball would find itself again confronting political disputes between Cuba and the United States.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ David Binder, "Data Long Implied Soviet Units in Cuba," *New York Times*, 6 September 1979, A7; Stevenson, *Rise and Fall*, 204; Garthoff, *Confrontation*, 577.

CHAPTER SIX

Rain Delays: The 1980s and a Return to the Cold War

During the 1970s, Cold War *détente* had produced unprecedented opportunities to rekindle the severed ties between Washington and Havana. Baseball had occupied an important space in this development, both as a potential harbinger of improving relations through baseball diplomacy, and as a likely beneficiary of U.S.-Cuba normalization, which would portend resumption of the pre-Revolution baseball exchange. Despite coming close in a number of instances, baseball diplomacy failed to materialize during the 1970s. The venture faltered due to a host of issues that included lack of support within the Nixon administration, Cuban involvement in Angola during the Ford administration and squabbles over access to talent and availability of Cuban players during the Carter administration. Though supposed to help bridge the political divide, baseball instead became a victim of the divide, and the failure of baseball diplomacy during the 1970s reflected the complicated reality of U.S.-Cuba relations. Lingering problems—American insistence on maintaining the embargo over Cuban objection, Cuban insistence on pressing the issue of Puerto Rico's independence, violent opposition from the Cuban exile community over reconciliation with Castro—not only stunted baseball diplomacy, but destroyed most hopes for *détente*.

By the end of the decade, the thaw had largely vanished and tension was once again on the rise. The discovery of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba in September 1979 came on the heels

of discouraging developments in Central America. In July 1979, the leftist Sandinista National Liberation Front had overthrown Nicaraguan dictator and U.S. ally Anastasio Somoza. Cuba, which had long supported the Sandinista movement, provided a critical assist in the Nicaraguan Revolution, as Castro, the year before, had mediated the disputes among three factions within the movement, allowing for a unified and ultimately successful assault on Somoza's forces in 1979. This summer of discontent reached a crescendo that autumn, with a war of words developing between Carter and Castro. The president denounced the troop presence in late September, calling Cuba "a Soviet puppet." Castro fired back, decrying Carter's actions as "dishonest, insincere, and immoral" in a late September press conference, and accusing the president of manufacturing a false crisis to score political points in an interview with CBS News' Dan Rather. Thus, while baseball diplomacy scored a small, symbolic victory in October, when an amateur team from the United States became the first to play in Cuba since prior to the Revolution, it did so against the backdrop of decaying relations between Havana and Washington.¹

During the 1980s, Cuba and the United States largely returned to the antagonistic posture that defined their relationship during the 1960s. The Cold War détente that had characterized the previous decade was on its way out by 1979, and it took with it all chances of baseball diplomacy. To the limited extent that baseball exchanges existed between the nations during the 1980s, the sport failed to improve the political relationship by any significant measure. Instead, U.S.-Cuba baseball exchanges—with a few exceptions—resumed the antagonistic, Cold War tone that had previously defined them.

¹ Gary Prevost, "Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?," *Latin American Perspectives* 17, no. 3 (1990), 124; Jimmy Carter, "New York Question and Answer Session at a Town Meeting With Residents of the Borough of Queens," September 25, 1979, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=31420&st=Cuba&st1=>; Fidel Castro, "Press Conference on Presence of Soviet Troops," September 30, 1979, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>; Castro, "Interview with CBS," September 30, 1979, *Speeches*, 266.

I

Shortly after the calendar turned and ushered in a new decade, any hopes of a Carter-Castro accord were irreparably shattered by the Mariel Boat Lift fiasco. The seeds of this controversy were germinated, ironically, by the improved relationship fostered by the Carter administration. Castro began permitting Cuban Americans to visit their relatives in Cuba in 1979 and these exiles often brought along money and gifts for their typically less wealthy Cuban family members. As a result of these visits, more than \$100 million dollars flowed to the island by the end of 1980 and many Cubans were offered a glimpse at North American prosperity for the first time. On April 1, a group of disgruntled Cubans took control of the Peruvian embassy, and by April 6, the compound had become a rallying point for roughly 10,000 seeking to leave the island. After a frustrated Castro granted the would-be exiles permission to leave, questions developed over where they would go. The United Nations intervened and a handful of nations, including the United States, agreed to take in some of the Cuban refugees. The problem escalated, however, when Castro ended the airlift program that had begun transporting the emigrants, and called on Cuban Americans in Florida to use boats to pick up their relatives at the Cuban port of Mariel. Despite warnings that transporting refugees was illegal and threats of prosecution from the Carter administration, by the time Castro closed Mariel in September 1980 over 125,000 Cuban exiles—which included thousands the Castro regime considered undesirable, such as criminals and mentally ill—had been brought to the United States.²

² Leonard, *Encyclopedia*, 132; Silvia Pedraza, *Political Disaffection in Cuba's Revolution and Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007), 151-155; David Wells Engstrom, *Presidential Decision Making Adrift: The Carter Administration and the Mariel Boat Lift* (Oxford: Rowan and Littlefield, 1997), 4-6; Ward Sinclair, "Sealift Accelerates; Key West Awash: Prosecution Defied, Key West Awash in Little Sealift Boats," *Washington Post*, 25 April 1980, A1.

The Mariel Boat Lift's impact could be felt on the baseball diamond as well as in the political realm. In Cuba, chants of "Let them go!" embodied the public backlash against the Mariel exiles. Inside a Havana ballpark, the same cheer became a form of fan heckling toward an underperforming pitcher. As the refugee crisis escalated in May, nearly 400 Cubans sought sanctuary inside the United States Interests Section in Havana. While officials negotiated with the Cuban government over the fate of the boarders, they kept their guests entertained by showing taped recordings of the previous year's World Series. A *Washington Post* article from May about a refugee camp established at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida revealed that New York Yankees baseball caps served to identify the unofficial leaders among the exile group.³

The effect of the refugee controversy went beyond the symbolic. The sudden influx of thousands of Cuban exiles brought about a host of complications to which baseball was not immune. Given the sport's popularity in Cuba, it was expected that more than a few prospective baseball players would arrive as part of the Mariel crowd. Upon receiving word that a known talent named Julio Soto had arrived in the United States, the Cincinnati Reds dispatched two scouts to the Eglin camp to conduct an informal tryout for the Cuban second baseman. Major League Baseball had to act quickly to avert a possible free-for-all, and in early May Commissioner Kuhn announced that he was reviewing its policy in an effort to develop an "orderly process" for teams to fairly acquire Cuban talent. In the meantime, he reiterated to every club that his 1977 directive prohibiting teams from signing Cuban players was still in force.⁴

³ Jo Thomas, "Boats Swarm to Port in Cuba to Pick Up Refugees," *New York Times*, 26 April 1980, 13; Marlise Simons, "Cuba Demands U.S. Yield Male Refugees," *Washington Post*, 5 May 1980, A1; Donald P. Baker, "Refugee Portrait: Survivor at Age 7," *Washington Post*, 19 May 1980, A12.

⁴ Joseph Durso, "Cuban Review By Kuhn," *New York Times*, 9 May 1980, D17; Byron Rosen, "Penguins Fire Wilson," *Washington Post*, 9 May 1980, D5;

Indeed, a number of Mariel refugees harbored major league hopes, and their stories highlight the personal impact of the U.S.-Cuba political divide. Amidst the boatlift controversy, Tonight Show host Johnny Carson quipped that Kuhn need not fret about the possibility of a players' strike, since "he's got 65,000 replacements who just got to Miami ready to step in." Carson's jest aside, newspaper articles detailing the refugees revealed that a number of them were indeed ballplayers. Many had run afoul of the political system in Cuba and as a result had seen their sports careers stunted. One refugee, a former baseball player named José Quirino, discussed how Cuba's top athletes were rewarded for their skill by receiving paid exemptions from their assigned jobs—allowing them to draw their regular salary but skip work. Quirino had been denied this arrangement, however, after he had refused military service in Angola, and he was unable to balance his job schedule with baseball training. At age twenty-four and out of practice, Quirino admitted that he had little hope of playing professionally in the United States. Julio Soto, who met with the Reds' scouts inside the Elgin camp, was undeterred. Though there were questions about his actual age, Soto himself claimed to be twenty-four but stayed optimistic that he would have a shot at the major leagues, provided he could get released from the camp. Asked about his backup plan, should he be unable to play professional baseball, Soto joked that he would "die." Fellow ballplayer and refugee Eduardo Cajuso offered to "give [his] left arm to play in Major Leagues," requiring only the use of his "right arm and [his] legs" in order to compete. By the end of May, some of the ball-playing refugees had formed an impromptu squad called the "Free Cuban Baseball Team" and were holding regular practices to keep their skills sharp while inside the camp. Their uncertain legal status and imprisonment initially kept them from signing with American clubs.⁵

⁵ Ward Sinclair, "Cuba: Slogans Mock Realities," *Washington Post*, 11 May 1980, A1; Jane Gross, "For Some Cuban Refugees, Major Leagues Are Final Goal," *New York Times*, 18 May 1980, S1; John Feinstein, "Cuban

Their dreams of playing professionally took a step toward becoming a reality in late May, when Kuhn lifted the ban on signing Cuban players. At the time, Cuban numbers in Major League Baseball had declined significantly from their 1950s peak. By the end of the 1970s, only four Cuban-born players remained in the majors. The first Mariel player was signed just days after Kuhn's May 31 announcement. The Detroit Tigers inked Eduardo Cajuso to a minor league contract and agreed to sponsor his release from the Eglin refugee camp. Cajuso never made it to the major league level, however. The same was true for Julio Soto, who managed to bypass Kuhn's Cuban signing ban before it was lifted by joining an independent professional team, the Macon Peaches. A local Cuban American restaurant owner in Macon worked to secure Soto's release from Eglin, and Soto spent twenty-five days with the Peaches in 1980. His dream of playing professional baseball came to an abrupt end, however, when he was cut from the team in July.⁶

Ultimately, only one Mariel refugee made it the major leagues. Bárbaro Garbey came to the United States in late May 1980 as one of two thousand Cubans onboard a Miami-bound shrimp boat. This successful exodus came after his first three attempts to leave the island had failed. Garbey, who had led the Cuban League in batting as a member of the Havana Industriales, decided to flee Cuba after being banned from baseball over a game-fixing scandal in 1978. His notoriety as a ballplayer made leaving difficult, however, and three times Garbey was denied permission to board an outgoing vessel when officials recognized him. Even his fourth and triumphant attempt was nearly unsuccessful, when he was recognized again despite

Refugees Ache for Shot At 'American Great Leagues',” *Washington Post*, 25 May 1980, F1.

⁶ “Kuhn Gives Approval For Signing of Cubans,” *New York Times*, 1 June 1980, S4; John Feinstein, “Hopes High, the Changes Slow,” *Washington Post*, 27 May 1980, D1; “Connors, Gerulaitis Move to Semifinals: Orantes Defaults,” *New York Times*, 4 June 1980, B5; Bruce Branch, “2 Cuban Refugees Cut by Peaches,” *Washington Post*, 9 July 1980, D2.

attempting to use false identification. Fortunately for Garbey, the investigating official decided that if he was so anxious to leave Cuba, he should, and sent the future major leaguer packing. After arriving stateside, Garbey was sent to a refugee camp in Pennsylvania, where a Tigers' scout noticed him and signed him to a minor league deal. His ability allowed him to successfully climb through the minor league ranks, though a few misadventures nearly derailed his career. While a member of the triple-A level Evansville Triplets in 1983, Garbey was placed on probation in May when word of his past game-fixing involvement in Cuba became public, and was suspended in July after attacking a heckling fan with a bat. Despite this, he managed to make the major league club the following season and helped the Tigers win the 1984 World Series as a rookie. Though his major league career lasted only three seasons, Garbey in many ways blazed a trail as the original Cuban baseball defector. Though defections did not become common until the 1990s, his success garnered attention back home, and 2002 defector José Contreras cited Garbey as an inspiration to those who came later.⁷

Outside of the Mariel controversy, occasions for baseball-related exchanges between Cubans and Americans were dwindling. The boatlift stunted further efforts at normalizing relations with Cuba during the Carter administration. Though the interests sections, created in 1977, remained open, and though American travel to Cuba remained unrestricted until 1982, the Mariel problem came at an inopportune time for President Carter, who in 1980 was facing a serious challenge for reelection from Ronald Reagan. Castro, likely recognizing Carter's precarious position and surmising that a Reagan presidency would be worse for Cuba, attempted

⁷ "Cuban Refugee May Get Shot At Pro Baseball," *Atlanta Daily World*, 6 July 1982, 5; "Cowboys Say Martin To Evaluate Clinic," *Washington Post*, 29 May 1983, D2; "Player Is Suspended For Clubbing Heckler," *New York Times*, 3 July 1983, S6; "Elway to Start Rest of Year," *Washington Post*, 23 August 1983, D2; Tom Weir, "Cuban ballplayers remember Garbey," *USA Today*, 5 July 2005, http://www.usatoday.com/sports/baseball/2005-07-05-garbey-defection_x.htm.

to reconcile prior to November. In his 1980 anniversary address for the start of the 26th of July Movement, he noted the Republican Party's aggressive foreign policy platform and framed the upcoming presidential election as a choice between "peace and war." In late October, just days before the November 4 election, Castro attempted a goodwill gesture by granting pardons to thirty Americans who had been imprisoned in Cuba and allowed them to return home.⁸

In the bigger picture, the breakdown of Cold War détente by 1980 had diminished opportunities for sports-related diplomacy as a whole. Two major sports stories with geopolitical significance dominated the headlines in the first year of the decade and both were amplified by Cold War developments. The first came in February, when the United States national hockey team pulled off one of the biggest upsets in Olympic history, beating the powerhouse Soviet team in the so-called "Miracle on Ice" en route to winning the gold medal at the Lake Placid Games. The American victory over the menacing Soviet club—dubbed, like the dominant Cincinnati Reds teams of the 1970s, the Big Red Machine—carried political symbolism due to the obvious Cold War overtures, and provided a measure of revenge after the controversial gold medal basketball game from the Munich Olympics four years earlier. *Washington Post* columnist Barry Lorge credited the victory as being the brightest spot in a sports year otherwise riddled with scandal and controversy. The victory came at a time, however, when Soviet-U.S. relations were also hanging in the balance. In December 1979, the Soviet Union had begun dispatching forces to Afghanistan in the start of a decade-long effort to put down an Islamist insurgency. Carter immediately denounced the move as a "blatant violation of accepted international rules of behavior." He responded with a grain embargo, as well as restrictions

⁸ Fidel Castro, "27th Anniversary Of Assault On Moncada Barracks," July 26, 1980, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>; Art Harris, "30 Americans Return From Cuban Prison: Some Prisoners of Cubans Return to Families, Some to More Jail," *Washington Post*, 28 October 1980, A1.

limiting technology sales to the Soviet Union. In the end, however, sports provided the most public weapon at Carter's disposal, and in March the president announced that the United States would not participate in the Moscow-based 1980 Summer Olympic Games.⁹

Rather than providing common ground and understanding in an environment of détente, as they were proposed to do during the 1970s, sports competitions were back to serving as Cold War battlegrounds by the 1980s. Americans were jubilant over the "Miracle on Ice" because of what the victory represented: the youthful U.S. squad of collegiate and amateur players had overcome a team of veteran Soviet players who were amateurs in name only. Thus, in the eyes of the American public, the United States had remained true to the Olympic spirit and thwarted a devious Soviet attempt to skirt the rules and win propaganda victories for Communism. The public was likewise supportive of Carter's boycotting the Moscow Games. The 1980 Olympics, the first to be held in a totalitarian state since the 1936 Munich Olympics, were heralded by the Soviets as a showcase for their political system. This, by itself, would not have justified skipping the games, as the use of sport for propaganda was not a new tactic. Once the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, however, Carter argued that participation in the Moscow Olympics would serve to condone what the United States claimed was an illegal occupation. Despite arguments from the International Olympic Committee that the Games were supposed to transcend international tensions and rivalries, polls indicated broad American public support for the boycott. In a *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* article on the boycott, David Kanin explains

⁹ Barry Lorge, "1980: Despair Fades in a Hockey Team's Glow," *Washington Post*, 28 December 1980, D1; Jimmy Carter, "American Hostages in Iran and Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan Remarks to Reporters," December 28, 1979, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=31881&st=Afghanistan&st1=>; David B. Kanin, "The Olympic Boycott In Diplomatic Context," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 4, no. 1 (March 1980), 6; Jimmy Carter, "Remarks to Representatives of U.S. Teams to the 1980 Summer Olympics," March 21, 1980, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=33171&st=Afghanistan&st1=>.

that by 1980, “the politicization of sport had reached public consciousness.” Americans could thus support boycotting a sporting event over political differences.¹⁰

Rising Cold War tension also proved detrimental to Carter, who had built his foreign policy around détente. Cuban antagonism was especially toxic to the Carter presidency, given the steps it had undertaken to normalize relations with Havana. Loosening travel restrictions and establishing interest sections appeared to have only netted the president boatloads of Cuban castaways, Soviet troops in Cuba, and a Castro assist in the successful Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua. These developments allowed the Republican challenger Reagan to blast Carter’s Cuba policy. Speaking at a Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in August, Reagan denounced the Carter administration’s “weakness, inconsistency, vacillation and bluff,” and highlighted the continuing presence of Soviet troops in the hemisphere. Leading up to the election, Reagan called for firm action, including military engagement, to deter Soviet aggression, and even proposed using a naval blockade of Cuba—which he called a “colony...owned lock, stock and barrel by the Soviet Union”—as a countermeasure. Carter, beset by problems foreign and domestic, captured only six states and forty-nine electoral votes in his November defeat.¹¹

Reagan’s election heralded a new Cuba policy—one that cast off normalization and froze any hopes at baseball diplomacy. The Reagan administration, perceiving of a “Moscow-Havana axis,” warned of rising Communist movements in Latin America, and blamed Cuba, as a Soviet surrogate, for perpetuating the problem. As a candidate, Reagan denounced Cuban efforts at assisting leftist uprising in Nicaragua and Grenada. Once in office, Reagan tried to prevent a

¹⁰ Kanin, “Olympic Boycott,” 7.

¹¹ Beth A. Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1997), 22; Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Chicago,” August 18, 1980, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=85202&st=Cuba&st1=>; Ronald Reagan, “Governor Reagan’s News Conference,” October 14, 1980, Ibid.

similar development in El Salvador. The administration decided to increase aid to the El Salvadorian military, which sought to stem guerilla activities from the leftist Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). Reagan took aim at Cuba's suspected ties to the FMLN, disparaging the Communist insurgency as "terrorism" and threatening "direct action" against Cuba in a March 1981 interview with Walter Cronkite. By the following autumn, as the civil war in El Salvador continued, the Reagan administration was considering all options against Cuban involvement. Unnamed officials quoted in a *New York Times* article disclosed proposals not only to increase economic sanctions against Cuba, but also the possibility of "large naval exercises," "a general blockade," and even "an invasion by American and possibly Latin American forces."¹²

The Reagan administration also sought to intensify pressure against the Castro regime in Cuba. Following a September 15 speech in which Castro blasted "the warlike policy and philosophy of the new Yankee administration," Reagan announced the development of a government-funded radio station to counter Castro's message. Dubbed "Radio Martí," this new station would "promote open communication of information and ideas" by "broadcasting to the Cuban people...accurate information about Cuba." The venture was based on existing anti-Communist networks, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, which broadcasted to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.¹³

¹² Mark T. Gilderhus, *The Second Century: U.S.-Latin American Relations Since 1889* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 223; Ronald Reagan, "Excerpts From an Interview With Walter Cronkite of CBS News," March 3, 1981, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=43497&st=Cuba&st1=>; Leslie H. Gelb, "Haig Is Said to Press For Military Options For Salvador Action," *New York Times*, 5 November 1981, A1.

¹³ Fidel Castro, "Fidel Castro Scores U.S. In IPU Speech," September 15, 1981, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1981/19810915.html>; Ronald Reagan, "Executive Order 12323 – Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba," September 22, 1981, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=44286&st=Cuba&st1=>.

Radio Martí reflected the reality that hopes for détente and normalization had passed and the antagonistic tone that had defined U.S.-Cuba relations in the 1960s had returned. Much of the proposed station's programming was innocuous, relying on cultural diplomacy by transmitting American music and sports. Officials conducted surveys of Cuban exiles in the United States for suggestions of what forms of entertainment to air. As might be expected, baseball consumed much of the airtime on Radio Martí. From the initial planning stages, station administrators proposed airing major league games, and in 1985, Radio Martí began relaying Spanish broadcasts of New York Yankees and New York Mets games. Though some Cubans could already receive such programming through private stations in southern Florida whose signals reached the island, Radio Martí would differ significantly in tone by directly targeting the Castro administration and highlighting, according to National Security Advisor Richard V. Allen, "its promotion of subversion and international terrorism" and "what these activities cost in terms of living standards" for Cubans.¹⁴

This new approach had its share of detractors. Shortly after Radio Martí was announced, U.S. diplomats at the Interests Section in Havana raised objections over the new station. Citing Cuba's own transmission power, the diplomats warned that the provocative plan could bring about radio reprisals from Castro. They also feared that the message of Cuban discontent bred by Radio Martí would not manage to dislodge Castro, but may provoke additional waves of Cuba refugees similar to the Mariel Boat Lift crisis. In addition, the diplomats voiced concerns over the station's perceived credibility among the Cuban populace, concerns which were echoed in a *Washington Post* commentary from Mary McGrory and confirmed in a 1984 *New York Times*

¹⁴ John M. Goshko, "U.S., Accusing Castro of Lying to Populace, Plans New Radio to 'Tell the Truth' to Cuba," *Washington Post*, 24 September 1981, A40; Phil Gailey and Warren Weaver Jr., "Briefing," *New York Times*, 31 July 1982, 5; Norman Chad, "Sports Waves: Major Leagues Return To Cuba on Radio Martí," *Washington Post*, 7 June 1985, E2; Thomas Rogers, "Scouting," *New York Times*, 12 October 1985, 24.

article which concluded, after conducting interviews, that Cubans were “skeptical” of Radio Martí.¹⁵

Criticism continued once the station began broadcasting in 1985. In a *New York Times* commentary, James Reston lamented that the station only “revive[d] the old bogey of Yankee domination” and questioned, in light of Cuba’s economic difficulties, the need for “official broadcasts out of Washington telling the Cubans that [Castro’s] system isn’t working, when they know better than anybody else.” Interestingly, Reston proposed abandoning the radio effort and instead putting “an expansion Latin American [baseball] team into the big leagues.” It was also unclear how effective Radio Martí’s message was to Cuban listeners. Criticism pointed to the station’s tone being out of date. One Havana woman interviewed in a June 1985 *Washington Post* article said that the broadcasts sounded “as if somebody were giving us news from Eisenhower’s time.” Another echoed that the station was “right out of the ‘50s” and that it “sounds as if the programs were taped 25 years ago.” In an April 1986 letter to the *New York Times*, Columbia University Media Studies student John Nichols argued that Radio Martí had been a failure, costing American taxpayers considerably, while “the Cuban people have gained nothing but heavy doses of Michael Jackson and Yankees baseball.”¹⁶

Radio Martí did provoke a reaction from Cuba, but one that only served to increase the political distance between Havana and Washington. Fears that Castro would stage a radio retaliation against the American station were realized as early as 1982. While Congress debated

¹⁵ Barbara Crossette, “U.S. Diplomats in Cuba Dissent on Radio Plan,” *New York Times*, 29 October 1981, A3; Mary McGrory, “Let’s Turn Off the New Broadcasting Station Aimed at Cuba,” *Washington Post*, 26 November 1981, A3; Joseph B. Treaster, “Cubans Seem Skeptical On Radio Martí’s Aims,” *New York Times*, 20 May 1984, 12.

¹⁶ James Reston, “Washington: Hot Line To Cuba,” *New York Times*, 22 May 1985, A27; Edward Cody, “Martí Wafts Time Warp To Listeners in Havana: Uncle Sam Is Said To Play ‘50s Again,” *Washington Post*, 3 June 1985, A20; John S. Nichols, “Right the First Time on Turning Off Radio Martí,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1986, A30.

that autumn over approving Radio Martí, Cuba used its powerful radio capacity to blast a warning shot over the airwaves by disrupting the signals of five American AM stations. The reprisals escalated once Radio Martí began broadcasting. On the station's first day of broadcasting in 1985, Cuba's government announced that it was suspending an immigration agreement reached with the Reagan administration the previous year. Under that accord, Cuba had acquiesced to the return of thousands of convicted criminals who had been shipped out during the Mariel Boat Lift, and approved of increased family visits by Cuban Americans. The Castro regime also took efforts to disrupt Radio Martí's signal, resulting in a persistent drone-like tone in the background of the station's broadcasts that was sure to annoy anyone listening.¹⁷

II

The fallout over the new station was a clear signal that U.S.-Cuba relations were in decline once again. The station itself was also significant in terms of baseball diplomacy. Efforts undertaken during the 1970s to create high-profile baseball games between American and Cuban teams were done under the guise of improving the political relationship between Washington and Havana. The Ford and Carter administrations had different approaches over when a baseball exchange would be appropriate, with the former preferring to use the games as an incentive that would follow Cuban concessions and improved ties and the latter willing to employ baseball diplomacy as an icebreaker and catalyst to developing a better relationship. In both cases, however, baseball would serve to symbolize a U.S.-Cuba détente.

¹⁷ David Shribman, "Cuba Disrupts U.S. Radio as Distant as Des Moines," *New York Times*, 1 September 1982, A11; Joseph B. Treaster, "Radio Martí Goes on Air and Cuba Retaliates by Ending Pact," *New York Times*, 21 May 1985, A12; Dale Russakoff and John M. Goshko, "Cuba Halts '84 Accord With U.S.: Start of Radio Martí Sharply Assailed; Reprisals Announced," *Washington Post*, 21 May 1985, A1; "Cuba Steps Up Efforts to Jam Radio Martí," *Washington Post*, 22 May 1985, A18.

That Radio Martí relied on baseball broadcasts as part of its programming indicated a fundamental shift in the nature of baseball diplomacy. The station's intent was not to foster a more harmonious relationship between the Washington and Havana governments, but to arouse discontent among Cuban people against the Havana regime. Radio Martí used baseball as one of its weapons against Castro's Cuba. In this context, baseball functioned not as a balm for the purpose of diplomacy, but an irritant deployed to undermine an undesirable government.

The new approach found favor outside of the Reagan administration. In a 1982 piece for the *New Republic* entitled "Diamond Diplomacy" that was reprinted in the *Washington Post*, Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy urged using baseball, rather than blockades, against Castro. He cited a recent game-fixing scandal that had developed involving Cuban players and coaches and noted the irony of those involved being chastised for their "zeal for profits...individualism, and mercantile spirit," much as American professional players had been during a recent labor dispute. McCarthy argued that "the State Department and the CIA have not grasped baseball's potential force in international relations." The scandal, he claimed, was evidence that "what the Bay of Pigs could not accomplish, baseball might. Faced with a choice between baseball and Socialism, Cubans would surely choose baseball." McCarthy concluded that the United States "needn't think about blockading Cuba...rather, we should be trying to corrupt Communism with capitalism" by using Radio Martí to "broadcast a steady diet of the latest news on baseball scores and baseball salaries."¹⁸

This change in tactics, from baseball diplomacy to baseball deployment, largely continued to the present day. Beginning in the 1980s, baseball became a tool that the United States sought to use, along with diplomatic non-recognition and the embargo, to weaken the

¹⁸ Eugene J. McCarthy, "Diamond Diplomacy," *New Republic* 186 (April 28, 1982), 10; -----, "Baseball Can Bring Castro to His Knees," *Washington Post*, 25 April 1982, C1.

Castro regime. Exposing Cubans to American baseball and to the wealth and prosperity that surrounds it, officials hoped, would serve to refute Castro rhetoric about the blessings of Socialism. Even the Clinton administration's efforts in the late 1990s, examined in the final chapter, better fit this use of baseball deployment. Though billed as baseball diplomacy, the 1999 Cuba-Orioles series took place under the administration's effort to boost "people-to-people" contacts between Cubans and Americans, thereby exposing the former to the culture, lifestyle, and political system of the latter.

Beyond Radio Martí, Cold War antagonism continued to increase the distance separating the Washington and Havana governments. The Reagan administration's campaign to stamp out the threat of Communism and leftist movements in the hemisphere naturally implicated Cuba as a chief sponsor. In addition to denouncing Cuban activities in El Salvador, the United States began efforts to rollback Communism in Nicaragua, targeting the Sandinista regime that had come to power in 1979 with Cuban assistance. Beginning early in his term, President Reagan and administration officials accused the Castro regime of supplying massive military aid to the Nicaraguan government. Despite denials from the Cuban leader, by late 1981 administration officials were considering a host of actions, including military intervention, after receiving reports that Cuban troops had moved into Nicaragua en route to interfering in the El Salvadorian Civil War. In December, Reagan authorized the CIA to begin supporting an opposition force in Nicaragua known as the Contras. Though Secretary of State Alexander Haig met with high-ranking Cuban officials in December, efforts to stem rising U.S.-Cuba tension were halted by April 1982, when Cuba announced an agreement to send \$130 million in economic aid to the

Sandinista government. The Reagan administration retaliated by reinstating the ban on American travel to Cuba, which had been lifted by the Carter administration in 1977.¹⁹

Amidst this backdrop, efforts at sports diplomacy continued to languish. Yet another Major League Baseball franchise tried and failed to arrange exhibition games against Cuban opponents. Prior to the 1982 season, the Seattle Mariners had planned to play a portion of their March spring training schedule against a Cuban team. Though Commissioner Bowie Kuhn had previously blocked similar efforts, political considerations appear to have doomed the Mariners' effort. Team president Dan O'Brien announced in January that the club had decided to cancel the Cuban games, citing intense and outspoken opposition from the public, particularly from Cuban American groups, as the chief cause. The timing for the proposed Mariners-Cuba games was particularly poor, coming in the midst of the intensifying dispute between Cuba and the United States over Nicaragua.²⁰

Politics also cast a pall over the 1982 Caribbean Games. Originally scheduled to take place in Puerto Rico, the competition was moved at the host nation's request in March 1981, owing to financial difficulties. Because the event was set to open in a little more than a year, the Caribbean Games were faced with finding a new host nation that already had functioning, major athletic venues. Thanks to massive government investments in sports, Cuba had the necessary infrastructure and was awarded hosting responsibilities after offering to hold the games in

¹⁹ Mark P. Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine: Sources of American Conduct in the Cold War's Last Chapter* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1994), 59-64; Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Bridge Over the River Lempa," *Washington Post*, 19 October 1981, A15; "Castro Denounces Reports He Sent Force to Nicaragua," *Washington Post*, 11 November 1981, A37; Fidel Castro, "Fidel Meets With National Press On Red Sunday," November 16, 1981, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1981/19811116.html>; John M. Goshko, "Haig Won't Rule Out Anti-Nicaragua Action," *Washington Post*, 13 November 1981, A16; Ronald Reagan, "The President's News Conference," February 18, 1982, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=42183&st=Cuba&st1=Nicaragua>; Gerald F. Seib, "U.S. Proposes Plan to End Rift With Nicaragua," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 March 1982, 2; "Nicaragua, Cuba Announce \$130 Million Aid Agreement," *Washington Post*, 7 April 1982, A21.

²⁰ "Sports People: Mariners Absolve Kuhn," *New York Times*, 22 January 1982, A26.

Havana. The change of venue created difficulties after the Reagan administration revoked travel to Cuba in April 1982. The United States, not a participant in the competition, was not affected, but the travel ban forced the contingent of Puerto Rican athletes to receive a special waiver from the state department in order to take part. Once the Caribbean Games opened, political tension was openly on display. Castro revived Cuban sentiments over Puerto Rico's independence by wearing a hat bearing the Puerto Rican flag at the opening ceremonies. Some Puerto Ricans directly challenged the Reagan administration by ignoring the travel ban. A group of about two hundred spectators from Puerto Rico attended the games in Cuba in protest of the restriction.²¹

Only a minor episode managed to buck this trend. In the spring of 1983, a group of New York high school students embarked on their own course of baseball diplomacy, visiting Cuba and playing games against Cuban teenagers. The high school ballplayers, from two schools in Chappaqua, took the trip during their spring break after receiving permission from the state department. The group was allowed an exemption to the travel ban under a special category granted to traveling cultural groups. Peter Berland, baseball coach at one of the participating schools, got the idea for the trip after talking to a colleague who had just returned from an educational visit to Cuba. In reality, the high school exchange appears to have been motivated more by the educational opportunity than by the chance to improve diplomacy, and Berland insisted that the trip was not a political one. An article in the *New York Times* notwithstanding, the teenagers' Cuba visit does not seem to have garnered much attention or moved the needle at all in terms of U.S.-Cuba relations.²²

²¹ "Cuba to Host Games," *Boston Globe*, 10 May 1981, 1; Christopher Dickey, "Puerto Ricans Defy U.S. Ban, See Cuba Games," *Washington Post*, 11 August 1982, A1.

²² Franklin Whitehouse, "For 2 Teams, Spring Training in Cuba," *New York Times*, February 27, 1983, WC1.

Sports diplomacy as a whole seemed to have ebbed by the mid 1980s. Peter Ueberroth, who would later serve as Major League Baseball Commissioner, lamented this development in a May 1983 commentary that appeared in the *New York Times*. Then president of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, Ueberroth decried the “gap in good will between many countries and the United States” since the 1980 boycott of the Moscow Games and argued that the United States was ignoring “the power of sports as a vehicle for world peace.” He cited efforts on the part of East Germany and the Soviet Union at establishing friendly relations through athletics, and argued that, “in stark contrast, the United States has done little to promote sports exchanges with other countries.” Though Ueberroth’s piece did not specifically cite the failures of U.S.-Cuba baseball diplomacy, a letter to the editor written in response noted the canceled 1977 games involving the Yankees, and declared that the American sports program had become “yet another victim of the new cold war” in arguing the need for détente.²³

Political developments seemed to indicate that no such thaw would be forthcoming. Since taking office, President Reagan had been critical of rising Cuban and Soviet influence in Latin America, denouncing efforts to support leftist governments in Nicaragua and El Salvador. By the mid 1980s, the Reagan administration grew concerned about the developments in another Caribbean nation, Grenada. The island country, which had gained its independence from Great Britain in 1974, underwent a revolution in March 1979 when the left-wing New Jewel Movement (NJM) overthrew the parliamentary government. Over the next three years, ties among Grenada, Cuba, and the Soviet Union grew stronger, and in April 1982 Reagan proclaimed that the island bore “the Soviet and Cuban trademark.” By March 1983, the administration had learned that Grenada was building new military facilities with help from its

²³ Peter V. Ueberroth, “A Call for the U.S. to Catch Up in Sports Diplomacy,” *New York Times*, 1 May 1983, S2; Herman Leiberman, “Sports for Peace,” *New York Times*, 15 May 1983, 201.

leftist allies. In a March 23 address to the nation, President Reagan cited this latest Caribbean development as evidence of a Soviet-Cuban “power projection into the region” in lobbying public support for bolstering U.S. military forces as part of the Strategic Defense Initiative. The level of Cuban infiltration became clear the following month when a *Washington Post* article noted Cuban workers, in Grenada to help construct a massive new airport, playing baseball during their downtime.²⁴

The subsequent U.S. military intervention in Grenada in late October did nothing to foster harmony between Washington and Havana. Indeed, by 1983 U.S.-Cuba antagonism continued on an uptick. The action in Grenada came at the end of a concerted effort to stare down Communism in Latin America. In April, Reagan called on the United States to serve as a “shield for democratization” and announced plans to bolster military aid to Central American governments. The next month, the president replaced his Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American affairs in what the press regarded as a clear signal of the administration’s move toward a tougher policy in Central America. By July, the CIA was seeking increased flexibility to target Cuban forces in Nicaragua amidst growing congressional opposition. That September, Reagan approved an amended finding that permitted the CIA to circumvent restrictions in supporting counterrevolutionary forces, which would ultimately lead to the Iran-Contra episode.²⁵

²⁴ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks in Bridgetown, Barbados, Following a Luncheon Meeting With Leaders of Eastern Caribbean Countries,” April 8, 1982, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=42380&st=Cuba&st1=Grenada>; ----, “Remarks on Central America and El Salvador at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Manufacturers,” March 10, 1983, *Ibid.*; ----, “Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security,” March 23, 1983, *Ibid.*; Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945-1993* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 180; Edward Cody, “Grenadan Tempest Bemuses Tourists,” *Washington Post*, 21 April 1983, A1.

²⁵ Ronald Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on Central America,” April 27, 1983, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=41245&st=Cuba&st1=Grenada>; Josh M. Goshko and Lou Cannon, “Reagan Has Enders Replace at State Dept.” *Washington Post*, 28 May 1983, A1; “Yankees, Bats and Nicaragua,” *New York Times*, 26 July 1983, A20; White House Presidential Finding on Covert Operations in Nicaragua, September 19, 1983, “The Iran-Contra Affair 20 Years On,” The National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/index.htm>.

Rising political tension in Central America was reflected in athletic exchanges. While the Reagan administration looked to ramp up action against leftist governments in the Caribbean, U.S. athletes prepared to compete against hemispheric opponents in the 1983 Pan American Games. Press accounts leading up to the competition recounted past episodes of hostility—including a Cuban water polo player breaking an American player’s jaw following a match in 1975—and discussed the political dilemma that confronted the United States. If the best American athletes participated, the United States would likely dominate the medal count and draw resentment from other nations. Having top athletes skip the games for the sake of competitive balance would also appear to be a slight, however. By the time the Pan Am Games opened in Venezuela, the United States had generated hard feelings in politics, through tougher policies, as well as on the athletic front, having made precautionary arrangements to shift the competition to Puerto Rico if Venezuela had faltered on planning the event.²⁶

Baseball triumphs in the Pan Am Games provided U.S. opposition with a symbolic victory. Though Cuba’s 8-1 win over the United States to clinch the gold medal was not an upset, nor even a surprise, Nicaragua’s successful showing was both. Playing before a partisan crowd that chanted “Yankees, no!,” the Nicaraguans stunned the United States, pulling off a 9-5 victory that clinched the silver medal and relegated the Americans to a bronze medal finish. The win garnered a congratulatory telegram from the Sandinista government, which praised the Nicaraguan players’ “dignity and athletic courage.” Guillermo Cortés, a Nicaraguan sportswriter, highlighted the game’s political significance. Quoted in a *New York Times* article recapping the contest, Cortés called the Venezuelan crowd’s support “Latin American unity

²⁶ Robert Facht, “Pan Am Games: Playing Politics, Playing to Win,” *Washington Post*, 14 August 1983, D1; -----, “Cuba, U.S. Prevail in Water Polo Debuts,” *Washington Post*, 17 August 1983, D4.

against imperialism” and wrote that “it was hard not to think of the warships and thousands of American soldiers closing in on our coasts while [Nicaragua’s pitcher] blanked the gringos through eight innings.” The victory ensured the Nicaraguan team a spot in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, which Cortés argued would “be held in the very heart of the enemy.”²⁷

Indeed, Cold War antagonism in the 1980s would also overshadow the upcoming Olympic Games. As the Los Angeles Games approached, a mixture of anticipation and concern loomed over the event. The 1984 competition was an especially exciting time for baseball; the sport would be featured as a demonstration sport and Los Angeles would play host to a six-team international Olympic baseball tournament. Tickets for the final game, played at Dodger Stadium, had sold out by the end of 1983 and a scheduled August 4 match-up between Cuba and the United States was expected to be televised internationally. Baseball advocates were confident that the 1984 Games would serve as a stepping stone and elevate the sport into a permanent Olympic event. A *New York Times* article surmised that a successful Olympic run would boost baseball’s global appeal: “If things work out, baseball could become the international pastime.” The link between baseball and the Los Angeles Games was solidified in March 1984, when Peter Ueberroth, head of the games’ organizing committee, was selected to replace Bowie Kuhn as Commissioner of Major League Baseball.²⁸

The excitement over the Olympics was undercut by concerns that Communist countries would not participate. Because the United States had boycotted the 1980 Moscow Games due to Soviet operations in Afghanistan, many feared that the Soviet Union would exact symbolic

²⁷ “U.S. Clinches Gold In Men’s Basketball,” *New York Times*, 27 August 1983, 31; Stephen Kinzer, “9-to-5 Victory Over the U.S. Cheers Nicaraguans,” *New York Times*, 3 September 1983, 2.

²⁸ Phil Elderkin, “‘Batter up’ at 1984 Olympics for tournament field of six teams,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 December 1983, 46; “Cuba/Nine Faces USA in Olympics,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 26 January 1984, B13; Robert Thomas, Jr. and William J. Miller, “Sports World Specials,” *New York Times*, 26 December 1983, C2; Joseph Durso, “The First of Baseball’s Opening Days Is Today,” *New York Times*, 2 April 1984, C5.

vengeance by skipping Los Angeles. This speculation was realized on May 9, when the Soviet Union announced it would not send a delegation in 1984, citing costs, security concerns, and disagreements over travel arrangements. The Soviet withdrawal came in spite of Ueberroth's best efforts to keep them. The state department, however, overruled a number of concessions that Ueberroth had made during the negotiations with the Soviet Union, including permission to fly Soviet planes directly into Los Angeles and to dock a Soviet ship in Los Angeles harbor.²⁹

Once the Soviet Union announced its boycott, Olympic officials turned their attention to keeping Soviet allies in the games. The prospect of fellow Marxist countries joining the Soviet boycott threatened to turn the Los Angeles Games into a strictly Western affair. Losing the Eastern Bloc nations would diminish the competition across all sports and take away from the games' legitimacy. Losing Cuba, an international power in baseball, would undoubtedly detract from the demonstration tournament.³⁰

The early signs were not encouraging. Quoted in a *Washington Post* article just two days after the Soviet announcement, Cuba's Education Minister José Ramón Fernández disclosed that, while "no decision has been taken" on Cuban participation, "we must emphasize our concern about the climate in which it is being organized." Fernandez raised familiar Soviet objections over security, and specifically referenced "counterrevolutionary elements" in Los Angeles. By late May, Cuban sports representatives were refusing to discuss the boycott with Olympic officials, prompting speculation that the island would side with the Soviet Union. Accusing the United States of violating "Olympic regulations," Cuba announced on May 23 that it would

²⁹ Christopher R. Hill, "The Cold War and the Olympic Movement," *History Today* 49 (January 1999), 25.

³⁰ Frank Litsky, "Major Effect Seen: If Soviet's Allies Follow, Quality Would Suffer More Than in 1980," *New York Times*, 9 May 1984, A1.

forego the Los Angeles Games, joining the Soviet Union, East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Vietnam, Mongolia, Laos, and Afghanistan.³¹

Olympic officials urged Cuba to reconsider. Ueberroth denounced what he termed a “Soviet blockade of Cuban athletes” and disputed Cuban contentions that security was inadequate, claiming that their Olympic committee had previously been satisfied with the arrangements. He also made a direct appeal to Castro, traveling to Cuba in June to lobby its leader directly. In the end, however, Ueberroth was unable to persuade Castro to send his athletes to Los Angeles. Castro defended Cuba’s decision as stemming from loyalty to the Soviet Union, since the Soviets had remained staunch athletic allies after Cuba had abolished professional sports in 1961. He did promise Ueberroth, however, that Cuba would not pressure allies such as Nicaragua and Angola to withdraw from the games.³²

The 1984 Olympic boycott reflected just how contentious the Cold War atmosphere had become. As it had done four years earlier in Moscow, politics once again prevented what was supposed to be an apolitical sports exchange. Instead of competing in the Olympics, boycotting nations organized their own athletic event for 1984, the Friendship Games. Increasingly Cuba and the United States, in baseball as in other sports, were unable to meet on the athletic field. Baseball’s grand coming-out party at the Los Angeles Games was tarnished by the absence of the Cuban team. This did not remove all Cold War animosity from the tournament, however. Though Cuba stayed out of the competition, Nicaragua, whose Sandinista government was

³¹ Noll Scott, “Sports-Minded Cubans Put Off Olympic Decision,” *Washington Post*, 12 May 1984, A18; Jane Leavy, “Ueberroth: Soviets ‘Pressure’ Allies,” *Washington Post*, 22 May 1984, D4; “Romania Delays Decision, Cuba Is Likely to Join Boycott Today,” *Washington Post*, 23 May 1984, C5; “Cuba Withdraws From Olympics,” *New York Times*, 24 May 1984, A4.

³² Jane Leavy and Sandra Bailey, “Cuba Joins Boycott of Olympics: Cubans Pass on Chance of Medals Haul,” *Washington Post*, 24 May 1984, C1; “Soviets Pull Blind Team; Ueberroth Heads to Cuba,” *Washington Post*, 7 June 1984, C2; “Castro Reiterates Stance on Olympic Games,” June 8, 1984, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1984/19840608.html>.

closely tied to the Soviet-Cuban block, hoped to use the Olympics to boost its profile in sports and politics. On the eve of the games, a Nicaragua athletic official quoted in the *Washington Post* declared that the competition was “not only a sporting aspiration for the country, but also a political aspiration.” The developing political feud with the United States, which had been highlighted in the Pan American Games the year before, continued into Olympic competition, as the Nicaraguans accused the United States of rigging the tournament draw to give themselves a favorable position while putting Nicaragua at a disadvantage. The budding rivalry did not get a chance to play out on the field in 1984, however, as the United States did not face Nicaragua in the Olympic tournament.³³

After the Olympics, the United States and Cuba continued to remain politically distant. President Reagan, facing reelection in 1984, campaigned by touting his administration’s efforts at stemming Cuban and Soviet expansion in Latin America. In his speech accepting his party’s nomination in August, Reagan cited the efforts of hemispheric allies who “valiantly struggle to prevent Communist takeovers fueled massively by the Soviet Union and Cuba” and promised that the United States would not “betray our friends, reward the enemies of freedom, or permit fear and retreat to become American policies.” The president had also spoken out against a personal effort at Cuban diplomacy. In June, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, a Democratic contender for the party’s presidential nomination, traveled to Cuba and met with Castro. Jackson went seeking the release of a number of American citizens and political dissidents who were being held in Cuban prisons. One account from a released prisoner revealed that they had been forced to play baseball prior to Jackson’s arrival to give the impression that they were being

³³ “Sports News Briefs: Soviet Bloc Set For Its Games,” *New York Times*, 16 August 1984, B17; Edward Cody, “Sandlot Sandinista Warm Up For Olympic Swat at Yankees,” *Washington Post*, 30 June 1984, A1; Peter Richmond, “Nicaragua’s Game Here Is Baseball,” *Washington Post*, 30 July 1984, D7.

treated well. Jackson also discussed normalizing the political relationship with Cuba, and received Castro's praise as "the bravest of U.S. politicians." Reagan showed little enthusiasm for the trip. While he praised Jackson's humanitarian efforts, he accused the Castro regime of using the visit as a publicity stunt to win political favor.³⁴

Election results did not foreshadow a change in U.S. foreign policy. Jackson lost his bid for the Democratic Party nomination to Walter Mondale, former Vice President under Jimmy Carter. Mondale went on to a spectacular defeat in November, losing to Reagan in one of the most lopsided results in presidential election history. The president showed no signs of moving closer to Cuba, and had a solid mandate in 1984 to stay the course.

III

Hopes for friendly exchanges involving Cuba and the United States did not vanish, however. Following the conclusion of the Los Angeles Games, Peter Ueberroth attempted to highlight the opportunity that sports presented in working toward a more peaceful world. In a *New York Times* commentary, Ueberroth cited the Olympics' success and urged the United States to allow its athletes "to go forward and continue as our ambassadors of good will and peace" through sports interactions.³⁵

³⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas," August 23, 1984, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=40290&st=Cuba&st1=>; Gerald M. Boyd, "Jackson Says Cuba Offers to Free 26 Detained as Political Prisoners," *New York Times*, 28 June 1984, A1; Joel Brinkley, "70 Innings of Baseball, Then Freedom," *New York Times*, 30 June 1984, 4; "Castro Praises Jackson," June 18, 1984, Castro Speech Data Base; <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1984/19840628-2.html>; George Lardner, Jr. and David Hoffman, "Jackson, U.S. Officials Clash Over Trip's Impact," *New York Times*, 30 June 1984, A1.

³⁵ Peter Ueberroth, "A 16-Day Message of Peace That We Must Not Let End," *New York Times*, 26 August 1984, 2SL.

Others continued to push baseball as a tonic for U.S.-Cuba ties. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) had called on President Reagan to forge a better relationship with Cuba after the group sent a small delegation to the island in September 1984. The visitors broached the subject of baseball diplomacy with Castro, who remained favorable to such an exchange, and a LULAC spokesman announced the group's plans to discuss the idea with Ueberroth—the incoming Major League Baseball Commissioner. Though LULAC hoped to stage a baseball exchange with Cuba in 1985 or 1986, it does not appear that the plan ever got past the preliminary stages. A similar defeat met one baseball executive's scheme to develop a pipeline of Cuban talent. David LeFevre, who as a lawyer had assisted in the Yankees' 1977 efforts to play an exhibition series in Havana, tried to use his Cuban contacts to sign players to the Cleveland Indians while he was attempting to buy the team in 1984. In July, LeFevre boasted that he was close to completing a deal with Castro whereby the Indians would have exclusive rights to purchase Cuban players. Though LeFevre believed that bringing the imported players through the Indians' minor league system would circumvent rules that forbade teams from signing Cuban players, it is doubtful that the United States government would have ever allowed the club to ignore the embargo and send money to the Castro regime. The plan became a dead issue in November, in any case, when LeFevre withdrew his offer to buy the Cleveland club.³⁶

Despite lingering political tension, there were indeed some baseball exchanges of note. In October 1984, Havana played host to baseball's Amateur World Series for the first time since rival organizations FIBA and FEMBA had reconciled in 1976. The United States had skipped

³⁶ "Baseball Diplomacy Suggested As Aid to U.S.-Cuban Relations," *Washington Post*, 11 September 1984, A6; "Four Drivers Injured in Michigan 500," *Washington Post*, 23 July 1984, B2; "Cleveland Owner Wants Rights To Cuban Players," *Washington Observer-Reporter*, 23 July 1984, D4; "LeFevre Cancels Offer for Indians," *New York Times*, 15 November 1984.

the tournament in 1971 and 1973, the last two times it had been held in Havana, but the barrier against U.S. teams competing in Cuba had been broken at the 1979 International Cup. In April, the United States confirmed it would participate in the 1984 tournament. The American team finished with a bronze medal, falling 10-1 to the gold medal-winning Cuban team in their final game, which over 55,000—including Castro—attended. That the United States was now regularly sending athletic teams to Cuba for baseball competitions generated reciprocity on the Cuban side. In 1985, two Cuban squads took part in stateside tournaments. In late July, Cuba's national team came to Los Angeles for the United States Open Amateur tournament—the first such visit since before the Revolution. The next month, a team of Cuban teenagers won the World Junior Championship, held in Albany, New York. These exchanges went on despite the May debut of Radio Martí and before Havana's reactionary cancelation of the U.S.-Cuba immigration agreement in October. In these episodes, at least, baseball was able to buck the political climate.³⁷

In other areas, baseball continued to mirror politics. While the United States used baseball as propaganda in Radio Martí broadcasts, Cuba also employed the sport to its own political ends. In August, Castro granted an interview to *Playboy* magazine, in which he chastised the Reagan administration's "dirty war" against Nicaragua and implied that the president was a dictator who could "make the decision to unleash a thermonuclear war without consulting the Senate or the House of Representatives." Castro used a baseball anecdote to contest the American concept of freedom, noting that "not long ago, a U.S. black athlete could

³⁷ Bjarkman, *History*, 202-205; "U.S. Team Entered in Tournament," *Washington Post*, 4 April 1984, D5; "Orioles Square Series With Carp," *Washington Post*, 29 October 1984, C2; Karl Meyer, "The Editorial Notebook; Inside Fidel's Fortress," *New York Times*, 30 June 1985, A22; Bob Cuomo, "Cuban Team's Visit Ends 26-Year Baseball Drought," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 August 1985; "Baseball," *Washington Post*, 21 April 1985, D2; Roy S. Johnson and Frank Litsky, "Scouting: Baseball Lesson?," *New York Times*, 25 July 1985, B10; Ross Atkin, "Sports Notebook: Touching other bases," *Christian Science Monitor*, 6 September 1985, 20.

not play baseball in the major leagues.” Cuba also continued to export baseball to its political allies. A January 1985 article detailing the ongoing Cuban presence in Angola noted that Cuban baseball teams had been deployed to Africa for entertainment purposes. The next year, Cuba began sending instructors to the Soviet Union after that government adopted baseball as a state-approved sport. Perhaps to counter the strengthening Cuba-Soviet baseball ties, the United States embassy in Moscow donated some equipment to developing baseball leagues as a goodwill gesture. To fend off criticism over having adopted America’s national pastime, the Soviets renewed claims that baseball had derived from an old Russian game called “lapta.”³⁸

Political considerations also continued to overshadow international sporting events. Reciprocal boycotts had undermined the 1980 Moscow Olympics, as well as the 1984 Los Angeles Games. Reagan’s 1984 reelection and the 1985 onset of Radio Martí provoked Cuba to repeal the post-Mariel immigration agreement with the United States in October. In retaliation, the Reagan administration began clamping down on visitation visas for Cubans coming to the United States. The action stifled U.S.-Cuba exchanges on a number of cultural fronts. Four Cuban health officials were barred from taking part in an April 1986 conference at Emory University, despite a request from former president Carter that they be granted visas. In another case, the Latin American Studies Association was forced to cancel a number of panels at its October 1986 meeting after several Cuban participants were denied entry into the United States. In sports, Cuba’s delegation to the Special Olympics missed an organizational meeting in South Bend, Indiana after the state department delayed their visas and caused them to miss their inbound flight. By the end of 1986, Cuba’s Interest Section in Washington complained that a

³⁸ “Playboy Interview: Fidel Castro,” *Playboy*, August 1985; James Brooke, “The Cubans in Angola: They’re Not All Soldiers,” *New York Times*, 22 January 1985, A2; “Baseball Becomes A Soviet Sport,” *Washington Post*, 3 October 1986, A10; Gary Lee, “Soviets Get in the Swing, Vow They’ll Master Baseball,” *Washington Post*, 6 July 1987, C1; Bill Keller, “In Baseball, the Russians Steal All the Bases,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1987, A1.

number of Cubans in academics, medicine, music, and even baseball, had been denied visas. A visa snafu also forced Johns Hopkins University to abandon an effort to host a Cuban baseball team for exhibition games in May 1987—a reciprocal visit following the American collegiate team’s trip to Cuba the year before. Denying Cuban visits was part of a Reagan administration policy of preventing individuals with ties to Communism from entering the United States. It was ultimately overturned by a federal appeals court as well as the Supreme Court, but not before adding to the angst over the upcoming Pan American Games.³⁹

With the Pan Am Games set for Indianapolis in 1987, the fight over visas raised questions about Cuba’s participation. The United States government was unlikely to ban Cuban athletes from participating, as doing so would have jeopardized Indianapolis’ status as host city and led to possible Olympic sanctions. There were concerns, however, that Cuba would attempt to undermine the games by boycotting them. Indeed, by early January, Cuban officials were threatening to skip the Pan Am Games if the United States did not waive the law that forced all Cuban flights to land in Miami and instead allow their athletes to fly directly to Indianapolis. Adding to the tension was the fact that Havana had been passed over as host of the 1987 event in favor of Indianapolis—a decision that, Castro alleged, resulted from an American bribe.⁴⁰

Cuba’s athletes were ultimately present when the games opened in August. Considerations on both sides prompted a more conciliatory approach. As early as April, Castro had publicly stated his hopes that Cuba would take part in the competition, and in July he personally assured the Indianapolis organizing committee that the Cubans would participate. A

³⁹ Terri Shaw, “U.S. Exclusion of Cubans Draws Criticism,” *Washington Post*, 12 December 1986, F2; “Cuban Team Visit To U.S. Canceled,” *New York Times*, 3 May 1985, S10; Stuart Taylor Jr., “Justices Limit Effect of Election Law,” *New York Times*, 16 December 1986, B11; -----, “Supreme Court Roundup; Reagan Powers to Bar Alien Visits Are Limited,” *New York Times*, 20 October 1987.

⁴⁰ Isabel Wilkerson, “Indianapolis Rouses for Joys and Headaches of Pan Am Games,” *New York Times*, 12 January 1987, A10.

boycott could have been costly. After losing the 1987 Games to Indianapolis, Havana had been awarded hosting rights for 1991 with the understanding that skipping the Indianapolis Games could prompt revocation. The United States helped boost the chances that Cuba would attend by giving permission for Cuban charter flights to avoid the Miami stopover en route to Indianapolis.⁴¹

Any notions that Cuba's participation signaled reconciliation were dispelled by a contentious spirit throughout the competition. An exile group called the Cuban-American National Foundation staged a number of demonstrations in Indianapolis. During the opening ceremony a plane carrying a banner encouraging Cuban athletes to defect flew over the stadium. Members of the group also handed out cards informing Cubans of outlets and points of contact for defection. In a number of instances, exile protests provoked violent outbursts that cast a pall over the games. Prior to a baseball game against the Netherlands Antilles, the Cuban team was met by a protesting group of Bay of Pigs veterans outside of the stadium. Inside, they endured anti-Castro chants from an exile group seated directly behind their dugout. After the contest, protest turned to punches when a brief skirmish broke out between a few of the demonstrators and some members of the Cuban delegation. The same day, Manuel Gonzales Guerra, Cuba's Olympic Committee President, was verbally harassed in his hotel. All this occurred in the first day of competition. The rude welcome prompted Cuban officials to appeal to the Pan Am Games' organizing committee, which responded by increasing security at events involving Cuban teams. A few days later, however, an exile group got into fistcuffs with members of Cuba's boxing team during an altercation in the arena bleachers, which prompted Indianapolis

⁴¹ Michael Janofsky, "Castro Tells Officials He Is Optimistic on Cuba's Participation," *New York Times*, 19 April 1987, S3; "Patterson Tops Women In Race Across America," *Washington Post*, 3 July 1987, F2; "Jackson Agrees to Reported 5-Year Deal With Raiders," *Washington Post*, 15 July 1987, F2.

officials to boost security even more. A heavy contingent of police kept antagonistic factions separate at the Cuba-Nicaragua baseball game a few days later. Another ugly incident came during the baseball semifinal. Cuba defeated Puerto Rico in a hotly contested game that saw both benches clear in the eighth inning over a collision at first base. After the Cuban victory, a fan began yelling insults at some of Cuba's players and one of them, catcher Victor Mesa, responded by tossing a bottle into the stands at the offending spectator.⁴²

Things were not as contentious as far as U.S.-Cuba baseball was concerned. In fact, baseball seemed to highlight goodwill between Cubans and Americans during the Pan Am Games. Just prior to the Indianapolis competition, the American baseball team had traveled to Cuba to play a five-game exhibition series against the home squad. They received a warm reception in Havana, with Castro personally visiting the American team's dugout before the first game and shaking hands with each U.S. player. One member of the team prompted particular excitement among the Cuban fans. Future major league star Jim Abbott, who had been born without a right hand but had developed into a bright prospect as a left-handed pitcher, received a standing ovation before the game that he started. The fans gave Abbott another standing ovation after he gave up just three hits in a victory over the Cuban hosts. Even Castro had been in awe of the American pitcher. During the pregame handshake line, the Cuban leader had offered his left hand to Abbott, and spent several moments greeting him.⁴³

⁴² "Fight at Stadium," *New York Times*, 10 August 1987; C6; "U.S. Diver Wins," *New York Times*, 10 August 1987, C7; Michael Wilbon, "U.S. Pan Am Athletes Show Competitive Edge," *Washington Post*, 10 August 1987, C1; Michael Janofsky, "Action and Distractions for Cubans at Games," *New York Times*, 11 August 1987, A1; Sally Jenkins, "Harassment of Cubans Mars Games," *Washington Post*, 11 August 1987, E3; Malcolm Moran, "Cuban Boxers in Scuffle With Crowd," *New York Times*, 15 August 1987, 47; -----, "Security Increased In Wake of Fight," *New York Times*, 16 August 1987, S1; Michael Wilbon, "Police Busy Stemming Violence," *Washington Post*, 18 August 1987, C4; -----, "Baseball: It Comes Down to U.S., Cuba," *Washington Post*, 22 August 1987, B1.

⁴³ "Fanfare: Chamberlain Takes Fling at Olympics," *Washington Post*, 18 July 1987, C2; George Vescey, "Abbott Up Front At Pan Am Games," *New York Times*, 9 August 1987, S1; Michael Wilbon, "Abbott Doesn't Need Pity," *Washington Post*, 9 August 1987; D1.

The baseball goodwill carried over into the Pan Am tournament. Leading up to the competition, each team praised the other, with Cuban coach Higinio Velez calling the American squad their best in two decades, and U.S. coach Ron Fraser claiming that the Cuban team “probably would finish third in the American League East.” On the field, things remained just as respectful. During the group play stage of the competition, the American team won a shocking upset victory over Cuba with a ninth inning homerun. While the Americans celebrated on the field, the Cubans crossed the diamond to shake hands with their opponents—as they had done after each contest during the exhibition series in Cuba. The gesture prompted Fraser to praise the visitors as “great sportsmen.” It was repeated again after Cuba defeated the United States in the gold medal game to win the tournament. U.S. pitcher Cris Carpenter admitted that the games had allowed the American players to discover the Cubans’ “friendly side.” One columnist surmised that the baseball tournament “proved to the U.S. players that they could perform with the Cubans, and also get along with them.”⁴⁴

Baseball goodwill did not dispel the overt political tone that dominated the Indianapolis Pan Am games, however. Even while the on-field exchanges with their American opponents were friendly, Cuba imposed tight security around their ballplayers, keeping professional baseball scouts—who had flocked to Indiana to observe the tournament—at a safe distance and providing little to no biographical information about their team. While not evident during U.S.-Cuba contests, political tension had been apparent at the Cuba-Puerto Rico game, as well as in the United States-Nicaragua game. Relations between the latter had been strained since the

⁴⁴ Michelle Kaufman, “Pride will be on the line when U.S., Cuba meet today on baseball field,” *Tampa Bay Times*, 15 August 1987, 6C; Michael Janofsky, “Pan Am Games Begin: 80,000 Attend Ceremonies,” *New York Times*, 9 August 1987, S1; George Vecsey, “Ty Hits A Winner in Indianapolis,” *New York Times*, 16 August 1987, S1; William C. Rhoden, “Cuba Defeats U.S. On Late Rally, 13-9,” *New York Times*, 23 August 1987, S5; Michael Wilbon, “8-5 Lead Turns to 13-9 Defeat,” *Washington Post*, 23 August 1987, D1; Ken Denlinger, “A Victory for the Cuban Baseball Team, a Triumph for Some Boys of Summer,” *Washington Post*, 23 August 1987, D8.

Sandinistas took power, and earlier in the year American Colonel Oliver North had stirred up hard feelings again by citing a baseball field at a military installation in Nicaragua as evidence of Cuban interference. After the American team scored a blowout, 18-0 victory, a number of newspapers noted the abject disappointment among Nicaraguan fans. Fraser had joked with his team, before the game, that a loss to Nicaragua would likely get the Americans banned from baseball. Cuba, likewise, continued to chaff under perceived slights while in Indianapolis. As the host nation for the next Pan Am Games in 1991, Cuba was scheduled to play a prominent role in the Indianapolis closing ceremony. At the conclusion of the competition, the symbolic torch would be passed to Cuba's delegation. The Cubans very nearly skipped the ceremony, however, threatening to boycott the event upon learning that Gloria Estefan and the Miami Sound Machine—which featured a band member who was a relative of Fulgencio Batista—would perform. Though Cuba ultimately relented, the fracas over the closing ceremony marked a fitting end to a contentious set of Pan Am Games in Indianapolis.⁴⁵

Still, the baseball goodwill provided some optimism. Beyond the Pan Am Games, baseball exchanges between Cuba and the United States were occurring with more frequency. A few months before the Indianapolis event, a California semi-professional baseball team defeated a Cuban squad while competing in an international tournament in Mexico. “Bats Not Bombs,” a private organization that promoted baseball diplomacy, helped to sponsor the San Bernardino Indians’ trip. The former had organized contests between college-age teams from the United

⁴⁵ Michael Wilbon, “Baseball Scouts Gather, but some Prospects Untouchable,” *Washington Post*, 18 August 1987, C4; “Lt. Col. Ollie North strikes out,” *Montreal Gazette*, 9 July 1987, B2; George Vecsey, “U.S. Meets Nicaragua, but It’s Only a Game,” *New York Times*, 13 August 1987, A1; William Branigin, “Managua Roots but U.S. Wins,” *Washington Post*, 13 August 1987, A1; Ross Atkin, “The US scores a big victory over Nicaragua – on the baseball field,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 August 1987, 18; Michael Wilbon, “It’s a Runaway for U.S. Against Nicaragua,” *Washington Post*, 13 August 1987, D1; Sally Jenkins, “Cuban Tempest Buffets Indianapolis,” *Washington Post*, 19 August 1987, B1; Michael Janofsky, “Stage Was Filled By Cuba and U.S.,” *New York Times*, 24 August 1987, C4.

States and Nicaragua the previous year, also under the guise of improving hemispheric relations. In 1988, the Cuban and American national baseball teams agreed to another round of exhibition games against one another, renewing the friendly series that had been held in Cuba the previous year before the Pan Am Games. In August, Cuba and the United States played a seven game exhibition series that doubled as a promotional tour, with contests staged in Charlotte, Indianapolis, Richmond, Norfolk, and Millington, Tennessee. In a *Christian Science Monitor* commentary piece the next month, Jay Berman, a journalism professor at California State University, argued for ending the embargo and opening up relations with Cuba, citing the success of cultural exchanges such as baseball in support.⁴⁶

The exhibition baseball tour actually ended up being a consolation prize of sorts. As the Olympics neared, Cold War politics once more obstructed international athletics. With baseball again slated to be a demonstration sport, Cuba was expected to showcase its powerhouse national team at the 1988 Seoul games. Following the major boycotts that tarnished the 1980 and 1984 Games, hopes were high that the 1988 Olympics would be a truly international affair. It also seemed to be a prime opportunity to build upon the recent baseball goodwill between Cuba and the United States. Nevertheless, by the time that Cuba embarked on its exhibition baseball tour in the United States, it had announced that it would not participate in the Seoul Olympics. Questions over Cuba competing had first emerged two years earlier, when Castro, in a move of solidarity with North Korea, threatened to skip the event if both North and South Korea were not named as co-hosts. The issue remained unresolved in 1988, after North Korea refused the

⁴⁶ Robert Thomas, "Sports World Specials: Diplomatic Approach," *New York Times*, 18 May 1987, C2; Thomas Boswell, "For U.S. Baseball Team, The Innocence Is Gone," *Washington Post*, 20 July 1988, D1; Frank Litsky, "Spotlight in Trials Shifts to Swimmers: Olympics," *New York Times*, 8 August 1988, C6; "Team USA Loses," *Washington Post*, 11 August 1988, C8; Peter Alfano, "Before the Minors, A Major Challenge," *New York Times*, 15 August 1988, C1; Cesar Brioso, "Cubans Want Title, Not Olympic Trip," *Washington Post*, 16 August 1988; Jay Berman, "Time to stop treating Cuba like an untouchable," *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 September 1988, 11.

International Olympic Committee's compromise offer to host a few Olympic events. Though China and the Soviet Union declined to join the North Korean boycott, Cuba reiterated its concerns, and Castro appealed to the Olympic Committee again. In a January 1988 letter, Castro warned that if the Games could not be staged in a manner "satisfactory to everyone, the Olympic spirit would take a great step backwards." He confirmed that Cuba would not participate, but closed the letter by stating that if the situation were resolved, they could reverse their decision.⁴⁷

The Cuban boycott initially seemed half-hearted. In addition to the door left open in Castro's letter, Cuba was still considering sending its baseball team to Seoul to participate in the demonstration tournament. In April, the Cubans asked for and received an extension on the deadline for Olympic baseball teams to apply for the tournament. In the end, however, Cuba declined to take part in the baseball competition as well, skipping the Seoul Olympics entirely and focusing its efforts on the upcoming Baseball World Cup (formerly the Amateur World Series) in Italy. There, the Cubans won a close final over the United States, 4-3, thanks in part to a close call at first base that went Cuba's way.⁴⁸

As the 1980s came to a close, Cold War developments clouded the future of U.S.-Cuba relations, in baseball and elsewhere. The breakdown of the Communist Eastern Bloc in Europe culminated in November 1989 with the Berlin Wall's demise. The Soviet Union was undergoing major changes under the *perestroika* and *glasnost* initiatives put forth by Mikhail Gorbachev.

⁴⁷ "Fanfare: Baseball," *Washington Post*, 5 February 1986, D2; Angus Phillips, "Cuba Declines to Participate In Summer Olympic Games," *Washington Post*, 16 January 1988, A1; "Castro Sends Letter To Olympic Committee," January 16, 1988, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1988/19880116.html>.

⁴⁸ "For the Record: Olympics," *Washington Post*, 24 April 1988, 38; "Cuba Gets Extension," *Washington Post*, 19 May 1988, B7; "Cuba Out," *Washington Post*, 26 May 1988, D2; "Cuba Wins World Title," *Washington Post*, 8 September 1988, D5.

Improving U.S.-Soviet relations even spurred baseball exchanges, as the Soviet national team toured the United States for four weeks in April 1989, playing exhibition games against college teams from Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. The dwindling Cold War again pushed questions about the United States' Cuba policy to the forefront. In a December letter to the editor in the *New York Times*, former Oregon congressman Charles Porter argued that the time had come for "doing away with our 'wall' around Cuba" by lifting the embargo and travel restrictions, and abandoning Guantanamo Bay as no longer necessary for national defense.⁴⁹

For baseball, as usual, the prospect of improved relations with Cuba meant access to talented Cuban players. This proved easier to imagine than to realize, however. Angst over delayed Major League Baseball expansion prompted plans to develop an alternate professional league in 1989. Organizers planned to place franchises in cities that lacked major league teams, such as Washington, D.C., Portland, Miami, and New Orleans. New York lawyer David LeFevre, who was heading up the new baseball venture, once again hoped to use his connections in Cuba to have a club from Havana in the league. And once again, the alternate league proposal failed to materialize, rendering the potential Havana franchise moot. The allure of showcasing Cuban ballplayers in the United States remained, however. In February 1989, baseball legend Pete Rose spoke of his desire to go to Cuba, meet with Castro, and "talk him into letting [Rose] be the scout of the players in Cuba." Rose said he and Reds' owner Marge Schott "could go down with her checkbook and make Fidel happy."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Anthony Cotton, "Drubbing Doesn't Deter Soviets," *Washington Post*, 12 April 1989, D1; -----, "Slowly, Surely, Soviets Are Playing Better Ball," *Washington Post*, 13 April 1989, D7; Charles Porter, "The U.S. 'Wall' Around Cuba Goes Next," *New York Times*, 1 December 1989, A34.

⁵⁰ Thomas Boswell, "Enough of Suffering Through the Big Stall, It's Time to Start a New Baseball League," *Washington Post*, 29 March 1989, F1; David Margolick, "At the Bar," *New York Times*, 15 September 1989, B7; Murray Chass, "And Now Pitching for Cuba: Castro; Batting for Reds: Rose," *New York Times*, 26 February 1989, S3.

In reality, Cuban players were still not close to being able to legally play for Major League Baseball Teams by the end of the decade. Deputy Commissioner Fay Vincent, discussing the international growth of baseball in a 1989 interview, admitted that the prospect of signing Cuban players “is not just a baseball thing...That really has to follow on political developments.” Politically, the United States and Cuba were still distant. As it turned out, however, Cold War developments would result in more Cuban players competing in American professional leagues. During the next decade, economic pressure on Cuba, brought on not by the embargo but by the Soviet Union’s demise, would force scores of Cuban baseball players to defect, following the lure of a lucrative major league contract.⁵¹

⁵¹ Christine Brennan, “For U.S. Sports, World Is Steadily Shrinking,” *Washington Post*, 17 May 1989, B1.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Hit-and-run: Baseball Deployment and the 1990s, Part I

The 1980s had brought about a fundamental change in the nature of baseball as a diplomatic tool. As hopes for détente between Cuba and the United States vanished, so too did baseball's chances of serving as a bridge between the divided governments in Washington and Havana. Rather than seeking the middle ground with Cuba, the Reagan administration adopted a tough anti-Communist hemispheric policy, one that sought to eliminate the Castro government, not to coexist with it. Thus, whereas the Ford and Carter administrations had made efforts, albeit unsuccessful ones, to employ baseball as an agreeable shared cultural element that could boost normalization with Cuba, the Reagan administration, primarily through Radio Martí, sought to deploy American baseball to Cuba with the hope that exposing Cubans to the professional game would garner resentment against Castro and contribute to a regime change. With the reciprocal U.S.-Soviet Olympic boycotts in 1980 and 1984, combined with Cuba's boycott of the 1988 Games, sport had never been as politically charged as it was during that decade. At the same time, by the end of the 1980s people-to-people contacts were increasing, owing to more frequent games between Cuban and American baseball teams, and a generally cordial baseball relationship that bucked the political climate.

These seemingly divergent trends continued into the 1990s. On the political level, U.S. administrations deployed baseball as a potential weapon against the Castro regime. Baseball-

related exchanges between Cubans and Americans continued to grow as well, culminating, at the end of the decade, in the high-profile exhibition series between the Baltimore Orioles and the Cuban national team. Though dubbed “baseball diplomacy”—like the aborted 1970s efforts—in press accounts, this series had a far different purpose than the original endeavors. The Clinton administration allowed the baseball games as a part of a policy of increasing people-to-people contacts between Cubans and Americans under the premise that such contacts could undermine the Castro government.

I

As the new decade began, the end of the Cold War loomed and would bring about unforeseen changes in the U.S.-Cuba baseball relationship. Politically, the Washington and Havana governments remained distant. George H. W. Bush’s election to the presidency in 1988, following eight years as vice president under Reagan, meant no major change in the United States’ Cuban posture in the early 1990s. As Communism fell in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union dissolved, American efforts to undermine the Castro regime intensified. In a May 1991 speech commemorating the eighty-ninth anniversary of Cuba’s independence, President Bush cited recent democratic gains in Nicaragua, Chile, Panama, and Peru and called upon Castro, whom he dubbed “the hemisphere’s last dictator,” to follow suit. In a December 1991 press conference that followed the Soviet Union’s demise, Bush dismissed Castro’s long-term chances of staying in power as “a pretty pessimistic prospect” and labeled the Cuban leader “the only one that still thinks Communism is a good idea.” Castro, on the other hand, dug in against the rising tide of anti-Communism. In a lengthy January 1990 address, he called Cuba “a trench for the world’s revolutionary, progressive and just ideas” and affirmed that though “others are taking

[Vladimir] Lenin's name off streets and parks and tearing down statues... We build those things here."¹

Believing that Castro's Cuba would ultimately go the way of the Soviet Union, the Bush administration sought to accelerate the process of declension. Washington's leaders remained confident that the supremacy of western ideas and their increased flow across the Iron Curtain had ultimately brought about the Eastern Bloc's demise, and sought a similar answer in Cuba. Following up on the use of Radio Martí, since the 1980s, to increase Cuban exposure to American news, sports, and culture, the United States launched a parallel television network in 1990. Named TV Martí, the new broadcast venture sought the same goal as its radio forerunner: to bring about Castro's downfall by taking the American message directly to the people of Cuba and generating unrest over Communism. The United States devoted \$7.5 million to a three month test period for TV Martí, and used a balloon suspended 10,000 feet above the Florida Keys to transmit the broadcast signal over Cuban airwaves. Just as Radio Martí had employed Major League Baseball as programming, the new television network also featured the sport, and the February 1990 debut included highlights from the 1971 World Series—which had featured Latin American star Roberto Clemente—as part of its opening lineup. That October, TV Martí broadcast the World Series to Cuba, marking the first time the event had aired on the island since before the Revolution.²

¹ George Bush, "Message on Cuban Independence Day," May 20, 1991, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=19598&st=Cuba&st1=>; "The President's News Conference," December 26, 1991, *Ibid.*; Fidel Castro, "16th Workers Federation Congress Closes," January 29, 1990, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1990/19900129.html>; Pat M. Holt, "Pentagon Defends Itself," *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 March 1990, 19.

² William M. LeoGrande, "The United States and Cuba: Strained Engagement," in *Cuba, the United States, and the Post-Cold War World*, Morris Morley and Chris McGillion, eds. (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2005), 37; Marshall Ingwerson, "Testing Period Ends Today for TV Martí; Congress Awaits Report From Bush," *Christian Science Monitor*, 25 June 1990, 7; Laura Parker, "Cuba Carries Out Threat To Jam TV Martí Signal," *Washington*

As the radio network had done, TV Martí prompted scorn and retaliation from the Havana government. Cuban officials dubbed the American network “TV Menti”, meaning “TV Lie” in Spanish, and Cuba took steps to jam its broadcast, making it nearly impossible to receive the signal in Havana and weakening its transmission across the island. The Castro regime also used the propaganda war to bolster anti-American sentiment inside Cuba. Pointing to TV Martí as evidence of U.S. imperialism, the government warned that Cuba was likely the next American target. A 1990 article that discussed Cuban fears of an imminent American invasion noted the appearance of a new sign along the outfield wall of Havana’s baseball stadium that read “Socialism or Death” as evidence of Castro doubling down.³

The end of the Cold War complicated U.S. policy toward Cuba. The Soviet Union’s demise in December 1991 meant that Cuba could no longer count on Soviet assistance to temper American action. The Bush administration, now with a seemingly free hand, found itself pulled in opposite directions over Cuba policy. Anti-Castro elements within the vocal Cuban American contingent smelled blood in the water and pressed the United States to tighten the screws on the embargo to accelerate the process of Castro’s demise. Those who opposed the Cuban sanctions, however, believed that the end of the Cold War provided an opportunity to alter long-standing policy, and urged the administration to demobilize and pursue peace in the hemisphere.⁴

This new, divergent dynamic was echoed in legislation. In 1992, Congress passed the Cuban Democracy Act. The law offered a two-pronged approach, strengthening economic

Post, 28 March 1990, A3; Mike Maske, “Piniella, La Russa Renew Boyhood Acquaintance,” *Washington Post*, 16 October 1990, C6.

³ Leo Hockstader, “Cuba Defends Against TV Martí,” *Washington Post*, 3 April 1990, A15; Les Whittington, “Castro Keeps Cubans in state of fear,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 April 1990, B5; Leo Hockstader, “Castro Turns His People’s Love Into Fear,” *Washington Post*, 13 September 1991, A27.

⁴ Susan Kaufman Purcell, “Collapsing Cuba,” *Foreign Affairs* 71 (1991/1992): 143; Lisa Foderaro, “Castro’s Friends and Enemies Hold 2 Rallies in Manhattan,” *New York Times*, 8 April 1990, 28.

sanctions but also providing for more interactions between Cubans and Americans. The first part of the policy, commonly referred to as Track I, barred American subsidiaries from engaging in trade with Cuba, restricted international vessels from entering U.S. ports for six months after visiting any Cuban ports, and threatened to cut foreign relief and debt assistance to any nation that assisted the Castro regime. The second part of the Cuban Democracy Act, known as Track II, aimed to bolster people-to-people contacts between Cubans and Americans through academic and cultural exchanges, as well as through enhanced mail and telecommunication service linking the island and North America. Track II also relaxed laws restricting monetary aid from Cuban Americans to their relatives back home, and freed humanitarian organizations to provide more assistance for Cubans.⁵

The first track reflected the Bush administration's aims for post-Cold War relations with Cuba. Whereas previous administrations had focused primarily on weakening Cuba-Soviet ties and diminishing Cuban efforts to export revolution in the hemisphere, the Bush administration, emboldened by victory in the Cold War, was more ambitious. Normalization with Cuba now depended on more than a moderated Castro regime. It could come only after Cuba underwent a democratic transformation. In signing the bill into law on October 23, President Bush affirmed that the Cuban Democracy Act would "speed the inevitable demise of the Cuban Castro dictatorship." He further declared that "For freedom to rise in Cuba, Fidel Castro must fall" and warned that "there will never be normal relations with Cuba as long as Castro sustains this illegitimate regime."⁶

⁵ LeoGrande, "Engagement," 37; Morris Morley, "Reconnecting with Cuba: How Washington Lost a Cold War in Latin America," in *Cuba, the United States, and the Post-Cold War World*, 186.

⁶ Morley, "Reconnecting," 185-186; George Bush, "Remarks on Signing the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 in Miami, Florida," October 23, 1992, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=21646&st=Cuba&st1=>.

The second track functioned in a more complicated manner. Increasing people-to-people contacts appeared to be a non-partisan issue on the surface. On the one hand, officials could tout the humanitarian provisions as putting a human face on the economic sanctions. The president made assurances, in signing the law, that the act was “not designed to hurt the Cuban people” and cited the food and medicine donations now allowed as evidence of its good intentions. At the same time, however, officials hoped that increasing contact between Cubans and Americans would boost the flow of ideas, culture, and eventually, freedom. Moreover, under the Cuban Democracy Act the government’s role in these ventures went beyond merely granting permission, or even providing official encouragement. The law allowed the government to fund efforts by “individuals and organization to promote nonviolent democratic change in Cuba.” In essence, the Track II provisions armed the nongovernmental organizations that fostered people-to-people contacts as infiltration agents to undermine the Castro regime from the inside.⁷

The Cuban Democracy Act was thus an incredibly shrewd law: one that flexed U.S. political muscle while appealing to American compassion. The law’s endgame was to eliminate the Castro regime and while the first track’s economic sanctions went bluntly toward this goal, the second track allowances on people-to-people contacts were more subtle in their aim. That these exchanges would occur under humanitarian auspices made them appear to be benevolent (which, despite the law’s political shrewdness, they often were) and helped defend against critics who called for improving the relationship with Cuba. In backing the law, President Bush hoped to shore up election-year support from Cuban Americans in Florida, a crucial swing state. Bush even held the signing ceremony in Miami, speaking before a solidly anti-Castro crowd. Democratic challenger Bill Clinton refused to cede the Cuban vote to the Republican incumbent,

⁷ Bush, “Remarks on Signing the Cuban Democracy Act”; LeoGrande, “Engagement,” 37.

however, and came out in support of the law during the 1992 presidential campaign while at a fund raiser in the Little Havana section of Miami. In co-opting the Cuban issue, Clinton took a harder line with the Castro regime than Democratic candidates previously had, and though it did not allow him to wrestle away Florida in November, it did help Clinton become the first Democrat since Lyndon Johnson to win New Jersey—which at the time boasted the nation’s largest Cuban American population outside of Florida.⁸

The Track II developments in the law meant that Cuba-U.S. baseball exchanges—though still cordial—would take on a covertly political significance beginning in the 1990s. Some argued for using baseball as direct leverage against Cuba. Mark Feierstein, a Latin American policy specialist, suggested in a June 1991 *New York Times* editorial that President Bush should offer Castro a major league expansion team for Havana in exchange for free elections. A more subtle approach emerged instead. The United States’ new Cuba policy, encapsulated in the Cuban Democracy Act, expanded and cemented the subversive role that baseball had first played through Radio Martí in the previous decade: baseball deployment became standard practice. The discord between the Washington and Havana governments had not ended with the Cold War, but baseball interactions continued to become a more regular occurrence, building on the momentum that had developed by the end of the 1980s and creating direct person to person contacts between Cubans and Americans. Track II sought to exploit these friendly athletic exchanges, envisioning them as American propaganda that could undermine support for the Castro regime in Cuba.⁹

⁸ LeoGrande, “Engagement,” 37; Max Azicri, *Cuba Today and Tomorrow: Reinventing Socialism*, Gainesville: University of Florida, 2000, 183; “Cubans in the United States,” Fact Sheet, Pew Hispanic Center, August 25, 2006, <http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/23.pdf>.

⁹ Mark Feierstein, “Castro Would Play Ball,” *New York Times*, 9 July 1991, E17.

The 1990s picked up where the previous decade had left off, and the first year boasted a number of baseball exchanges involving Cuban and American teams. The Cuban and U.S. national teams renewed their summer exhibition series, playing a July game in Havana that was broadcast nationally by NBC, and holding two more contests in Nashville, Tennessee. The series preceded the baseball tournament at the 1990 Goodwill Games, which was held in Seattle and in which both teams took part without a hint of controversy or any discussions of boycotts. Reciprocal attendance at baseball-related events was becoming customary for American and Cuban teams. In May, a handful of Cuban players had traveled to Atlanta to participate in the International Baseball Association's World All-Star Game, and in September, a team of American youths traveled to Havana to compete in the Junior World Championships.¹⁰

Baseball exchanges continued into 1991, with the Pan American Games. That competition, staged in Cuba for the first time since the Revolution, showcased both the routine nature of U.S.-Cuba athletic events, as well as the economic pressures Cuba was beginning to confront in the post-Cold War world. While there were no major concerns over boycotts this time around, there were questions about how Cuba would afford to host the Pan Am Games absent the former subsidies that came from the Soviet Union. Even Castro acknowledged the economic difficulty posed by Cuba's "special period," as it was being called, and admitted that Cuba would not have offered to host the competition if the decision had not been made years before. U.S. athletic officials recognized the urgency of Cuba's situation, but do not appear to have seriously considered skipping the event as a result. In April 1991, a delegation of United States Olympic Committee officials traveled to the island to inspect the facilities and

¹⁰ Steven Goff, "Around The Dial," *Washington Post*, 13 July 1990, F2; Christine Brennan, "United States Gets Shelled by Cuba In Baseball, 16-2," *Washington Post*, 31 July 1990, E3'; "26 Countries In First IBA World All-Star Game," *Atlanta Daily World*, 29 May 1990, 5; Karl Hente, "Tiny Mayo Looms Large in Legion Ball," *Washington Post*, 12 July 1990, D12; "For The Record: Baseball," *Washington Post*, 4 September 1990, B2

preparations underway. Yankees owner George Steinbrenner, serving as vice president of the group, admitted that the Cubans “have their work cut out to finish by August,” but did not express any reservations over American participation, and praised Cuba’s efforts to that point. The Cuban press downplayed these concerns and following the visit *Granma International* argued that the American public would be able to rest at ease “if news coverage is objective” in the United States.¹¹

There were some roadblocks prior to the Pan Am Games’ opening. While the U.S. Olympic Committee did not use concerns over Cuba’s preparations to justify boycotting the competition, they did amend their athletes’ travel arrangements. In May, the committee announced that many American athletes would not have prolonged stays in Cuba and instead would fly into Havana just a day or two before competing and return as soon as possible once their events had concluded. Although the committee cited conflicting schedules with other international events and the proximity of Cuba to the United States as the formal reasons for the altered travel plans, an unnamed official revealed that concerns over facilities were driving the changes. The anonymous source, quoted in a May 1991 *New York Times* article, complained that “There is no air conditioning in the athletes’ village and we don’t have a lot of confidence in the food...Bringing the kids in a day before the event just makes sense.” Criticism from Cuba and other participating nations prompted the committee to back off from the policy change slightly. Because travel arrangements were ultimately left up to individual sports, however, a number of American teams passed on residing in the athletes’ village and were shuttled back and forth

¹¹ Christine Brennan, “Cuba Digs Hard to Meet Pan Am Deadline,” *Washington Post*, 18 January 1991, B1; Fidel Castro, “Castro Speaks to Pan-American Games Athletes,” July 16, 1991, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1991/19910716-2.html>; “USOC Praises Cuba’s Pan American Games Effort,” *Washington Post*, 15 April 1991, C2; William C. Rhoden, “For Games in Cuba, the Athletes Come to Compete and Politics Come Into Play,” *New York Times*, 29 July 1991, C6; Miguel Hernández, “In news coverage is objective, the U.S. public will know how preparations for Pan Am Games are progressing,” *Granma International*, 3 February 1991, 4.

between Havana and Miami, most notably the men's basketball team. While this left the United States' delegation open to criticism, concerns over the athletes' living conditions in Havana were justified. Newspaper articles revealed that the bathrooms in the village lacked toilet seats, and that the athletes were surviving on a steady diet of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.¹²

Television arrangements provided another obstacle. While ABC Sports, which aired the Pan Am Games, customarily paid the host nation a fee for the broadcast rights, the embargo made such an arrangement with Cuba illegal. The state department's refusal to allow ABC to pay the Castro regime \$10 million to carry the competition nearly prevented the Pan Am Games from being televised. Castro denounced American efforts to "sabotage" the Havana event, but in the end relented, allowing ABC to carry the games free of charge. The Cuban leader claimed benevolent intentions in foregoing the broadcast rights fee for the sake of ensuring the games would air on television. In truth, both sides had something to gain from the event's publicity. For the United States, the Pan Am Games represented exactly the sort of people-to-people contact that the Cuban Democracy Act, passed the following year, would come to favor as a weapon against the Castro regime. Cuba, for its part, was seeking to boost tourism to the island in hope that an influx of foreign wealth would relax the needs for fiscal austerity. The Pan Am Games thus presented an opportunity to showcase Cuba to a global audience. Castro made reference to the competition as an investment in Cuba's future tourism industry in a speech to Cuba's athletes in July 1991, promising that the money spent on the games would be recovered in time.¹³

¹² Christine Brennan, "U.S. Plan To Shuttle Athletes," *Washington Post*, 8 May 1991, C1; -----, "U.S. Is Criticized For Pan Am Shuttle," *Washington Post*, 8 August 1991, B1; -----, "Spotlight of Americas on Cuba: Contrasts Are Startling as the Pan Am Games Open," *Washington Post*, 2 August 1991, F1.

¹³ Richard Sandomir, "Castro, on All the Touchy Subjects," *New York Times*, 25 June 1991, B11; Rosemeri Mealy, "Preparations on schedule for Pan-American Games in Cuba," *New York Amsterdam News*, 13 July 1991, 51;

Economic woes did not thwart Cuban success in baseball at the Pan Am Games. Though the Cuban team always entered tournaments as the favorite to win gold, an American upset seemed a real possibility in 1991. The United States had split a six-game exhibition series against Cuba earlier that summer, and just before the Pan Am Games began, the Cuban team learned that its best pitcher would miss the competition due to a blood clot discovered in his arm. Speaking about these ominous signs, Cuban sportscaster Edel Casa warned that, should the home team lose in the Pan Am tournament, Cuba “would declare a national day of mourning here.” Such fears vanished once the competition began. The Cuban team beat the United States in preliminary round competition, winning a close 3-2 victory before a partisan crowd of sixty thousand fans—five thousand over capacity—that U.S. coach Ron Polk said made his players feel “a million miles away from home.” A much anticipated rematch to decide the gold medal never came to fruition, as the American squad fell to Puerto Rico in the semifinals. That game was marred by a controversial balk call by a Cuban umpire that went against the United States and resulted in a shoving match between Polk and the official. In the end, Cuba swept through the tournament undefeated, while the Americans had to settle for the bronze medal.¹⁴

The legacy of the 1991 Pan American Games was one of Cuban triumph and U.S. disappointment. On the American side, the baseball team’s defeats at the hands of Cuba and Puerto Rico went along with numerous losses to Cubans in boxing and track, as well as a shocking upset loss to Cuba in women’s basketball that Castro himself was present to cheer. The

Castro, “Castro Speaks to Pan-American Games Athletes,” <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1991/19910716-2.html>.

¹⁴ “U.S. Team No Big Hit In 6-1 Opener,” *Washington Post*, 6 August 1991, D2; William C. Rhoden, “Cuba’s Premier Pitcher Is Out With a Blood Clot,” *New York Times*, 1 August 1991, B12; -----, “U.S. vs. Cuba: This Was Elite Baseball,” *New York Times*, 12 August 1991, C7; George Vecsey, “Puerto Rico Stuns U.S., This Time on the Diamond,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1991, 29; Michael Wilbon, “U.S. Baseball Team Loses Cool, Game to Puerto Rico,” *Washington Post*, 17 August 1991, D1; “Baseball Bronze, Too,” *New York Times*, 18 August 1991, S2.

poor showing in baseball prompted speculation that the United States would begin using professional players for future competitions, as they were set to do in basketball for the upcoming 1992 Olympics. For Cuba, the games were an unabashed success. Though the United States won the most overall medals, the host nation won more gold medals than any other participant. Following the Games' conclusion, the front-page headline in *Granma International* blazed "Cuba 140 gold; US 130 gold." Castro also used the event to boost his own popularity, making appearances at countless events throughout the competition. The Cuban leader kept such a conspicuous profile during the Pan American Games that he appeared to be in multiple places at the same time, prompting one newspaper writer to wonder if Cuba kept a stock of Fidel impersonators and deployed them in the same manner as shopping malls do with hired Santa Clauses at Christmas. Another American scribe questioned if the competition had defused Cold War tension with the island nation, asking: "Can we seriously loathe Cuba after seeing Fidel Castro do the wave at the Pan American Games?" *Granma International* heralded the event's positive public reception, heralding a headline that quoted praise from Pan American Sports Organization President Mario Vázquez Raña: "The Best Games in Pan American History."¹⁵

Behind Cuba's success in the Havana competition, however, were clear indicators of economic turmoil. While Castro promised that the Pan Am Games would boost tourism, that industry was being carefully crafted in Cuba to cater to foreigners while keeping locals isolated. Sports columnist Michael Wilbon, covering the athletic events in Havana for the *Washington Post*, wrote a scathing critique that detailed how Cubans were barred from the hotels, restaurants,

¹⁵ Christine Brennan, "U.S. Misses Women's Basketball, Men's Diving Golds," *Washington Post*, 11 August 1991, D1; "Cuban Hosts Make Strong Showing in Pan Am Games," *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 August 1991, 14; William C. Rhoden, "The Secret of Cuba's Sports Success? Spot the Children Who Are Athletes," *New York Times*, 19 August 1991, C4; "Cuba 140 gold; US 130 gold," *Granma International*, 25 August 1991, 1; George Vecsey, "Even Cuba Sometimes Wins Ugly," *New York Times*, 30 July 1992, B7; Richard Sandomir, "The Effect of Political Events on Rooting Interests," *New York Times*, 11 September 1991, B17; "The Best Games In Pan American History," *Granma International*, 25 August 1991, 12.

nightclubs, and retail stores that served foreign visitors, labeling the system “Tourist apartheid.” Moreover, despite fulfilling its obligations as hosts and completing the athletic venues for the Pan Am Games, economic austerity measures escalated after the competition was over. By the end of 1991, the Cuban government announced cutbacks designed to conserve oil, which included reducing television airtime, shutting off street lights, and even banning nighttime baseball games.¹⁶

II

Post-Cold War economic struggles also prompted a troublesome new development for Cuban baseball: defections. Though future major leaguer Bárbaro Garbey had fled Cuba as part of the Mariel Boatlift in the previous decade, the 1990s saw baseball defections become a regular occurrence. The first of this new wave was René Arocha, a Cuban pitcher who defected in 1991. Ironically, the cordial baseball relationship that had developed between Cuba and the United States served to enable defection. In July, Arocha, who was on Cuba’s national team, came to Millington, Tennessee with the rest of the squad to play in what had become an annual exhibition series against the American club. While there, Arocha began to ponder defecting, and when the team stopped over in Miami on its way back home, he stayed. Despite leaving his wife and children behind, Arocha harbored dreams of playing in the major leagues and defended his decision as one of necessity, since Cuba “forbids the development and advancement of individuals’ careers.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Michael Wilbon, “A Sad Conclusion at the Games,” *Washington Post*, 19 August 1991, C1; Jose de Cordoba, “Commodities: Cuba’s Vital Sugar Harvest Is Delayed, Spelling Ominous Sign of Decline of Nation’s Economy,” *Wall Street Journal*, 23 December 1991, C14.

¹⁷ Bill Brubaker, “Arocha Trades In Past for Future Shot at Majors,” *Washington Post*, 4 August 1991, D10; “Defector From Cuba Dreams of the Majors,” *New York Times*, 13 July 1991, 28.

Arocha's arrival, coupled with Communism's demise elsewhere in the world, seemed to herald significant changes for baseball. Many believed that economic pressures would mean Cuban players once again filling major league rosters. Arocha himself boasted of the talent levels in Cuba, claiming that "if the doors were open, there would be an invasion of Cuban players." Among American baseball officials, longstanding hopes for such a Cuban influx once again rose. Two major league teams—the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Montreal Expos—sent personnel to Havana to scout baseball players during the Pan Am Games, and a number of other clubs expressed interest in obtaining Cuban players should they become available. Cuban American scholar Roberto González Echevarría even suggested in a *New York Times* opinion piece that Castro's "inevitable" demise could prompt a crisis in the major leagues as teams jettisoned veteran players for new Cuban arrivals.¹⁸

The prospects of a Cuban baseball invasion prompted legal considerations as well. Arocha's defection raised questions about his eligibility to play professionally in the United States. Globalization had prompted changes to the visa system in 1990 for foreigners working in the United States, including professional athletes. As a Cuban, however, Arocha did not qualify for either the category "O" or "P" temporary visas typically granted to international athletes, since he was seeking asylum and planned to remain in the United States. Baseball's rules were also ill-fitted to defectors. Since 1977, major league teams had been barred from signing players in Cuba by the so-called "Kuhn Directive." The question, in 1991, was how this policy applied to a Cuban player in the United States. Despite initial speculation that Arocha would have to wait one year—the time period required for Cubans refugees to establish residency in the United

¹⁸ "Cuban 'Nolan Ryan' defects to U.S.; Expose not interested in signing 25-year-old pitcher," *Montreal Gazette*, 13 July 1991, C2; Bob Brubaker, "Baseball Scouts Ready to Slide Into Cuba: Hopeful Major League Clubs Keep a Watchful Eye on Island," *Washington Post*, 4 August 1991, D1; R. González Echevarría, "The Cuban Baseball Crisis," *New York Times*, 6 April 1992, A19.

States—before being able to join a team, Major League Baseball decided instead to grant signing rights for Arocha through a special lottery draft, which was held in October, allowing him to join a club before the start of the following season. The St. Louis Cardinals, who won the lottery, inked Arocha to a six-figure deal that included a \$15,000 signing bonus.¹⁹

By successfully defecting and signing a professional contract, Arocha had blazed a trail for other Cuban players. Over the next few years, baseball defections became a common occurrence. In 1992, three of Arocha's former teammates defected while playing with Cuba's national team in Mexico. Their situation prompted Major League Baseball to revisit and revise its policies on Cuban players. Rather than seeking asylum in the United States, as Arocha had done, and being subject to the draft—as the rules required for domestic players—the three defectors sought to negotiate contracts as free agents (which would likely have earned them a higher salary) and entered the United States illegally—without asylum—in the process. In response, the league relegated the three to the following year's amateur draft, declining to hold a lottery as had been done for Arocha. The commissioner's office apparently also sent teams a memorandum warning them not to illegally sign Cuban players, as this communication prompted a scathing editorial in the *Montreal Gazette* that referenced the memo and chastised the Toronto Blue Jays, who complied, with having “knuckle[d] under to a U.S. embargo against trade with Cuba.” Forcing Cuban players who entered the United States to take part in the amateur draft became the new policy hereafter.²⁰

¹⁹ Matthew Greller, “Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor, Your Fastball Pitchers Yearning for Strike Three: How Baseball Diplomacy Can Revitalize Major League Baseball and United States-Cuba Relations,” *American University Law Review* 14, no. 6 (1999), 1661-1671; “Sports Briefs: Baseball,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 12 September 1991, 8; “Around the Majors: Grievance,” *Washington Post*, 21 October 1991, C9.

²⁰ Greller, “Give Me Your Tired,” 1671-1673; Andrea Kupfer Schneider, “Baseball Diplomacy,” *Marquette Sports Law Review* 12, no. 1 (2001), 481; “Cuban Player Ban: Jays watch White House signals,” *Montreal Gazette*, 5 February 1993, A6.

Arocha's defection also provoked a response back home. The Cuban government reacted harshly, accusing the departed pitcher of "high treason against the Revolution." Arocha expressed concerns that his family would be punished for his act, though this never materialized. His official reputation in Cuba does appear to have suffered, however. References to Arocha in Cuban sports media immediately ceased after his defection, and one member of Cuba's junior national team, interviewed while competing in the United States in 1993, declared "Rene Arocha for us and for all the teams in Cuba, is a traitor." Additional defections after Arocha prompted baseball changes in Cuba. In addition to demoting a number of high-ranking baseball officials as punishment, Cuba began expanding privileges for its players and coaches as a means of decreasing their impetus for defection. By 1992, the island had begun allowing coaches in baseball and other sports to take positions as athletic advisors in other countries, provided that they agreed to turn over a large portion of their salary (typically fifty to eighty percent) to the government. In 1995, Cuba expanded this program, developing a form of early retirement for its baseball players that allowed them to play or coach professionally in other countries, though again still requisitioning the bulk of their incomes. In three years, over one thousand Cuban players and coaches took advantage of this system, and Cuba's government earned an estimated \$40 million in revenue as a result. Despite the windfall, the government canceled the retirement privileges in 1998 after Cuban fans complained that the exodus of talent was hurting the quality of their domestic baseball league, and attendance declined correspondingly.²¹

²¹ Greller, "Give Me Your Tired," 1668; Bjarkman, *History*, 398; Kevin F. Hayes, "Cuban Junior Team Gains Experience," *Hartford Courant*, 13 August 1993; William C. Rhoden, "Help Wanted? Call Havana: Cuban Coaches Fan the World," *New York Times*, 5 August 1992, B11; David Clark Scott, "Cuba Markets Its Sports Expertise," *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 December 1993, 17; Katherine E. Baird, "Cuban Baseball, Ideology, Politics, and Market Forces," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 29, no.2 (May 2005), 171; S.L. Price, *Pitching Around Fidel: A Journey into the Heart of Cuban Sport* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), 65; Jamail, *Full Count*, 70.

In the aftermath of Arocha's flight, the specter of defections loomed over each international competition that involved Cuba's baseball team. For the most part, though at times displaying some hesitation and taking precautions, Cuba did not allow these fears to keep its team grounded. Their first post-defection test of will came from the 1992 Olympics.

As the Barcelona Games approached, baseball, and by implication, Cuba, were thrust into the international spotlight. The 1992 Olympics were especially significant to baseball, as for the first time the sport would constitute a regular Olympic event, rather than a demonstration sport as it had been in 1984 and 1988. Coming off of such a difficult fiscal year, however, Cuba seemed ill-prepared to compete. As 1992 began, economic austerity measures designed to conserve dwindling resources remained in force. By the end of 1991, the financial strain had prompted not only a notable baseball defection, in Arocha's, but a spike in overall defections. A *Washington Post* article from late in the year noted over two thousand attempted defections across the Straits of Florida in 1991, with college-educated Cubans making up eighty percent of the fleeing population. Fiscal considerations were also taking a toll on athletics. Citing prohibitive costs, Cuba withdrew its soccer team from 1994 World Cup qualifying events in early 1992.²²

Having skipped the 1984 and 1988 Olympics over political issues, it seemed possible that Cuba would eschew the 1992 Games over monetary issues. On the contrary, however, Cuba does not appear to have ever considered backing out of the Barcelona Olympics, and did not shy away from competition leading up to the tournament. INDER official Gustavo Rolle, quoted in a June 12 newspaper article, defended Cuba's athletic commitment, affirming that "The Olympics

²² David Clark Scott, "Hard Times In Cuba," *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 March 1992, 1; Jose de Cordoba, "Cuba's Search for Offshore Oil to Replace Soviet Crude Supplies Appears to Falter," *Wall Street Journal*, 15 April 1992; A17; Leo Hockstader, "Cuba Plagued By Growing Brain Drain," *Washington Post*, 15 December 1991, A33; "Cuba limps out of World Cup soccer," *Montreal Gazette*, 24 January 1992, D10.

are important to [Cuba's] people" and as such, Cubans who were struggling economically would understand the burden of sending a team to Spain. A *Washington Post* article surmised that though the island struggled through bread rationing and "bicycles are replacing cars on city streets," a likely gold medal in Olympic baseball gave Cubans "one reason for optimism." By June, not only had Cuba confirmed its participation in the 1992 Games, but Castro had informed the IOC that he would be traveling to Barcelona to personally witness the event. Moreover, despite Arocha's defection the previous year, Cuba's baseball team continued its annual exhibitions against the United States. The two squads met for a friendly seven-game series, playing three games in Cuba and four games in the United States, with the Cubans winning five contests.²³

Once the tournament began, Cuba's baseball team continued its dominance, beating the United States 9-6 in the preliminary round. Though the close score prompted suggestions in the American media that economic troubles and fears of defections had weakened the Cuban club, U.S. coach Ron Fraser disagreed. Noting that Castro—who had been in Spain but departed on the day of the Cuba-U.S. game as a result of false reports from Miami that a rebellion was breaking out in Cuba—was not in attendance, Fraser argued that "if Castro felt this team were in trouble, he'd be here, sitting right behind them." Indeed, the three-run margin was as close as any team got to matching Cuba in Barcelona. En route to winning all nine games and capturing the gold medal, the Cubans defeated the United States once again in the tournament semifinals.

²³ Bill Brubaker, "Cuba's Renewed Mission: Olympic Glory," *Washington Post*, 12 July 1992, D1; ----, "Olympics: Even Without Star, Cuba May Be Best," *Washington Post*, 29 June 1992, D4; Christine Brennan, "Sanctions of Yugoslavia Spoil IOC's Hopes for a Politics-Free Olympics," *Washington Post*, 3 June 1992, D1; Howard W. French, "In Cuba, Baseball Provides Solace to Anxious People," *New York Times*, 6 July 1992, A3; Mark Maske, "Baseball: Rotation Worries Turn to McDonald," *Washington Post*, 6 July 1992, C7; Harvey Araton, "Baseball: Who to Watch," *New York Times*, 19 July 1992; S07.

Back in Cuba, a scheduled power shutdown for energy conservation was delayed so that the game could be shown on live television.²⁴

Continuing their global domination in baseball could not immunize Cuba against defections, however. In July 1993, Cuba took part in an international amateur sports competition called the World University Games, held in Buffalo, New York. Sending a lower-level baseball team, not the juggernaut national team, Cuba nonetheless had to absorb the loss of two players while in the United States. The first defection occurred just prior to Cuba's game against Taiwan. While the team was on the field preparing for the contest, a twenty-three year old pitcher named Edilberto Oropesa climbed up and over the ten-foot high outfield wall and got into a waiting vehicle, leaving his teammates and his native land behind. Three days later, the Cuban squad lost another athlete when twenty-two-year-old shortstop Reilando "Rey" Ordóñez executed a defection plan that was months in the development by walking out of the athletes' village and getting into a red Cadillac that was waiting to pick him up.²⁵

The attrition in Buffalo did not derail the Cuban team, but did provoke consternation. Following Oropesa's departure, a Cuban assistant coach downplayed its significance, boasting, "we'll still win the gold anyway." Manuel Morales Quintana, the head of Cuba's delegation, dismissed the defections as "just craziness" and assured reporters that Cuba's baseball program could more than absorb the loss of two players. Cuba did manage to overcome the defections on the field, winning the gold in Buffalo as expected. Behind the scenes, however, Cuban officials were less cavalier toward the exodus. After making his escape three days later, Ordóñez

²⁴ Hubert Mizell, "Cuban masters prevail," *Tampa Bay Times*, 30 July 1992, 10; Thomas Boswell, "Cubans Still Unbeaten, but No Longer Unbeatable," *Washington Post*, 30 July 1992, D8; -----, "Cuban Pitcher Ajete Is Ace of These Games," *Washington Post*, 5 August 1992; George Vecseys, "Cubans Show U.S. How to Play the Game: Baseball," *New York Times*, 5 August 1992, B16.

²⁵ Gabby Richards, "Cuban Baseball Player Announces Defection in Miami," *Washington Post*, 13 July 1993, C2; William C. Rhoden, "A Cuban Defector's Strange New World," *New York Times*, 16 July 1993, B9.

revealed that the heightened security Cuba placed its teams under following Oropesa's defection nearly derailed the plans for his own. An article in the *New York Times* recounted a brief but friendly ballpark conversation between a Spanish-speaking American citizen and a handful of Cuba's players that abruptly stopped when Cuban officials motioned for the players to return to their dugout.²⁶

Personnel losses continued later that year at the Caribbean Games in Puerto Rico. Castro delivered a speech to Cuba's delegation prior to their departure in November and his message revealed growing concerns over defections. Though he boasted confidence that his athletes' would perform well as the multi-sport event, joking that Cuba "might have to send an extra airplane to bring home the medals" after the competition, he also implored them to return home once the games ended. Conceding that "Medals are worth much," Castro contended that "the medal of the fatherland's prestige is worth even more...the battle of loyalty to the fatherland is worth more." Despite their leader's appeal, nearly forty members of Cuba's delegation to the Caribbean Games defected while in Puerto Rico. The only saving grace for Castro was not losing any members of Cuba's athletic crown jewel, the baseball team. That squad, despite the wave of departures, actually remained in Puerto Rico after the Caribbean Games had ended to play an exhibition game against a Puerto Rican professional winter league team, the San Juan Senators. The entire team returned home after losing a close 4-3 game to the Senators, ignoring chants from some in the crowd encouraging the players to "Quédate aquí!" (Stay here!).²⁷

²⁶ "Cuban Player Takes Intentional Walk," *New York Times*, 11 July 1993, S5; William C. Rhoden, "In Cuba, Baseball Is Major but Not Major League," *New York Times*, 14 July 1993, B10; ----, "Looking Before They Leap," *New York Times*, 15 July 1993, B13; "Cuban Official Downplays Players' Defections," *New York Times*, 14 July 1993, B10; "No. 1 Cuba Rolls Over U.S. by 7-2," *New York Times*, 15 July 1993, B15.

²⁷ Fidel Castro, "Castro Address Athletes Departing for Games," November 4, 1993, Castro Speech Data Base, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1993/19931104-1.html>; "2 More Cubans Defect," *New York Times*, 27 November 1993, 28; Peter Applebome, "Defection, Not Sport, At Games: Being just good enough to get out of the country," *New York Times*, 1 December 1993, A21; ----, "For Cuba, Mixed Scores In Games and in Politics," *New*

Indeed, despite the embarrassment from the desertions in Buffalo and Puerto Rico in 1993, Cuba continued to send its athletes abroad and to partake in international sports exchanges. Competitions pitting the United States against Cuba in baseball, which had become more common since the end of the 1980s, also continued in spite of the threats of defections. Just after the Buffalo competition concluded, Cuba upheld plans to send a team of eighteen-year-olds to compete in the World Junior Championships in Canada, and even allowed the group to stop in the United States for a round of exhibition games along the way. The next year, Cuba's prized national team once again visited the United States, competing in a four-team tournament in Tennessee, which they won over teams from Canada and Australia, apart from the hosts. Domingo Zabala, Cuba's leading baseball official, even announced his hopes to bring the team to the United States for exhibition games against Major League Baseball players once a players' strike that started in August 1994 canceled the remainder of the major league season as well as the World Series. Cuba likewise continued to host American teams, declining to use international competitions as a diplomatic stick against the United States' policy of political asylum for Cuban refugees. In August, the United States national baseball team visited Cuba for an exhibition against the home nation's squad. In October, an amateur U.S. team from Washington, D.C. went to Cuba to compete in the World Club Baseball Championship. Cuban fans demonstrated no ill will over the recent spate of defections, even cheering the American visitors and chanting "USA!" after they managed to defeat one of the Cuban teams in the

York Times, 3 December 1993, A20; Christine Brennan, "Lower Return of Castro's Athletic Exports," *Washington Post*, 5 December 1993, D3; Steve Wulf, "The Great Escape: Fleeing their troubled homeland, more than three dozen Cubans defected during a competition in Puerto Rico," *Sports Illustrated*, 6 December 1993.

tournament. Thus, while baseball defections were creating political challenges, baseball goodwill between Cubans and Americans continued unabated.²⁸

III

Politically, the rise in Post-Cold War defections from Cuba prompted significant changes in the United States-Cuba relationship. The Cuban exodus that began in the early 1990s was in no way limited to baseball players. The economic downturn prompted by the end of Soviet subsidies, coupled with the pressure that the tightened embargo posed out of the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act, produced an outgoing wave of Cubans. The United States Coast Guard picked up roughly 500 Cuban refugees in 1991. The next year, that number more than tripled, to 1,722, and in 1993, it increased again to 2,882. By August 1994, refugee totals from the previous year had doubled. The Cuban exodus had developed into a crisis, and showed no signs of relenting on its own.²⁹

The refugee flood created political problems on both sides. In Washington, the glut of Cuban arrivals threatened to reawaken memories of the Mariel Boatlift fiasco in the American public. For the Havana government, the fact that so many Cubans were risking their lives to escape the island hardly read as ringing endorsement for Cuba's chances to weather the "special period." Beginning in July 1994, however, Castro, as he had done back in 1980, opted to relax

²⁸ L.A. Lough, "Building Bridges on the Diamond," *Washington Post*, 5 August 1993, MD1; "Fanfare: Customs Officials in Brazil Want Cup Stars to Pay Up," *Washington Post*, 31 July 1994, D2; "Fanfare: World Cup in Hand, Parreira Resigns," *Washington Post*, 1 August 1994, C2; "Around The Majors," *Washington Post*, 11 October 1994, D2; Robert Facht, "A Quick Night's Work For Champion McClellan," *Washington Post*, 7 August 1993, F2; -----, "Fanfare: Fans to Owners: Keep Hands Off Baseball," *Washington Post*, 11 September 1993, G2; -----, "Fanfare: Golfers Beware: Cheaters Don't Win," *Washington Post*, 2 October 1993, D2.

²⁹ Leo Hockstader, "Cuba Plagued By Growing Brain Drain," *Washington Post*, 15 December 1991, A33; Melanie M. Ziegler, *U.S.-Cuban Cooperation Past, Present, and Future* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 50. "Revise the refugee policy," *Tampa Bay Times*, 19 August 1994, 22A.

emigration controls and allow dissenters to leave. Despite the perceived public relations cost from the hordes of Cubans deserting the island, condoning the exodus allowed the Castro regime to blame the refugee glut on the embargo for directly creating the economic crisis that was sparking the departures. As the crisis grew, the Clinton administration faced growing pressure from the Cuban exile community, though Cuban Americans were divided on how to approach the refugee problem. The hard-liners from the politically influential Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) saw the mass exodus as a signal that Castro's last days were at hand, and called for the United States to squeeze the Cuban regime even further. More moderate Cuban exile groups, including the Cuban Committee for Democracy (CCD) wanted to ensure continued U.S. government favorability toward Cuban refugees.³⁰

The Clinton administration, above all else, sought to minimize the political damage. The Mariel potential loomed large to President Clinton, who as governor of Arkansas had seen his reelection hopes drubbed in 1980 over a riot that broke out among Cuban refugees at the Fort Chaffee camp in his home state. Once the Castro regime began lifting restrictions on dissident departures, the Clinton administration responded by clamping down on refugee privileges in the United States to try and dissuade defectors. Beginning in August, Cubans who entered the United States illegally were detained in a refugee camp in Miami, and Cubans picked up at sea were held at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station, as had been the protocol for a recent spate of Haitian refugees. In a nod to the powerful anti-Castro CANF lobby, Clinton also upped the economic pressure on Cuba, ending cash remittances to the island from Cuban relatives, which the Castro regime was able to seize since legalizing the dollar the year before, and restricting charter flights to Cuba. The measures proved insufficient, however, as the migrant flood

³⁰ Ziegler, "Cooperation," 50-51; LeoGrande, "Engagement," 15; Myra MacPherson, "Between Miami and Havana: Cuba in Search of Itself," *Washington Post*, 17 April 1994; C3.

continued and the numbers at Guantanamo swelled thanks to more than 37,000 Cubans intercepted at sea during August and September. The rising tide of detainees sparked fears of violence, disease, and despair inside the camps. Amidst the refugee crisis, baseball attempted to play a conciliatory role, as Cuban national and former major league player Tony Pérez, then in a front office position with the Florida Marlins, traveled to Cuba with a delegation from the team and conducted an instructional clinic with some of the detainees at Guantanamo.³¹

After the Clinton measures failed to stem the flow from Cuba, it became clear that a two-party solution was necessary. The United States secretly reached out to the Castro government over the refugee crisis, with Clinton sending the first signal through Mexican president Carlos Salinas, and Castro responding through his friend, Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez. Citing his previous bad experience with a Cuban refugee problem, Clinton declared to García Márquez, in warning the Castro regime to limit the dissident departures, that he would not lose another election over Cuba. The administration began secret negotiations with the Cuban government, and that September these discussions yielded a new bilateral immigration agreement that committed both sides to stopping the refugee flow. Havana agreed to take steps to limit the numbers of illegal departures. The United States, in return, agreed to clear the backlog of Cubans who had obtained exit visas from Cuba but were still awaiting entrance visas from Washington. The Clinton administration also pledged to allow 20,000 legal immigrants from Cuba per year. At the same time, the United States attempted to discourage illegal migration by agreeing to return to Cuba any defectors captured at sea. This policy of return, informally dubbed “wet foot, dry foot” since reaching U.S. soil was now a prerequisite for receiving

³¹ Ziegler, “Cooperation,” 51-52; LeoGrande, “Engagement,” 15. “Batter Up,” *Intelligencer* (Philadelphia), C Edition, 1 December 1994, B8.

political asylum, marked a significant change in previously liberal Cuban immigration policies. Cuba and the United States signed a subsequent agreement finalizing the new arrangements in May 1995.³²

The 1994-1995 immigration agreements slowed the refugee tide, but led to other problems. Because the wet foot, dry foot provision made reaching American shores a necessity for would-be defectors, exiting Cubans began forgoing rickety rafts in favor of speed boats, and a black market industry in human smuggling developed from speed boat operators, who charged as much as \$10,000 per person for illegal transportation to the United States. Furthermore, because the Washington government was now actively discouraging defection, humanitarian organizations and Cuban exiles stepped up efforts to assist those seeking to escape Cuba. One particular organization, *Hermanos al Rescate*, or Brothers to the Rescue, had previously flown planes over the Florida Straits to search for rafters and inform the Coast Guard of those needing rescue at sea. Once the United States began returning refugees found in the water, however, Brothers to the Rescue turned its attention to monitoring the capture and detainment of Cuban defectors to ensure that the Cuban government was keeping its word not to punish those caught attempting to flee. The surveillance flights that resulted from this new mission brought the organization's planes into Cuban air space more frequently, and fostered clashes with the Cuban government on a more regular basis.³³

In 1996, a confrontation over these Brothers to the Rescue flights drove U.S.-Cuba policy in a decidedly more antagonistic direction. On February 24, Cuba, alleging that its airspace had been violated, shot down two planes that belonged to the organization. Of the four Cuban

³² Ziegler, "Cooperation," 52-54; Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 615; Tim Golden, "U.S.-Cuba Accord Sets Off A Surge Of New Refugees," *New York Times*, 11 September 1994, 1.

³³ Ziegler, "Cooperation," 57-58.

nationals killed in the attack, three were naturalized U.S. citizens, and the fourth had obtained permanent residency in the United States. The backlash over the shooting forced Clinton, facing reelection that November, to take a hard line against the Castro government. In February 1995, Senator Jesse Helms and Representative Dan Burton had introduced legislation designed to ratchet up the pressure on Cuba. The Helms-Burton bill sought to legally exclude the possibility of future normalization with the Castro government and threatened sanctions against foreign countries that sent economic aid to Havana and against foreign businesses that traded with Cuba. Though the president had opposed the Helms-Burton legislation in 1995, public pressure led Clinton to condemn the shoot down as “a brutal and cruel act” and to sign a revised version of the bill into law in 1996 to “send a powerful, unified message.” In addition to the above measures, the Helms-Burton Act as approved removed the president’s power to revoke the embargo by codifying into law all executive acts on Cuba since the 1960s. Normalization, which would now require a legislative act, seemed less of a possibility by the middle of the decade.³⁴

The Post-Cold War struggles from Cuba’s economic “special period” and the resulting flow of refugees also created changes in the sporting realm. From an athletic standpoint, the influx of Cuban players and their questionable legal status prompted Major League Baseball to revisit its policy limiting teams from signing Cubans. The 1977 Kuhn Directive had not envisioned the spate of defections that started in the early 1990s, and major league officials responded by attempting to cast Cuban players under traditional policies. This meant that those Cuban defectors who requested asylum and were granted residency in the United States were subject to the amateur draft, as were all players who resided in U.S. territories. As early as 1993,

³⁴ Ziegler, “Cooperation,” 31-32; LeoGrande, “Engagement,” 24-25; Azicri, *Reinventing Socialism*, 205-210; William J. Clinton, “Remarks on Signing the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996,” March 12, 1996, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=52531&st=Cuba&st1=>.

however, the Major League Baseball Players Association began challenging this status and advocating that Cuban players receive the same free agency rights granted to other international players.³⁵

The restrictiveness of league policy prompted defecting players and their agents to get creative. In 1995, one agent, Joe Cubas, exploited a loophole and developed a new tactic for bringing Cuban players into American professional baseball. That year, two high profile players, Osvaldo Fernández and Liván Hernández, defected while traveling abroad with Cuba's national team. Rather than requesting asylum in the United States, however, both players, under Cubas's advice, traveled to the Dominican Republic. Upon establishing residency there, they were able to bypass the amateur draft and were free to sign with the highest bidding major league team. This tactic became standard practice, as Cubas and other agents for defecting players began directing their clients to foreign nations to establish residency that would give them free agency rights in Major League Baseball. Since 1995, several other high-profile Cuban defectors, including Orlando "El Duque" Hernández, José Contreras, Yoenis Céspedes, and Aroldis Chapman, have taken the third nation route and have entered the major leagues as free agents, enabling them to sign more lucrative contracts than are typically available to drafted players, who are restricted to negotiating with a single team. Liván Hernández's 1996 deal with the Florida Marlins, worth \$4.6 million over three years, set a record for Cuban defectors and included a \$3.5 million signing bonus. Such lofty contracts increased the pull on Cuban players to defect, and salaries continued to rise through the remainder of the decade. After defecting in late 1997, Liván's half-brother Orlando agreed to a four-year, \$6.6 million deal with the

³⁵ Schneider, "Baseball Diplomacy," 480; Murray Chass, "Policy On Cubans Draws Fire," *New York Times*, 19 November 1993, B13.

Yankees. Countryman José Contreras signed with the same club in 2002 for \$32 million over four years.³⁶

As defections continued, particularly among high-profile players, Cuba intensified its efforts to stunt the flow of exiting athletes. Though the national baseball team still traveled abroad for international competition, in some instances Cuba withdrew over defection concerns. In late 1995, a planned exhibition series in Venezuela between the Cuban team and the host nation was abruptly canceled after two pitchers fled upon arriving. Cuba also appears to have stepped up surveillance on athletes believed to be potential defectors. Tennis player Bobby Rodríguez, who defected in 1994, admitted to having his vehicle searched and his travel privileges as an athlete revoked prior to his departure. In baseball, Cuba began a crack down by suspending players thought to be defection threats. In late 1996, Orlando Hernández and two fellow national team players were banned from Cuban baseball for their suspected involvement in Liván's defection the previous year.³⁷

Concerns over defections also raised serious questions about the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. Leading up to the competition, a number of American media outlets questioned if Castro would boycott the Olympics and keep his athletes home to avoid the potential embarrassment of losing additional prominent citizens. One commentary in the *Newport News*,

³⁶ Murray Chass, "New Route To Majors For Cuban Defectors," *New York Times*, 7 December 1995, B24; ----, "Cuban Pitcher Is Offered A Record Signing Bonus," *New York Times*, 13 January 1996, 33; "Fanfare: Cuba Loses Two to U.S.: Pitcher and Game," *Washington Post*, 30 July 1995, D2; Claire Smith, "Cuban Pitcher Gambles On a Major League Life," *New York Times*, 19 February 1996, C2; Gwen Knapp, "Baseball: Cuban pitcher not alone in land of the Giants; Osvaldo Fernandez has lots of help in land of opportunity," *Ottawa Citizen*, 1 March 1996, B2; Mark Maske, "Special Agent, Bearing Arms; Little Intrigue, Lot of Money Bring Cuba's Best to the U.S.," *Washington Post*, 11 February 1996, D1; Buster Olney, "Defector From Cuba Will Join The Yanks," *New York Times*, 7 March 1998, C3; Steve Fainaru and Ray Sánchez, *The Duke of Havana: Baseball, Cuba, and the Search for the American Dream* (New York: Villiard, 2001), 232-235.

³⁷ Robert Facht, "Fresno State Mum Over Title IX," *Washington Post*, 9 December 1995, D2; Ethan Skolnick, "Borderline Decision After Defecting, Cuban Tennis Player Lands in Valley," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 July 1995, 8; Larry Rother, "Cuba Makes a Strict Move In Order to Deter Defections," *New York Times*, 1 November 1996, B22; Fainaru and Sanchez, *Duke*, 152-156.

Virginia *Daily Press* cited two boxers who defected in Mexico just prior to the Atlanta Games, and questioned whether it was an ominous sign: “one wonders if, after the Olympics conclude in Atlanta, there will be any Cubans left to go back to Cuba.” A columnist for the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* rhetorically asked before the 1996 Olympics, “will Cuba’s baseball team win its second straight gold medal before most players have a chance to defect?” As usual, Cuban leaders attempted to downplay such speculation. Head baseball official Domingo Zabala chided that player defection “isn’t something we need to talk about” with athletes and dismissed fears over potential departures in Atlanta. Though defection did not deter Cuba from sending its best athletes to Atlanta, Castro did allude to the prospect in a farewell address to Cuba’s delegation that chastised “attempts to buy off athletes and convince them to be traitors to their countries, to the sports community, and to their teammates.” The Cuban leader warned his departing athletes that “all the resources and all the tricks, all the ruses and all their intelligence will be deployed against our delegation” by subversive forces in Atlanta. He cautioned them that “history will never forgive the athlete, the trainer, the coach or the manager who becomes a traitor,” but declared his confidence that Cuba was “sending a delegation of patriots” to the Olympics. Once the competition began, an article in *USA Today* surmised that the twelve-foot high fence surrounding the athletes’ village was keeping would-be Cuban defectors inside as much as it was keeping potential threats to the participants outside.³⁸

Cuba’s baseball experience in the Atlanta Games was undoubtedly bittersweet.

Surviving a few close games, the Cuban team overcame the recent defections from high-profile

³⁸ Dave Anderson, “Will Cuba Tolerate Many More Defectors?” *New York Times*, 1 July 1996, C4; -----, “Cuban Defectors Will Not Climb This Fence,” *New York Times*, 21 July 1996, S5; “At Week’s End: Capsules Of Commentary On Events In The News,” *Daily Press*, 13 July 1996, A10; Michael Mayo, “100 Years of Gold & Glory; Let The Celebration Begin,” *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, 19 July 1996, 1G; Tom Weir, “Castro’s Team Reigns,” *USA Today*, 9 May 1996, 1C; Fidel Castro, “Our athletes’ honor interests us more than medals,” *Granma International*, 24 July 1996, 14.

players Osvaldo Fernández and Liván Hernández and managed to keep its undefeated Olympic streak alive, winning all seven of its contests in capturing the gold medal once again. The predictions for a massive Cuban athlete exodus, which had prompted jokes in American newspapers, did not materialize. The team did not escape Atlanta unscathed, however, as two players defected in Georgia just prior to the competition. One of the departing athletes, star pitcher Rolando Arrojo, obtained a \$7 million signing bonus in agreeing to a contract with the Tampa Bay Devil Rays the next year. Cuba's press opted to ignore the losses and emphasized the victories. The front-page headline for *Granma International* on August 14 heralded Cuba's eighth-place finish in the overall medal count, and the ensuing article championed the accomplishment in light of economic decline and the pressure of the embargo.³⁹

Apart from the Olympics, defections were beginning to take a toll on U.S.-Cuba baseball exchanges. In July 1997, Cuba balked at continuing what had become an annual exhibition series against the United States amateur team, canceling plans to travel to Millington, Tennessee just two days before the scheduled games were to begin. Though Cuban officials cited a spate of bombings in Havana and expressed concerns over player safety in the United States, the more likely explanation came the previous week, when yet another member of Cuba's national team had defected while traveling with the club in Colombia. Concerns over likely defections were perhaps confirmed a few weeks later, when Cuban officials permanently banned three players for allegedly making attempts to flee Cuba and sign with professional teams in the United States. Indeed, the impact of this attrition was beginning to show. The next month, Cuba lost to Japan

³⁹ Ken Rosenthal, "Defects appear in foundation of the Cuban baseball dynasty," *Baltimore Sun*, 23 July 1996, 10D; Jerry Schwartz, "Cuban Slug Their Way Past Japan to Gold Medal," *New York Times*, 3 August 1996, 28; Jere Longman, "His Eye on Majors, Cuba's Top Pitcher Defects in Georgia," *New York Times*, 11 July 1996, B15; Tom Spousta, "Shelled, But Still The Future," *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, 29 May 1997, 1C; "8th Place!," *Granma International*, 14 August 1996, 1.

in the final of baseball's International Cup tournament. The defeat broke a 134-game winning streak and was the first time that the Cubans had failed to win a major international competition since the 1987 Pan American Games.⁴⁰

Baseball goodwill between Cuba and the United States took another hit that autumn. Bolstered by recent Cuban defector Livan Hernandez, the Florida Marlins reached the 1997 World Series in October. In the opening contest against the Cleveland Indians, Livan became the first Cuban pitcher to start a World Series game since Luis Tiant in 1975. His meteoric success in the major leagues against the backdrop of his defection prompted extensive coverage in the American media. The night after Livan's game one victory, NBC aired a pre-game segment that discussed his flight from Cuba, as well as his half-brother Orlando, who had remained behind. A number of newspapers noted how Livan's presence boosted interest among Cuban baseball fans. The Marlins' Spanish language radio station in Key West increased its broadcast wattage for the remaining games after receiving a number of calls from Cuban listeners. For Livan's game five start on the mound, NBC allowed TV Martí and Radio Martí to broadcast their signal to Cuba, though Cuban officials managed to scramble the television feed. A *Boston Globe* article recounting an interview with a dissident who had recently approached an American reporter in Cuba noted the Marlins baseball cap that the outspoken Castro critic wore. On his way to helping the Marlins win the championship and being named World Series Most Valuable Player, Livan, one writer argued, was "smashing holes in the proverbial Berlin Wall that Fidel Castro has tried to keep around his baseball-blessed nation."⁴¹

⁴⁰ "Cuba Calls Off Games in U.S.," *New York Times*, 14 July 1997, C3; "World," *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 July 1997, A10; "Castro Verifies His Fears, Failing By Blocking Players' U.S. Travels," *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, 17 July 1997, 18A; "Results Plus: Baseball: Cuba Expels a Player and Three Coaches," *New York Times*, 23 July 1997, B10; John Powers, "A Greco-Roman tussle for IOC," *Boston Globe*, 17 August 1997, C14.

⁴¹ Murray Chass, "In Marlins vs. Indians, a Clash of Young and Old," *New York Times*, 18 October 1997, C1; Larry Rother, "Marlins Star Is a Hero Cuba Ignores," *New York Times*, 19 October 1997, 9; Jody A. Benjamin,

Just weeks after the World Series ended, Orlando Hernandez defected from Cuba, seeking to join his half-brother Liván in the major leagues. One year later, Orlando had written his own improbable success story of providing a critical victory in the American League Championship Series and helping to pitch the Yankees to a World Series title in 1998. In light of the Hernandez brothers' success in consecutive years, Castro in late 1998 suggested to media outlets that Cuba be offered two Major League Baseball teams of its own and receive compensation for players to defect to the United States. It was a feeble attempt to legitimize, from Cuba's perspective, the illegitimate but increasingly common practice of high profile Cuban baseball players taking their talents to North America. On the American side, the defections could be counted as evidence that professional baseball's deployment to Cuba appeared to having at least an antagonistic effect in Havana, if not a destabilizing one.⁴²

"Hernandez Stars In Little Havana," *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, 19 October 1997, 25C; Jim Sarni, "Series Not Drawing National Interest," *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, 20 October 1997, 4C; David Beard, "Radio Duo Reports Fall Classic To Cuba," *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, 20 October 1997, 22C; Bernie Lincicome, "Livan Leavin' Cleveland In Great Shape," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 October 1997, 4; Ken Rosenthal, "Hernandez story one for history books," *Baltimore Sun*, 24 October 1997, 1D; Steve Fainaru, "Free speech in Cuba? It's up for debate," *Boston Globe*, 20 October 1997, A2; Claire Smith, "Series No One Wanted Has an Inner Beauty," *New York Times*, 26 October 1997, SP9.

⁴² "Sidelines," *Ottawa Citizen*, 27 October 1998, C6.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Hit-and-run: Baseball Deployment and the 1990s, Part II

It seemed unlikely, amidst the climate of confrontation, punitive legislation, and highly-publicized defections that Cuba and the United States would ultimately come to stage a significant baseball exchange by the end of the decade. In truth, however, while the Cuban Democracy Act and the Helms-Burton Act had cemented the embargo and sought to put additional pressures on the Castro government, the Clinton administration had, on a number of occasions, walked a more moderate line with regard to Cuba. In addition to the 1994 negotiations that produced the bilateral immigration agreement, the United States reached out to Castro in a few more instances during the 1990s. In a 2005 speech, Castro revealed how after a spate of bombings rocked hotels in Havana in 1997, the United States Interests Section actually relayed a warning over possible terrorist activities in Cuba to the Havana regime. This exchange prompted a meeting between previous intermediary Gabriel García Márquez and a few high-ranking Clinton administration officials over sharing information regarding terrorist plots. In October 1995, Bernardo Benes, a Cuban American businessman who served as an intermediary to the Castro regime on a number of occasions during the Carter and Reagan presidencies, traveled to Cuba and met with Ricardo Alarcón, formerly the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Though not acting in an official capacity for the Clinton administration, Benes received U.S.

approval before departing, and his visit helped lead to Cuba's allowing American media outlets to open permanent news bureaus in Havana beginning in 1997.¹

U.S. policy toward Cuba shifted slightly in 1998. Following Pope John Paul II's visit to the island in January 1998, the Clinton administration revoked a number of the restrictions put into place two years earlier by the Helms-Burton Act. Reflecting a desire, in Secretary of State Madeline Albright's words, "to reach out to the people of Cuba to make their lives more tolerable," the administration authorized humanitarian missions to Cuba, once again allowed Cuban Americans to send monetary donations to family members on the island, and pledged to expedite licenses allowing American companies to sell medical supplies to Cuba and work with congressional leaders to "develop bipartisan legislation to meet humanitarian food needs on the island."²

These concessions did not change U.S. policy toward Castro, however, nor did they spell the end of the blockade, as administration officials were quick to clarify. Albright specified that the March 1998 modifications "do not reflect a change in policy towards the Cuban Government. That policy has been, and remains, to seek a peaceful transition to democracy." President Clinton echoed this sentiment in his own remarks, affirming that "these measure were fully consistent with the letter and spirit of the Cuban Democracy Act and the [Helms-Burton Act],"

¹ Fidel Castro, "A Different Behavior," May 20, 2005, Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.cubaminrex.cu/english/SpeechesContributions/FCR/2005/Speech3.html>; Robert M. Levine, *Secret Missions to Cuba* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 172-173.

² Madeline K. Albright, "Opening Remarks on Cuba at Press Briefing followed by Question and Answer Session by other Administration Officials," March 20, 1998, U.S. Department of State, <http://1997-2001.state.gov/www/statements/1998/980320.html>.

that they were designed “to support Cuba’s people without supporting its regime,” and that “pressure on the regime for democratic change” continued to be a fundamental goal.³

Indeed, through relaxing restrictions, the Clinton administration was seeking to return to the Track II components of the Cuban Democracy Act. Allowing increased contacts between Cubans and Americans, the United States hoped, would gradually erode support for Communism and Castro within Cuba. Albright, in fact, cited historical precedent to this end, recalling how the Pope’s visit to Poland in 1979 helped spark organization and interaction across churches and created pressure for change:

[W]hat we have been trying to do is build on the Pope’s visit...the Pope’s trip to Poland in 1979 was one of the catalytic events in bringing about the fall of communism in Poland and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe...what happened was that as a result of that trip to Poland, the churches, the parishes, learned about the logistic abilities in networking and working with each other. And then the people...realized how many of each other there were. And what we are trying to build on is what happened in Cuba, not because of anything Castro has done because...he has not, in fact, to my mind, responded in any kind of a generous way to the Pope’s trip. But the people of Cuba did. So what we want to do is to build on that.⁴

The Clinton administration expanded these efforts the following year. In January 1999, Albright announced additional measures on Cuba designed to facilitate increased cultural encounters, specifically regarding music, arts, and sports. The policy changes also increased the

³ Ibid.; Willian J. Clinton, “Statement on Cuba,” March 20, 1998, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=55654&st=Cuba&st1=#axzz1kyXHjOGN>.

⁴ Azicri, *Reinventing Socialism*, 221; Madeline K. Albright, “Address & Question and Answer Session before the American Association of Newspaper Editors, J.W. Marriott Hotel,” April 2, 1998, U.S. Department of State, <http://1997-2001.state.gov/www/statements/1998/980402.html>.

amount of money that Cuban Americans could send to relatives in Cuba, streamlined the visa process, and created more flights to Cuba, facilitating easier travel.⁵

I

By allowing more people-to-people contact between Cubans and Americans, the Clinton administration also cleared the way for a high-profile baseball exchange between Cuba and Major League Baseball. Efforts to use baseball as a facilitator for diplomacy and improve relations between Washington and Havana had originated in the 1970s, but were never realized. The 1999 exchange, like the 1970s proposals, would take on the term “baseball diplomacy” in the American press. In reality, however, the 1999 series was another effort at “baseball deployment.” Though in general the participants in this and other cultural exchanges had more benevolent intentions regarding U.S.-Cuba relations, the changes in the Clinton administration’s Cuba policy were not designed to foster a better relationship with the Castro government, but instead aimed to aid Cuban people and hasten Castro’s downfall, through fostering discord in Cuba as a result of increased exposure to American people, prosperity, and culture. The players, sports officials, and other participants did not knowingly act as metaphorical soldiers hiding in a Trojan horse, but baseball in 1999 was deployed to Cuba as a potential weapon, not as an olive branch.

The Baltimore Orioles took advantage of the policy modifications and successfully completed arrangements to play an exhibition series against Cuba’s national baseball team. The 1999 exchange that resulted was the culmination of a multi-year effort for the Orioles. Team owner Peter Angelos had initiated efforts to take his club to Cuba for an exhibition game in 1995

⁵ Madeline K. Albright, “Statement on Cuba,” January 5, 1999, U.S. Department of State, <http://1997-2001.state.gov/www/statements/1999/990105.html>.

at the behest of *Washington Post* writer Scott Armstrong, who had been advocating a Cuban baseball exchange even longer. Armstrong began lobbying for such a game in the 1980s and had approached previous Orioles owner Edward Bennett Williams and then-commissioner Bart Giamatti with no success. During the 1994 baseball strike, he broached the idea to the players' union, only to be rejected yet again. Finally, in 1995, Armstrong met Angelos through an unlikely mutual acquaintance—actor Mike Farrell, best known for playing Captain B. J. Hunnicut on the television series “M.A.S.H.” Armstrong discussed the proposal with Angelos, who embraced the opportunity and began lobbying Major League Baseball and the state department. In 1996, however, the Brothers to the Rescue shooting and the ensuing Helms-Burton Act quashed the Orioles' hopes of baseball diplomacy for the time being. Angelos persisted, despite the setback, and the state department granted permission for an Orioles delegation to begin negotiations with Cuba the same week it announced the policy changes in 1999.⁶

State department approval to begin planning the games was only the first step, however, in a complicated process. Numerous obstacles, beyond Clinton administration approval, still confronted the Orioles' efforts to play ball with Cuba. After the team began talks with the Cuban government and the Major League Baseball Players Association, political and logistical issues resulting from the hostile relationship between Washington and Havana again threatened the chances for a baseball exchange.

One concern was player safety. Shortly after the Orioles announced their plans, Major League Baseball officials and the players' union expressed reservations about players traveling

⁶ Tim Weiner, “U.S. Ready To Ease Some Restrictions In Policy On Cuba,” *New York Times*, 5 January 1999, A1; Madeline K. Albright, Interviewed by Jim Lehrer, *PBS-TV Newshour*, January 5, 1999, Public Broadcasting Service, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/jan-june99/albright_1-5.html; Ellen Gamerman, “The Man Behind O's Game in Cuba,” *Baltimore Sun*, 26 March 1999, 1A.

to Cuba. The safety of the players involved had to be considered not only during the trip to Havana, but also before and after the trip. Fears arose that strong anti-Castro sentiments in the United States could put players at risk of becoming targets for terrorist organizations. Given the threats directed at participating players as well as commissioner Bowie Kuhn during the 1978 baseball diplomacy efforts, these concerns were certainly reasonable.⁷

Other safety concerns arose about the playing field at Havana's *Estadio Latinoamericano*. During a planning trip to Havana in January, the Orioles delegation, accompanied by representatives from the Major League Baseball Players Association, inspected the stadium and playing surface. Before the Americans agreed to the contest, Cuba had to address several issues. The playing field, which was considerably worn from frequent use by the Cuban League, required significant attention, and Major League Baseball even sent American groundskeepers to Havana to help bring the field up to major league specifications and ensure player safety. The stadium's unpadded outfield walls posed another complication. The players' union insisted that the walls be padded before the game could occur. This created a financial hold-up, however, as Cuba's government balked at paying the estimated \$400,000 cost to import the necessary padding, and the embargo prevented Major League Baseball from purchasing and shipping the padding from the United States. In the end, Major League Baseball covered the cost of the padding, which was shipped from Japan to avoid violating the embargo.⁸

Baseball officials also questioned how Cuban-born major league players would react to the Orioles' trip. Indeed, shortly before the team traveled to Havana in late March, several

⁷ Murray Chass, "Major Leagues Have Security Concerns Over Orioles' Proposal To Play Cuba," *New York Times*, 5 January 1999, D8.

⁸ Peter Schmuck, "Cubans, O's Face Extra Innings," *Baltimore Sun*, 19 January 1999, 1C; ----, "Baseball, Politics, and History Meet in Havana," *Baltimore Sun*, 28 March 1999, 3C; Jeff Seidel, "Capitos Returns to Familiar Turf," *Washington Post*, 19 May 1999, M21.

individuals around the league spoke out against the exhibition game in Cuba. The most vocal criticism came from Florida Marlins owner John W. Henry, who denounced the games and speculated that those who supported them were ignorant of the “depth of oppression in Cuba.” The Marlins’ owner accused Angelos of using the trip as an opportunity to recruit Cuban talent. Henry was also upset that Major League Baseball failed to discuss the game with owners or players ahead of time, and argued that if any team played in Cuba, it should be the Miami-based Marlins, given the community’s exile population. Others around the league also voiced dissatisfaction. New York Mets third base coach Cookie Rojas, who grew up in Havana before leaving in 1961, criticized the games in light of the Castro regime’s human rights violations. Mets shortstop Rey Ordóñez and Marlins pitcher Liván Hernández, both Cuban defectors, likewise expressed opposition to the Orioles’ trip. Hernández’s half-brother and fellow defector, Orlando “El Duque” Hernández, declined to comment on the game.⁹

Major League Baseball also had to contend with disgruntled umpires. In March, the umpires’ union filed a grievance over the scheduled contest in Cuba. Umpires opposed being sent to Cuba to work the Havana game because baseball officials had not consulted with them prior to finalizing it. Major League Baseball decided, in light of the opposition, to use only Cuban umpires for the game in Havana.¹⁰

In addition to these issues, the Orioles had to overcome a number of logistical differences between Cuban and American baseball. Although professional baseball in the United States only uses wooden bats, Cuban teams, which compete mostly in international amateur competitions, had used aluminum bats—more durable and economical than wooden ones—since the 1970s.

⁹ Murray Chass, “Cubans in Majors Opposing Orioles’ Trip to Homeland,” *New York Times*, 25 March 1999, D3; Mike Phillips, “Henry Blasts Decision to Play in Cuba,” *Miami Herald*, 26 March 1999.

¹⁰ “Umpires Protest Strike-Zone Change,” *New York Times*, 13 March 1999, D7; “Umpires May Skip Trip to Cuba,” *New York Times*, 16 March 1999, D4.

Metal bats were more practical in Cuba, a nation that struggles to find adequate sports equipment, among other commodities. On the other hand, these bats pose far more danger to an opposing pitcher, as they are lighter, strike the ball faster, and generate greater “pop” than wooden bats. Cuba had compensated for this reality by using only locally-made baseballs that were softer than the ones used in the major leagues. The Orioles were not about to subject their pitchers to the danger of aluminum bats, however, meaning that a compromise would have to come from the Cuban side. Fortuitously, the International Baseball Association announced that spring that it would bar aluminum bats in favor of wood beginning at the Pan-American games that summer. The Cubans, thus, would now have to adopt wooden bats to play in international competitions. Though this change resolved the bat issue in the Orioles game, the Cuban players, it should be noted, were put at a slight disadvantage by having little time to adjust to their new bats before the game.¹¹

Despite overcoming these obstacles, talks between the Orioles and Cuba continued to stall through January and February and threatened the chances of playing games that spring. The question of distributing proceeds from the Havana game created the biggest delay. The Clinton administration was adamant that no money from the baseball exchange go to support the Castro regime. As a result, the state department and the Orioles initially advocated channeling any revenue from the Havana game to needy Cubans through Catholic Relief Services, a charity based in Baltimore. The Cuban government opposed any involvement by a Catholic charity, however, and was apparently upset that Tom Garofalo, a representative of Catholic Relief Services, had accompanied the baseball delegation to Havana for negotiations. The Cuban officials preferred to use the money for hurricane relief efforts in Central America, and an article

¹¹ Tom Weir, “Cubans Have Knock On Wooden Bats,” *USA Today*, 25 March 1999, 1C; Murray Chass, “For Cubans, Wood Bats Mean More Sting (and Less Ping),” *New York Times*, 27 March 1999, D2.

in *Granma International* even declared that “Cuba will not renounce this just and noble prerequisite, even if no games at all take place.” Major League Baseball attempted to resolve the dispute by pledging the money to baseball-related charity work in Cuba.¹²

When the Orioles delegation, state department, and Cuban INDER officials met in Florida in early March to finalize an agreement, the talks again hit a wall. While Cuba relented from its original stance, the state department apparently refused to go along with the Major League Baseball proposal for donating the money to Cuban youth baseball. Negotiations continued well into the night of March 5, before Scott Armstrong, part of the Orioles contingent, phoned Samuel R. Berger, National Security Advisor to President Clinton. Berger got on the phone with the state department’s negotiators around 2 a.m. and pressed them to agree to the compromise. A tentative deal came together the next day, and by March 15, the Orioles finalized arrangements for two exhibition games with the Cuban national baseball team, the first in Havana on March 28, and the second in Baltimore on May 3.¹³

Political pressure also threatened the Orioles’ efforts with Cuba. Opposition to the baseball exchange arose as soon as negotiations commenced in January and continued after details emerged in March. While a few members of Congress criticized the Clinton administration’s Cuba policies in general, others attacked the baseball game, specifically, as an abomination. Florida Representative Ilena Ros-Lehtinen spearheaded the opposition to baseball diplomacy. Speaking out for her large Cuban American constituency, Ros-Lehtinen insisted that

¹² Peter Schmuck, “Cubans, O’s Face Extra Innings,” *Baltimore Sun*, 19 January 1999, 1C; “Joint communiqué issued by INDER and the Baltimore Orioles,” *Granma International*, 24 January 1999, 15; Morris Morley and Chris McGillion, *Unfinished Business: America and Cuba After the Cold War, 1989-2001* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002), 150.

¹³ Murray Chass, “Deal Is Finally Worked Out For Orioles-Cuba Exhibition,” *New York Times*, 7 March 1999, SP2; ----, “Cuba-Bound Owner of Orioles Wants to Win,” *New York Times*, 8 March 1999, D7; “Cuban team will play against Baltimore Orioles,” *Granma International*, 14 March 1999, 14; Ellen Gamerman, “The Man Behind O’s Game in Cuba,” *Baltimore Sun*, 26 March 1999, 1A.

the game would only provide the Castro administration with a positive public relations boost and prolong the Cuban peoples' suffering. New Jersey Representative Robert Menendez joined Ros-Lehtinen in denouncing the Clinton administration's Cuba policy as well as the baseball game. Congressman Dan Burton of Indiana even accused the state department and the Clinton administration of ignoring the war on drugs and Cuba's role in drug trafficking by permitting a thaw in Cuban relations.¹⁴

Adding to these challenges, in the months and weeks leading to the game the Cuban government did little to endear itself to American critics. Though Cuba consented on the proposed baseball exchange, it recognized that the Clinton administration's 1998 and 1999 measures had not been enacted to bolster the political relationship between Washington and Havana. In announcing Clinton's January 1999 modifications, an article in *Granma* focused on the fact that the embargo remained in place. In a late-January speech, Ricardo Alarcón diminished the importance of the Clinton measures. In discussing provisions allowing increased food and medicine sales to Cuba, Alarcón countered that "the problems posed by the blockade could not be resolved even if they succeeded in its removal from these two areas...It would not even be significant in economic terms, nor would it make the blockade less callous and inhuman." Alarcón also described the proposed Orioles' game as "a challenge" and "the first test" in terms of Cuba's willingness to negotiate with the United States. The next month, a *Granma* writer denounced complications from recent Cuban efforts to acquire medicine from the

¹⁴ "Congress Pair With Cuban Ties Rip Trip," *Baltimore Sun*, 25 March 1999; Department of State, Daily Press Briefing number 18, 10 February 1999, on file with author.

United States, deeming the previously announced policy change “mere lip service” from the Washington government.¹⁵

Cuba’s antagonistic response went beyond rhetoric. Shortly after the state department announced the new policy changes in January, the Cuban government stepped up efforts to suppress dissension on the island by passing the “Law to Protect National Independence and the Economy.” This new act permitted prosecution and lengthy prison sentences for any Cuban caught with potentially subversive literature, or anyone deemed as serving U.S. interests, including media reporters from foreign nations working in Cuba. Castro declared that the new measures were “needed to defend [Cuba] from an enemy which spares no weapon in its arsenal” and a *Granma* piece attributed the law to “confirmed enemy attempts to destabilize the country through promoting violations of law, social indiscipline and civic insecurity.” In March, the Castro regime used the new law to prosecute four human rights activists in Cuba on charges of sedition. The four dissenters had criticized the government’s one-party rule and called for a peaceful transition to democracy. During the trial, Cuba barred any foreign diplomatic representatives or media members from the courtroom. Furthermore, the regime took steps to discourage any public protests outside of the courtroom by detaining dozens of activists.¹⁶

That the Castro government seemed to be doing little to improve relations with the United States provoked outrage from anti-Castro activists and put pressure on the state department to revoke the recent policy changes. The timing was particularly unfortunate, as the

¹⁵ “Clinton affirms decision to maintain the blockade,” *Granma Internacional*, 6 January 1999, 7; Ricardo Alarcón, “What they have done is to inform the world that the blockade stays in place,” *Granma Internacional*, 24 January 1999, 5, 11; Marelys Valencia Almeida, “I say yes, but mean no,” *Granma Internacional*, 7 February 1999, 5.

¹⁶ Department of State, Unclassified Memorandum from Secretary of State to All Diplomatic and Consular Posts, “Background Information on Cuba’s Human Rights Record and Recent Events,” 23 March 1999, obtained through Freedom of Information Act request and on file with author; Aldo Madruga, “Cuba is defending itself,” *Granma Internacional*, 14 February 1999, 5.

trial had begun on March 1 and the dissidents' sentencing was announced on March 15, just one week after the Orioles had struck an initial agreement with Cuba for the baseball exhibitions. Though the state department joined in condemning the trial and verdict, it refused to call off the Orioles-Cuba games. Instead, the state department used the dissident trial as justification for the new policy. State department spokesman James P. Rubin insisted that "the repressive Cuban reality" warranted the need "to continue people-to-people contacts." He declared that the state department's goal was to expose the Cuban people to democratic values, and that "sports contacts, such as the Orioles games, will do just that." He went on to claim that the games were "part of the people-to-people effort which conveys the message that the American people bear the Cuban people no ill will."¹⁷

In essence, the state department defended the new Cuba policies as a goodwill gesture toward the Cuban people, not a gesture to the Castro regime. By taking this stance, the state department saved the 1999 baseball exchange from suffering the same fate as earlier attempts at baseball diplomacy during the 1970s. Retaliation for the Cuban government's involvement in Angola had doomed baseball diplomacy's efforts in 1976. The dissident crackdown could have easily had the same effect in 1999, had the exchange that year been designed as a diplomatic carrot like the 1970s proposals. The state department's stance revealed the true nature behind this 1999 series as an episode in baseball deployment. From Washington's perspective, the games were designed to weaken the Castro regime, not accommodate it. Thus, the games could continue with or without favorable responses from the Cuban government.

¹⁷ "Congress Pair with Cuban Ties Rip Trip," *Baltimore Sun*, 25 March 1999; Department of State, WHA Press Guidance, March 16, 1999, on file with author; Murray Chass, "Game 2 of Series Set for May 3," *New York Times*, 15 March 1999, D9.

So, too, could a number of other exchanges that the new policies now encouraged. Apart from baseball games, the Clinton administration's modifications fostered several other cultural exchanges that developed in 1999. In February, the MTV network filmed a segment of its reality show "Road Rules" in Havana, with cast members given the chance to enjoy Cuban music and play baseball during their time on the island. In a decidedly more refined cultural export, American theater producer George C. Wolfe took advantage of the increased "people-to-people" interaction between Cuba and the United States to explore taking the hit Broadway musical, "Bring in da Noise, Bring in da Funk," on tour to Havana. The most notable exchange, however, was through a Los Angeles-based program called "Music Bridges." In late March, a contingent of over seventy American musicians embarked on a one-week trip to Cuba as part of the program. Music Bridges allowed American artists to collaborate with Cuban musicians, and culminated in a large music festival at the end of the trip. Among those in the American contingent was pianist Byron Janis, who had previously performed in Cuba in 1958 and had been one of the last American musicians to do so. Janis had completed a concert in Santiago on the evening of December 31, 1958, the day before Castro's forces entered the city. Though the Music Bridges trip was not political by nature, some of the participants noted its political significance as well as its potential. Peter Buck, a member of rock group "R.E.M.," compared the Music Bridges program to his experience in Berlin in 1989. Buck noted the importance of cultural exchange in the fall of the Berlin Wall, opining that, "finally, it was the kids, who wanted rock-and-roll and jeans that changed the culture."¹⁸

The Orioles' success at scheduling a trip to Havana also sparked other baseball exchanges between Cubans and Americans. Following the conclusion of the Orioles-Cuba series

¹⁸ Peter Watrous, "More Americans Going to Cuba As Performers," *New York Times*, 15 February 1999, E1.

in May, Siena College, a small, Franciscan school in New York, announced plans to send its baseball team to Cuba for a series of games against various Cuban teams the following winter. Inevitably, the Orioles' trip also prompted other major league teams to explore playing in Cuba. Shortly after the Orioles received the initial go-ahead from the state department in January, the New York Yankees once again surfaced as a potential participant in baseball diplomacy. A member of the Cuban Foreign Ministry extended an invitation to owner George Steinbrenner to visit Cuba, noting Castro's long-standing hopes of hosting the Yankees in Havana. Though Bowie Kuhn had vetoed such a trip in 1977, a potential visit to Cuba in 1999 would have had an even more intriguing storyline, as the team then featured high-profile Cuban defector Orlando Hernandez. Castro had even made a friendly gesture to Hernandez the previous October by allowing the pitcher's two daughters to reunite with their father in the United States. In fact, many thought that the Yankees, who had won the World Series in 1998 and set an American League record with 114 victories, would make the best opponent to showcase American baseball talent. New Jersey Senator Robert Torricelli, a self-professed Yankee fan, had questioned the Orioles' credentials as representatives of Major League Baseball, citing the club's 79-83 record and fourth place finish in the East Division in 1998. "Having the Orioles going to Havana may be good foreign policy," Torricelli explained, "but it's bad baseball strategy." By May, speculation of a Yankees visit to Cuba was dead, as Steinbrenner, apparently seeing no benefit in taking his club abroad, proclaimed that the team's only goal was a return trip to the World Series. Indeed, though several people around baseball and within the media predicted that the Orioles' trip would be the first of numerous exchanges between Cuban and American clubs at the major league level, no other teams followed the Orioles to Havana.¹⁹

¹⁹ "Siena College," *New York Times*, 13 May 1999, D6; Buster Olney, "Steinbrenner Invited To Visit Cuba," *New York Times*, 6 January 1999, D4; Tim Weiner, "U.S. Ready To Ease Some Restrictions In Policy On Cuba," *New*

One amateur ballclub actually preceded the Orioles in 1999, however. In perhaps the most bizarre cultural exchange undertaken that year, the East Hampton Maidstoners, a team of Long Island beer-league softball players, traveled to Cuba in early March to play an eight-game schedule against Cuban teams, arriving just a few weeks before the Orioles. The team originally started as a charitable organization to benefit a children's center in the Hamptons. Once the new policies encouraging "people-to-people" contacts with Cuba emerged in January, the group conceived of taking their unorthodox pastime abroad. Ironically, the Clinton modifications did not help the Maidstoners' efforts, as the state department ignored their visa requests. Ultimately, the team traveled to Cuba illegally, flying to Havana by way of Jamaica. After arriving, the team was initially concerned about complications from the language barrier between themselves and their opponents, but the players admitted that the keg of beer they brought from the United States proved useful as an ice-breaker. Before one of the games, Cuban players welcomed the Americans by painting "USA" on the playing field. The two teams sang their respective national anthems prior to the contest, and afterward exchanged jerseys with the Cuban team. Before returning home, the Americans gave their Cuban counterparts their bats and gloves, and several players agreed to deliver mail from the Cuban players to relatives in the United States. Undoubtedly, this exchange embodied the sort of "people-to-people" contact that the state department and Clinton administration were supposed to be encouraging. Unfortunately, despite changes in policy, it still had to occur outside the law.²⁰

York Times, 5 January 1999, A1; Tina Rosenberg, "It's Great Béisbol, but Diplomacy Lite," *New York Times*, 27 March 1999, A16; "Yanks Say No to Game in Cuba," *New York Times*, 7 May 1999, D5; Peter Schmuck, "Trip Not to Boost O's," *Baltimore Sun*, 26 March 1999, 1E.

²⁰ Rick Murphy, "L.I. Team to Orioles: In Cuba, We're No. 1," *New York Times*, 4 April 1999, L12.

Other positive personal exchanges took place within the bounds of the law and under the umbrella of the Orioles' baseball exchange. As part of the American delegation to Havana, the Orioles took along a group of boys from Baltimore's St. Ignatius Loyola Academy, a Catholic school geared toward educating underprivileged youths in the inner-city. Orioles' owner Peter Angelos donated over \$12,000 to defray the costs of the trip for the St. Ignatius students and fifteen students from the school joined a larger group of around thirty-five American youths who went to Havana. The kids arrived in Cuba the Friday before the Orioles' game. On Saturday, they toured a Cuban sports academy for athletically gifted children, and later in the day engaged in pick-up baseball games with their Cuban peers. The exchange allowed the American youths to experience a country that they previously only knew about in a Cold War context. One of the American kids expressed his excitement at seeing Cuba with his own eyes, having "heard that everybody looks the same, they have to eat the same food, and play the same sport." Though the last quality was not so far off the mark, the St. Ignatius youths took the opportunity to introduce Cuban athletes to a new game: lacrosse. Along with baseball bats, balls, and gloves, the Baltimore kids brought along their lacrosse gear. After showing the curious Cubans the basics of handling a lacrosse stick, scooping the ball, and passing, the American and Cuban youths engaged in a makeshift lacrosse game, believed to be the first ever on the island.²¹

II

The Orioles departed for Havana on Saturday, March 27, 1999, to become the first Major League Baseball team in forty years to play a game in Cuba. Upon landing at José Martí Airport,

²¹ Anne Haddad, "St. Ignatius Boys May Join Cuba Trip," *Baltimore Sun*, 22 March 1999, 1A; Jean Marbella, "St. Ignatius Boys Arrive in Havana," *Baltimore Sun*, 26 March 1999, 1C; ----, "For Cuban Boys, A Look at Lacrosse," *Baltimore Sun*, 27 March 1999, 1A.

the team received a warm welcome from hundreds of Cuban baseball fans who were excited to get their first glimpse of the major leaguers. In keeping with the prior tone of the exchange, the Baltimore club had to overcome some last minute hurdles on the journey to Havana. The team had arranged to travel from southern Florida, where they had been holding their spring training camp, on a special charter flight. The company originally hired to fly the team to Cuba backed out at the last minute, however, apparently due to the game's sensitive status in south Florida. Though the Orioles managed to arrange another flight and arrived in Havana on schedule, other obstacles proved insurmountable. Cuban fans were disappointed to learn that the most famous Baltimore player, Cal Ripken Jr., would not join the team in Havana due to the death of his father on the Thursday before the game. Oriole hurler Juan Guzmán, who was scheduled in the pitching rotation to start Sunday's exhibition game, also remained stateside when the club departed for Cuba. Guzman, who lived in a Cuban-heavy Miami neighborhood, declined to elaborate on his decision to skip the exhibition game, citing "personal reasons." A less conspicuous but more intriguing absence was Orioles batting practice pitcher Rudy Arias, who was the only Cuban national on the team. Just before the Orioles departed for Cuba, Baltimore slugger Albert Belle's status was also uncertain, as his visa was initially withheld because he could not produce a birth certificate. Belle acquired the needed documentation before the trip, however, as did fellow Oriole Lenny Webster, who had had the same problem, and both players ended up traveling to Havana with the rest of the team.²²

Before the game, players and fans on both sides noted the game's historical significance, but attempted to downplay any political implications. Cuban fans were excited to see how their team, a perennial powerhouse in international amateur competitions, would fare against

²² Peter Schmuck and Joe Strauss, "In Cuba, The Pieces Fall Into Place With Only Orioles Missing," *Baltimore Sun*, 27 March 1999; Joe Strauss, "Orioles Warm to Cuba Task," *Baltimore Sun*, 28 March 1999, 1F.

professional players. Discussing the contest at the famous “Hot Corner,” a notorious gathering place for baseball fans in Havana, Cuban Victor Armenteros dubbed the game “the best of the amateurs versus the best of the professionals” but insisted it was “not a political event.” Fellow countryman Luis Meneses added that baseball could allow both sides to forget their “contradictions and differences during the game.” Likewise, Orioles players initially tried to defuse any political aspects of the trip. Relief pitcher Mike Timlin acknowledged the outside forces surrounding the contest, but confirmed that, for the players, the focus was strictly on the game itself. Timlin argued that the players were simply there to play: “other people made the decision for this to take place.” Pitcher Scott Erickson, who started the contest against the Cubans, surmised that “it’s not the seventh game of the World Series,” but admitted “it’s not just an exhibition game.” Erickson claimed that the players were there, “to have a good time and do the best we can,” adding, “political or not...our guys want to win the game.”²³

The Cuban government, on the other hand, seemed more than willing to embrace the game’s political implications. On the eve of the contest, a *Washington Post* commentary quoted a *Granma* editorial that declared “what [was] at stake [was] the honor of Cuba’s national sport.” As expected, Castro maintained a high profile during the contest. Fifteen minutes before the game’s scheduled first pitch, the Cuban leader entered the stadium from behind the outfield wall. Wearing his customary military fatigues, he walked across the field to the cheers of the 50,000 fans in attendance. He approached the Orioles’ dugout, shook hands with several players,

²³ Serge F. Kovaleski, “Orioles vs. Cuba ‘Is All About Baseball’” *Washington Post*, 27 March 1999, A1; Peter Schmuck, “Baseball, Politics and History Meet in Havana,” *Baltimore Sun*, 28 March 1999; Joe Strauss, “Orioles Warm to Cuba Task,” *Baltimore Sun*, 28 March 1999, 1F; James C. McKinley, “Clash of Cultures, Pride, Passion When Cuba Plays Orioles,” *New York Times*, 26 March 1999, D1.

greeted Baltimore manager Ray Miller, and assured the visitors that they playing in front of “the best fans in the world.”²⁴

Castro could be confident of his assertion, as well as the warm welcome he received, having almost hand-picked the fans in attendance. Although Cuban baseball games were typically open to the public, with tickets costing only pocket change, the regime exercised tight control over ticket distribution for the highly publicized and internationally televised event with the Orioles. Most of the seats went to officials within the Cuban government. The move had drawn the ire of devout Cuban baseball fans, many of whom had to watch the contest from home. It also angered the state department, which was irritated at the Cuban government’s ticket distribution policy, and frustrated with the Orioles for not pressing Cuba on this issue. For Baltimore’s part, the team did threaten to withdraw prior to the contest, when it appeared that Cuba would not provide game tickets for the youth contingent accompanying the Orioles to Havana. Cuba eventually agreed to distribute a few hundred tickets to the youths who had participated in the exchange program, as well as to various American officials in attendance. Nonetheless, the crowd was overwhelmingly pro-Castro and could hardly be described as a random sampling of the Cuban population.²⁵

Castro partook in other pre-game festivities. After welcoming the visitors, he walked across the diamond to the home team’s dugout. The Cuban leader then summoned the players together, huddling with the team to likely offer words of encouragement, and perhaps even to

²⁴ Serge F. Kovaleski, “Cuba’s Major League Welcome,” *Washington Post*, 29 March 1999, A1; Richard Justice, “Orioles Are a Big Hit in Cuba,” *Washington Post*, 28 March 1999, D1; Thomas Boswell, “It’s Not the World Series, But It Means the World to Cuba,” *Washington Post*, 29 March 1999, D1.

²⁵ James McKinley Jr. with Mireya Navarro, “Fans in Cuba Walking Tall Despite Loss,” *New York Times*, 29 March 1999, A1; Department of State, Action/NODIS/Eyes Only Memorandum from Michael G. Kozak to Secretary of State, March 23, 1999, obtained through Freedom of Information Act request and on file with author; Department of State, WHA Press Guidance, March 26, 1999, on file with author; Peter Schmuck and Joe Strauss, “Tickets for Youths 11th-hour Obstacle,” *Baltimore Sun*, 29 March 1999.

discuss strategy. Following the pre-game talk, Castro retired to the stands, taking his seat between Orioles owner Angelos, and Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig, whom the Cuban leader had invited to join him in his private box. The two capitalists and the one socialist watched the Orioles, a team with a payroll of \$82 million, compete against the Cubans, whose total player salaries was a mere \$6,000.²⁶

The monetary mismatch meant little between the lines on the baseball field, however. The Orioles jumped out to a quick 2-0 lead in the top of the second, thanks to catcher Charles Johnson's home run. The blast ended the day for Cuban starting pitcher José Ibar, but reliever José Contreras—who would later defect to the United States in 2002 and win the World Series with the White Sox and fellow defector Orlando Hernández in 2005—stifled the Orioles' bats through eight shut-out innings. Cuba's offense finally scratched across a run in the seventh inning, cutting the lead in half. One inning later, the Cubans tied the game with Omar Linares's run-scoring single. At the end of nine innings, the score remained 2-2. Cuba had proven its athletes could compete with major-leaguers. In the bottom of the tenth, the Cuban amateurs nearly defeated the high-priced American professionals, putting runners at first and second with only one out before Oriole reliever Mike Fetters got a strikeout and pop-up to end the inning. Finally, in the top of the eleventh, Baltimore broke the tie and held the Cubans in the bottom of the inning to escape Havana with a 3-2 win.²⁷

Although Cuba lost the game, there was little disappointment around Havana. Cuban fans expressed satisfaction that the team had made a good showing. The day after the first game,

²⁶ Peter Schmuck, "Castro Presence Puts Politics at Forefront," *Baltimore Sun*, 29 March 1999; Thom Loverro, "Orioles Rally to Win in Havana," *Washington Times*, 29 March 1999, A1.

²⁷ Richard Justice, "In Cuba, O's Take Home a Win," *Washington Post*, 29 March 1999, D1; Jean Marbella, "Orioles, Cubans Finally Play Ball," *Baltimore Sun*, 29 March 1999, 1A; Thom Loverro, "Orioles Rally to Win in Havana," *Washington Times*, 29 March 1999, A1; Murray Chass, "Cubans Match Big Leaguers Pitch For Pitch But Lose In 11," *New York Times*, 29 March 1999, D1.

a number of unofficial commentators at the “Hot Corner” buzzed that the Cubans would score the upset in the return game in Baltimore. *Granma* proclaimed that the team “demonstrate[d] its skill” in a close defeat on the April 4 edition’s front page. One article inside that edition confirmed that “the Cuban team showed it could compete with a team from the Major Leagues.” Another piece cited Orioles’ owner Peter Angelos praise that “Cuba could rival any baseball team in the world.” Even the state department noticed the Cuban pride emanating from the game. Michael Kozak, head of the United States Interests Section in Havana, mentioned the “frenzy” around the city, with Cubans overjoyed that “their baseball could stand on its own against the best in the world.”²⁸

After the first meeting in March, the Orioles were due to host the Cuban team at Oriole Park at Camden Yards in Baltimore on May 3. Whereas the Orioles’ trip to Havana had sparked security concerns and presented obstacles with regard to travel visas and arranging transportation to the island, even more complications and questions arose regarding the Cuban team’s visit to Baltimore. The Castro government had exercised dictatorial authority to prevent massive protests or demonstrations at the Havana game, but such restrictions were unconstitutional in the United States, prompting fears that anti-Castro forces would disrupt the event in Baltimore. The possibility of Cuban defectors posed another issue. Since the early 1990s, concerns of Cuban players defecting to pursue a higher-paying career in the major leagues arose any time the team played games abroad. Because of this reality, it was unclear if the Cuban government would allow its most talented stars to go to Baltimore, for fear they would not return.

²⁸ James McKinley with Mireya Navarro, “Fans In Cuba Walking Tall Despite Loss,” *New York Times*, 29 March 1999, A1; “Baltimore Orioles in Havana – Home team loses 3-2 but demonstrates its skill,” *Granma International*, 4 April 1999, 1; Anne-Marie Garcia, “Cuba on a par with the Major Leagues,” *Granma International*, 4 April 1999, 7; Roberto Ramirez, “Orioles’ owner praises Cuban baseball,” *Granma International*, 4 April 1999, 7; Department of State, WHA Diplomatic Collective from Michael G. Kozak to Secretary of State, 29 March 29, 1999, obtained through Freedom of Information Act request and on file with author.

Because of these considerations, the Orioles and the City of Baltimore took unprecedented measures to ensure the Cuban delegation's safety and limit the game's use as a political message board. Baltimore police maintained a notable presence at the Cubans' hotel in the city's inner harbor, and more than tripled the regular patrol contingent at Oriole Park at Camden Yards, boosting the force of 44 officers for a normal home game to 140 for the contest with Cuba. The federal government also cooperated with the preparations. The Orioles and the City of Baltimore persuaded the Federal Aviation Administration to restrict the airspace above the stadium on the day of the game. Officials feared anti-Castro demonstrators would clog the Baltimore sky with small planes flying banners of protest or dropping leaflets onto the crowd and disrupting the ballgame.²⁹

The Orioles organization also exercised tight controls inside and outside the stadium. Although they did not limit ticket availability to the general public, as the Castro regime had done for the Havana game, the Orioles did impose seating limitations. The club sold tickets to the contest in two-seat pairs, in hopes of preventing groups from buying up large blocks of seating and staging demonstrations during the game. The seats behind the visitors' dugout were an exception to this policy. These tickets went to the Cuban delegation of journalists, former players, and students who accompanied the team from Havana. By filling these seats with Cubans, the Orioles hoped to enhance security for the visiting team by providing a buffer between the players and American fans. In keeping with its standard game policy, the Orioles organization prohibited fans from displaying signs or banners inside the stadium. Outside the ballpark, the Orioles limited protests and demonstrations to defined areas. These efforts frustrated but did not deter several hundred protestors from traveling to Baltimore, many from as

²⁹ Michael Janofsky, "A Show of Security and Some Protests," *New York Times*, 4 May 1999, D2; George Vecsey, "Cuba Game Could Open Some Doors," *New York Times*, 4 May 1999, D1.

far away as New York and Miami, to send a message about the game. Some denounced the contest for giving positive publicity to an oppressive Castro regime. Others used the baseball game to highlight the hypocrisy of the American embargo against Cuba, and called for its revocation. Both sides denounced the efforts of the Orioles and the city to limit free speech and assembly.³⁰

As the Baltimore game drew closer, speculation increased regarding defections. Prior to the game, Cuban manager Alfonso Urquiola fielded numerous inquiries on this subject, including a question about the remote possibility that a Cuban player would chase a foul ball into the Orioles' dugout...and never return. Though Urquiola publicly played down such concerns, some of his choices over which Cuban players would travel to Baltimore likely reflected his insecurity. Arguably the most talented player on the club, shortstop Germán Mesa, was conspicuously absent from the Cuban roster for the game in Baltimore. The Cubans attributed this to Mesa's prior training commitments back home, as well as his poor offensive output since switching to a wooden bat. These may have been legitimate reasons. Without question, however, concern over defection played some role in the decision. INDER had suspended Mesa two years earlier over suspicion that he would defect. In addition, the presence of several American sports agents at the Baltimore game—among them Joe Cubas, who had represented both Hernandez brothers following their defection—did little to ease Cuban concerns. The Clinton administration, which intended the baseball exchange to undermine the Castro regime, also did little to reassure Cuba. Although it did not openly support players or other members of the Cuban delegation defecting, the state department refused to condemn the act, or even downplay the possibility. On the eve of the Baltimore game, spokesman James Rubin cryptically revealed that officials from

³⁰ Michael Janofsky, "A Show of Security and Some Protests," *New York Times*, 4 May 1999, D2; Alex Dominguez, "Ground Rules Set For Orioles-Cuba Game," *Associated Press*, 28 April 1999, A.M. cycle.

Immigration and Naturalization Services would be on hand in Baltimore, but declined to elaborate on the likelihood of defections, surmising, “what will happen will happen—que sera, sera.”³¹

As the baseball game itself played out, politics once again occupied some of the limelight. The game’s political undertones were showcased differently in Baltimore than in Havana, but were still present. Castro’s highly visible presence at the Havana game had drawn much attention during and after the contest. Though he did not travel to Baltimore for the second game, Castro did take an active role in Cuba’s preparation by attending the team’s daily workouts in the weeks leading to the trip. The Clinton administration, conversely, sought to downplay the game’s political significance, perhaps to avoid association with the Castro government. In contrast to Castro, President Clinton did not attend the game in Baltimore, nor did any other high-ranking U.S. official. With the exception of bureaucratic officials in Baltimore to facilitate the Cubans’ arrival and departure, the United States government was conspicuously absent during the second game.³²

Politics revealed itself in the second game through the actions of fans in attendance. Four times during the contest, individuals were detained for running onto the playing field and interrupting the game. The most notable episode occurred in the top of the fifth inning. A fan carrying a small sign that read, “Freedom—Strike Out Against Castro,” ran out of the stands and onto the field. César Valdez, one of the Cuban umpires working the game, took exception to the protest. The demonstrator successfully eluded stadium security, making his way toward the

³¹ Murray Chass, “Castro Is Taking a Break From His Day Job,” *New York Times*, 3 May 1999, D3; -----, “Cubans Outplay Fumbling Orioles At Every Turn,” *New York Times*, 4 May 1999, A1; Bob Elliott, “An Aura of Paranoia,” *Toronto Sun*, 4 May 1999; Department of State, Daily Press Briefing Number 59, 5 May 1999.

³² Murray Chass, “Castro Is Taking a Break From His Day Job,” *New York Times*, 3 May 1999, D3; David Briscoe, “Government Taking Low Profile in Cuba-Orioles Game,” *Associated Press*, 30 April 1999, A.M cycle.

infield, until Valdez grabbed the suspect, slammed him to the ground, and unleashed a flurry of punches. Oriole outfielder B.J. Surhoff, first to reach the fracas, managed to pull the umpire off the battered demonstrator.³³

Surhoff's peacekeeping was one of precious few highlights for Baltimore. What had started as a disappointing season only got worse on the evening of May 3. Four weeks into their schedule, Baltimore had limped into last place in the American League, with an abysmal 7-17 record. To make matters worse, the Orioles showed little enthusiasm about using a rare off day in their major league season to host the Cuban team. The game's lop-sided outcome reflected their apparent lack of motivation. Cuba battered the Orioles on the home turf, outscoring them 12-6 and pounding out eighteen hits to Baltimore's six. It would have been worse, if not for a three-run home run in the bottom of the ninth by the Orioles' Delano Deshields. As the team emerged from the dugout after the game to shake hands with the Cuban victors, a chorus of boos erupted from the Baltimore crowd.³⁴

The contest was an embarrassment for the Orioles. News media members and even other players bemoaned Baltimore's performance. New York Yankees pitcher David Cone criticized Oriole players' grumblings about giving up a day off to play the Cubans, insisting that the contest was "bigger than baseball." An editorial appearing the week after the game assessed Baltimore's poor showing in the second contest of the two-game series, noting that, "mercifully for the Orioles, no third game was planned."³⁵

³³ Murray Chass, "Cubans Outplay Fumbling Orioles At Every Turn," *New York Times*, 4 May 1999, A1; ----, "High-Priced Orioles Humiliated by Cubans," *New York Times*, 5 May 1999, D3.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Buster Olney, "Royals Make An Example Of the Yanks This Time," *New York Times*, 4 May 1999, D3; "No Joy in Baltimore," *New York Times*, 9 May 1999, 129.

The bitter aftertaste in Baltimore contrasted sharply with the celebration in Cuba. A cheering crowd and a beaming Castro greeted the Cuban team upon its triumphant return to Havana. Emerging from the plane after landing in Havana, first basemen Omar Linares greeted the Cuban leader, proclaiming that “the mission you gave us has been completed.” Castro lauded the team’s effort and dubbed the game a victory for Cuba’s system of government. In a three-hour speech that praised the Orioles’ hospitality but also criticized American sports agents’ efforts to encourage defection, Castro declared the baseball game “a match between two concepts: the concept of sports as the people’s right, and the concept of sports as a source of income and personal wealth.” The Cuban press seemed to imply that the victory in Baltimore, which had proven Cuba equal to the Orioles on the baseball diamond, could foreshadow a more even political relationship between Washington and Havana. The front page of *Granma* labeled the contest in Baltimore “nine innings without cold war.” The newspaper also issued a special supplemental edition, on May 30, which reprinted in entirety Castro’s remarks welcoming home the Cuban team.³⁶

For Cuba, the baseball exchange had been an unqualified success. After the Cuban players demonstrated that they could contend with the American professionals in a close loss in Havana, they destroyed the Orioles in Baltimore, reaffirming Cuba’s reputation as a global leader in baseball. Furthermore, despite speculation leading up to the second game, no major defections occurred during the trip. Six former Cuban players who were part of the Cuban

³⁶ “Cuban Players Are Greeted By Castro and Loud Cheers,” *New York Times*, 5 May 1999, D3; Fidel Castro, “This game was a match between two concepts,” *Granma International*, Special Supplement, 30 May 1999; Gabriel Molina, “Baseball free of cold war,” *Granma International*, 9 May 1999; 7.

contingent in Baltimore missed their return flight home, early in the morning of May 4, sparking rumors of defection. After questioning the players, who claimed to have overslept, INS officials allowed them to return to Cuba at their own request. Only one defection occurred during the trip, as Rigoberto Herera Betancourt, the team's pitching coach, walked out of the Baltimore hotel where the team was staying and hid in a city park for seven hours before entering a police station and requesting asylum.³⁷

Things had not gone so well for the Orioles. Given the way their 1999 series ended, it is easy to understand why no other major league franchises have pursued similar exhibition games with Cuba. The weeks leading up to the Baltimore game saw significant controversy. The Orioles organization absorbed heavy criticism from those opposed to the Cuban series and the team took additional flack for new policies controlling ticket sales and prohibiting protests outside of designated areas. The pre-game criticism paled in comparison to the public beating the Orioles franchise took following its lackluster 12-6 loss.

Criticism and controversy did not end with the 1999 contests. Another public relations firestorm erupted from the Orioles' unofficial policy, stemming from the Cuba series, not to sign defecting Cuban players out of respect for the Cuban government. From the spring of 1999 to the summer of 2000, the Orioles passed on opportunities to scout and sign any of the roughly two-dozen Cuban players who defected during that time. According to one Orioles' official, the unwritten rule, which he labeled "not a policy, as much as a philosophy" sprang from owner Angelos' desire "not to do anything that could be interpreted as being disrespectful."³⁸

³⁷ Michael Janofsky, "As Cubans Take Home a Victory, One Coach Is Said to Seek Asylum," *New York Times*, 5 May 1999, A1; "'Tardy' Cubans Return Home," *New York Times*, 6 May 1999, D3; "Cuban Coach Hid for 7 Hours," *New York Times*, 8 May 1999, D4; Department of State, Daily Press Briefing Number 59, May 5, 1999, on file with author.

³⁸ Brooke Tunstall, "Agents: Orioles' Actions Speak Louder Than Words," *Washington Times*, 15 July 2000, C1.

The apparent black-balling of Cuban defectors by the Orioles—evidenced by their being the only major league team not to have scouts present at any of the various defectors’ public workouts—ultimately caught the eye of the Justice Department. In July 2000, at Senator Jesse Helms’s behest, the Justice Department began an investigation of the Orioles’ anti-defector stance to see if it violated the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which bars employers from not hiring defectors and aliens who are authorized to work in the United States. In the wake of the controversy, Angelos revised his public stance, restating that his only goal was not to encourage defections, and denying that any official policy against signing Cuban players existed within the Baltimore organization. The episode added more controversy to the 1999 series, and undoubtedly did nothing to encourage any other major league franchises from taking on a similar undertaking and inviting such problems upon themselves.³⁹

As a result, for many Americans, baseball diplomacy was defined by the embarrassing Orioles performance in Baltimore and the joyous Cuban victory celebration. Though the 1999 series was supposed to highlight people-to-people contacts and forego any political significance between Washington and Havana, Castro could not resist placing himself, and by implication the Cuban system of government, at the forefront. His conspicuous presence at the Havana game, coupled with his jubilation over the Cuban victory in Baltimore, made the match-ups not simply games between two baseball teams, but contests between two nations, two governments, two sets of beliefs, and two ways of life. Framed in this manner, the American performance in this competition had been a colossal disappointment.

³⁹ Thom Loverro, “O’s Can Avoid Discrimination Charge by Signing Morales,” *Washington Times*, 5 August 2000, C1; Eric Fisher and Brooke Tunstall, “Justice Probes Orioles’ Hiring; Angelos Refuses to Sign Cubans,” *Washington Times*, 13 July 2000, A1.

The series also seemed to extract a heavy toll from the Clinton administration. Though intended to hasten Castro's demise, the late 1990s measures, coupled with the high-profile baseball series, seemed for many Cuban-Americans to indicate a softening stance toward Castro. That Cuba had not made any concessions in exchange for the baseball series intensified this perception. Beginning late in 1999 and continuing into 2000, the Elián González case gave the administration's Cuba policies another black eye in the public realm. In 1996, Bill Clinton had won Florida by over 300,000 votes. In 2000, on the heels of these stumbles over Cuba, Vice President Al Gore lost the state, and by result the presidential election, by 537 votes.

EPILOGUE

The complicated relationship between baseball and U.S.-Cuba politics has continued into the twenty-first century. Though used for two distinct purposes, baseball has been unable to bridge the gap separating Washington and Havana. Baseball diplomacy failed to foster normalization during the 1970s. Baseball deployment, to date, has not brought about regime-change in Cuba.

George W. Bush's victory over Al Gore in 2000 led to changes in the Clinton-era Cuba measures. After September 11, 2001, the Bush administration began revoking many of the "people-to-people" allowances that had developed during the late 1990s. Licensed family visits to Cuba by American relatives, which had been permitted annually, were reduced to one every three years. Legal monetary remittances dropped to \$300 per year, down from \$1200 during the Clinton presidency. The Bush administration also tightened the special exemption requirements for academic, athletic, and cultural exchanges. The new restrictions were based, in part, on Cuba's long-standing place on the state department's list of nations that sponsor terrorism.¹

Baseball's employment—or deployment—as a diplomatic tool did not end in 1999, however. Although there have been no other series involving major league teams like the Orioles-Cuba games, a number of baseball exchanges between American and Cubans took place in the decade following. The most notable came in 2000 at the Sydney Olympic Games. In that

¹ Lillian Guerra, "The Alliance of George W. Bush and Fidel Castro?: Reassessing Perceptions and Consequences of U. S. Policy in Cuba," *Yale Journal of International Affairs* (Winter/Spring 2006), 156; Laura Meckler, "U.S. to Lift Some Cuba Travel Curbs," *Wall Street Journal*, 4 April 2009.

contentious tournament, the United States team managed a measure of revenge for the humiliating defeat Cuba's team had laid on the Orioles the year before. The United States and Cuba met twice in Sydney, and the first game, in the preliminary round, saw political tension boil over. U.S. manager Tommy Lasorda sparked a bit of controversy before the first meeting when he admitted wanting to win the game for Cuban exiles in the United States. Though both teams had already qualified for the medal round, the contest was tense, and both benches cleared briefly in the second inning after an American batter was hit by a pitch. Asked about Lasorda's pregame comment, Cuban manager Servio Borges responded that his team's 6-1 victory was "dedicated to the people of Cuba." After the United States upset the Cubans in a rematch for the gold medal, Lasorda compared it to the 1980 American victory over the Soviet hockey team and called the win "bigger than the World Series."²

The political implications were even more apparent in 2006, leading up the inaugural World Baseball Classic. That tournament, organized by Major League Baseball, was the first international competition to feature major league players. Because participating nations were guaranteed a share of profits, however, the Bush administration sought to bar Cuba from joining the tournament field. Opposition from other competing nations, combined with Castro's pledge to use the proceeds for Hurricane Katrina victims, prompted the United States to relent. The move—attempting to block Cuba from taking part in an international competition—harkened back to similar efforts in the 1960s to stonewall baseball exchanges. In the end, Cuba got the last laugh, reaching the tournament's final round and finishing second to Japan.³

² Dan Shaughnessy, "Diplomatic Immunity Lost Between The Lines," *Boston Globe*, 24 September 2000, E5; Lonnie White, "Lasorda revels in golden moment," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 September 2000, C5; Cuba vs. USA post-game press conference, 2000 Olympic Baseball Games Papers, National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, NY.

³ John O'Brien, "Political Balk: Opening The Door For U.S.-Cuba Policy Reform Via Diplomatic Blunder At The World Baseball Classic," *Villanova Sports and Entertainment Law Journal* 15 (2008), 135-137.

These major competitions aside, most of the baseball exchanges between Cubans and Americans since 1999 have been of a much lower profile. Several collegiate baseball teams have embarked on trips to Cuba, including the University of Washington in 2000, the University of Tennessee in 2002, the University of Southern California in 2004, and the University of Alabama in 2008. There have also been numerous exchanges involving youth league teams in Cuba and the United States. Generally speaking, the games played as a result of these trips did not garner significant attention in the American press, but they did allow the citizens of two governments still at odds with one another to meet peacefully on an athletic field. In many instances, on top of playing baseball the visiting American clubs have engaged in humanitarian work while in Cuba, and teams often donated their equipment to their Cuban opponents before departing as goodwill gesture.⁴

Thus, while many of the Clinton-era measures fell in the decade since 1999, and despite the fact that no other major league team followed the Orioles in pursuing an exhibition series against Cuba's national team, the people-to-people baseball contacts that the 1990s policies facilitated have continued. Overall U.S. policy toward Cuba remains unchanged however. The United States persists in upholding the embargo, and has made no significant efforts to improve the diplomatic relationship with the Castro government. Although Raúl succeeded his brother Fidel in 2008, as long as a Castro remains in power in Cuba, this policy is likely to remain in force. As long as it does any baseball exchanges involving Cubans and Americans, despite the

⁴ "Cuban Batas Come Alive in 14-7 Pounding of Huskies," September 4, 2000, University of Washington Athletic Site, <http://www.gohuskies.com/sports/m-basebl/spec-rel/090400aaa.html>; "Baseball Vols Complete Three-Game Sweep in Cuba With 10-1 Victory," December 17, 2002, University of Tennessee Athletic Site, <http://www.utsports.com/sports/m-basebl/spec-rel/121702aaa.html>; "Trojans Defeat Antillana De Acero in Estadio Latinoamericano," January 26, 2004, University of Southern California Athletic Site, <http://www.usctrojans.com/sports/m-basebl/spec-rel/012604aaa.html>; "Cuban Collegiate All-Stars Rallies Past Alabama Baseball, 7-5," December 18, 2008, University of Alabama Athletic Site, <http://www.rolltide.com/sports/m-basebl/spec-rel/121808aaa.html>.

goodwill and benevolent intentions on both sides, will carry political significance. While barriers continue to divide Cuba and the United States, baseball deployment continues. What role baseball may play, if any, in overcoming those political barriers remains to be seen.

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Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA
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U.S. Department of State Archive, 1997-2001
<http://1997-2001.state.gov>

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