

BOOK REVIEWS



Raceball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game

By Rob Ruck

Boston: Beacon Press, 2011

Photos, endnotes, bibliography, index, \$25.95 hardcover

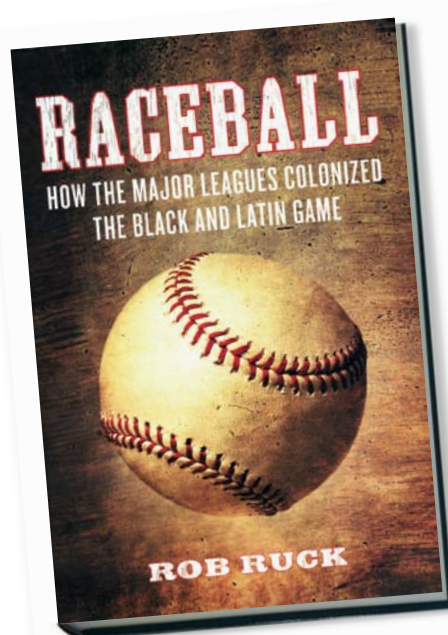
Reviewed by Craig Britcher, Museum Exhibits Associate

Thirty-five years ago, 27 percent of all Major League Baseball players were African-American; now less than 10 percent are black. Although baseball's integration provided a crucial push in civil rights advancement, in recent decades more young black athletes have chosen instead to play basketball and football. In comparison, the proportion of Latin American baseball players has soared. University of Pittsburgh Professor Rob Ruck, expert in both Negro League and Latin American baseball history, tells a fascinating, engaging story of the sociological impact of baseball's historical relationship with race and the state of today's game.

Journals and newspapers first dubbed baseball "The National Pastime" in 1856. Much like the ideal and practice of democracy, this American tradition was not enjoyed inclusively by everyone. Segregation, instituted after Toledo's Moses Fleetwood Walker's last appearance in the American Association in 1884, lasted until the Brooklyn Dodgers' Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947.


Relying on his pioneering research and expertise in Negro League history, including the Pittsburgh Crawfords and Homestead Grays, Ruck shows that the transition from segregation through integration largely was triumphant. Although new heroes emerged in the Major

Leagues, in retrospect a somewhat bittersweet transition also took place. The Negro Leagues were one of the nation's biggest black-owned businesses and a great source of racial pride. Jim Crow practices prevailed: Major League Baseball established more control over the minor leagues, while blacks were excluded from coaching and management positions for decades, even after proving in the Negro Leagues that they were more than capable.



Ruck interweaves the stories of Negro and Latin American baseball in rarely seen detail. Cuba, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and many other Latin American countries hold baseball at the core of their identities as a true national pastime. Through revolution and war amidst poverty and strife, baseball has been a powerful uniting force, with consequential American ties. Following the early success of greats such as Roberto Clemente, Juan Marichal, and Orlando Cepeda, an influx of Latin talent soon fed the Major Leagues. Many teams have established baseball academies and offer better opportunities for potential young players than ever available,

yet Ruck poignantly reveals how Major League Baseball has exploited this pipeline. Competition, most notably in Cuba and the Mexican League, threatened the Majors and contributed to the fierce control that owners have developed. Baseball's reserve clause is the most striking example of how owners had traditionally controlled players.

Young baseball fans initially enjoy baseball's simplicity, yet eventually appreciate how complex and intricate the "simple" game actually is. Ruck's engrossing narrative reveals the complexities of the relationship between race and baseball in much the same way. As with watching the game, Ruck's book leaves the reader feeling that the more one learns, the more one realizes there is to learn. Major League Baseball's financial strength and controlling power has grown increasingly stronger, while the health of the game amongst our youth is questionable. 

Chatham Village: Pittsburgh's Garden City

By Angelique Bamberg

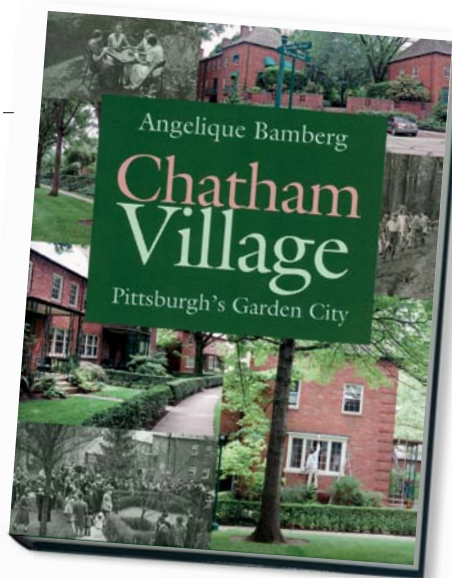
Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011

32 pages, 208 illus., hardcover, \$29.95

Reviewed by Brian Butko

An island in the urban neighborhoods of Pittsburgh, Chatham Village was meant to set an example of elegant housing in a park-like setting for low- and middle-income families. The Depression-era development—now a National Historic Landmark—is internationally recognized as an outstanding example of the American garden city planning movement, though it goes mostly unnoticed in its hometown.

Chatham's 197 red brick row houses atop Mount Washington were a new kind of response to one of the country's most dire urban housing crises. The development was the idea of Charles Lewis, head of the just-formed Buhl Foundation, who was becoming a



crusader for decent affordable housing. Even at this early date, he recognized the wastefulness of sprawling subdivisions that were appearing at the fringes of cities.

The architects Lewis hired—Clarence Stein and Henry Wright—were influenced by utopian ideals that promoted large-scale but low-density communities organized around a central park, where “streets were the most wasteful form of open space.” They rejected the 19th-century urban grid pattern as outdated and even deadly for roads now dominated by the automobile. Stein and Wright pioneered principles that included separation of pedestrian and vehicular circulation routes and the “superblock,” which featured “a large cluster of houses that turned away from the perimeter roadways and faced inward to communal lawns and gardens ... attempting to reconcile the dual desires of city and country living.”

These principles were taken up by Lewis, who believed that Pittsburgh’s challenging terrain could be developed with economy yet beauty of form; that its success would encourage other developments that could help those foreclosed by the Depression, demonstrating that there were profits to be made in housing an otherwise-overlooked class

of people; and that it would generate revenue for the Buhl Foundation, allowing it to increase its philanthropic activities. It must have seemed like the perfect melding of ideas. Indeed, the dream of Chatham Village “created a sensation among architects, planners, housing experts, and house-hunters from its initial construction in 1932 until World War II brought new housing production, private and public alike, to almost a complete halt.”

Chatham Village was owned and managed by the Buhl Foundation as rental property. Author Bamberg explains, “Lewis actually wanted to have the houses for sale, but the economics of the project wouldn’t allow it (and Stein and Wright argued persuasively for rentals). It became a co-op in 1960, after Charles Lewis’ departure from Buhl—and, some would say, with the specter of Fair Housing Laws on the horizon.”

Despite a handful of imitators, Chatham Village was never replicated as Lewis had hoped, nor did it reeducate and revolutionize the private building industry. But eight decades later, Chatham looks remarkably unchanged thanks to policies of common exterior maintenance and non-alteration, and the concealment of technology. It is stable, well-maintained, and, as the author describes it, “an aesthetic refuge from the world of the machine.... [It] is not a collection of generic design gimmicks like so many ‘planned’ suburbs today, but benefits from a city-, neighborhood-, and site-specific plan.” As Bamberg lovingly shares the history of Chatham Village and the context of its planning, she makes us all believe that if everyone could have such decent housing, the world would be a better place. ✪

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