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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Dominican Baseball

An Exploration of the Modern Major League Baseball Academy System

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Art

Latin American Studies

by

Andrew Mitchel

2020

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Dominican Baseball

An Exploration of the Modern Major League Baseball Academy System

by

Andrew Mitchel

Master in Latin American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professors Bonnie Taub, Co-Chair

Professor Lauren Derby, Co-Chair

This project is about Major League Baseball's (MLB) developmental academies in the Dominican Republic (henceforth D.R.). Athletes from across Latin America, once signed, begin at this first level of Minor League Baseball to prove their sporting abilities, learn English and become consummate professionals. This thesis concerns both the history of the United States (U.S.)-D.R. relationship through the lens of baseball, and ethnographic fieldwork completed at one MLB academy in the D.R. in summer 2019. The research included watching Dominican Summer League games, touring the facility, interviewing staff and sitting in on a high school equivalency course. It analyzes various so-called 'signs of universality' as to how baseball is played worldwide: language/ritual, camaraderie, food, education and masculinity. The historical context surrounding the relationship between the nations shows how the baseball academy is one just type of neoliberal and neocolonial enclave in the Dominican Republic. Concluding thoughts cover where this system stands as of 2020 and what can be done to ensure ideal conditions for these teenage players.

**Keywords:** anthropology of sport; U.S.-D.R. relations; Latin baseball players; cultural universality

The dissertation of Andrew Mitchel is approved.

César Ayala

Bonnie Taub, Committee Co-Chair

Lauren Derby, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

*All you need to do is walk into our clubhouse to see that baseball is a true melting pot. It's like this in practically every clubhouse you go into. In ours, it's a great mix: You have the Dominican guys, the Venezuelans, a couple guys from Japan, guys from everywhere from California to Connecticut and me, the small-town kid from Aruba. Sometimes having all these different cultures in one room can make things difficult in getting people on the same page, but it all works for us.*

- Aruban and Boston Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts (TIME 2017)

*"I'll actually tell you why I think there are thirty academies there... It's political stability. The stability in the Dominican Republic is reliable enough for 30 teams to make investments there, but I think it's also... [that] there aren't that many other options. Baseball is the one really possible outlet or opportunity for people that doesn't exist otherwise."*

- Former New York Mets General Manager and MLB Vice President of Operations Sandy Alderson (YouTube, "Los Mets," 2018)

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**Finally**, I would like to dedicate this work to the Latin players whose stories I seek to tell herein.



## **Introduction: The International Battle, o *La Lucha Internacional***

I am obsessed with baseball. I grew up in Queens as a New York Mets fan in the borough the Mets call home. However, at this point in my fandom, I am willing to watch any Major League Baseball (henceforth MLB) game between any two teams from across the nation.<sup>1</sup> As someone who follows, watches and listens to not just my favorite team but the whole league, many moments from the recent history of the sport's highest level stand out. I vividly recall listening to World Series Game Seven in 2014 while working late into the night as an undergraduate to edit and finish a paper for a world literature course. The topic of the paper may elude me as I think back six years on, but I know I was listening as Madison Bumgarner pitched the final five innings to close out a third World Series victory for the San Francisco Giants in just six years. These memories of watching the best players in the world compete on the highest stage in a sport I love will remain with me for the rest of my life.

I have always been intrigued by player demographics in this sport. MLB is the world's most competitive and highest-paying league; thus, it has become the one where nearly all talented baseball players, both domestic and international, hope to play. The sport known as America's pastime now has a great deal of foreign-born talent. The recruitment and training of foreign players is encompassed by a vast system collectively referred to as 'international player development,' into which each MLB team invests millions of dollars a year.<sup>2</sup> This includes both the signing players from around the world, as well as the training and game experience they receive to prepare

<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I refer to MLB as a U.S. league. This is not meant to diminish the MLB club in Canada, the Toronto Blue Jays, or the history of MLB and other baseball leagues (minor leagues, Negro Leagues, etc.) in various Canadian cities like Montreal, Vancouver and Winnipeg.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note here, as I reiterate below, both Canadian and Puerto Rican players feature not in the international development realm, but are instead drafted in the MLB Amateur Draft. This ensures they skip the academy system, especially significant as Puerto Ricans, as residents of a U.S. territory, are U.S. citizens. See the next section for more information.

them for MLB. This is paired with the mainly U.S.-based system of evaluating high school and college players for these teams. Together, these avenues provide the players that form both the major and minor leagues of professional baseball.

The discussion of this demographic shift in baseball brings us to a Cleveland Indians and Minnesota Twins game from August 11, 2019. This particular game between teams from two Midwestern cities stands out since these teams, while fighting for a playoff berth, also served as a showcase for the international players who are now hyper-visible in MLB. Between the 20 players<sup>3</sup> who started the game, thirteen (60%) were foreign-born. The Twins lineup in order by place of origin, with the starting pitcher last, from that day reads: Germany, Dominican Republic, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, New Mexico, Venezuela, California, Venezuela, Curaçao and Puerto Rico (MLB 2019). Of the players who appeared in this game, counting not just the starters, but also pitch-runners, pitch-hitters and replacement pitchers, seventeen (51%) out of the 33 players who appeared in the game were foreign-born. This is not just a two-team phenomenon: at the start of the 2019 regular season, 28.5% of players on 25-man MLB rosters (including injured players) were born outside of the United States (MLB News, 2019). These numbers are dominated by players from Latin America, especially the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Cuba. In fact, if the lineups for the two World Series teams for 2019 are reviewed, there nine (45%) of the twenty starting players, the nine hitters and starting pitchers, were from Latin America; another, third baseman Anthony Rendon, is an American-born Latino from Texas (BaseballReference.com, accessed 2020).

<sup>3</sup> There are nine starting position players and two starting pitchers for an American League, or AL, game because of the designated hitter, or DH.

Going into this thesis, I wanted to learn more about how this influx of foreign-born talent came into sport once played only by white U.S.-born athletes, due to both a color barrier<sup>4</sup> in MLB until 1947 and a lack of robust international player development in Latin America for MLB teams until approximately 1980. I also wanted to know more about international player development to find out how players from these Latin American countries become incorporated into what is essentially a foreign corporation, the U.S.-based professional baseball franchise. Though it may seem odd to call a sports team a corporation, it is important to separate sports fandom from the business decision a team makes concerning which players are signed, traded and released.

These questions led me not back to my television or laptop to watch more MLB games, but to the lowest rung of MLB's minor league system: MLB's academy system in the Dominican Republic, and its Dominican Summer League (henceforth DSL) contested between these academy teams. This is where all Latin American (henceforth Latin)<sup>5</sup> international signees start their career upon being signed as teenagers into professional baseball.

This thesis will consider the history of the political, economic and social relationship between the United States and Dominican Republic as visible through baseball. This will show not just how baseball grew in popularity in the D.R. and many surrounding nations, but not others, but also to reveal why the island nation was chosen as first a center of talent recruitment through scouting and training of these players at academies. My ethnographic observations completed in the summer of 2019 at a DSL academy of one MLB team, as well as analysis and utilization of

<sup>4</sup> Before Jackie Robinson broke this color barrier in 1947, African American and Latinx players appeared only in the 'Negro League,' and only a small number of white-passing Latin players from Cuba played in MLB.

<sup>5</sup> I am opting to use the term 'Latin' as short-hand for all baseball players born or with roots in Latin America, which is the norm in baseball circles. I use 'Latinx,' meanwhile, to refer to those of Latin American descent born or living in the United States.

theory on sport and related areas, including globalization, the body, masculinity/gender, etc., is in pursuit of a snapshot of life in the academy, how it has been improved since the late 1970s when the first was opened. This work seeks to ascertain what can be done to improve not just this system as a whole to avoid it becoming any more capitalist or cut-throat than it presently is, but most critically to protect and provide for players that pass through these academies in pursuit of their dream to play in MLB.

### Dominican Republic Country Profile



**Figure 1:** Map of the Dominican Republic with locations of academy sites, Boca Chica and San Pedro de Macoris, marked by black boxes (image courtesy of dr1.com)

The Dominican Republic is a Caribbean nation located on the island of Hispaniola which it shares with Haiti. It was a Spanish colony until 1865 when it received full and total independence from Spain after a period of conflict when Spain tried to re-enter known as the War of Restoration (Haggerty 1989). Its Gross Domestic Product, as per a 2017 estimate, is \$76 billion; major Dominican economic sectors include agricultural production, especially sugar, and since the

1970s, more sectors related to the service economy like tourism, as well as free trade zones for manufacturing (CIA World Factbook 2020). The Dominican Republic maintains a tenuous and racially-charged relationship with its neighbor Haiti; whereas each was a European colony exploited for natural resources like sugar, Haiti gained its independence earlier in the 19th century. The D.R. then underwent “twenty-two years of Haitian occupation” (Haggerty 1989). In the twentieth century, governments like that of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo sought to break up the solidarity between Dominicans and migrant Haitians who peacefully coexisted in the D.R. and had far more in common with one another than they did with elites.<sup>6</sup> (Hintzen 2015) Trujillo’s intent was to cast Haitians as Other: foreign, inferior and outsider. Clearly, race in the Dominican Republic is a complex subject. Many residents consider themselves to be white, or at least a *mestizo/a/x* combination of Spanish and indigenous miscegenation (Haggerty 1989). Others have African or immigrant roots, but black features are cast as inferior and thus these populations are disparaged, especially by elites.

### **MLB’s ‘Three-Tiered’ Global System of Player Recruitment**

The current landscape of recruitment of players in MLB can be divided into a ‘three-tiered’ system of player recruitment. It is wholly based on the player’s country of origin, and descriptions and player examples follow below.

The first level is the First Year Player Draft of both college and high school level from the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. This yearly draft is based on team performance from the previous year, thus the MLB team with the worst record will get the first pick in the draft and so on, with the final team drafting each round being the World Series champion. Players can return

<sup>6</sup> Hintzen also writes that “local communities opposed the illegal targeting of Haitian immigrants [by Trujillo]. Indeed, Haitians and Dominicans lived together all over the country, and were often openly hostile to attempts by the central government to intervene in their lives” (Hintzen 2017).

to their school if they are drafted out of college, and if they are at the high school level they can decide to not sign, go to college and re-enter the draft in a later year. One MLB example of a drafted player is Californian pitcher Gerrit Cole, first drafted out of high school by the New York Yankees. He did not sign with the Yankees, but instead went to UCLA and then was drafted and signed by the Pittsburgh Pirates in 2011. Another example is Puerto Rican shortstop Carlos Correa, drafted out of high school (in Puerto Rico) by the Houston Astros in 2012. Both Cole and Correa were the first overall selection in their respective drafts.

The second tier is of international players signed when they are teenagers, which will be covered here in detail as they make up the subject population of this thesis. There is an annual International Signing Period which opens each July, usually on July 2, when all teams are able to sign these players. The vast majority of them are from Latin American countries like Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama and Colombia. Some players are also signed from other nations, but typically if they are not Latin they are sent not to the D.R. academy but to their team's Spring Training complex in Arizona or Florida and begin their career with teams in a level called 'rookie ball.'<sup>7</sup> The best available players are recruited and signed in a competitive battle between different MLB organizations who covet the same talented youngsters. The signing bonuses these players receive have grown exponentially over the past few decades. Two examples of MLB players from this process are Dominican pitcher Luis Severino, signed by the New York Yankees in 2011, and Dominican outfielder Juan Soto, signed by the Washington Nationals in 2015.

<sup>7</sup> The Pittsburgh Pirates, for examples, had two in 2017 who were these first to play in MLB from their country that they had signed in the International Signing Period: South African infielder Gift Ngeope, the first African-born MLB player, and Lithuanian pitcher Dovydas Neverauskas, the first MLB player from that country (Coffey 2017).

The third and final tier are players coming to MLB from other foreign leagues, who are mainly Cuban and East Asian. I have grouped these players together despite some key differences, especially that when players leave Cuba, they must defect to reach the United States because of the political animosity between the two countries since the 1959 Cuban Revolution. The U.S. and Cuban governments had negotiated an agreement that sought to create a more streamlined process for Cuban players to enter MLB without defecting under the Obama administration. However, the Trump administration axed the plan because it saw any “payment to the Cuban Baseball Federation... [as] a payment to the Cuban government” (Waldstein and Tackett 2019). For East Asian entries into MLB, there is what is called a ‘posting system’ for players from these foreign leagues, which is in place both for the Nippon Professional Baseball Organization (NPB) from Japan, and the Korean Baseball Organization (KBO) from South Korea. Baseball also grew in popularity in this region thanks to its introduction by U.S. citizens there at the turn of the 20th century, and accelerated during the Cold War. Three examples of players involved in this tier are Cuban outfielder Yasiel Puig, who defected and signed with the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2012;<sup>8</sup> American infielder Eric Thames, who played in MLB, then left to play for a few seasons in the KBO but has since returned to MLB when he was signed by the Milwaukee Brewers in 2016 as a free agent, not through the posting system;<sup>9</sup> and Japanese Masahiro Tanaka, posted by his Japanese club in 2014 and signed by the New York Yankees.

<sup>8</sup> For more details about Puig’s see the exposé on his journey in LA Magazine. (Katz 2014)

<sup>9</sup> Such occurrences of American-born players going to Japan or South Korea to play and then returning to MLB after success in Asia is a new phenomenon; other examples include pitchers Miles Mikolas for the Saint Louis Cardinals and Merrill Kelly for the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Name	Citizens of what countries	Date	Age/Eligibility Requirement	Player Examples
<b>1. First Year Player Draft</b>	U.S., Canada, territory of Puerto Rico	Annually in June	High school graduate; at least three years at a four-year college (or twenty-one); community or junior college attendee (generally all eighteen or older)	Gerrit Cole; Carlos Correa
<b>2. International Signing Period</b>	Latin America (Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Mexico, Panama, etc.) and elsewhere	Annual signing period begins July 2nd	Must be over sixteen years old and registered with MLB	Luis Severino; Juan Soto
<b>3. Players from Foreign Leagues</b>	Nations with foreign leagues (Japan, Korea, Cuba)	Signing at any timing for Cubans; Posting for Asian leagues is during MLB's offseason (typically November-March)	Any age	Yasiel Puig; Eric Thames; Masahiro Tanaka

**Figure 2:** “Three-tiered” System of Talent Recruitment to MLB

### **Anthropology of Sport**

The analysis of sport through a critical anthropological lens is a rather new phenomenon but a topic receiving increasing scholarly attention. A look into some theoretical frameworks that view sport as both play and competition offered by scholars like Victor Turner, as well as an examination of the seminal work by Niko Besnier on the area of sporting migration will be helpful



to forwarding some themes in this thesis. The term ‘sporting migration’ is defined as the “global dispersion of elite athletes pursuing sporting careers” (Bruce and Wheaton 585). I use the term to mean basically the same thing but would add that these athletes who embark on playing careers outside of their country of origin move themselves, literally their bodies, their culture and their selfhood, in order to pursue sporting careers across the globe. These combined analyses will provide a solid foundation from which to dive into both the history of United States- Dominican Republic relations and ethnography of the academy system in the Dominican Republic.

Turner, in writing about global carnival traditions, uses Huizinga’s definition of play as both “outside ‘ordinary life’... but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly” (Turner 105). Sport certainly fits into the realm of play, as it constitutes an arbitrarily separated sphere of being outside of normal life. It, in turn, also contains an in-group and out-group: within it are, first, its competitors, or the highly seasoned men and women who compete after long periods of training to complete various sorts of athletic feats. They are paired with its fans, who pay great sums of money to watch these endeavors live or on television. They form a spellbound audience, as “[e]ven the audience at great sports events, such as Superbowls, [sic] is under the spell of mimicry” (Turner 108). Turner then uses Caillois’ definitions of the four realms of play, into which sport enters as the *agon*, which is Ancient Greek word for competition (Turner 107). These *agon* events, in which I would group most major global spectator sports like baseball, must establish conditions of artificial equity between parties to legitimize the exploits of the athletes (Turner 107). It is, in essence, the need to create a level playing field between the two sides even if one team is more talented than the other. Turner’s synthesis of play and competition herein shows that sports like baseball are a continuation of the games of antiquity like the Olympics, but also of organized processional gatherings of people like *Mardi Gras* in New Orleans or *Fastnacht* in Germany

(Turner 104). Sport comes to represent our social relations with one another and shows a desire to play and compete is part of human nature. These definitions, too, establish modern sport as increasingly rational and organized.

George Gmelch, an anthropologist who himself played Minor League Baseball (or MiLB) offers another area of interpretation around sport: athletes' rituals, fetishes and taboos are superstitions and magically derived since the realm of the sport is so dominated by chance (Gmelch 2000, 1). Oftentimes, factors out of one's control determine success or failure in baseball: a pitcher, for instance, relies "not only on his own skill, but also upon the proficiency of his teammates, the ineptitude of the opposition, and luck" (Gmelch 2000, 1). Though many modern baseball statistics attempt to take as many of these extraneous factors out of the evaluation of player ability as possible, players still engage in practices Gmelch cannot help but refer to as magical rituals.

The first of three he describes is the establishment of an unchanging daily routine: as one coach put it, "[y]ou've got a routine and you adhere to it" (Gmelch 2000, 2). These routines are something which a player can control, and as daily repeated actions they ensure a player feels prepared. One great example of this is that "[m]any hitters go through a series of preparatory rituals before stepping into the batter's box" (Gmelch 2000, 2) to hit. These include various physical gestures and movements that are repeated between each pitch by a given batter. Current Philadelphia Phillies outfielder Bryce Harper has one where he readjusts his gloves, touches his helmet, looks at his bat, takes a half-swing, taps the ground around home plate three times, taps his toe and sets his bat to swing<sup>10</sup> (YouTube, "Bryce Harper," 2018). This is an attempt to gain control over the situation and are typically the same throughout the whole of a player's career once

<sup>10</sup> See Matt Antonelli's YouTube video for a video of this process, and an explanation of his view on why it is important for players to establish such a routine (YouTube, "Bryce Harper," 2018).

adopted. Though they can be changed, usually they are not and instead become part of a player's persona.

Taboo, too, is present in baseball, which include deliberate personal actions like avoiding certain activities such as reading or eating certain foods before games; former star hitter Wade Boggs, for example, only ate chicken before games (Gmelch 2000, 3). These taboos include again personal desires to create a routine, but also include more collective and concerted efforts by all baseball players who avoid things like stepping on the lines on the baseball field demarcating fair and foul territory. If these taboos are breached, such action is actively noted by one's teammates. Finally, ballplayers often have fetishes, or material objects which have been ascribed supernatural power (Gmelch 2000, 4). These can include mundane objects players carry or hold like rocks or coins; for a now illegal example,<sup>11</sup> former Dominican infielder Juan Uribe always played with a massive wad of tobacco in his cheek which was reportedly soaked in both Kahlua and honey (Rohan and Goodman 2016). These objects can also sometimes include something incredibly noticeable when, say, a player like American outfielder Mark Canha from the Oakland Athletics attributes his success to wearing a ski mask on one cold evening, but then continues to wear it for weeks on end in the middle of sweltering June heat, as seen below in Figure 3. Just like Pavlov's dogs or Skinner's pigeons were trained to see an item or activity as signaling the presence of food, players follow their rituals, fetishes and taboos to achieve batting or pitching success and avoid 'slumps,' or periods of poor performances. It gives them control and confidence, and these practices are fully entrenched in the game.

<sup>11</sup> Most MLB ballparks have banned smokeless chewing tobacco (Rohan and Goodman 2016).



**Figure 3:** Mark Canha in his Ski Mask (Photo by Kelley L Cox, USA Today)

Many scholars have written about how anthropological theories of modernity and the body are visible through sport. The promotion of so-called ‘national character’ to explain a nation’s preference for one sport over another is problematized in this article as an idea that ignores both prevailing power structures and dominant ideologies. One example is that rugby, an individualistic sport, is popular in Samoa, a society rooted in communalism (Besnier and Brownell 445). Another example centers around the ‘noble savage’: the now globally acknowledged performance of the *haka*, a Maori war chant, by the New Zealand national rugby team. Its aggressive stances and shouts are meant to intimidate the opposition, and this performance has been globally recognized and seized upon by sporting brands like Adidas as part of their advertising (Jackson and Hokowhitu 126-127). Even though this has brought recognition and celebration to the New Zealand team, this indigenous practice is ‘othered’ as savage, foreign and primitive (Jackson and Hokowhitu 125, 132). Such performativity is at the same time lauded as exciting in the context of sport yet also disparaged and racialized by an outside audience.

Other authors also point out the checkered record sport has had with regards to sex/gender of competitors. Feminist scholar Judith Butler calls gender “a performance with clearly punitive

consequences,” (Butler 522) and sport could be defined using the exact same words. Sport is a regimented space that demarcates separation between groups, such as different positions or opposing teams. This causes sport to trumpet traditional gender values and ensures it struggles mightily to both acknowledge a gender spectrum or admit LGBT+ competitors. This has led transgender competitors, like South African runner Caster Semenya, to be banned from competing amongst their preferred gender (Longman and Macur 2019). Also, openly gay athletes like American football player Michael Sam have left the game due to, in his words, “mental health concerns”<sup>12</sup> (Dubin 2015). These points on the body and modernity’s role in sport reveal how the study of this arena has become more critically engaged over the past decades than ever before.

As entertainment like sport has gone global in the 21st century, various conceptions of globalization demand analysis: ‘glocalization,’ McDonaldization and electronic colonialism. ‘Glocalization’ is the desire to “configure the modern in accord with the local” (Besnier and Brownell 447) and this appears often in sport. As shown in the Samoan rugby example above, sports are reconfigured to fit the societal norms and values of the place where it is played. This has also led to, for instance, the embedding of different forms of masculinity within baseball in the U.S. and Caribbean, creating a cultural war on the proper way to play in MLB. At the same time as these moments of cultural valuation within sport occur, the same rules, regulations and other aspects of sport remain uniform whether a baseball game is played in the United States, the Dominican Republic or Japan. This idea of ‘glocal,’ however, reveals the tenuous relationship between this reconceptualization and other global forces: problems with a game can be imported,

<sup>12</sup> Also see former American football player Ryan O’Callaghan narrate his own struggles with his sexuality and coming out to his family and teammates (YouTube, “Note to Self,” 2017).

including sports culture which might, for example, enable toxic masculinity. The negotiation of introducing and playing a new, unfamiliar sport needs to be handled delicately.

In the realm of economics, a desire for all exchanges to be rational, speedy and efficient arose in the United States and has rapidly spread across the globe as the predominant style of all-consuming capitalism (Ritzer 100). Similar to how Fordism ensured the mass production and consumption of products globally when it was introduced in the 20th century, these recent developments are called McDonaldization by sociologist George Ritzer and certainly visible through how fast food is ordered, served and packaged. One example of this concept in sport is in soccer, with the thought of having a European Super League, or “[o]ne elite competition comprising the world’s richest clubs, untethered from their domestic leagues” (Panja 2019). This would remove the importance, history and tradition of the domestic leagues in each European country, and thus most people reject this idea wholeheartedly. It would, however, create a new world order in which soccer would follow the McDonaldization model. It is ‘rational’ (for some) that only so-called ‘super clubs’ like English club Manchester United and German side Bayern München play one another, provides a speedier arrival at high-quality games all season long and asserts economic efficiency since money is spent by owners and fans to see the best of the best compete. McDonaldization signals to the globe the tentacles of rampant capitalist profiteering can be in the form of global restaurants like McDonald’s or in global sporting brands like the best teams in the world.

Finally, Thomas McPhail’s idea of electronic colonialism theory (or ECT) from communication studies how new concepts of global empire are being staked not just by industrialized powers through neocolonialism and McDonaldization, but also by mass media companies. Sport, of course, includes within its confines a multitude of global spectacles or ‘mega-

events' that possess "dramatic character, mass popular appeal, and international significance" (Besnier and Brownell 451). Sporting events like the Olympics, FIFA World Cup, UEFA Champions League Final and National Football League (or NFL) Super Bowl are global events with culture-altering impact. With the presence of technological connections globally, multimedia companies can push certain messages to billions of consumers, thus "ECT focuses on how global media systems, including advertising, influence how people look, think, and act" (McPhail 2014). This is especially pervasive as these multimedia companies are headquartered in the Global North, and like the McDonaldization model mandates, seek to spread and obtain profit, especially now from the Global South. This means, then, that there is long-term exposure through television, movies and other media to a particular form of Western culture: McPhail's examples of this exposure include television shows like *The Simpsons*, (McPhail 2014) but one can learn just as much about a nation's cultural forms by watching sports. One sporting example is the consumption of MLB baseball across Latin America on TV and the radio.

Niko Besnier's seminal article "The athlete's body and the global condition: Tongan rugby players in Japan" covers the topics of sporting migrants and diasporic contexts, just as my work. Here, as in my work, players are moving to play from the Global South to the Global North, providing additional gendered and racialized components to an already difficult transition, be them baseball players from across Latin America as I am describing, but also for the Tongan rugby players who fill the ranks of the Japanese rugby league that Besnier studied.

Rugby in Japan was originally a hybridization of muscular Christianity for a Japanese audience and helped socialize high-class men in Japan's elite private colleges, or Sokeme triad, via use of a Western sport brought from both France and Australia (Besnier 492). However, over time, Tongans, New Zealanders and other foreigners have come to play first in these colleges as

exchange students, but then in the professional league of Japan, in which each team is owned by a corporation (Besnier 492). The position of elite colleges and corporate entities as team owners shows how sport “inscribe[s] social class structures through hierarchies of distinction that articulate... inequality” (Besnier 492). Besnier shows how rugby is dominated by brutish men, truly an embodiment of hegemonic masculinity “embodying ideals of virility, fortitude, and controlled aggression” (Besnier 495). Tongan men fit the physical mold this sport demands far better than most local Japanese men because of their physical size, extensive training and the Tongans’ association over time with the sport, such that these players are seen as graceful and skilled by aficionados (Besnier 499, 502). However, societal differences arise among rugby players because the masculinity standard that is in-vogue in Japan is “slim macho,” (Besnier 498) in which men are less muscular and slenderer. Since sport can be defined in gendered terms as “a hypermasculine spectacle for global consumption,” (Besnier and Brownell 449) in Japan the local slim macho man is more desirable than the hypermasculine Tongan. This further ‘others’ these Tongan men, as their physiological differences turn them into a spectacle to behold for fans.

In Japan, rugby remains an ‘old guard’ endeavor which props up outdated aesthetics of how manhood should be performed. It is still played by the elite classes in colleges, and the corporate teams are watched by alumni of Sokeme universities and a particular slice of the population: the conservative, “hard-working, aging, middle-management male” (Besnier 498). This shrinking audience makes it the third most popular ball sport in Japan, behind baseball and soccer, with an aging fan base; this is not dissimilar to MLB which has fallen behind both professional football and basketball in its popularity, and also maintains an older fan base.

Tongans hope to play rugby in Japan because though their homeland is obsessed with the sport, it does not have its own league. These men either provide remittances for their families back



home in Tonga, or the family sometimes relocates to live with them in Japan during their playing career. Similar to baseball, especially once a player makes it big, “entire extended families, villages, and congregations” (Besnier 500) are both involved in the player’s career and dependent on remittances sent home. The sport, however, represents a strange dichotomy: Tongans can make money playing in Japan, but, as mentioned, the league itself is seen as antiquated and many people do not care about the sport, whereas in Tonga, rugby is king but there is no league (Besnier 503-504). Besnier, considering this migration and the position of the league, ponders in the article “[w]ill Tonga go the same way... as the Dominican Republic... a ‘baseball farm’<sup>13</sup> for the United States?” (Besnier 502).

Finally, Besnier also brings up the fact that these players and their families are seen as racialized Others; (Besnier 505) this is especially the case as Japan dissuades immigration. Also, these players unwittingly perform what Besnier calls “the non-elite assault on elite dominance” (Besnier 492). These Tongans do this as though they supplant Japanese rugby players as better athletes, they are not part of an old boys’ club who historically gravitated towards this sport. Thus, “the global circulation of professional athletes” (Besnier 494) now involves not just moves across nearby borders, but from Global South to Global North (Besnier 494). This brings players into new regimes of class, race, gender and sociality with which they are unfamiliar. We see this in the example of the Tongans in Japan, but the same process is occurring for Latin players in MLB. Unlike these Tongans who mainly come as older professionals, Latin players enter academies at the age of sixteen and are separated from their families and hometowns to play baseball at the professional level.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Farm’ is used as a term of art to describe the minor leagues in baseball.

## **History of U.S.-D.R. Relations through Baseball**

It is important to begin when baseball was introduced in the Dominican Republic so as to fully discuss its spread both from outside of the United States, and outward from the elite class. Though there is “the sharp ambivalence Dominicans feel towards the United States” (Derby 1998, 459) thanks to imperialism perpetuated by the U.S., the two nations are inextricably linked. The United States- Dominican Republic relationship is defined, first and foremost, by direct military interventions by the U.S., one in the 1910s and the one in the post-Trujillo period of the 1960s. It is also rooted in economic ties, both with regards to sugar but now in a service economy that includes ballplayers as human capital exports. Describing this relationship between the two nations is possible by examining baseball in the D.R. from its entry into the country to its current position today as central to cultural life.

The introduction of sports into new nations or regions arises with colonial, imperial and most centrally, capitalist power dynamics. Soccer, for example, spread across the globe thanks to British economic and political clout throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The British industrial and mercantile class started teams whenever they settled not only all across Europe, but also in Latin America. Commercial ties between the British and countries like Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil brought the sport to these now *fútbol*-crazed nations (Szymanski 2009, 19). Copying the dominant hegemonic power’s cultural forms, including sports, and adapting them as part of one’s own national culture has occurred across history. At first, the sports in question included soccer and cricket from Great Britain, however baseball took up the mantle once U.S. power grew after the Civil War.

The United States fashioned itself as a hemispheric hegemon, even in its earliest days; these efforts began a decade after the ouster of the British in the War of 1812. Before even Manifest

Destiny or the annexation of a wide swath of Mexican territory under the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, the Monroe Doctrine reveals that the United States hoped to be the dominant powerbroker in the Western Hemisphere in a space only just beginning to become postcolonial. This doctrine comes from a speech made by President James Monroe in 1823: he asserts that “the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers” (Monroe 1823). This edict pushes for an end to European colonization in the hemisphere and opens the door to complete control of the geographic space, economically and politically, by the United States. American exceptionalism is nothing new: “as Jefferson put it... ‘America has a hemisphere to itself’” (Ruck 1998, 22) to be controlled as they saw fit. This process began in earnest soon after this doctrine, but certainly sped up in the latter half of the 19th century once Spain, Portugal and other nations lost their colonies.

The spread of this sport alongside the imperial and capitalist tendrils of U.S. power can be called ‘baseball diplomacy.’ It was present in places directly under American control, especially as the United States continuously involved itself in affairs of its southern neighbors in Latin America. Albert Spalding, acclaimed as one of baseball’s founding fathers alongside the mythic Abner Doubleday, “articulated the notion that the role of baseball was ‘to follow the flag’... [to] lay the groundwork for... imperialism” (Klein 2014, 11). This soft imperialism through sport ensures consumers for U.S. cultural forms, as nations where baseball is now played will watch and consume MLB. Thanks to electronic colonialism, I was able to watch MLB game broadcasts on live television while I was in the Dominican Republic for this project and Nicaragua on a separate trip in 2016, not to mention the local news from New York City and Miami. This ‘baseball diplomacy’ also promotes local obsession with U.S. culture, which captivated the upper classes of

many nations around the turn of the century. Thus, locales in East Asia and Latin America which had a U.S. military, economic, and/or political presence in the late 19th century continue to play baseball to this day (Elias 2010, 28).

‘Baseball diplomacy’ worked in two ways: either those who came from Latin America learned the sport in the United States, or Americans brought baseball to Latin America. The sport came to stand in for many avant-garde guiding principles of the time: democratic governance, technological advancement and capitalist power. Historian Louis Pérez Jr. writes that “the United States was not only a standard and source of modernity, but also an experienced alternative” (Pérez Jr. 499). The country served as a beacon of hope for Caribbean colonies like the Dominican Republic and Cuba, whom even in the late 19th century still endured Spanish control. Dominican eyes, then, looked to the U.S. as the standard-bearer of what a nation should look like as they themselves sought to throw off the yoke of Spanish control. They even sought annexation by the U.S. in 1870, with their President arguing it “signified salvation” (Derby 1998, 460) from the advances by Haiti on Dominican national sovereignty. This motion barely failed to pass in the U.S., a development which would have completely changed the story of baseball in the nation, and of course the whole history of the country.

Dominicans and Cubans from the upper echelons of society traveled to the United States in the late 19th century and brought baseball back home with them. Historian Rob Ruck writes that, at the end of the 19th century, “[t]he sport’s first acolytes were boys from better-off families, especially those who had studied in the United States” (Ruck 1998, 6). Young men from these backgrounds went to schools in the United States to obtain expertise and knowledge at the expense of the hegemon: baseball, for Cubans and Dominicans alike, served as “a way to mediate... [their] encounter with the north, to grow familiar with North American ways and participate in those

ways” (Pérez Jr. 499). This led to some exceptional cases of early entry of Latin players into professional baseball, like Esteban Bellán.

Bellán, who studied in New York at Fordham University from 1866 to 1868, was the first Latin baseball player in the U.S., playing for three seasons in Troy and New York before returning back to Cuba to help organize the first professional game in the country (Pérez Jr. 499-500). He was able to serve as a forerunner in the U.S. as he showed a Cuban could compete and play well at the professional level, as he hit .250 over the three seasons he played (BaseballReference.com, accessed 2019). He was also a cultural broker who brought the sport to his countrymen and helped organize some of the earliest baseball games in the Caribbean. He is the earliest recorded so-called ‘binational’ baseball player coming from the Caribbean; little did he know that over a century later, modern American professional baseball would be populated by many Latin American players.

However, baseball, though born in the United States and seen by well-off Dominicans while they were there, came to the Dominican Republic more directly through a third party: Cubans who migrated to the Dominican Republic, mainly to work in the sugar refineries, or *ingenios*, and plantations. Pérez Jr. writes that,

As early as the 1870s, Cuban emigres arrived in the Dominican Republic to organize sugar production in... San Pedro de Macoris and La Romana. Baseball soon followed. Shortly thereafter, the brothers Ignacio and Ubaldo Alomai arrived in the Dominican capital, Santo Domingo, from Cienfuegos, and within months... had organized two baseball teams (Pérez Jr. 514).

Relations between Cuba and the Dominican Republic are as complex as those with Haiti since Cuba, during Spanish colonial days, was seen as the more powerful, wealthy and modern island. Since that time, it has served as something of a metaphorical ‘older brother’ for the Dominican Republic. Baseball was first introduced to the little brother from Cuba in urban spaces like Santo Domingo and played there by professionals and elites who learned the sport in America. However, as this quotation above illuminates, the history of baseball in the D.R. is inseparable

from that of sugar production. Once sugar became the key part of a plantation economy, both Cuban and American business interests became heavily involved in the nation. This is when baseball became entrenched as a sport not just for modern elites, but for all Dominicans.

This rapid expansion of baseball in the Dominican Republic arrived once it was introduced on a mass scale to those who worked on plantations, especially to cane-cutters and refinery workers. An interviewee of anthropologist Alan Klein said that, during his youth, “[e]ach town had a team. *Ingenio Consuelo* used to provide one team with uniforms, gloves, and so on” (Klein 2014, 92). Dominicans, however, regarded “cane cutting as socially unacceptable, indeed degrading, work;” (LeGrand 569) it is low-skill, back-breaking wage work and a job of last resort for locals. Modest opportunities for social mobility throughout the early 1800s permitted land ownership by many rural Dominicans which led to access to subsistence farming; local recruitment was therefore limited by both the aforementioned stigma and this achieved economic self-sufficiency. Apathy and disdain for this work by native Dominicans only grew, to the point that in 1884 both plantation owners and the Dominican government felt that “it will be indispensable to take steps for the introduction of foreign labour” (Bryan 276). Contracted workers for sugar plantations first came from neighboring Haiti, but also later from various British West Indian islands like Tortola, Antigua and St. Kitts (Bryan 279-281). In one case, the whole male population of the island of Anguilla in 1926 went, with “every available man had gone off as usual for the four or five month season on the sugar-cane estates” (Bryan 281). This reveals the economic dependency these communities had on this migrant labor. These migrant workers, collectively referred to as *cocolos*, were often demeaned as slaves because of both the menial work they were willing to take up and their skin color, and also as “*las golondrinas*,” (Ruck 1998, 121) or swallows, as their migration was seasonal in nature. Eventually, many did settle in the D.R. and

most “settled in and around the principal sugar-producing area of San Pedro de Macoris” (Bryan 279). These *cocolos* brought with them other cultural markers like Protestantism, benevolence societies, a belief in the ideology of Marcus Garvey and cricket (Bryan 280; Ruck 2005, 58-59). These workers organized cricket leagues to compete amongst themselves during *tiempo muerto*, or the dead season, during which sugarcane did not need to be cut or processed into refined sugar.

Over time, the original *cocolo* cricket players got old, and their children, instead of continuing with cricket, sought to play baseball to gain acceptance in the Dominican community (Ruck 1998, 137). These concentrated sites of labor-intensive agricultural work brought the presence of enough working-age men to have teams to play organized baseball tournaments between neighboring towns and *ingenios*, especially during *tiempo muerto*. These extremely poor folks pushed back against the notion that baseball was only for the elite: Ruck points the sport quickly “became something that the *cocolos* did... better than anyone else on the island” (Ruck 2005, 59). Examples of players from San Pedro de Macoris from Ruck mentions from the 1980s and 1990s include outfielder Rico Carty, Juan Samuel and George Bell, and one can imagine many of the Dominicans who play in MLB today from San Pedro de Macoris likely have *cocolo* roots (Ruck 2005, 59). The Dominicanization of these West Indian sugar plantation workers slowly brought them increased acceptance in the community. As black foreign workers, their presence disrupted the social order and thus, encouraged by the elite, scapegoating continued (Bryan 285). State promotion of anti-blackness and this foreign Other did not end, but by taking on cultural forms of the host country, acceptance of *cocolos* began to proliferate and peaceful coexistence brought increased solidarity.

Various interventions by the United States in the Caribbean ramped up at the turn of the century. With Manifest Destiny complete and control established over many far-flung territories

in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the U.S. set its sights on its southern neighbor Cuba's independence struggle with Spain. This short conflict in 1898 saw the U.S. take from the Spanish their last remnants of their world empire. The U.S. obtained the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico, and with these actions revealed the hypocrisy of the Monroe Doctrine: by ending European colonization in Latin America, the U.S. had become the colonizer (Greene 21) and sole hemispheric hegemon. It had consolidated both a command of its own territories and holdings, but also over economic and political affairs in Latin America and beyond.

President Theodore Roosevelt, in fact, added a Corollary to the aforementioned Monroe Doctrine in 1904, in which he stated that "the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power" (Roosevelt, 1904). He may claim reluctance in this speech, saying military action by the U.S. is used "only in the last resort," (Roosevelt, 1904) but it is clear that American political and economic ambition during this period, and to this day, was to dominate world affairs as a global superpower. This would come in the 20th century to Latin America as in the forms of economic extraction by various U.S.-owned sugar and banana plantations, but also direct military action. Both are visible, for example, in U.S. support for Panamanian independence from Colombia in 1903 in order to obtain the rights to build a canal and establish "complete and perpetual control" over a Canal Zone that split the nation in half (Greene 22). This was a 'civilizing mission': the U.S. sought to open up the world to democracy and capitalism, even if it had to be by force.

This Corollary was used to justify an intervention in the Dominican Republic by U.S. forces in the 1910s. Political scientist Walter Soderlund points to three key reasons a takeover of Hispaniola was executed: national security of the United States during World War I; so-called



'humanitarian' desire to ensure democracy; and economic concerns, especially with regards to collecting customs<sup>14</sup> revenue in the D.R. (Soderlund 88-89). This customs receivership was, in fact, the "initial application of the Roosevelt Corollary," in which the U.S. took customs revenue directly from the Dominican Republic to repay its foreign debts (Soderlund 89).

This issue of foreign intervention to ensure the payment of debt initially worked well, but this period of political calm in the D.R. quickly ended when President Ramón Cáceres was assassinated in 1911. Direct military intervention by the U.S. came a few years later then in support of a democratically elected President Juan Jiménez. Military sources of the time considered one General Desideiro Arias a particularly troublesome threat, and "[u]nder pretext of the danger that Arias would come to power [especially once Jiménez resigned,] in May 1916 the United States landed six hundred Marines... [b]y July all strategic points in the country were occupied" (Castor and Garafola 255). These Marines would remain stationed throughout the country for eight years, especially in the countryside where small bands of revolutionaries, referred to by U.S. sources as "bandits" (Soderlund 89,94) grew in their insurgent abilities and anti-American sentiment. The U.S. established full military government with total power over internal and external affairs, which ceded control of internal affairs to the U.S. military (Soderlund 93). This shows the U.S. had no interest in working with Dominican politicians and demanded total control of the situation. This brash exceptionalism continues today.

Baseball during this time of U.S. control came to serve as a way to not only embody the hegemonic power, but also as a means of defeating it in sporting competition. This occupation

<sup>14</sup> Rippy adds that this economic intervention, which expanded into a military occupation of the D.R. in subsequent years, was carried out due to the confluence of four major factors: fear of European interests entering; protection of U.S. citizens and their economic interests; general expansionism, which led to various U.S. interventions around Latin America at this time; and genuine desire to aid Dominican citizens who actively sought U.S. help (Rippy 419).

brought the spectacle of Dominican teams playing against American military personnel, not just in the capital of Santo Domingo, but also around the island. A correspondence sent to Secretary of State William Jennings-Bryan by dispatch minister James Sullivan shows even the U.S. government is aware of the powerful role of ‘baseball diplomacy’: “[baseball] satisfies a craving in the nature of the people for exciting conflict and is a real substitute for the contest on the hillsides with the rifles” (Klein 2014, 11). He assumes Dominicans can be won over by the troops stationed on the island, and wrongly claims it has stopped further guerrilla warfare in the countryside. This confidence in an end to internal conflict because of the presence of baseball is misplaced, of course, as locals conforming to the cultural sport of choice does not always mean that the political and economic domination will occur. Sport can take on an “‘empty form...’ enabling ‘refilling’ with local meaning” (Besnier and Brownell 448). In Cuba, Fidel Castro, the face of anti-Americanism in Latin America for decades, was a pitcher who tried out for various U.S. teams (Echevarría 145). Thus, even during a rebellion in the countryside by Dominicans during the American occupation, the two sides of a conflict played baseball against each other.

Fervent nationalism was present in contests between the best Dominican players on the island and U.S. servicemen. These formal and semi-professional exhibitions provided the opportunity to beat back the Americans: they could be defeated in the very game they had invented under a military government the U.S. itself had instituted. This is said to have been the major reason for baseball’s meteoric rise in popularity in the nation: “it was during the epoch of North American occupation that baseball was really ignited” (Ruck 1998, 7). These games are extremely well-documented with many articles in local newspapers about them, not to mention the accounts of by American servicemen and diplomats, like Sullivan’s correspondence from above. One famous example comes from the best Dominican of the day, Enrique Hernández, who “pitched a

no-hit, no-run game against a team of Americans from the U.S. Navy cruiser *Washington*” (Klein 1991, 17). Large crowds came to see these games, and the whole nation was keyed into the symbolic importance of beating back the foreign occupiers. This nationalism is made clear when the famous player Rafael ‘Fellito’ Guerra would not accept a baseball contract from a U.S. team in protest of the occupation (Ruck 1998, 11). This shows quite a separation between ideas of playing professionally at the highest level in the U.S., at least for Dominicans at this time, and competing with those who have come to invade and control the nation.

One anonymous reporter made it clear who was the stronger side in these contests, writing “[i]t has now been proven that all the Dominican teams are stronger than any of the Yankee teams that we have met until now” (Derby 2009, 44-45). This provided national pride and confidence in baseball ability all across the island. With this period of fervor for baseball wrought by playing the occupiers expanding the sport’s popularity, local clubs grew into national powers. *Tigres del Licey* is Santo Domingo’s oldest remaining team and, not to be outdone, their rivals *Leones del Escogido* play in the same stadium in the capital city. Following an end to U.S. intervention in 1924, there was a long period of calm and growth in the nation, visible through what is referred to as *béisbol romántico* (Elias 2010, 109). This term, a nostalgic offering, refers to a period where amateurism prevailed in the sport; the sport was a pursuit for the love of the game and not pay, and contested in urban areas by employees of industry or the wealthy. As mentioned, there were parallel developments of leagues during *tiempo muerto* in rural areas, especially on sugar plantations. An increase in professionalization of urban teams over time drew imported talent from around the Caribbean, as well as from the United States. This debate between amateurism and professionalism in sport rages on to this day in many arenas.

This period of professional league structure and salary-haranguing between clubs reached an explosive apex in 1937. By this time, the aforementioned Rafael Trujillo was entrenched as leader of the country; in fact, Santo Domingo had been renamed Ciudad Trujillo the prior year. Trujillo had been a member of the Dominican constabulary and received special training from the U.S. forces during their occupation (Soderlund 94-95). He first seized control of that arm of the military, then the entire military in 1928, and finally ascended to the presidency and was dictator for over thirty years starting in 1931. His total power ensured there was a state-controlled baseball team and, to please the leader, it would have to be the champion.

Thus, a super-team was assembled of players that President Trujillo would want to watch. It included many Negro League players like National Baseball Hall of Fame pitcher Satchel Paige: he was offered “between \$6,000 and \$15,000 (reports vary) to come to the Dominican Republic that year to play for Trujillo's team” (Loverro 2002). Coerced by these high wages and better treatment to play on the island nation than they received in the U.S., many black Americans arrived to the D.R. for this season. Paige convinced two other members of his team, the Pittsburgh Crawfords to join him: outfielder Cool Papa Bell and catcher Josh Gibson, who are both also in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in the U.S. (Loverro 2002; Elias 2010, 109). However, what followed was a season that, in the end, bankrupted the league, as it could not afford to pay the exorbitant salaries offered to what amounted to the best players available to be paid to play in this league. The league shuttered itself as a destination location to play for players from across the Caribbean and from the Negro Leagues. It has never regained this central position. The Dominican Winter League is still locally acclaimed and popular among locals, but like the Tongan example from Besnier, now talented Dominican baseball players have to leave their island nation to compete at the highest level of their sport.

With the local baseball league's death came another social death, this one of a civilian scapegoat. This was a horrifying and grotesque use of state power as nearly 15,000 rural Dominican citizens, supposedly a foreign 'Haitian' population, were murdered in October 1937. This is especially horrific as "the massacre affected a population that [may have been] ethnically Haitian, but [was] actually Dominican by nationality" (Derby 2009, 308). As discussed earlier, this represented an effort by Trujillo to eliminate what he saw as a social problem and outside Other: "soldiers were ordered to kill anyone... assumed to be Haitian because of... physical appearance or command of the Spanish language" (IACHR 55). Trujillo's actions created what Omi and Winant call a 'racial project,' blaming Haitians for all societal woes. However, the killing of native-born Dominican citizens shows "the State was less interested in highlighting any political differences with Haiti and more interested in emphasizing the racial difference" (IACHR 58). This intentional whitening process which demonized black bodies emphasized *pureza de sangre*, or purity of blood. This type of ethnic scapegoating was common during this period: another example is *La Matanza*, or The Killing, in El Salvador with the slaughter in 1932 of communist organizers and indigenous people by state forces led again by an enraged dictator (Ching and Tilley 122). The massacre ordered by Trujillo, wherein race was entrenched as a major method of self-definition, (IACHR 58) is just one example of a nation formulating its ethnic identity around whiteness (Euraque 159). This leads to the targeted killing of communities of color to make a political point about who belongs in the nation, and who can be excluded and blamed for various social ills.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> These processes sought a national corpus that was white or *mestizo/a/x* (mixed-race) since, under the ideals of the racial science, "white blood canceled out the 'negative quality'" (Rahier 44) of indigenous and black blood. These efforts included Sinophobic and anti-black laws in Honduras (Euraque 152,159,161). It also involved more explicit *blanqueamiento*, or whitening, in Argentina which saw both the violent elimination of indigenous peoples and the encouragement of European (white) immigration. These efforts resulted in the immigration to the country of millions of Italians who totally reshaped Argentine demography and culture (Briones 61; Cottrol 114, 122-123).

Local baseball talent remained on the island, but without a robust league of its own, many players instead played in other nations like Cuba and the United States. This increased talent recruitment of Dominicans to foreign leagues brought the first Dominicans to MLB, which greatly reinvigorated it in the island nation. This was first thanks to the arrival of MLB scouts to the island and later expanded even further through the creation of academies. Early Dominican players were bicultural and binational: the first man born in the D.R. to appear in MLB was Ozzie Virgil, who himself moved to the burgeoning Dominican enclave in New York and first appeared for his local team, the New York Giants, in 1956 (Muder 2019). Very few Latin players had appeared in MLB besides a few white-passing Cuban pitchers for the Cincinnati Reds for decades as the ban on ‘colored’ players, black or brown, had taken hold in the sport. Jackie Robinson’s reintegration of the sport in 1947 as a black man in the white space of MLB was just as important a moment for Latin (and other racial minorities) players as it was for his fellow African American players (Burgos 2019). His debut and fight against racist individuals and institutions reopened the ability for all capable players to compete in MLB and for players like Virgil to make their debuts.



**Figures 4 and 5:** Ozzie Virgil in uniform for the New York Giants (Salas 2020); Statue of Juan Marichal in front of the San Francisco’s home ballpark (now called Oracle Park) (Fruth 2018).

Back in the Dominican Republic, baseball remained yet another place where the Trujillo government exerted its total power. Though Rafael Trujillo himself was not a lover of baseball,

his son Ramfis was a fanatic supporter of the game. The Dominican military recruited players from across the island to play on their teams. This led to the discovery of Juan Marichal, arguably the best Dominican pitcher of all time, by MLB scouts. He worked at the United Fruit Company in Monti Cristi and played baseball for the company team there until he was found by Ramfis' scouts and brought to play on the air force team, *Aviación Dominicana* (Finkel 2018; Mayoral 2018). From there, the San Francisco Giants signed him in 1958 and is widely considered the greatest pitcher in that franchise's history. He has won the most games of any Dominican pitcher in MLB history, and entered the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1983 (Mayoral 2018).

Three developments in the mid-20th century have set the stage for the creation of the academy system in the Dominican Republic and the explosion of the number of Latin players in MLB. The first was yet another intervention by the United States into the Dominican Republic. During the Cold War period, the key objective of U.S. foreign policy was to limit the spread of Communism.<sup>16</sup> After Rafael Trujillo was killed in 1961 by dissidents, a transitional council headed by Joaquín Balaguer took power. Juan Bosch, a former exile and democratic liberal, won elections held in 1962; he was, however, quickly overthrown by a *coup d'état* by the military, though this was not a move supported by all its military men (Soderlund 96). In-fighting in the military on whom to support began the unrest: 'loyalists' wanted Bosch to be replaced, while the other side, the 'constitutionalists,' demanded his return to the presidency. Much of the fighting was in Santo Domingo, and the U.S. sent in troops to protect American citizens and interests there in April 1963. Fear of Communist control of the 'constitutionalist' side, however, turned this small U.S. mission into a full-scale intervention, which at its height had 23,000 troops with aid from the Organization

<sup>16</sup> Many examples of interventions in Latin America to prevent its spread exist: the overthrow of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz (Handy 203) in 1954, or of Chilean President Salvador Allende in 1973 (Tedeschi et al. 2015) come to mind.

of American States, or OAS. This lasted nearly six months (Soderlund 99). Just as had been done in other internal conflicts like the Berlin War or Korean Demilitarized Zone, a ceasefire line, or International Safety Line, was established by American troops in Santo Domingo. After months of tense standstill, and then fighting once OAS reinforcements arrived, Bosch returned to the Dominican Republic. Bosch lost potentially fraudulent elections advertised as free to Balaguer, who became President in July 1966. This turbulent period created political, economic and social uncertainty, and aside from the continuation of sugar's role as a major export crop, baseball attracted Dominican men since it was an opportunity to sign with a professional team to play in the United States and escape the poverty and violence of their homeland.

The second is the growth of the Dominican population in the United States; this immigrant population, which in 2012 was 960,000 people, (Nwosu and Batalova 2014) has helped promote a firmer transnational connection between the two nations. This demystification of the U.S. assuaged fears of this foreign place for many baseball players; players could rely on narratives told to them by family, neighbors or other community members who lived in the U.S. about the country and its culture. Indeed, the neighborhood where Ozzie Virgil grew up in New York exploded as a destination for Dominican immigration. This northern Manhattan neighborhood of Washington Heights is now referred to as 'Little Dominican Republic' (Barravecchio et al. 2020). Many of those arriving fled the violence and political uncertainty of the Balaguer/Bosch years of the 1960s. Most arriving now are economic migrants, sponsored by family so they can receive a green card (Nwosu and Batalova 2014). Many Dominicans who have played in MLB grew up in the U.S.: the most notable is outfielder Manny Ramírez, who was born in Santo Domingo but moved to Washington Heights at thirteen years old and played high school baseball at George Washington



High School in the neighborhood (Rimer 2011). These transnational ties only tightened the relationship between the D.R. and U.S., both in general but especially as it relates to baseball.



**Figure 6:** Former MLB star Manny Ramírez when he was at George Washington High School (Krulwith 2011).

Third among these developments is the establishment of free agency and increased player movement in MLB. This process began with African American outfielder Curt Flood’s protest of an unsolicited transfer of his contract when he was traded from the Saint Louis Cardinals to the Philadelphia Phillies in 1969. In a letter to MLB Commissioner Bowie Kuhn, he wrote “[a]fter twelve years in the Major Leagues, I do not feel I am a piece of property to be bought and sold irrespective of my wishes” (Flood 1970). As the quotation shows, his positionality as a black man led him to equate the buying and selling of him as a player with the history of slavery in the U.S. and elsewhere. He was thus not just fighting an injustice, but like the Civil Rights activists of his time, battling institutional racism. Flood refused to report to his new team and did not play in 1970. Flood opted to sue MLB: his case was in opposition to the so-called reserve clause under which MLB teams had total control and players could not veto a trade; it also “prevented players from selling their talents to the highest bidder” (Sloope 2013). Players were thus on the same team

unless they got traded, released or retired so nearly all played for the same team their whole career. Flood's opposition to being traded without his consent is a seminal moment in baseball history, as it set in motion many major alterations to player rights and the start of a union, or MLB Players' Association. Flood inspired what today is known as a player's '10-and-5 rights,' often called the Curt Flood Rule. This permits players who have accrued both ten years of service time in MLB and five with their current team to veto any proposed team, a power Flood did not have (MLB Transactions Glossary 2020). Flood sacrificed his career to ensure these rights and protections for other players, as his last MLB appearance was a thirteen-game stint in 1971 for the Washington Senators. Flood should be remembered as someone who fought the MLB establishment and, more generally, for fighting for his rights in the face of abuse by his employer.

Flood's case also opened the door to the erasure of the reserve clause, and a period of freedom of player movement and free agency.<sup>17</sup> The massive amount of money MLB players can now earn ensures many are paid millions a year for their baseball talent. However, this change has also created more opportunities for younger players as teams opt to promote their young talent, which they can pay them the so-called Major League minimum, which in 2019 was \$550,000, overspending millions on older players. Marcano and Fidler agree, claiming in 1999 that "ever increasing financial pressures on MLB intensify MLB teams' search for high quality talent on the cheap in Latin America" (Marcano and Fidler 518). One example of this is Washington Nationals Dominican outfielder Juan Soto, who never played at the DSL level,<sup>18</sup> (Infield Chatter 2019)

<sup>17</sup> Other sports have had similar battles for freedom of player movement including unrestricted free agency's arrival to the NBA in 1988 and the 1995 Bosman case in European soccer. Increased player power through their unions have led to more player-friendly conditions, especially in professional basketball: the NBA is known as a 'player's league' run not by ownership groups, but by superstars like LeBron James.

<sup>18</sup> Skipping this level entirely to be sent directly to the U.S. is very rare, which shows Soto's exceptional talent was acknowledged very early on by the Nationals.

debuted in MLB at age twenty, and at twenty-one is already considered a superstar. This early deployment of young stars has occurred before in MLB history, as Hall of Fame players like outfielder Al Kaline and pitcher Catfish Hunter made the direct jump from high school to MLB (DiTullio 1980). However, never before has this practice been so common, with various teams willing to promote their young stars to MLB at such a young age. The Nationals parted ways with their former superstar outfielder Bryce Harper<sup>19</sup> and allowed him to sign as a free agent with the Philadelphia Phillies since they knew they had Juan Soto as a capable replacement.



**Figure 7:** Washington National Juan Soto during the 2019 MLB Playoffs (McDonnell 2019).

Starting in the 1970s, a few MLB teams decided it would be prudent to heavily scout in the Caribbean and Latin America as a means of obtaining players that could be paid far less than those drafted out of high school or college. The first two major figures in this development that would eventually also include the academy system were Ralph Avila of the Los Angeles Dodgers and Epy Guerrero of the Toronto Blue Jays. In fact, Klein devotes a chapter to Avila in one of his books, calling him “the best baseball mind” (Klein 1993, 96) in the Dominican Republic. At first, these men split their duties between scouting and developing Latin players, but what was really

<sup>19</sup> Harper had also been part of this trend of promoting exceptional talent to MLB at younger and younger ages, as he made his debut at nineteen in 2012 (BaseballReference.com, accessed 2020).

desired by teams was to alleviate culture shock that paralyzed many Latin players. They hoped to foster “transnational seamlessness” (Klein 2014, 51) and quicker entry of Dominicans, Venezuelans and other Latin players into MLB. This was especially urgent as the opportunity to see and recruit professional Cuban players had been slammed shut by Fidel Castro (McKenna 2017). To this day, Cuban players must defect from their homeland to have a chance to play in MLB, as mentioned in the example of Yasiel Puig earlier. By entering the academy, however, Latin players are given an opportunity to be evaluated and trained on Dominican soil before they are sent off to a foreign country. Instead of sending players directly to a U.S. minor league, as was the practice for many years, these “[a]cademies [both] prepare and adjust” (Fields 48) players for standards which are expected of them, not to mention expose them to American culture and English to avoid crippling culture shock. This was a revolutionary model, for soon after it arose, Guerrero devised his version of an academy for the Blue Jays in 1977. At the time, it was a concrete shack next to a field where about ten players slept and ate meals cooked by a local woman (Fields 14). This first location would develop and grow into the complex and elaborate system I studied.

Following the 1965 intervention in the country and U.S. withdrawal following dubious ‘free elections,’ Joaquín Balaguer served as president of the Dominican Republic from 1966 until 1978. The Cold War established total U.S. support against communism across Latin America. The idea of domino theory, or what President Eisenhower in a 1954 speech called the “‘falling domino’ principle,” (Eisenhower 1954) was the fear that if one nation becomes communist, neighboring countries are likely to as well. This meant that, with Communist Cuba’s physical proximity to the Dominican Republic, the United States sought to maintain it and the rest of the Caribbean as a controllable capitalist stronghold. Economic matters were key to this strategy of containment: it was thought that a strong capitalist private sector would prevent, or slow, political instability and

stave off a potential communist *coup d'état* (Nelson 34). Into the 1970s, Balaguer ushered in economic redevelopment, infrastructure improvement and economic and social improvements for everyday Dominicans that caused an increase in urbanization and the growth of domestic manufacturing. His time in power was not all positive, however, as his regime was “responsible for jailing, torturing, and murdering approximately 6,000 people” (Rodríguez 2020) including union leaders and journalists. Post-intervention growth was rapid, as “[t]he apex of the Dominican economic ‘miracle’ came in 1975 when sugar prices peaked” (Haggerty 1989) and political stability, albeit under a repressive regime, ensured access to markets like the United States.

Following these twelve year of stable control by Balaguer, the Dominican Republic was rocked by the suicide of President Antonio Guzmán in July 1982. Guzmán apparently “felt abandoned,” (Solomon 1982) but was dealing with both widespread corruption in his inner circle and a bleak economic situation which existed throughout the 1980s, or *La Década Perdida* (the Lost Decade) that ravaged much of Latin America. The country was also nearing a default on its loans thanks to the International Monetary Fund, or IMF, shock treatment. Debt ballooned and the Dominican Republic had to borrow money from abroad as export prices on sugar dropped to their lowest in forty years (Haggerty 1989). This devastation was wrought by processes created by global forces over which a small nation like the D.R. had no control. An economy based solely on one product whose price is set not in the country but on the global market, referred to as Dutch Disease, was no longer a viable option as the main source of revenue for the D.R., both with this price decrease and a drop in the quotas for it from the U.S. (Haggerty 1989; Gregory 7). Diversification of the economy could not continue during such a recession as stipulations like those jump-started under Balaguer were impossible without startup capital. The displacement of rural people continued as land concentration increased: shockingly, in 1985 “[m]ore than 40 percent of

the households surveyed owned no land” (Haggerty 1989). This crisis was wrought first by a land monopoly by Trujillo over public lands, and was made worse when “the equitable distribution of [these] former Trujillo properties” (Roorda, Derby and González 338) proposed by President Bosch never occurred. Population growth did not permit parents to effectively bequeath land to their children, and state-owned land distributed by the Agrarian Institute only came for 15% of rural people (Haggerty 1989). Even Balaguer’s once-successful programs could not solve the issues created by this recession.

Thanks to this bleak situation, international actors moved in in an effort to gain from the crisis: the IMF provided a three-year, \$400 million loan in 1983 (Meislin 1984). The administration, led at this time by President Jorge Blanco, had no choice but to accept this dependency on foreign loans, but “unprecedentedly high interest rates... spiraled the economy into a cycle of balance-of-payments deficits and growing external debt” (Haggerty 1989). This nationwide economic precarity during a recession caused an exponential increase in consumer prices. Food riots and three days of protesting in cities like Santo Domingo in 1984 showed a descent into disorder: one official stated that “the social equilibrium is breaking up” (Meislin 1984). The nation was charged compound interest in a process it could not pay back, and squeezing could only do so much. Further dependency became necessary thanks to this breakdown.

This position of economic precarity, unsolved by international intervention, brought U.S. economic intervention in the form of various neoliberal and neocolonial programs. President Ronald Reagan established the Caribbean Basin Initiative, or CBI, in 1983 “which gave preferential access to the U.S. market for manufactured goods from... the Caribbean” (Nelson 34). This led directly into the increase in the number of free trade areas in the D.R. and other

surrounding developing economies. These are colloquially referred to as ‘zonas francas,’<sup>20</sup> and are fenced-off areas for factory-level manufacturing of goods like electronics and jewelry (CNZFE 2020). They provide “tax exemptions to firms planning to export what they produced” (Nelson 34). These zonas francas remain a critical cog in the modern Dominican economy and today are run by local-foreign partnerships: a 1990 Dominican law, Ley 8-90, says “*se han convertido en fuentes permanentes de generación de empleos e ingresos para la población dominicana*”<sup>21</sup> (Balaguer 1990). Many of these factories have, however, outsourced to include cheaper production methods in Haiti: just as in the case of cane-cutting, “Haitian labour... [has once again emerged] as a low-wage resource for labour-intensive exports” (Traub-Werner 156). The tax-free status of these zonas means they generate little to no revenue for the state. This same model of extractive capitalism, for the most part, applies to the baseball academy.

Other economic sectors which began during this period continue to this day. The importance of the so-called ‘remittance economy,’ or money-sending by migrants in the United States and elsewhere back to their family or community, cannot be understated. As per the International Organization for Migration, in 2014, migrants sent \$4.65 billion back to the Dominican Republic (IOM 2020). *Dominicano/a/xs* can move to the United States for a few years, work and then return, while others have permanently relocated to New York, Boston, Miami and other U.S. cities and towns, not to mention other countries like Spain. Both of these types of migrants send money back home to family and friends. Such remittances reveal families still wish to help one another even when separated by oceans and borders, showing “participation in family life and a focus for their longings for return” (Fouratt 798). Even those who do not end up moving

<sup>20</sup> I was able to see the first ‘zona franca’ on the island in La Romana founded in 1969 as a subsidiary of the sugar production in that area of the country (CNZFE 2020).

<sup>21</sup> “They have become a permanent source of jobs and income for Dominican workers.”

back home contribute money for such things as the construction of household compounds for family members, forming transnational networks of care and concern which continue to link these two nations. Latin baseball players participate in these transnational networks and much of their salaries goes directly into their home communities in the D.R., Venezuela and other countries.

Tourism is also a major economic sector in the modern Dominican Republic. First promoted under Balaguer, resorts catering to Western clientele were built both on the coast along the *Autovia del Este* freeway near the academies in Boca Chica and San Pedro de Macoris, but also on the far eastern point of the island in the now booming resort town of Punta Cana. The first and most famous is Casa de Campo, built by a sugar mogul Alvaro Carta who was right in thinking that converting his prime waterfront real estate would be a worthwhile investment (Casa de Campo 2020). Many others, including international hotel brands like Hilton and Marriott, have followed his example. Across the Caribbean, these developments are popular stopgaps for economic growth as they do not mandate heavy industrialization, but instead “relied on natural resources already in place- sand, sun, friendly people” (Gregory 23). These hotels and associated tourist industries employ some Dominicans but stimulate less-than exemplary job growth (Gregory 25). Despite this, the conversion of both privately-owned lands like Casa de Campo continues, as does the displacement of communities from coastal areas by governmental decree to forge state-owned *zonas playeras*, or beach zones, geared solely to tourists (Gregory 24). Locals become a nuisance to this sector earmarked for relocation, and then simply as servants meant to work for these tourists (Gregory 24). The physical space of the island nation was once again carved apart, with foreign interests given priority access to desirable public spaces like beaches.

Globalization has also led to an entrenched neoliberal system of constant dependency on foreign capital, be it American capital or IMF loans. In 2000-2001 the state underwent a more



complete conversion to a “free-market economy” (Gregory 27) via the privatization of various state-owned entities. This pushes more and more Dominicans, both those recently laid off thanks to economic restructuring and those cast aside by the state for generations, into the informal economy. This is a space that has developed in various Dominican towns and cities, and anthropology Steven Gregory’s ethnography focuses directly on the beachfront town of Boca Chica, about a ten-minute car ride from nearly half of MLB academies. He writes about this patchwork system made up of honest work *trabajando con turistas* (working with tourists) selling products or providing tours to tourists without a license (Gregory 31,33). This informality also includes far more illicit activities like sex tourism, participated in by white American and European men searching for sexual partners, which mirrors the pursuit for ‘virgin’ lands globally via settler colonialism (Gregory 133). This economy of desperation in the neoliberal moment reveals an ad hoc economic transformation in the D.R. away from sugar as the sole economic driver and towards a new model catering to foreign interests, with tourists coming in and export products, like baseball players, going out.

The final new economic sector of note in the Dominican Republic is baseball, much of which is based around MLB’s academy system. These academies, like *zonas francas* and sugar plantations, are the foreign domains. Sculpted in the neocolonial model, MLB has even threatened to leave if they the Dominican state ever were to regulate their affairs. A continuous frenzy for Latin talent spiraled rapidly out of control as the academy system grew, with players and their *buscón* agents lying about ages and identities to allow players to sign at younger ages and for more money (Klein 2014, 138, 143). However, these efforts at deceit and keeping the cost of players low was double-sided: MLB teams also had a role in this chaos by, for example, hiding players from other scouts and teams. The Yankees brought Puerto Rican prospect and future star Bernie

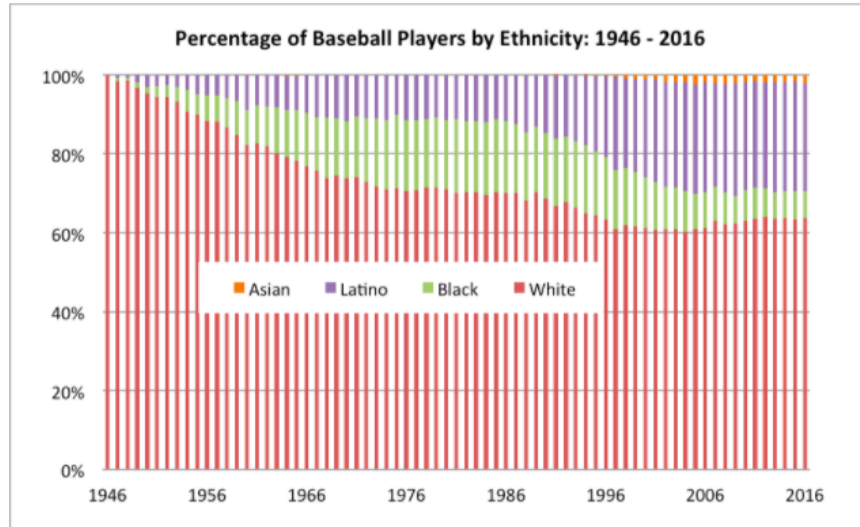
Williams to the U.S. before they could sign him to keep him from being lured by another team (Marcano and Fidler 541). Clearly, both sides were toying with the capitalist profiteering made possible from the buying and selling of baseball talent at the expense of Latin teens just hoping to play ball and provide for their family as a sporting migrant.

These dealings and activity continued to the point that, in 2010, Commissioner Bud Selig sent in yet another intervention by a U.S. military man, calling upon former Marine and MLB Vice President of Operations Sandy Alderson to ‘fix’ the situation (Klein 2014, 135). Just as military governments during the interventions, MLB had no interest in working with the Dominicans; they simply wished to tell them what to do. In fact, much of what Commissioner Selig saw as problematic were common practices that had existed in the D.R. for decades. Dominican agents and others involved in the baseball industry were infuriated, as ‘sheriff Alderson’ blamed them for all the problems. We see in Alderson’s quotation at the beginning of this work that he lays out why the D.R. is the site for MLB: the country is stable (i.e. controllable and democratic) thanks to various U.S. interventions, and there is a captive labor force who sees baseball as one of the few pathways to social mobility (YouTube, “Los Mets,” 2018). Many *buscones* thought that MLB was acting at that time to simply force down the price tag on signing bonuses these players received (Klein 2014, 143) in order to reestablish a cheap labor force they so wished to have. The legal problems, then, became an excuse for MLB to demand more control over a system it already managed singlehandedly with limited oversight once players were signed.

Eventually, after a baseball summit which saw protesting by *buscones*, MLB added fingerprinting for players that had already been signed (Klein 2014, 143) among other measures to maintain a database of players’ identities. This also included agreements between the two governments for more identity documents, increasing the amount of paperwork for teams and

agencies hoping to have their players signed by MLB teams to play in academies (Klein 2014, 142). This is the embodiment of neoliberalism: the Dominican Republic had to agree to the terms MLB sent forth, or risk losing the academies altogether. With the “economic importance of the baseball academies to... [various] impoverished communities,” (Marcano and Fidler 544) they could not allow this to happen. Neither side can ever fully agree as to what constitutes a problem to begin with (Klein 2014, 150). MLB not only strong-armed the D.R. into giving into their demands, the D.R. was also blamed for apparent shortcomings it saw as business as usual. All these factors mean that MLB’s side has, thus far, always won out. There are fears that a draft for Latin American players could eventually be devised, which would cost ancillary employment related to youth player development in the D.R. its entire industry. Dominican sovereignty was yet again pushed aside: the baseball economy fell under the hegemonic possession of the U.S., thanks to hardball played by Alderson and MLB.

Back on the field, the number of Dominicans and other Latin players has only increased during this time. For twenty year between 1967 and 1987, the percentage of Latin players in MLB held stable at between nine and twelve percent; since then, this number jumped up to about 27% and has held at or near this number each year since 2001 (Armour and Levitt 2016). This is a revealing statistic, as it shows the role of the academy in player development and the success it has had in ushering in a new generation of Latin baseball talent in MLB. As Figure 8 shows, however, the decreasing number of African-Americans in MLB cannot go unmentioned here; whereas in the mid-1980s African-Americans made up around 18% of the players, they now only make up 6.7% of players as of 2016, (Armour and Levitt 2016) a number that has only decreased since.



**Figure 8:** Demographics of Baseball (courtesy of Armour and Levitt 2016).

Countless reasons for this decrease in black baseball players have been offered. One is that baseball has been relegated to the third most popular American sport behind football and basketball, especially amongst younger people. These sports hold appeal as young players are fast-tracked into the professional level: U.S.-born football and basketball players play in college and then are drafted into the professional level. College baseball, meanwhile, is not this same style of feeder league as college football or basketball; African American star outfielder Andrew McCutchen, quoted in 2017, said that “you don’t get a full ride... [to play baseball in] college” (Barra 2017). In conjunction with the opportunities offered by National Collegiate Athletic Association (or NCAA) football and basketball, baseball has become an elitist, expensive sport like tennis or golf available almost exclusively to suburban white families. Many minority and lower-class children simply cannot afford the fees, cleats, gloves, bats and other equipment required to play baseball<sup>22</sup> (Tanier 2012). Finally, basketball and football are the sports of popular

<sup>22</sup> The Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (or RBI) Program was founded in 1989 through a partnership between MLB and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. It allows underserved youth the chance to play baseball (Boys and Girls Clubs 2020). Many black players in MLB today, like brothers Melvin and Justin Upton from Houston and L.A. native Dominic Smith are alumni, but this alone cannot solve the structural barriers and sheer cost of the sport.

culture. Michael Jordan, who retired from the NBA in 2003, and LeBron James are arguably two of the most recognizable athletes in the world; comedian Chris Rock puts it perfectly and bluntly: “[i]f you lose black America, you lose young America” (Barra 2017). MLB continues to contend with this problem domestically both in terms of a lack of black participation in the sport, and young people's loss of interest in a slower-paced sport. They do not have this problem in baseball-crazed nations like the Dominican Republic, where basketball is starting to gain popularity but is still a distant second behind baseball.

Transnational sporting migrants now make up a quarter of MLB players. As of 2017, the entire active Dominican Republic roster for the World Baseball Classic, a quadrennial global baseball competition in the mold of the FIFA World Cup in soccer, was composed of MLB players, anchored by superstars like third baseman Adrián Beltré and second baseman Robinson Canó (Lara-Cinisomo 2017). This sporting prowess of Dominican talent shows all exceptionally talented Dominican players play in MLB and are there to stay.

MLB retirees from Latin America live binational lives: many have homes in warm locales in the U.S. like Miami, and another in their country of origin. Nearly all ex-superstars return to great acclaim: former Venezuelan outfielder Maggilo Ordoñez, for example, became mayor of Juan Antonio Sotillo in 2013 (Scharfenberg 2013). Others become embroiled in more nefarious activity: former Dominican pitcher Octavio Dotel and second baseman Luis Castillo were arrested, and later cleared, in 2019 as they had allegedly hid assets for a drug trafficking kingpin known as ‘César the Abuser’ (Anderson 2019). Sadly, many players cannot go home, including Cuban players who had to defect for the opportunity to play in MLB. Also, Venezuelans from strife-torn areas stay in the U.S., as they risk being kidnapped if they go back. Venezuelan catcher Elías Díaz’s mother’s kidnapping shows their families are also targeted (Bloom 2018). Clearly, these

players are some of the most popular people from their home countries and have an impact on their home communities as remittance providers, cultural figures and political candidates post-career.



**Figures 9 and 10:** Dominican Dynasties form in MLB: Vlad and Vlad Jr.  
(photos courtesy of Lisa Blumenfeld and Tom Szczerbowski, both from Getty Images)

Figure 9 is of one of those binational and bicultural former baseball players: Dominican Hall of Fame outfielder Vladimir Guerrero. Figure 10, meanwhile, is of a younger player who just started his MLB journey with astronomically high expectations. As the name on his jersey reads, he is indeed third baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr.: he shares his father's athletic gifts, but also his biculturality as a Dominican man playing an American sport. As he grew up alongside his dad in clubhouses and MLB cities like Montreal and Anaheim, and since he spent a great deal of time around the game, Vlad Jr. knows the sports and its trials and tribulations. That he plays in Toronto, Canada just to make the situation all the more global, as well as more sentimental as his father played for years in Montreal for the now-defunct Expos. These intergenerational players and ties are becoming increasingly common in modern MLB, with sons of famous MLB stars making it to the Majors. These second-generation Latin players know the commitment, talent and hard work it takes to make it to MLB. They, then, hope to parlay this knowledge into a long, productive MLB career.

## **Academy Ethnography**

It was a cloudless, hot July day in the Dominican Republic. Though the baseball game I was here to see started early to avoid the heat of the midday, I could already feel the sweat sticking to the back of my neck and soaking into my polo shirt. Seated under an overhang just behind home plate on the first base side of the field, I had a front row view Dominican Summer League baseball, contested in this island nation between the Latin signees of MLB teams over a 72-game season.

For sports anthropologist Alan Klein, these academies are liminal spaces of transformation: the input is human capital in the form of Latin American teens with sporting promise and the output is MLB ballplayers, or at least players prepared for advancement into higher minor league levels in the U.S. (Klein 2014, 47). Unlike many other spaces of capital exploitation in developing nations, where workers are simply exploited, both sides here hope for the same goal: “to form/become major leaguers” (Klein 2014, 47). These young Latin teenagers play to practice as, within this developmental league, practice can eventually make perfect. Thus, very little stock is put into the wins and losses record for these teams. Spectators at these games are also rare aside from friends and family members of the Dominican players. Many Dominicans I talked with about my research interests and projects at my accommodations knew little to nothing about the academy or the DSL. Some knew about the presence of these academies, but even my cab driver had not realized how fabulously opulent these facilities were, or that such an elaborate mosaic of fields and offices of 30 MLB teams existed in his island nation. More of the in-country focus remains on the locally run Dominican league, the Dominican Winter League. A tenuous relationship exists which allows MLB’s presence in the forms of these academies in return for Dominican control of this domestically run league. This positioning of the DSL and the academies as such a critical space for Latin teens yet once hidden from Dominican society made it a unique field site.

Just as these academies are liminal spaces of growth and development, they are also enclaves, “created by the penetration of capitalism from outside, controlled by foreign investors, and completely divorced from the nations in which they are situated” (LeGrand 595). The role of foreign capital and MLB team control over the proceedings at these academies certainly qualifies these spaces as enclaves, just as sugar plantations and *zonas francas* run by outside corporations operate under the same rules. In describing the coal towns of Appalachia, Karida Brown calls these enclaves ‘company towns,’ where “the basic structure necessary to sustain a stable workforce” (Brown 14) is provided by the corporation and the labor is supplied by working class folks in search of a job. These regimes, including the plantation, company town and I content these baseball academies, are also total institutions, a term first coined by Irving Goffman “defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals cut off [are] from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enclosed formally administered round of life” (Goffman 11). These models of the company town and total institution are exported all across the world by the capitalistic beast; they permit these academies to have free reign over their internal affairs. As shown, MLB has negotiated a model where regulation by the Dominican government is limited to non-existent.

All thirty MLB teams’ academies, as shown in Figure 2, maintain these enclaves within two strategic locations: the beach resort area of Boca Chica, and the sugar plantation hub of San Pedro de Macoris. These locations were selected decades ago, mainly due to the where talent is, as discussed with the plethora of *cocolos* from plantation towns, but also thanks to ease of travel for team staff. Boca Chica and San Pedro de Macoris are both quite close to the capital of Santo Domingo and its international airport. Adolfo, my host during my fieldwork from the team I worked with, described to me that coaches live in homes in the capital, and team staff coming to



visit can fly in for a few days and stay in an area hotel. Adolfo, as the international operations coordinator of an MLB team, spends about a week each month at his team's academy, and is able to easily travel back and forth between his office at the team's Spring Training facility in Florida and the Dominican Republic. Other traveling team employees, like so-called 'roving instructors' and scouts, can also make this trip as part of their circuit around the nation. These academies become an extension of the United States, not unlike a U.S. air force base in a country like Germany or Guantánamo Bay: it is "in effect a bit of American territory" (Kaplan 831). This spatial proximity is also helpful since these players are near at hand but not working in the United States. This saves MLB teams the visas it needs for its foreign-born players at both the minor and major league levels. Teams only have a small number of P-1A athlete visas to give out to "individual athlete[s] at an internationally recognized level of performance" (USCIS 2020). I was present for this complex process of promotion for one DSL player: it involved not just excitement on his end, but endless paperwork and calling of the league office to verify his identity and age.

The physical space of the academy I worked at was an elaborate collection of offices, gyms and baseball fields. The site contained three fully functional ball fields cared for by a full-time grounds crew who, like the players, lived on-site. One was the largest and used solely for DSL games, one was for tryouts and what is known as 'tricky league' made up of those signed the previous year, and the third was used for additional games that might occur at the academy, or for drills which required a baseball diamond for activities like infield practice. The facility also had a massive gym for all players and staff to use; a front desk and receptionist; meeting rooms for coaches and scouts; and a clerical area with offices for people like Adolfo complete with a fax machine and other office equipment.

A shining example of the typical academy was recently built and opened by the Seattle Mariners in 2014 in Boca Chica. This particular academy “house[s] 80 youngsters... [and] includes three baseball fields, covered batting cages, weight rooms, classrooms and dormitories for Mariners' Minor League prospects from the Caribbean area” (Johns 2014). The entranceway and building are shown below in Figure 11. Klein points out that “the lavishness and opulence of the academy” (Klein 2014, 47) can shock players into adhering and respecting team rules, but also aware of the money in the sort, that could be theirs if they reach MLB.



**Figure 11:** The Seattle Mariners’ Dominican Academy in 2014 (photo by MLB Media)

These academies enclaves are “a closed world of total and arbitrary authority” (LeGrand 556) controlled by each team. Adolfo attempted to romanticize the situation, calling this arrangement a positive one “like a summer camp.” However, the high degree of control over players the academy has make this an improper characterization. Since they are so young, the teams seek to keep players under strict social control, keeping them from leaving the academy for long periods of time during the season to limit outside distractions. This makes the setup far more akin to an educational institution like a boarding school or military academy. Unlike at other levels of minor league and major league baseball where players obtain their own accommodations, players at the academy live in a dormitory-style housing bloc on the grounds directly adjacent to

the administrative building and the fields. It is within the closed space of the academy and under the watchful eye of team staff.

Many parallels exist between these living quarters and Jeremy Bentham's view of the ideal boarding house. For example, these players live under a curfew, wherein they have to be inside by around 10pm; two coaches also sleep on the premises every night, living in a small apartment just below where the players live. Bentham writes that "[a]t night, as soon as the time of work is over... the lights in them [are] put out; and from that time, till the hour of work comes round again, a watchman is to patrol over every part of the house" (Bentham 1843, 22). Also, as all of the players are housed in one dormitory-style building, their living quarters are very small. Each room, as seen in Figure 13, houses four players and has two bunk beds, one dresser and not much else aside from the players' clothes and other assorted personal belongings. Bentham wrote that these bare necessities are all residents need: "[e]very lodging-room is to be provided with matting for lying upon, a coverlid, and two or more coarse blankets" (Bentham 1843, 22). Of course, these players are treated far better than those who live in a boarding house of the type Bentham describes: they are paid by their teams, and a few received lucrative multi-million dollar signing bonuses as part of their contract. This tightly packed dormitory housing is part of the deal, and all their needs like equipment, food and clothing are provided. However, this closed environment can be extremely suffocating and demeaning towards these players; the total institution can be all-consuming.



**Figures 12 and 13:** Common area and bunk bed in players' quarters (photos by author)

This compact space in the dormitory building was where I was told players spend most of their free time. It had a team lounge and a common room with couches and televisions, though free time for these players was sparse. Dead time was described as unwanted, as Adolfo described an active desire to “keep them [the players] active” at all times to “keep them out of trouble.” This can be paralleled with other labor pursuits disdaining lack of work: on the sugar plantation, *tiempo muerto* is a rare time of freedom. Players are pushed to avoid vices like drinking and drugs, not just at the DSL level but also in the minors if they make it to the United States. Clearly, this oversight by the teams is over the top in order for these teams to keep their assets from both self-inflicted and outside harm. These are workers hired to play baseball, and the team hopes they will avoid any sort of distraction, which the academy does not afford them. Also, any tomfoolery by players would reflect negatively on the team. Players, however, at the current moment are heavily surveilled and do little but play baseball, learn English and work out; this daily grind can be incredibly daunting, and the team believes any and all outside interests is a detriment to success.

This demands great discipline and focus from these players on a daily basis, which becomes part of their journey towards playing in the levels of baseball above the DSL.

Comfort, though, of these quarters has skyrocketed since the early days of professional baseball: anthropologist George Gmelch reminisced on his time in the minors, writing “[t]he old wooden barracks where I had bunked with my teammates on Army cots, four to a doorless room, were gone, replaced by a modern, air-conditioned cinder-block structure similar to a college dormitory” (Gmelch 2016). In the Dominican Republic, these living quarters had also once been more antiquated and simpler, with, as mentioned, the players from the first academy opened by Epy Guerrero living in a small house (Ruck 2011, 206). These academies are now state-of-the-art facilities for these players and function to keep them housed in a closed-off environment, as shown in the images of the Mariners’ complex in Figure 11. They play, train, sleep and eat all in the same location, which are all becoming increasingly more elaborate as a so-called ‘arms race’ between MLB teams as this scouting and training of international players continues to expand.

Modern technology, too, has become a major part of these players’ lives off the field. Players can now spend their free time away from the field playing video games like *MLB: The Show* on PlayStation, not to mention their enhanced ability to text or call their family and friends on their cell phones. Music, too, is no longer a shared endeavor with boomboxes that earlier researchers I have read described, as now every player had their own personal stereo in the form of their iPhone and headphones. Gmelch, again, voices his observations about the new minor league world: “I learned that, because of such devices, today’s players seldom leave the dorm in the evening” (Gmelch 2016). This encourages individual time talking to family and friends from home, instead of getting to know their teammates. This may hurt overall camaraderie, but earbuds

are so ubiquitous in all facets of modern life it is not necessarily more impactful here at the academy than elsewhere in our society.

Not only did the team I worked with emphasize learning how to play baseball, but also fostered the importance of character-building. An aura of professionalism was heavily emphasized by the organization with which I worked. The ten-step list posted in the classroom, unfortunately silhouetted by the team's logo so I will have to write it instead of sharing my pictures of it, reads:

1. Be punctual.
2. No eating or drinking.
3. No chewing gum.
4. No cell phones.
5. No electronic devices.
6. No tobacco.
7. No distraction outside the classroom.
8. No slippers or sandals.
9. Good manners.
10. Dress Code: Polos and Pants.

This list establishes a set of core principles all these players are held to at all times at the academy. Coaches and other team staff I spoke to espouse this notion of these players needing to take responsibility for their own actions early on. The staff explained that the players were extremely driven individuals because of their knowledge of how difficult the path they were on towards Major League stardom was, and that success was only going to come if they took this endeavor seriously. This individualistic mandate was quite striking given the control these teams had over players. This emphasis on character-building displays the importance of discipline for these players; those who act out or do not conform will be released, so players learn quickly that instruction needs to be heeded.

The baseball I saw played was at a novice level, as the players I saw in this game were almost all under the age of twenty. Most were only seventeen or eighteen; their path towards fully developing their abilities and 'taking advantage of their talent,' as scouts and team personnel put

it, had only just begun. Thus, what scouts and staff are looking for is not mastery at this level, but instead what is referred to as projectability. This projectability can be defined as how one will progress and improve as they age, and thus if they can hope to become a prospect, which is a player who is seen as a valuable asset by their organization and as someone who may reach higher levels of MiLB, or even MLB. This concept of value came up again and again: Klein writes about how looking at this system as an economic relation, indeed a commodity/supply chain in a Polanyian sense, is useful as there are “materials (Dominican rookies) and producers (MLB)” (Klein 2014, 21). The human capital signed and put into the chain, in an economic sense, is the young Latin teenager. Through the use of the physical gifts, referred to as ‘tools,’ players then undergo this period of training at the academy, which can be reconceptualized as an apprenticeship. Players who are talented and respond well to instruction can move onto minor league baseball in the United States.

Adolfo spoke at length about this concept of identifying ability at this first stage of play in front of MLB evaluators:

I try to project individually for each of these players and identify who I believe might be ready for the next level... who I believe is developing, and can maybe succeed at a certain level, with regard to a certain part of his game. What I’m usually doing is trying to identify and provide a voice for the organization as to which players I believe might be ready for the next level, and which players I believe might need a little bit more time to develop here at this level. (Adolfo Interview 2019)

Dominican baseball legend Juan Marichal, while working for an MLB team, also shows this concept: he said, “the game is an opportunity to evaluate talent, to see if any of these youngsters has a legitimate chance” (Ruck 1998, 69) to become a big leaguer. The major leagues are, of course, the goal for these Latin athletes, but playing in small towns and cities across the U.S. as a minor leaguer is still a good job opportunity. It is lucrative for these players to make a minor league salary and send this income back to their families and communities in Latin America

as remittances. For five, or even ten years, minor league players try to prove their abilities, and almost none of them reach MLB. Even players with the ability to play in MLB still sometimes fall through the cracks and do not make it; they can be blocked by a superstar at the same position, for example, and some still go overlooked by talent evaluators. Still others are struck by career-ending injuries. Even with the use of technology to enhance understandings of player performance and advancements in injury rehabilitation, this is an inexact science.

Because these players are signed at such young ages, those at the academy are still learning and growing daily. This leads to some frustration from team staff, such as when Adolfo apologized to me for the poor display in one of the games I attended. He was especially perturbed by the defensive showing of the team's middle infielders, or the shortstop and second baseman: on a few relatively simple opportunities they had to make plays, they instead made mistakes, or errors. These mistakes cost the team multiple runs, and moreover hurt the confidence of the pitcher: in baseball terminology, the pitcher had 'made his pitch to get the out, but his defense could not help him out.' This could lead to anger between teammates, thus this lack of completing plays hurts not just whoever has failed, but the team as a whole.

This sloppy play I saw can be given over a more generalizable phenomenon among these young Latin players: as mentioned, they are still learning how to play the sport properly while at the academy. They still need to grasp what in baseball are called the fundamentals. These are the small nuances within the sport, including such as how to throw, bat and pitch correctly given the situation. This sort of knowledge turned into action is immediately processed by top athletes in MLB and can only come with learning and experiencing playing organized baseball for an extended period of time. Though some of these fundamentals are also simply learned behaviors that come with trial and error, much of it comes via instruction provided by the coaches. The



preferable or most efficient way to do anything, in this case play a sport, involves esoteric knowledge, “a secret knowledge of the reality of things, of hidden truths, handed down... not all at once, to a relatively small number of persons who are typically ritually initiated by those already holding this knowledge” (Tiryakian 499).

This learning, as Tiryakian states, is particular in two important ways. Firstly, this knowledge is held by elders, in this case coaches and team staff. They must be respected and lauded, yet these relationships can become tense if coaches and players cannot relate to one another or work well together. These dynamics can be remedied through innovative methods: the Miami Marlins are encouraging coaches to learn Spanish (Wagner “Marlins,” 2019). The team I worked with emphasized the academy as a training ground not just for players, but also young coaches. Many coaches did play organized baseball and understand the players’ position. Melvin, an assistant hitting coach, was a career minor leaguer, for example, who also played in leagues in Europe and Australia. Though they understand the minor league grind, as it is called, they still occupy a position of power over players. Secondly, this overall player development continues not just at the academy level but throughout the minor leagues. This process can become monotonous and seem not to be yielding the results these Latin players, who expected to become the next MLB superstar, anticipated. The system of the academy, indeed of the whole of the minor leagues, is one of patience and waiting for one’s opportunity to succeed and impress your coaches, scouts and eventually adoring fans.

There is a profound lack of game experience and general baseball acumen for most prospects signed from across Latin America by an MLB team. Teenage Latin players arrive at various showcases and tryouts where MLB scouts come to see them perform. Only the best players are signed to join a DSL academy. These players have been working hard before they sign to

improve their abilities: most sign at young ages, around twelve or thirteen, and drop out of school to work with a *buscón*, a baseball middleman who is akin to an advisor, trainer and agent all in one. This term roughly translates to searcher, or looker, as *buscar* in Spanish means to look for. That is what these men do: they, many of whom are former players themselves, are “discoverers and developers of talent who play an essential, positive, and increasingly powerful role” (Klein 2014, 70). They are the first force of island-wide talent evaluation of young ballplayers. It is in service of their own profession, but they also provide a huge service to MLB teams as these middlemen.

Under the guidance of *buscones*, these teens play baseball all day in hopes of being signed by an MLB team once they turn sixteen. This signing period was once a time when lying about ages was common but, as discussed, MLB cracked down on this practice. Now the only ‘unsightly’ thing they have to contend with is the amount of a player’s signing bonus these *buscones* receive (Klein 2014, 71, 145). Klein describes a keen focus on ensuring their players are honing their ‘tools,’ instead of learning and practicing what to do during a game to be fundamentally sound (Klein 2014, 70-71). What this then amounts to, for these young Latin players, is far more time spent working on the drills that will be performed to impress scouts into wanting to sign them, like sprinting or speed drills, working on arm strength and simply hitting the ball a long distance. Again, this is instead of playing the game, grasping its rules and experiencing various in-game situations. This constitutes the esoteric knowledge teams want to instill in players that only comes by playing daily and not through these drills.

This *buscón* setup is nothing new and has its parallels in U.S. amateur sports in the form of Amateur Athletic Union basketball, or AAU. These coaches and teams function as middlemen for NCAA basketball coaches in the United States, and eventually the National Basketball

Association, or NBA. The best of the best at the high school level play on these AAU teams, so by going to AAU tournaments in cities like Las Vegas, which are sponsored by shoe companies like Nike or Under Armour, college coaches can see some of the nation's best players all competing at one site. This system amounts to a capitalistic ploy in which coaches and shoe companies make money, and even allegedly break federal law through illegal bribes handed out during the recruitment of players to particular colleges (Ryman 2019). This exploitation of unpaid high school athletes hoping to play in college, and eventually the NBA, is just the same as the actions taken by *buscones* who are paid to train these young Dominican middle school dropouts into only potential MLB signees.

The connection is even made stronger as criticisms of AAU are the same as those leveled against these *buscón* camps: NBA star and lifelong Laker Kobe Bryant, back in 2015 before his recent passing, said that AAU players “don't know the fundamentals” (Markazi 2015) of basketball. He claims that these AAU teams inflate young player's egos with their increased exposure in tournaments and on social media, and, like *buscones*, the focus is on what Kobe called “fancy crap” (Markazi 2015). These are the very same criticisms those who are anti-*buscón* have, as players working with these developers focus on learning how to blow away scouts not with making routine plays, but with their ability to hit a ball far or throw it a long distance. This move towards both further professionalization and specialization in sport is troubling to some, but it is only natural that a focus would be on improving players' talents at younger and younger ages and looking towards one's best abilities exclusively.

This lack of in-game practice and experience rears its ugly head when it comes time to know, for instance, which base to throw to from the outfield given the runner(s) on base, as well as the number of outs. Even a player with a strong throwing arm, who was seen at a tryout and

may have signed for this very reason, will soon learn this ability to throw to the right place at the right time is a more noteworthy skill than arm strength alone. This shows that, in baseball, timing in all its forms is critical. It can be taught or learned, but only in-game can a player truly realize the need to know such information at a moment's notice and enact the throwing the ball to the right base as soon as they receive the ball. The game waits for no one, and just like the mental mistakes Adolfo was so irked by, one misstep or mistake can compound to hurt the whole team, as well as a prospect's chance of promotion out of the academy. The physical and the mental need to be in sync and focus on the game situation at all times is key.

Since each academy signee represents an investment, their development and realization of talent also gives each of these players a given value to their organization which can go up or down. The notion of the valuation of all baseball players' labor and abilities holds across eras and nations: no one wants to be considered so-called 'minor league filler' and cast aside as not talented enough to achieve their goals. All those who play in the DSL are hoping for the chance to become a highly valued 'top prospect,' which is no sure thing. It is also more economically efficient, in the vein of McDonaldization, to sign multiple Latin players over one or two U.S.-born prospects. Signing bonuses when a contract is agreed to are increasingly common for academy signees from Latin America, however the amount of money they make on average remains much lower than players who are drafted.

George Gmelch, an anthropologist of sport who played and later studied minor league baseball, had these questions about his value as well: when he saw his old minor league coach, he writes "I blurted out the big question that had nagged at me for many years: had I been a real prospect? I'd always wondered if I could have made it to the big leagues" (Gmelch 2008, 14). When he learned the answer to his question was no, he reported feeling "a pang, disbelief, some

defensiveness, but also an odd sense of relief... this assessment put an end to my fantasies” (Gmelch 2008, 14). Being hit in the face with this reality of his lack of MLB potential was clearly jarring. Being truthful in the way Gmelch’s coach was to him about lack of ability from the onset for team staff would lead to many baseball players to become apathetic and without motivation, since they now know they have no chance of major league stardom. In this modern age of statistical analysis, baseball players can be assigned a numerical value derived from a complex formula: Wins Above Replacement or WAR, for instance, shows how much more value a player provides over the average replacement player (Weinberg 2014). This can also lead to an oversimplification of one’s talent, indeed that being boiled down to a number in the case of athletes is dehumanizing, yet now commonplace.

This discussion of the valuing of player labor in the Latin baseball academy and beyond draws a parallel to Julie Greene’s work on the American-controlled Panama Canal Zone. This work provides an example of tiered labor that is functional here for thinking about the signing and promotion to U.S. minor league teams of these young Latin men, not to mention U.S. colonial (and now neocolonial) actions across in Latin America. She writes about the gold and silver system, so-called because U.S. railroad companies would “pay unskilled workers with Panamanian silver and skilled workers with U.S. gold currency” (Greene 56). What began as a payment system with different groupings evolved rapidly into thinly veiled Jim Crow segregation, especially since the thousands of workers were recruited to the Canal Zone from West Indian islands, mainly Barbados and Jamaica. Greene shows the system was white American at top, and all other workers, or “all colored employees” (Greene 57) below:<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> This came to include African Americans who moved to the Canal Zone from the U.S.; they too were considered silver employees despite being U.S. citizens (Greene 57-58).

The government paid silver employees far less, fed them unappetizing food, and housed them in substandard shacks. Gold workers earned very high wages and terrific benefits, including six weeks of paid vacation leave every year, one month of paid sick leave every year, and a free pass for travel (Greene 56-57).

This extreme example from the early 1900s shows how biological determinism and racialized assumptions influenced the treatment of workers. Black workers were considered more suited to this manual work in the sun and heat, and at this time racial segregation was part of the natural order of things. Whites, meanwhile, were treated like kings to ensure they stayed in Panama to work. This rhetoric and differential treatment have of course for the most part been dismissed as horribly racist today, but the legacies of how one's national origin, skin color and other identifying features can be detrimental to one's success or acceptance. In this instance, race appears as another factor contributing to wage inequality; in the 21st century, class and nationality also play into modern wealth disparities between the Global South and Global North

In baseball, a shift towards the use of more and more Latin players as 'minor league filler' is clear, especially since they are a cheaper labor source. Though some of them are very talented and reach MLB, they represent a tier that received different treatment than drafted players, who even themselves are underpaid. However, this is a troubling development, especially since these Latin players are brought to the U.S. under false pretenses of ability to exist so that games with enough players who are not 'top prospects,' or sure-fire major leaguers, can continue. This concept of 'minor league filler' has been used as an argument to advocate for the contraction of Minor League Baseball, which was proposed by MLB in 2019 to reduce the number of minor league teams (Sheinin 2019). If MiLB is indeed too large there are redundant players or teams, McDonaldization mandates the excess be removed. However, this plan denies many small cities and towns the ability to see live baseball, so this is a tough choice given baseball's declining popularity.

In baseball, it is assumed that most players from countries like Cuba, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic grew up poor, whereas instead within these countries there are complex class relations. Many of these players grew up in privileged homes and pursued baseball not for the common tropes of desperation or to achieve social mobility, but because it was their passion. They hold baseball in the same esteem and still hope to play in the U.S.; Dominican outfielder Nomar Mazara, whose father was a general in the Dominican Navy, still said in an interview that “[b]aseball means everything in the Dominican Republic. It's the top sport there, and every little kid dreams of being in the Major Leagues” (Mazara 2017). Notice how even this player from a higher-class background recounts both the centrality of the sport in Dominican society and how every players’ goal is to reach MLB. The distillation of the Latin player into one trope, the desperate brown body seeking social mobility, is a dangerous assumption that does not take into account racialization and class structures in Latin America and the Caribbean. It does exist to some degree but does not capture the experiences of many players.

The dominant narrative is further compromised by two other examples of success stories of reaching the Major Leagues from Latin America. They both come from Central American players. Firstly, Nicaraguan infielder Cheslor Cuthbert, who grew up on Corn Islands, an English-speaking locale. Thus, he was an outsider first in his own Nicaragua when he moved to the city to train to play baseball and then provided a second hurdle upon his arrival to the United States as a Kansas City Royal (Dodd 2018). The other is infielder Mauricio Dubón from the city of San Pedro Sula on the north coast of Honduras. He moved to the U.S. to train at fifteen (thereby bypassing the academy system) and was drafted by the Milwaukee Brewers and debuted for the San Francisco Giants in 2019 (YouTube “Dubón Family,” 2019). One interviewee in this video put it well: “Mauricio’s success is our nation’s pride” (YouTube “Dubón Family,” 2019).

Another sporting example that refers back to the tiered labor system and conception of ‘minor league filler’ mentioned above comes from Peter Alegi’s work on Africa’s newfound role in global soccer. Alegi recounts the increased sporting migration of African players to European leagues, showing “the existence of a soccercape in which most African players labor in middle- and lower-tier European leagues” (Alegi 100). This, in many ways, exhibits Besnier’s point about the movement of athletes from the Global South to Global North, but once again reveals that talented players need to pursue employment opportunities which do not exist in their home countries. Just as Latin players have become ‘minor league filler’ in MiLB and play across the world in leagues in Asia, Europe and even Australia, so too are these African players filling out squads in far-flung European nations like Romania and Malta (Alegi 100). The best among them can transfer to so-called big clubs across Europe<sup>24</sup> which is quite a similar system to the buying of the best baseball players from East Asian countries like South Korea and Japan as we saw in the three tier of talent recruitment, as well as to simply making the Majors for players recruited out of academies in the Dominican Republic.

### **Signs of Universality**

I went into this field research hoping that, by viewing DSL games at an MLB team’s academy, I would achieve some sense of what I will call herein ‘signs of universality’ in how baseball is played across cultures, nations, ages and languages. I was interested to see such things as what language was spoken by players, coaches and umpires; how dugout interactions played out; and if some constant in how baseball appears are present the same across all levels of the

<sup>24</sup> Two examples of this include Nigerian defender John Obi Mikel’s move from Norwegian side Lyn to London club Chelsea 2006 (PSU sites, 2018) or Senegalese forward Sadio Mané’s meteoric rise from a small French club FC Metz, first to an Austrian team, then to English side Southampton and finally to English superpower Liverpool (Varley 2020).



sport. I found my answers to these questions just by watching a few games at the DSL level and spending time at the academy in other capacities. I note five major areas: language/ritual, camaraderie, food, education and masculinity.

### **Language/Ritual**

I wanted to find out if this league, played by players employed by a U.S.-based parent corporation, was conducted in English or Spanish. I soon learned that, by rule, the home plate umpire must speak English. Calls including the number of balls and strikes, asking the other umpire for assistance on calls like what are known as ‘check swings’ and the number of outs were all delivered in English. This, then, leads me to conclude that the catcher must know English well to play, even at the DSL level. A team cannot afford to have someone at that position who cannot fully understand what the umpire is saying to them because of a language barrier.

When out on the field, players also spoke to one another in English. Many of their exclamations in-game were in both English and Spanish, but such simple phrases as calling for a ball to catch it as a fielder were said in English: the universal “I got it!” is the best example of this. Again, when a ball was hit high in the air or lost in the sun by one of the fielders, one of the other players on the field yelled “Up!” to instruct his teammates someone needed to figure out where the ball was, and catch it if they could. These exclamations show these teams and their coaches stress learning how to communicate cross-culturally. The field of play is a hegemonically English-speaking place, while the dugout remained one where mostly Spanish was heard, from both players and coaches. Instruction, clearly, mandated English be spoken on the field, but in the dugout all bets were off. This distinction ensures there is less difficulty communicating if, for example, one of these DSL players ends up on a team at the next level. These games would be played in places like Arizona or Florida with a team of players and coaches mainly from the United States who

speak English. Calling to catch a ball and other exclamations used on the field, then, must be in the language everyone understands, so the mandate to learn English is critical for these Latin players' chances at success.

Another part of language in baseball that deserves a brief mention is the heavy use of slang, or 'baseball English,' by players, coaches and fans, many of which arrive from unexplainable etymological backgrounds. An easy catch? A 'can of corn.' A player who pretends to work hard or puts on airs? Fake hustle, or 'eyewash.'<sup>25</sup> These ritualized terms, both positive and negative, permeate the sport and give it its own language. They are also culturally specific and rooted in American conceptions of work, labor and even culinary ideals, like the aforementioned 'can of corn' but also how a baserunner trapped between two bases is 'in a pickle.' This can make these phrases difficult for Latin players to comprehend and utilize. I located a Spanish to English baseball dictionary that seeks to translate and describe these such terms (Insinga 1995). It is 22 pages of terms and includes both formal and slang terms. There are many cognates in this dictionary where the English and Spanish words are similar or identical: the word for strike is also spelled *strike* as well but pronounced e-stri-kuh, and the word for batter is *bateador*. In some cases, Spanish phrases to describe baseball situations are also slang: to describe bases loaded (runners on all bases), the Spanish phrase is *la casa está llena*, or the house is full. These sorts of transcultural exchanges show how ritual and context are embedded into sport, which I saw at DSL games.

This brotherhood and camaraderie exists at every level of baseball today, especially since nearly all Latin American players speak Spanish. Aruban and Boston Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts actually speak four languages: English, Spanish, Dutch and Papiamentu, the national

<sup>25</sup> See Lindsey Adlers's reporting in *The Athletic* titled "'Nice way to say bulls—t': An appreciation of 'eyewash,' baseball's most usable term" for more on baseball slang (Adler 2020).

language of Aruba. He has said in various interviews he picked up Spanish to communicate in the minor leagues with fellow players from Latin America, and as a Red Sox veteran he now helps to mentor young teammates like Dominican third baseman Rafael Devers (TIME 2017). This shared Spanish knowledge is an asset for players, especially when they arrive in unfamiliar monolingual minor league towns. They can then talk to their Latin teammates. In fact, many teams push all their players and staff to be bilingual: the Marlins are, as mentioned, “conducting Spanish classes for English speakers throughout the organization, from players to coaches to top executives” (Wagner “Marlins,” 2019). This seizes not just on the major league’s team location in Miami, but also to allow dialogue between all employees.

Dugout interactions in the DSL are similar to what one might see at any level of baseball: cheers and jeers; celebratory demonstrations like the aforementioned silent treatment; and finally, moments of anguish when players did not succeed and received words and pats of encouragement by both coaches and fellow teammates. As opposed to the language on the field by both the umpire and players, much of this dugout chatter was in Spanish. Many a time the phrase “¡Eso es!” (“That’s it!”) was exclaimed by encouraging teammates pushing along their pitcher after a well-placed pitch, or a batter if he was able to take a pitch that was not a strike. Another similar phrase I heard was “*Vamos patrón,*” (meaning “c’mon man/boss/dude”) which was also used to reinforce quality play within the arduous grind of the lengthy DSL game. These positive affirmations gave players on the field confidence and let them know their teammates were behind them. Players built bonds of understanding; it was clear these young men support each other despite them knowing they are competing against one another for promotion.

During one of the games I attended, something quite magical happened: a young first baseman for the visiting team hit a mammoth home run, or *jonrón* in Spanish. When he returned

to his team's dugout, initially there was no acknowledgement of his achievement, or even that he had returned from hitting this homer. Then, quite suddenly, the young man was mobbed by his teammates, who not only high-fived him, but also pounded their hands upon his head, or more precisely on his batting helmet. This style of celebration is actually rather common in all levels of baseball I have seen, including in MLB. This ritual is often referred to as the 'silent treatment,' and like the various slang terms used in the sport, its origins are lost to time. This is done most often when a rookie, or first year, player hits his first career home run, as it is customary that at first, he is completely ignored but then, like this DSL player, he gets swarmed and congratulated for such a massive accomplishment by his teammates.

For Victor Turner, sport contains "different phases of a rite of passage" (Besnier and Brownell 445). This space of competition and teamwork "enables initiates to form an egalitarian social bond, [or] 'communitas'" (Besnier and Brownell 445). This silent treatment reveals 'communitas' bonds Turner describes between these young Latin players. It was incredibly fascinating to see the silent treatment in the Caribbean; they certainly watched what Major Leaguers did and copied them. It is certainly a rite of passage: first, the athletic feat is completed, and then the player is celebrated for this momentous accomplishment. It is a choreographed maneuver requiring participation and coordination between team members, showing the heavy degree of performativity sport takes on. Even with limited spectators, players still act in a distinct way.

### **Camaraderie**

Collective actions like the 'silent treatment' emphasize the sense of camaraderie these players all share, which is critical to building success and trust in a team sport. Even as players compete against each other to get noticed and advance in their careers, this is a learned skill these

young men take on to help them advance, as everyone wants to be seen as a good teammate. All athletes have “a sense of belonging while training and competing with their teammates. They looked upon each other as belonging to a 'special group' who shared the same passion” (Fuller 6). This friendly nature of this athletic competition is very refreshing to see on the grounds of the academy. This is heightened since these players all play, eat and most importantly live together: they get to know one another far more than they do when they live alone if they progress in baseball and can afford to live alone or with their family.

In fact, in the past, many Latin players on the same team in MLB lived together. The so-called “Latin Giants” were a group of teammates which included greats like Felipe Alou, José Pagan, and Hall of Famers Orlando Cepeda and Juan Marichal. They all lived together in the Bay Area in the early 1960s when they played for the Giants (Ruck 2011, 154-155). Many of them faced explicit racism in the U.S.; players like Felipe Alou were sent to locales like Lake Charles, Louisiana to play in the minors (Armour 2012). The excerpts show these Latin Giants formed a clique that spent time together not in the clubhouse, but also during their time away from the ballpark. Such shared time together eased the process of adjustment to the United States for these players and created for them a community.

This is mimicked today by many Latin players when they arrive in the U.S.; they certainly spend time together, as even Major Leaguers from these countries share a bond as fellow Latin players with the same language, culture and food. During the 2019 MLB season, this community-building amongst Latin players can take on a culinary bend, as Dominican third baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr. shared his *abuela's* cooking with not just his teammates on the Toronto Blue Jays, but also visiting Latin players from other teams, with just one stipulation: “send back the container” (Wagner “Abuela,” 2019). These sorts of exchanges, even between opponents, reveals a tight-knit

fraternity of Latin stars who are forming their own social groups as foreign-born athletes striving for sporting success. These connections grow from shared experiences in their youth and of the journey through the minor leagues that for most began at the academy. Many also grew up together in countries like the D.R. or Venezuela, and this kinship is heightened as it is between bodies transported across national boundaries to play the sport they love. In unfamiliar territory, things like home-cooking and conversations in one's native tongue are cherished.

### **Education: 'Schooling' at the Academy**

Another area that has seen significant change in the past few years at academies in the Dominican Republic is access to education. Nearly all MLB teams have added high school equivalency programs for their Dominican players so they can earn a high school diploma. These players are signed before they can finish school, and the vast majority of players were in *buscón* camps around the age of thirteen and left school then to pursue baseball. This shows that the sport is universally acknowledged as the main means of social and economic mobility for men in the Dominican Republic, as it has been for those who become Major League players in the U.S. and make millions of dollars. However, those who never reach this level or who are released are only further disadvantaged: they now have both no place on a baseball roster, and also no high school diploma. These are the "left behind Dominican children [who] relinquish their education to play baseball because they see it as the only way to make a respectable living" (Wasch 104).

The stark gendered variation in the D.R. education levels between boys and girls reveal a shocking education gap. Dominican boys drop out of school very early: as of 2009, "[o]nly 58.9 percent of boys entering the first grade reach the fifth grade" (Wasch 107). There are not only fewer boys, but those who remain in school are left behind by their female counterparts as well: "[t]he D.R.'s young girls have far better rankings and percentages than the boys in almost every

key educational statistics at the middle school and secondary level” (Wasch 107). Wasch does not take into account boys who must work to feed their families on the family farm, but he does contend that many families see baseball as a more fruitful and direct pathway to social mobility for their children than school.

MLB academies seek to remedy this gap by providing its players with two forms of education on site: English classes for all, and high school equivalency classes for Dominicans citizens. The team whose facility I visited in Boca Chica had a dedicated classroom for English classes, held for all players two days a week for three hours each day in the evening after practice and games. I learned they usually took place from 4pm to 7pm, showing that “the student works a full day and is tired by the time classes begin” (Klein 1991, 85). I hypothesize these tired minds made retention of information difficult for these players. For foreign footballers in English soccer club academies,<sup>26</sup> Weedon noted that learning English was vital: it provided each player with “ability to integrate with his acculturating group” (Weedon 2011, 211). As mentioned earlier, English becomes more necessary as players progress through the minor leagues towards MLB. Since umpires and coaches speak English to players even in the Dominican Republic, players are shown the luxury of majority Spanish interactions will go away. Finding one’s way in small minor league towns, especially once there is more freedom and less restrictions, would be nearly impossible without some mastery of English. Clearly, this has “direct implications for [both] career development and social integration” (Weedon 2011, 212) of migratory athletes in all contexts.

An understanding of English must be obtained by these players, and Klein points out that approaches in the past to teaching have often created even more issues that they have solved. He

<sup>26</sup> Academy is also the term that describes soccer complexes in Europe where young players from the local area, and abroad, are brought to train and try to reach the ‘first team’ of stars.

worked as an English instructor with the Los Angeles Dodgers at their Dominican Republic academy. Seeing a flawed vocabulary and teaching system that stressed unnecessary vocabulary, he decided to create his own method of teaching. He described the older style as “completely irrelevant” (Klein 1991, 85) to the players’ needs; the new one instead had “four social situations in which... [players] would be likely to find themselves in [in] the minors leagues” (Klein 1991, 86) upon arrival to the United States. Such an approach to teaching has clearly evolved since Klein completed his fieldwork in the late 1980s. I observed on the walls in the English classroom at the academy lists of important words like the months of the year, days of the week and two maps: one of the United States with all the team’s baseball affiliates marked, and one of the Dominican Republic with its major cities and towns.

I will touch on how the other major North American sports of basketball, football and hockey handle this quandary of melding education and sport, an issue baseball is only beginning to address. Baseball distinguishes itself from other American sports as its minor leagues do not have any direct affiliation with colleges or universities: players are drafted out of high school or college and then become professionals. However, the best baseball players who hope to get drafted in early rounds are willing to leave school early once drafted and pursue their professional career. Many also make this jump to the minors directly from high school, regardless of round, to pursue their dreams of reaching MLB. As mentioned, unlike basketball and football, development time is far longer in baseball: even the most highly acclaimed prospects destined for stardom spend at least a few years in the minors before they are ready to compete in MLB.

Basketball and football have colleges and universities as their training grounds for elite players in the United States. While the vast majority of collegiate players are on scholarship and receive a free education, the NCAA, the governing body of college athletics, does not permit these



athletes to obtain salaries for their play. In college basketball, top so-called ‘five-star’ NBA prospects only need to attend college for one year under the current rules agreed to in 2005 and become draft-eligible after their freshman year. These so-called ‘one-and-dones’ attend college “to build their personal brand” and for the chance to play quality competition<sup>27</sup> (Stark-Mason 2018). Also, most highly drafted NFL players do not graduate from college either; also, many attend classes exclusively online. Quarterback Joe Burrow, who won the Heisman Trophy as the best college football player and led his team to a National Championship, never attended a course in-person: he received an online MA in Liberal Arts at his school, Louisiana State University (Stacy 2019). Many former players interviewed in a report about former college basketball and football players spoke about being dissuaded from pursuing the majors and classes they actually wanted to take. Instead, administrators pushed them into “majors that are most compatible with athletic participation” (Beamon 355). The system in place for basketball and football at major U.S. colleges and universities offers thousands of players the opportunity to attend schools on scholarship to play sports, but also contains various noteworthy flaws. Though players of these sports and various others are referred to as student-athletes, the very best who hope to play professionally are not mandated to graduate before they get drafted and many are pushed to pursue classes and majors that fit their practice and game schedule. Clearly, the athletic side is more highly valued.

Hockey’s youth structure is by far the most complicated of the four major North American sports: it includes both multiple minor ‘junior’ leagues in the U.S. and especially Canada for

<sup>27</sup> New developments may see this arrangement as agreed to in 2005 end: top players can now go play for the G League, a developmental league and direct subsidiary of the NBA, which can offer them \$500,000 in salary (Norlander 2020). This is likely to remove only the upper echelon of talent from NCAA competition, so college basketball as a whole is not at risk.

younger players, between sixteen and twenty years old, hoping to reach the National Hockey League, or NHL. These leagues are in a limbo-like position between professional and amateur, thanks to the age of its players but the presence of salaries (Campbell 2017). Hockey, however, also gives players the option of attending college to play NCAA hockey. They can go to college as late as twenty years old, once their junior eligibility is exhausted. Hockey players can be drafted and signed into an NHL organization but remain at their school to further develop and obtain their degree, whereas in college baseball, as mentioned, once a player is drafted and signed, they must enter the minor league system and cannot return to school (Kirshner 2018). This hockey model, though made more convoluted by the presence of ‘juniors,’ is a feasible model for the other sports to adopt. Permitting players to sign but remain in school would create issues around whether MLB teams would play these players, but it would ensure players who hope to become professional athletes but also become college graduates and can do so while they are still in their 20s. This is more efficient: it would allow baseball players to finish their degree once they retire, complete it during the offseason<sup>28</sup> or never finish at all.

This leads me to discuss the in-roads academies have made in their provision of a high school education to their players. Teams like the San Diego Padres and New York Mets were among the first to institute on-site academy educational programs, (Wasch 108) and I was able to attend a high school equivalency course offered by the team I worked with. Players take courses in a number of school topics like math, history and science in order to obtain a high school diploma while at the academy. The team I worked with had only just graduated their first class very

<sup>28</sup> This is not very common in MLB; some cases of this include Duke star and New York Mets pitcher Marcus Stroman and Stanford graduate and Los Angeles Angels catcher Jason Castro.

recently, as Adolfo was happy to tell me. However, the program is only open to Dominican citizens, so players from other nations have no option to complete their schooling.

My time in the class was fascinating, as I not only saw how players are treated by teachers and other staff from inside the academy and from the educational sector in the D.R., but I also got to hear how Dominican high schoolers are taught about colonial history. The style of teaching was very hands-on with a dedicated teacher who wanted the best for her students. The players were generally interested in the material, but used the time in class to spend time with their friends in the classroom and make jokes across the table. I would view this as normal teenage banter one should anticipate from students of this age. The setup was a bit odd as well, as the room used for the classes had a boardroom style table that made it difficult for these players to work together in groups. The teacher presented the material, which was mainly focused on the Columbian Exchange and the creation of early Spanish settlements in the D.R., and then had the players do activities based on the information provided. These activities encouraged them to think outside the box: one of these was that the student was to take on the role of a television anchor telling the Dominican public about this period of history. My general takeaway was that this class was helpful for the students to learn more about the world outside baseball, but that it was executed in a rather makeshift way using the resources of the academy (the boardroom) and the Dominican state (teachers and textbooks). The teaching was very good, but as discussed, players were more interested in making jokes and asking ancillary, unrelated questions to the teacher than fully grasping the material. This is a great start to the program, but more should be done to make it less impromptu and more relevant for the players.

It is certainly an outstanding innovation that teams are offering this high school equivalency program with the help of the Dominican education system. It shows both sides

acknowledge the skills learned off the baseball field are valuable. However, this program should be available to non-Dominicans, and forced as something taken more sincerely to heart by all those involved, including both players and staff. Mustering up the energy to focus on history or any other subject is certainly difficult after a long day of workouts, practice and games for these players, but educating players should be a major priority for all 30 MLB clubs.

### **Food: Rice, Beans and “Bulking Up”**

In this project, I knew I wanted to learn more about the food found in the academies themselves, but also how nutrition and sports science factor into the development of these Latin players in Dominican academies. I questioned my interviewees each about food at the academy, asking “what type of food is found at the ballpark, in the clubhouse, or in the cafeteria? Is this the food you grew up eating? Do you eat differently at home?” Each said they ate the food provided on-location at the academy, but talked far more about the food for players.

For the MLB team whose academy I visited, the cafeteria at the academy is for both players and academy staff. It is run by full-time cafeteria staff who live on premises to provide the players three meals a day. This, for me, reveals the emphasis placed on providing the right sort of food at the academy level, as opposed to the lack of such provision of low-quality meals in the higher levels of minor leagues.<sup>29</sup> The continuing theme of social control of these players is part of this as well, as the cafeteria at this team’s academy is in the same building as the players’ sleeping

<sup>29</sup> Players in the U.S. minor leagues are typically left to obtain their own food on their extremely low wages. Many players in recent articles on the subject reported the presence of limited to no nutritional options: most can only afford to eat fast food, and a photos of so-called ‘post-game spreads’ which were just ingredients for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches surfaced. See Emily Waldon’s reporting in *The Athletic* titled “‘I can’t afford to play this game’” for more on the harsh conditions faced by minor league baseball players with regards to food, housing and travel (Waldon 2019).

quarters. Everything is centrally located so players do not leave the grounds of the academy, which is convenient but ensures they remain on-site.

Melvin, the assistant hitting coach I was able to interview, spoke about the academy's food: "I think the coaches here eat, for the most part, everything that the players eat... it's rice and beans and chicken and pork and salad and vegetables, so it's a pretty balanced diet" (Melvin interview 2019). The cafeteria is a shared environment where coaches and players interact together as equals, distinguishing it from other player-coach interactions at the DSL level which are far more formal. When they eat in the cafeteria, however, player and coach are one and the same. The same can be said about the coaches' use of the academy workout equipment: my interviews revealed there was a competitive group of coaches trying to see who could gain the most muscle mass the quickest. Academy players were actively engaged in this pursuit which created a fun dynamic between coaches and players. However, Melvin told me he arrived at the complex before sunrise to work out, so through this competition he serves as an example to these players of the tedious work necessary to achieve one's goals including the early hours these coaches put in to work out before the day's activities.

To further discuss nutrition for players, I look to Adolfo's organizational level insights. I first asked him if the team had an idea of what players ate before they were signed, hoping to get an idea if the team was striving to maintain a familiar and known diet for the players. Adolfo did not say for sure if they knew what players ate before they were signed by the team: "we [the organization] have a general idea of their diet, but obviously we don't have the best idea, because... [we were] not with them three meals a day, seeing what they [eat]" (Adolfo Interview 2019). Of course, teams are not responsible for their players before they sign them, but I was still hopeful food choices made by teams would emphasize both nutrition and familiarity.

This answer to the question of culinary familiarity plays into the fact that MLB teams make many assumptions about these players' social lives before they are signed. This, critically, includes their socioeconomic status: notions about the poverty and desperation teams anticipate from these players, yet again, cannot be overstated. This is present too when coaches are referred to as 'father figures,' or when players are brought to the airport under the assumption they had never been there before. Through these actions, teams reveal that though they have the best interests of players in mind, they make many assumptions about players' class and race backgrounds. Many preconceived notions exist around what players' culinary habits are as well.

These assumptions play directly into the question of rice and beans. Adolfo told me:

I can tell you what it's like when they first start eating [at the academy]... just generally, in the Dominican Republic, rice and beans is a big component of [the diet], as it is with any Latin American country and that is a big part of their diet here [at the academy], you know, rice and beans with a protein, so it's not, I wouldn't say it's a drastic shift when I think about the country itself (Adolfo Interview 2019).

This assumption leads me to question when and how rice and beans became the prevailing food of choice for the average Dominican. Access to clean and healthy food instead of just these cheaper staples is true for some, but this vague generalization that does not take into account, for example, players who grew up in rural settings where their families grew fruits and vegetables, or in the city with access to different cuisines or more Americanized foods. It also does not consider the centrality of the plantain or yucca as Dominican cuisine's other staples, which are ironically far healthier options than rice or beans. Adolfo's statements also do not look towards the culinary variation across Latin America, simply what he thinks he knows about these players from the D.R., Venezuela and a few other nations. Much of it is right, of course, but some of it is excessive overgeneralization.

How much of these so-called “traditional Dominican staples,” rice and beans, are produced locally, and how much is imported from elsewhere, even in the United States? I looked at recent import/export data: the charts I found codify both these agricultural products’ origins and whether they are locally consumed or exported. This provides a view toward local production in the D.R., as well as the role of the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) ratified in 2005 in the U.S. and 2007 in the D.R. (USTR 2020).

According to the Foreign Agricultural Service, as of 2017, with a 50% market share, the U.S. is the largest food exporter to the D.R. (USDA 2017). This is further elucidated when it comes to rice and beans themselves. Rice is almost exclusively locally grown: in 2017 and 2018, imports constituted only 6% and 3% of Dominican rice respectively (Dominican Republic Agricultural Sector 2019). For beans, it is a different story: this same report says, despite or even because its central place in national cuisine, “production can no longer meet the demand” (Dominican Republic Agricultural Sector 2019). In 2017 and 2018, bean imports sat at 35% and 34% respectively. The vast majority of it from the U.S. for two reasons: U.S. imports are preferred for their quality, but they also came with a tariff-rate quota lowering their import price. As shown, local staples are not always locally sourced, and saying that these foods have been eaten for time immemorial in that place is a naïve claim to make. Can a particular moment when rice and beans became the overwhelming food of choice in the Dominican Republic be found? Is this another tenet in the neoliberal project? These are difficult questions to answer, but the historic role of other foods like plantains and yucca, the latter first cultivated by the Tainos indigenous to the island, should not go unmentioned. Again, U.S. dependency appears: one-third of beans, the quintessentially Dominican staple, are now imported from abroad.

In baseball, many of the anecdotes in literature about the historic presence of Latin players in U.S. baseball focus on food. Cuisine often appears as a major aspect of defining cultural difference, one which is second only to their unfamiliarity with English for these players. This so-called culinary dissonance is faced by Latin players when they make it to higher levels of baseball, as shown by Washington Nationals Dominican outfielder Juan Soto who said in an interview he learned how to speak English by ordering and getting corrected at a McDonald's (Infield Chatter 2019). This encounter with unfamiliar food was also commonplace for earlier Latin players, as many did not know what to make of strange American foods like gravy and hamburgers (Regalado 111). This unfamiliarity, in one case, manifested itself in one player receiving a free post-game steak every time he got a big hit and sustaining himself on that handout every night as he had no other options for food. These sorts of anecdotes are omnipresent and reveal the central role food plays in nostalgia for home, self-definition of one's culture and negotiation of unfamiliar space.

My interviewee Adolfo also acknowledged the difference in the typical meal eaten in a country like the D.R. and eating like an athlete seeking peak physical performance from their body. This gets into changing ideologies and debates in sports science, especially concerning if it is best to consume carbohydrates or protein as an athlete. Adolfo stated that, at the academy,

We do try to moderate and control the amount of fat [players eat]... we try to keep things nutritionally conducive to growth and physical development and to making them better ball players... we try to exclude things that are not [going to] help get them to that place (Adolfo Interview 2019).

This direct access to high-quality and ever-present food can of course be a new experience for these Latin players. Many famous former players reported their lack of food in their youth: Cuban shortstop Zolio Versalles, the first Most Valuable Player (MVP) award winner from Latin America when he won with the Minnesota Twins in 1965, spoke about how during his upbringing he was so poor he rarely, if ever, ate lunch (Regalado 111).



Eating correctly in order to ‘bulk up,’ a colloquial phrase for growing bigger and stronger, is a goal for players to meet while at the academies. Adolfo’s quotation above shows how physical development is ongoing for these young men throughout their minor league careers. Alongside simply getting better at baseball and going to classes to further their education, players also increase their physical prowess by eating properly and working out daily. Different nutritional philosophies abound in the sport, but the ready access to three square meals at an on-site cafeteria cannot be undersold: it is a true luxury for many of these players.

Food occupies a critical part of the academy’s function. There is a careful balance between concluding players should be grateful for what the team provides them when it comes to readily available food, with the preconceived notions about poverty levels and the expectation that these players only ate rice and beans in their childhood. Cultural norms do seem to suggest it is now rooted in Dominican cuisine, but as shown, the beans may even be imported from the United States. Nutrition and sports science, also, are a key portion of player development, in this case their physical growth into more physically mature ball players. Food, then, builds up these players into the major leaguers they hope to become and, unfortunately, also comes with built-in assumptions about poverty and culinary choice across Latin America.

**Masculinity: *¿Ser or No Ser Tiguere?***

Masculinity is one final part of academy life ripe for analysis. I was able to observe how players conducted themselves as an employee of a foreign corporation that is the academy baseball team; as mentioned, teams did not want to have players who were lazy or difficult to coach or train. It cannot be forgotten that, with some exceptions, coaches, talent evaluators and other team staff were born and raised in the United States, so the masculinity norms these players grew up will be different from these staff members. The staff of the academy emphasizes a certain way of

being a man that has been systematically ingrained into American baseball culture. Just as with other norms like punctuality, these ideals are all about notions of respect and even-keeled compartment. However, these Latin players have been socialized to understand how to be a man in their home country. This combination, then, manifests in a hybridization of the Caribbean and the American forms of masculinity. Teams are hopeful the players will become more of the latter, as shown by the rules put in place by the team with which I worked. Yet players lean more toward what their own personal communities and teammates expect from them as a Latin man, which is the former. Thus, this space of the academy can be thought of as an incubator for the ascent to a particular manhood which causes a confusing fusion of these two styles for Latin baseball players.

From what I saw, players at the academy were very congenial with their teammates. During the games I watched, they were very supportive of one another, as shown through their exclamation of such affirmative phrases as “¡Eso es!” I also got to see after the games ended in non-sporting spaces like the classroom. The team I worked with had, on the aforementioned list of rules, a policy where players had to wear a polo shirt and pants as well. During the Dominican high school class, I sat in on the players who had traded their uniforms for polo shirts of varying colors who were paying attention to the teacher. This divide between how these players can act on the baseball field versus in the classroom or other such setting is not just a public versus private divide, since these are both public settings.

Rather, these actions reflect what is known as the reputation and respectability model, the dual-natured way of being that determines a Caribbean man’s social status in the community. British scholar of the Caribbean Pete Wilson’s definitions are helpful and reveal the distinction: “reputation is both a cumulation of personal worth and an assemblage of signs of that worth,” (Wilson 74) while “respectability is a value derived from conformity to the ideals of the total

society” (Wilson 78). That one can be vivacious and loud on the baseball field yet calm and attentive in meetings or in the classroom may seem odd to a U.S. audience, but this model from the Caribbean permits it to exist. This juxtaposition reveals the importance of maintaining, or extending, one’s reputation among closer peers, as well as one’s respectability in the broader community. Wilson’s definition does not consider the underclass component of *tíguere* masculinity, but another popular bat and ball sport in the Caribbean, cricket, further demonstrates this concept.

Intellectual and writer CLR James grew up in Trinidad, so his sport of choice was not baseball but cricket: he writes at length about a long-standing admiration for the rule-breaking style in cricket, despite it being a Victorian, British and high-class sport. Hilary Beckles, who wrote the forward for the 2010 edition of this text, put it well when he says James looks at the “doggedness of the dejected Caribbean underdog” (James xi) as visible through cricket. This underdog mentality is also a story of opposition to empire, in this case the British. Baseball exhibits this as well, as shown through its popularity in Communist Cuba, and during the U.S. occupation of the D.R. from 1916 to 1924.

James opens his reflection by writing about his next-door neighbor Matthew Bondman: this man did not work and was generally detested in the community. James, though, writes that “Matthew had one saving grace- Matthew could bat... Matthew, so crude and vulgar in every aspect of his life, with a bat in his hands was all grace and style” (James 4). He has set the scales of reputation and respectability, which should be even, more towards one end: Bondman had a strong reputation as a batsman, but he was not as a community member worthy of respect. Thus, Matthew was, as James’ grandmother said, “[g]ood for nothing except to play cricket,” (James 5) and when he eventually stopped playing, he squandered both his talents and also his reputation.

This is not the outcome academy players seek, so they must maintain a balance between being able to play well, but also the ability to do things like listen to instruction, learn English and be a good teammate. They are constantly juggling all that is expected from them and anxious about their performance as related to their teammates and friends.

This ideal of reputation and respectability exists within yet another theory of Caribbean masculinity: the ‘rule-breaking’ man or *tíguere* (tiger) masculinity. Dominican scholar Lipe Collado writes that “[e]l *Tíguere*’ ha sido una conducta global venida de reglas de comportamientos básicos regidos por la ley vertebral de ‘sobrevivir.’”<sup>30</sup> (Collado 26) This struggle demands an underclass mentality in search of so-called ‘illicit social ascent’ towards the middle class. This *tíguere* way is in reaction to an unjust system that has pushed down upon the working-class Caribbean man; men use the methods it inhabits like “hustle, playfulness, and style” (Ramírez 172) to achieve class mobility. As it is underclass, in the Caribbean this in turn means it is a primarily black approach to enacting one’s manhood. Ramírez adds that this masculinity form draws from “historical precedents [in the D.R.] have mostly emblemized resistance to colonial power” (Ramírez 134). Examples include the various agitators for change to the social hierarchy: the anti-Spanish *criollo*; the marooned or escaped slave; the freedman or mulatto working as an artisan in the city or as an opportunistic privateer (Ramírez 134). Note that these examples all embody a resistance to not just draconian colonial authority, but also pose a threat or alternative to white supremacy.

For academy players, the stress and anxiety they are under at such a young age, where they know one small mistake can cost them and their family a livelihood in sport, leads to these displays

<sup>30</sup> “‘The *tíguere*’ has become a method of global conduct around basic rules and actions, per the vertebral law of ‘survival.’”

being quite animated. When it is a matter of survival in the face of poverty and other structural barriers, acting out and breaking certain rules is, in fact, acceptable. One's reputation can even be enhanced in the community when acting in this *tíguere* manner if this is done in the right manner. Sports are often the right time and place for this behavior: in fact, Latin American baseball games are not calm and reserved space, but just as lively as these *tígueres*. This style then, can help local players achieve reputation among fans since it shows their drive to win and intensity during athletic competition. This is less useful when these celebrations come not in front of a large crowd, but before American talent evaluators who know little about this style and think these players are 'acting out' when they are simply displaying appropriate behavior expected of them as Caribbean teenagers.

*Tíguere* masculinity is mainly visible, again, through the vivacious way players from across Latin America, especially from the Caribbean islands like the D.R., play the sport. They are unabashedly elated when they succeed, but also become angry when they fail. The main way this is visible is through physical gestures and vocalizations: it is actions like clapping and yelling that demonstrate this *tíguere* spirit. This *tíguere* style includes the use of wit: many Latin players in MLB will speak to one another in Spanish to relay information to deceive and confuse English-speaking opponents (Regalado 104). These sorts of mind games can be rewarded, even within an MLB that demeans this style of masculinity. This underclass ethos allows a baseball player to take on a different form, as in such spaces of play; a player can change into a *tíguere* to achieve the goals of personal success and team victory. This is part of the pathway to middle class respectability, in other words upward social mobility, for these young men.

The aforementioned hybridity of Caribbean and American masculinities in baseball is laid bare once Latin players reach MLB: they are now under conditions of hyper-scrutiny in this

different social context. Baseball has, since its founding, mandated a particular style of masculinity which includes various unwritten rules; while reputation and respectability fit into it, the *tíguere* way does not. Thus, this style of play is disdained by some American fans and members of the baseball community, especially an ‘old guard’ of so-called ‘baseball traditionalists.’ This trope of unwritten rules and respect became established as “sport long remained a white, and particularly WASP prerogative, only opening up to the melting pot [of immigrants and non-white Americans] in successive phases” (Battente 112). Early immigrants sought to learn American cultural institutions like baseball, but control of the official sport was maintained by the wealthy WASP upper class. This is visible today in the billionaire ownership of MLB franchises as well, as the rich continue to have their say in how cultural institutions like sport are run. The dominant group in a nation-state always maintains control of these most-celebrated institutions like sports leagues, as Besnier shows in Japanese rugby’s control by corporations (Besnier 498).

Baseball in America remained a white and high-class endeavor for decades, especially as new European immigrants at the turn of the century were seen as untrustworthy miscreants who “clashed with the dominant social order,” (Pope 14) and MLB remained segregated until 1947. Thanks to these legacies of white control over baseball throughout U.S. history, continuation of a desire for a posh and muted style of play remains for many fans. Many wish to weed out the spirited *tíguere* demonstrations of emotion by Latin players, including these old-school fans and baseball personalities. However, they continue to do them, as players use these demonstrations as a way to show the thrill of athletic competition and know no other way to play baseball. They embody the *tíguere* pursuit for social mobility and success just like the agitators for social change Ramírez lists from the Dominican Republic’s history. The traditionalist, within a frame of mind that is best characterized by so-called white fragility, seeks to demean the brown and black Other. This self-

righteous commentator ignorantly asserts that these Latin players are showing up the opposition and have a lack of ‘respect for the game.’ This is not what is happening in the slightest, yet the *tiguere* style remains under the microscope. Latin players have also had to contend with racist managers or those who called them lazy. McGregor adds to this the term ‘hot dog,’ described as “‘a showboat, [or] a player who calls attention to himself” (McGregor 181). Various baseball managers and sportswriters have demeaned African American and Latin players by using these terms to describe their mentality, seeing those who were not the same race as them as uncoachable, even uncontrollable. The tide is turning away from replication of these explicitly racist tropes in favor of the players’ right to act as they please. These anti-racist conditions contain a moral aversion to the racially coded policing of the sport and have been fostered by a younger generation of U.S. baseball fans, as well as the entry of more diversity in baseball leadership and sports writing.

The most debated of these celebratory breaches of an unwritten code in baseball is the bat flip, where after a batter hits the ball he throws his bat in the air instead of simply dropping it.<sup>31</sup> Figure 14 shows arguably the most famous bat flip of the past few decades, executed by former Toronto Blue Jay Dominican outfielder José Bautista after a postseason home run against the Texas Rangers in 2015. The Rangers were so perturbed by this act that a fellow Latin player Rougned Odor punched Bautista during a game in 2016. This resulted in a brawl, ejections and fines. It is commonly just called ‘The Punch’ by baseball fans. This self-policing was deemed inappropriate by league officials and Odor was suspended for eight games. Many Rangers fans and those who dislike bat-flipping did see the punch as an appropriate response (Hagen 2016).

<sup>31</sup> There is bat-flipping in South Korea’s KBO, showing the old-school notion of ‘respect for the game’ in MLB has made it so difficult for some fans to accept such acts of sheer joy.



**Figure 14 and 15:** Bautista’s bat flip and ‘The Punch’  
(Photos by Tom Szczerbowski, Getty Images and Richard Rodriguez, AP)

As mentioned, in the Caribbean the *tíguere* who does things like flip his bat is lauded: this style is expected from players. In my experience at the academy, I would say the moments where players celebrated, like the ‘silent treatment,’ were similar to what I had seen on TV or in-person at MLB stadiums. Nothing felt played up or over-the-top, and even after time spent at the academy and years of minor league ball, the *tíguere* cannot be decoupled from the Latin player.

This debate around what is appropriate to do on a baseball diamond boils down to two key arenas: generational difference and race. Like ‘The Punch,’ players will quarrel on the field if they feel an unwritten rule has been broken in bench-clearing brawls which result in fines and ejections. The policing of baseball culture in the U.S. supports an ideal of ‘respect’ and seeks limit ‘show-boating’ by players. This is set, I feel, in performativity and appeasing the aforementioned, and ever-shrinking, ‘old guard.’ Such a generational divide creates a great deal of issues in many arenas. In sport, this is a very contentious and racialized issue, since often the ‘perpetrators’ are typically black or Latin. MLB is starting to do a much better job of marketing its foreign and minority stars, such as advertising about the youth movement in the sport mentioned above through an advertising campaign with the tagline “Let the Kids Play” used in 2019. However, more should be done to encourage all fans to accept these different styles of play.



I spoke with Adam, the Assistant General Manager of the team I worked, about this debate around play style and celebrations like the bat flip. My exact question was “What are the key cultural differences you note with Latin players? Where do you stand on the debate about youthful displays of exuberance like bat-flipping and celebrations?” Adam said he had “no strong opinions” about these sorts of displays, and rightly pointed out that baseball in Latin America is played with a “little more exuberance” and probably not as accepted here in the baseball culture of MLB. He added that they are “not taught to disrespect the game, and it’s a little more accepted when they celebrate a certain way.” I wholeheartedly agree with the way he has framed this idea in these statements, which he of course is doing very delicately from his position of power within the establishment. Adam did dismiss much of this debate around bat-flipping as a non-issue, or at least “not something the front office staff is concerned with.” He also gave great examples of the U.S.-born players like Bryce Harper and Tim Anderson, the “new generation,” who are also known for their bat-flips. Adam was ambivalent about this debate around bat-flipping. However, even his ambivalent statements reveal that these so-called ‘antics’ are not permissible in MLB.

Adam went on to reveal that his organization forwards a particular style of play is easier to coach: he said, “guys get here and they... are taught to play the game we want.” These players still have to do the basic fundamentals: pitch, hit and run. He points out this style of play encourages homogeneous compartment from all players regardless of background or nationality, which is quite an impossible thing to police or mandate. Hustling, which in this context means giving extra effort or showing a will to win, is part of what the *tíguere* does, and this ‘winning mentality’ is desired from all players regardless of their country of origin. One example Adam gave of appropriate hustle is referred to in baseball circles as ‘taking the extra base,’ an action which includes tagging up on field ball outs or going from first to third on a single. This is a learned skill that does not

wait for the runner to be driven in by a home run, but instead relies on piecing hits together. This is something MLB teams feel they must teach Latin players as somewhere along the way, the assumption made concerning Latin baseball players is that they play a ‘slugger style’ and go for the home run instead of playing what is known as ‘small-ball.’ This only adds to ideas around Latin idleness or laziness, or the aforementioned ‘hot dog,’ that racializes Latin players.

However, baseball historian Roberto Echevarría retorts these assumptions and shows the style of play in the Caribbean includes these small-ball ways. This includes ‘taking the extra base’ but also “bunting, slapping a grounder past a charging infielder” (Echevarría 7) and other tactics which emphasize hustle and savviness instead of strength. This is the case as Latin players are generally smaller and pitchers do not throw the ball as fast as they do in MLB. The 21st century way baseball is played, at least in MLB, has cast aside many of these small-ball methods. In their place, the ‘slugger style’ with many strikeouts, as pitchers throw very fast, and home runs, as batters are large and hit the ball very far, reigns supreme. Hustle is still important, but it is less emphasized, though various Latin players use their skills in this arena like their fielding ability or speed. Overgeneralization is oversimplification: there are many speedy American-born players and Dominican sluggers. That a certain nationality plays a sport a particular way may be based on assumed evidence, but it is a flimsy argument which can quickly fall apart.

Ambivalence, like that of Adam, can cause issues, but so can the wrong type of support: those who enjoy the *tíguere* style of play often actually “argue in favor of allowing the Latin players to live up to American stereotypes about them” (Echevarría 7). This is equally hurtful and unproductive, as these are human beings and not a curiosity to be gawked at by fans. Generational difference and variant play styles in a sport like baseball are inevitable. Homogeneous compartment regardless of race or culture may have been asked for herein, but this would leave

baseball a boring sport if every player was the same. This makes an unachievable ask, truthfully an utter impossibility since styles like the *tíguere* are engrained into the psyche of players.

It should, thus, become more acceptable for the game to be played as a *tíguere*, as to tell these players to stop doing this and ‘respect the game’ or ‘calm down’ does not compute, as this *tíguere* way is meant to build one’s reputation. Acting as both an individual and in one’s own culturally appropriate manner should be celebrated by MLB. The sport is now a global endeavor with players from various countries, racial groups and backgrounds, thus one style of play should not be seen as preferable over others that are not wrong, but simply different. A full-stop move away from the ‘old guard’ norms may take another generation, but the younger players, especially from Latin countries where the more vivacious style of play is anticipated as the norm, are ushering it in more rapidly. Policing of the style in which the game is played, which is supposed to be for enjoyment and play, is moronic and will certainly not attract the young fans MLB is losing. This culture war and its coded racialization of Latin and black players must end.

## **Conclusion**

A historical analysis of the relationship between the United States and Dominican Republic reveals the interdependency between the nations and demonstrates why the D.R. is the chosen location for neoliberal and neocolonial scouting and development of future baseball talent to MLB. Through my fieldwork at a developmental academy, I was able to talk to administrators and coaches to see how this recruitment and training ground has, over the past few decades, become more and more critical to success at the MLB level. Along the way, I was able to observe the role of various elements of this setup: language; projectability and *buscones*; training of players and the need for fundamentals; rituals and rites of passage like the ‘silent treatment;’ tiered labor

regiments and the concept of ‘minor league filler;’ the racialized assumptions about the players in the academy; strict oversight of the players; and views on education, nutrition and masculinity.

These themes reveal the complex and hybrid space this academy fills as a foreign corporate entity whose job is to recruit, train and export human capital in the forms of talented Latin baseball players to the United States. Players, once signed, are incorporated into a space where their sole duty is to improve their craft at baseball and show their abilities, both the ‘physical gifts’ they possess as natural athletes, but also their ability to absorb instruction and improve their fundamentals and acumen as player and person. Promotion to the higher levels to MiLB leagues across the United States follows these years of hard work and a great deal of patience. Only the exceptionally gifted, like the example of Juan Soto who is already a superstar in MLB at 21 years old, advance through the minors at an accelerated pace and skip this so-called grind.

International player development has become an integral part of team operations across MLB. This particular field has grown from a shack next to a baseball diamond into the current elaborate DSL setup we see today. In both Boca Chica and San Pedro de Macoris, teams compete to have beautifully manicured fields and new academy complexes. This is big business and important to the Dominican economy. The Seattle Mariners’ new facility, described and shown above in Figure 11, cost \$7 million USD to build. This D.R.-U.S. partnership in the realm of baseball talent recruitment and training is not a arrangement that is likely to end anytime soon, especially not with the success teams and players have had in the past, the continuing domination of baseball’s popular acclaim in the D.R. and the business-friendly conditions and control that MLB, as a neocolonial and neoliberal enterprise, has over the Dominican government.

Baseball has gone at it alone in its formation of this formal academy system abroad; other North American sports do not have this same setup, and though soccer’s youth development

program shares the same name, it is on-site in the city where the club plays, not in a different country. This academy system for MLB has greatly improved over the years: teams realize that proper acculturation for its players has to be provided. This led to the formalization of reforms like English classes for players, more Spanish-speaking staff and other techniques to first make players feel comfortable at the academy. Teams then provide players with the skills needed to succeed in sports and life whether they are promoted to a team in the United States or not. Many teams also have formal translators, often called bilingual coordinators, and other team staff who help Latin players with their English and orient them to U.S. life. Adolfo was one of these people: he spoke fluent Spanish and traveled not only to the Dominican academy but also to various team affiliates across the U.S. to make sure Latin players knew how to sign their lease for an apartment or buy groceries at the neighborhood supermarket.

Limited research has been done on Latin minor league players who are released by their organization. There are many players who do not follow through on their talents and who cannot even become ‘minor league filler’ for their organization. As Klein puts it, “if they fail to impress, they will be released” (Klein 2014, 47). This pursuit is a business, so unsuccessful players represent an unnecessary expense; McDonaldization mandates they be swiftly removed. These ‘redundant’ players find other jobs: some stay in the U.S. as undocumented workers if they are released as minor leaguers and overstay their athlete visa, while others work in baseball back in their home country training new players as *buscones* since they know the system and the skills that MLB teams covet (Klein 2014, 160-161). Education is a big part of these so-called ‘reincorporation programs’ of released players. MLB agreed “in 2012 to provide education and training for Dominican minor league players who were released after January 2009,” (Klein 2014, 160) thus

money has been put aside to help those they released finish their schooling. There is future work to be done in this area, especially how it pertains to U.S. immigration policy.

Klein speaks about the recycling of one's accumulated resources: the skills learned in baseball, among them teamwork, punctuality and attention to detail, are all valuable skills in other work settings. One model that takes this into account has been devised by Ohio State University, or OSU. The Positive Transitions Model for Sport Retirement acknowledges success in major sports is extremely uncommon and is meant for student-athletes who are set to graduate from OSU without a professional career in sports (Stankovich et al. 81). This model focuses on the following areas: improved preparedness for this reality; more planning for post-career decisions; recognition and treatment for both physical and mental traumas; addressing one's feelings of loss of self-worth; and, finally, what the researchers call "reality therapy," which "holds student athletes responsible for... not dwelling on what 'could have been'" (Stankovich et al. 82). By convincing athletes to harness their abilities outside of sport, they can come to understand the transferable skills they have learned as a student athlete. This, then, will allow them to plan for a non-sports career. They were provided with confidence and goals through this program so as to avoid feelings of worthlessness or, even worse, criminality and addiction which many former athletes, especially those with untreated injuries, face. This OSU model should be adopted as a template for MLB academies to provide for all players, especially for those who are not selected for MiLB promotion. Coaches and other team staff should be encouraged to engage with this process of teaching athletes, (Fuller 12) so they too will understand this system serves many but sees success comes from only a few.

Academies have provided improved conditions, better education for players and other reforms which help players grow. However, some issues remain, especially concerning the

preconceived notions teams have of these players' background, intellect and cultural values. Some of what I saw and heard sought to extract the ballplayer out of the Dominican, or Venezuelan, or other nationality; the player's whole life pre-academy, their very identity, is not something to be shed but celebrated. These notions should be cast aside and more practical means of learning about these players' cultures and backgrounds should be encouraged. Assuming these are all poor kids from desperate families benefits no one and is likely to strain the relationship between player and team from the start. Cultural competency programs for team staff should be introduced to show that gender, class and race are conceived of differently in Latin America than they are in the United States. This would be another step in the right direction for MLB teams towards fully incorporating these Latin players into the fold as not just sporting equals, but social equals. This would bring an understanding of the complex history of a country like the D.R. to team staff who work there and introduce staff to concepts like *tíguere* masculinity. Dominican academic experts could be recruited to help this program, and current or former Latin players could serve as mediators for how these issues are presented in baseball.

Rhetoric such as the idea that this rigorous and competitive academy is anything like a summer camp should end as well. Both sides provide the other a service: players should work as hard as possible and listen to instruction to improve their talents, while team staff should facilitate an easy transition for these players so they can achieve their dreams of playing in MLB. The prideful and vivacious style of play of these players should not be seen as a negative aspect to be removed, but should be celebrated as simply a novel way to play the sport everyone involved with it loves. Finally, team staff and coaches should not be conceived of as parental figures; they are in a formalized work situation so though familiarity and affable relations should reign, this assumption of paternalism is awkward and self-serving for MLB teams.

The Dominican Republic, despite its small size and its role as the colonized in its political and economic history of Spanish colonization and U.S. military interventions, has become a hotbed for talent recruitment and development for MLB teams through the academy system. This symbiosis between the U.S. and D.R., at least when it comes to baseball, has been made possible because of a history of military intervention and economic interconnection. Strong political ties between the nations came from two periods of direct military intervention by the U.S. which created democracy and political stability in the D.R. which is not present in, say, equally baseball-obsessed Venezuela. This helped create economic dependency fostered first by sugar exports by the D.R. to the U.S., and later by neoliberalism and U.S. business interests in the country. A final reason for continuing ties is the hegemonic position the United States holds as a global superpower when it comes to many cultural forms like sport. MLB is the world's best baseball league and can offer incredibly lucrative contracts that are life-changing for these Latin players, their families and their communities. The now multigenerational pipeline of baseball talent arriving from this small island nation of the Dominican Republic, due to historical processes like colonialism and the Cold War, is not going anywhere and now 'America's pastime' has foreign-born, Spanish-speaking superstars.

What is the role of the Latin baseball player today? As mentioned, many former players remain popular and they are able to have cultural influence in both the D.R. and the U.S. through their binational presence and biculturality. Former Dominican pitcher Pedro Martínez is present in the media as a so-called "talking head," (Curtis 2018) appearing often as an analyst on MLB's TV channel MLB Network and in postseason coverage run by Turner Sports. He provides Latin representation on national television many evenings as a spectacularly astute student of the game, with an uncanny ability to know what the next pitch will be when watching a ball game.



When Latin players, retired and current, hold positions in the public eye, they are converted into ambassadors for all immigrants to the United States, especially those from Latin America. These ball players may be fabulously wealthy athletes, but they came to the U.S. as immigrants and represent all Latin Americans in diaspora in the U.S.: the Honduran refugee at the border, the poor Puerto Rican single mother in the inner city, even the high-class Argentine living in the high-rise of the sprawling American metropolis. These Latinx people are ‘othered’ due to cultural and linguistic differences; With the presence of what is called the Latinx Threat Narrative posited by scholars like Leo Chávez, broader societal rejection of Latinxs continues in U.S. (Chávez 6) even as this population continues to grow. This amounts to the dismissal of Latin America as home to a dehumanized mass: on refugees, the thought is that “[t]hese aren’t people, these are animals” (Davis 2018). Many uninformed Americans, then, are left to celebrate Latin baseball stars at the ballpark yet despise the working-class immigrant who has, apparently, come to take their job.

This balance of the celebration and demonization of Latinx people in the U.S. is also contributed to by baseball itself. MiLB teams celebrate their Latinx communities through a ‘Copa de La Diversión,’ or the Fun Cup. While these efforts included great name changes by these teams to harmless things like Mariachi and Flying Chanclas, the team in Everett, Washington changed from the AquaSox to... the Conquistadores (Salazar 2018). This ‘Fun Cup,’ meant to be a celebration of Latinxs, is transformed into a glorification of the genocidal conquest of the Americas by the Spanish and other Europeans. Clearly, more must be done to ensure cultural competency, especially in MiLB where many players are from Latin America. The roots of dissent against all immigrants sprout from this type of ignorance: Latin baseball players are fabulous representatives as though they become famous later, upon arrival, they were misunderstood outsiders.

How can Latin baseball players serve as a representation that goes against stereotypes and racism Latinxs face in the United States? The firmest embrace of a Latin player by a city I know of is David Ortiz, a prolific Dominican hitter best known for his years with the Boston Red Sox. Ortiz is almost universally known as ‘Big Papi.’ His affable personality and postseason hitting heroics have transformed this once-chubby prospect who could not make the Majors with the Seattle Mariners or Minnesota Twins into one of the greatest Red Sox of all time (Nowlin 2019). His nickname implies that he is a father figure, and that is exactly what he was following the tragic Boston Marathon Bombing in April 2013. As shown above in Figure 16, he spoke at the first game following the bombing: he spoke for the whole city of Boston as a Bostonian.



**Figure 16:** David Ortiz’s speech at the first Boston Red Sox’s game following the Boston Marathon Bombing in 2013 (Photo by Reuters)

He captured the fear, anger and frustration of a city reeling from this attack and concluded by saying “[t]his is our f---ing city. And nobody’s going to dictate our freedom. Stay strong” (Lauber 2016). He came to speak for an entire American city; it did not matter at that moment that

he was born abroad. He had gained cachet and respect thanks to his ability to hit a baseball and gregarious personality, but also thanks to the hard work fans know a player of his caliber puts in to represent the city of Boston to the best of his abilities every time he wore the Red Sox jersey and in his post-career life as well.

As discussed, the MLB developmental academy has come a long way since its foundations in the 1970s. Players still face homesickness and face down the rigors of learning to play ball under close scrutiny by team staff. As discussed, some additional small changes to the system, especially around how MLB teams and their staff understand these teenage players' backgrounds and cultures, will rehumanize these young men who hope to make it to MLB and become the representative of a given city in much the same way as Big Papi.

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