

Jim Crow Strikes Out

Interracial Baseball in Wichita, Kansas, 1920–1935

by Jason Pendleton

As Satchel Paige stood behind the pitcher's mound facing the outfield, his mind likely raced with excitement and a sense of accomplishment. With two outs in the ninth inning, the African American hurler and his Bismarck (North Dakota) teammates were on the brink of the first-ever national semi-pro baseball championship. The eleven thousand black and white fans on hand in Wichita, Kansas, to see the Bismarcks battle the Duncan (Oklahoma) Cementers for the ten-thousand-dollar first-place prize, however, were witnesses to something more significant than a championship baseball game. The huge crowd that filled Lawrence Stadium on a humid August night in 1935 saw a Bismarck team represented by both black and white players. It is unclear whether the fans recognized the importance of a racially integrated team competing in an era of racial segregation. Satchel Paige, however, barred from playing major league baseball because his skin was black, understood the significance of playing on an integrated team in 1935. Stepping back onto the mound Paige faced the Cementers' top power hitter, who had collected hits in his three previous at bats. Utilizing his famous windup, Paige unleashed three consecutive fast balls that struck out the Cementers' big first baseman and clinched the national title for the Bismarcks. That Paige had struck out fourteen batters in the championship game was of secondary concern to him; rather, the importance of the moment inspired him. Commenting later in his life about his experience with the Bismarcks, he remarked: "I'd cracked another little clink in Jim Crow."¹

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1. "Satchel Hits and Pitches Team to National Honors," *Wichita Eagle*, August 28, 1935; "Satchel Hurls Team to Victory," *Wichita Beacon*, August 28, 1935; Don Rogosin, *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues* (New York: Atheneum, 1983), 138; Mark Ribowsky, *Don't Look Back: Satchel Paige in the Shadows of Baseball* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 113–14.



Baseball's pitching sensation Satchel Paige was barred from playing major league baseball for the simple reason that his skin was black.

With Satchel Paige on the mound, the Bismarcks became the first national semi-pro baseball champions, winning before a huge crowd at Wichita's Lawrence Stadium in 1935.



The championship for the Bismarcks was the culmination of a tournament that brought thirty-two teams to Wichita, Kansas, from twenty-five different states, including California and New York.² The historical significance of the tournament, however, has less to do with the Bismarcks being crowned the first national semi-pro champions than with the presence of racial diversity among the participants. "Four different races will be found in the list of 32 clubs," reported the *Wichita Beacon*. The Memphis Red Sox, San Angelo Shepherders, Denver Stars, Texas Centennials, and Monroe Monarchs were teams comprising all black players.³ In addition to all black teams, the Nip-

ponese Stars were Japanese and the Stanolind Indians were Native Americans.⁴ However, the most racially diverse team was the Bismarcks, considered one of the best teams in the country with its victories over both the American League All Stars and the Kansas City Monarchs the previous year. The Bismarcks presented a team of five white and six black players.⁵

Twelve years before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier of major league baseball, the integrated Bismarcks, as well as the other black teams, played without incident before tens of thousands of fans in Wichita, Kansas. The participation of black players without incident in the 1935 Wichita tournament was

2. "Teams Journey to National Semi-Pro Tourney From Entire Nation," *Wichita Eagle*, August 11, 1935.

3. The San Angelo Shepherders gained entry into the tournament with their third-place finish in the 1935 Kansas state baseball tournament, which they played representing the city of Fort Scott. During the National Semi-pro Baseball Tournament in 1935 they were first referred to as the Fort Scott Blackhawks in the *Wichita Beacon*, August 14; as the San Angelo Blackhawks in *ibid.*, August 15, 17; and finally as the San Angelo Shepherders in *ibid.*, August 19. The name of the all-black team from Denver originally appeared as the White Elephants in the *Wichita Beacon*, August 14, 15. The *Wichita Eagle*, August 17, referred to the Denver all-

black contingent as the Colts; in *ibid.*, August 22, the team was referred to as the Stars and remained so until the end of the tournament.

4. The all-Indian team originally was referred to as the Seminole Indians in the *Wichita Eagle*, August 17, 1935. In *ibid.*, August 20, this team was named the Stanolind Indians and remained so throughout the tournament.

5. "Brilliant Array Of Stars in Battle For First Place," *Wichita Beacon*, August 11, 1935; "Bismarck Boasts Fast Club For National Meet," *ibid.*, August 4, 1935.

no accident. The previous fifteen years had exposed Wichitans regularly to African Americans and whites playing interracial baseball. This history had largely prepared them to accept teams like the Bismarcks in 1935. The question, however, remains as to why white Wichitans, as well many other Americans at the local community level, accepted integration in baseball but refused to allow African Americans such as Satchel Paige to stay in their hotels or eat in their restaurants.⁶

During the first decades of the twentieth century racial segregation had spread to nearly all social aspects on local and national levels. The 1896 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which established the doctrine of "separate but equal" as a constitutional principle, ushered in a wave of segregation statutes known as "Jim Crow" laws, which increasingly excluded African Americans from interacting with whites. Subsequently, racial animosity and resulting tension further separated black and white social interaction. The "Red Summer" of 1919 was the worst period of interracial violence in the history of the United States. In the last six months of the year approximately twenty-five race riots occurred throughout the country.⁷

Racial violence was not absent on the Great Plains. In September a riot broke out in Omaha, Nebraska, when Willie Brown, a black man, was accused of attacking a white girl. A mob of whites destroyed the county courthouse, captured Brown and dragged him through the streets. Reportedly shot a thousand times and mutilated beyond recognition, Brown's body ultimately was hanged from a downtown trolley pole. The trend of violence continued into the 1920s. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, twenty-seven people were killed and three thousand African Americans were left homeless due to a riot that caused \$1.5 million in property damage to the black community.⁸ Kansas did not escape the prevailing attitude of racial hatred.

In December 1920 Independence, Kansas, was the scene of what the *Wichita Beacon* referred to as a "race riot" when violence erupted between black and white citizens after a black man reportedly shot a white grocer. According to the *Negro Star*, a group of white men organized a posse to arrest "colored men who spoke out in defense of the man accused of killing the grocer." Fearful of the mob, African American men also united. The two groups reportedly squared off in a two-hour melee that resulted in the deaths of a white schoolboy and a black man.⁹ As with the riots throughout the country, the Independence riot provides evidence of the deep division between black and white citizens in Kansas.

By the 1920s racial segregation was firmly entrenched in Kansas. African Americans consistently were denied access to public accommodations that whites enjoyed. Black Kansans hoping to enjoy a cafe-cooked meal routinely were denied access to restaurants that catered to whites and most often used the back door to place take-out orders. Movie theaters throughout the state also were segregated. Although African Americans generally were granted access they were forced to sit in sections exclusively for black patrons. Along with the humiliating *de facto* segregation prevalent in theaters and restaurants, black Kansans faced similar forms of discrimination in housing and employment opportunities, as well as *de jure* segregation in some public elementary schools.¹⁰

In the urban environment of Wichita, Jim Crow attitudes made it increasingly difficult for the growing black population. In terms of employment African Americans had few opportunities for well paying jobs. According to historian Craig Miner, "more than twenty percent of the black population pursued menial occupations and lived far below the level of decency and comfort." Consequently, many black Wi-

9. "Race Riot Suspect Held," *Wichita Beacon*, December 26, 1920; "Independence Boy Pays With Life For Recent Race Riots," *ibid.*, December 27, 1920; "Over-zealous Whites caused The Riot," *Negro Star* (Wichita), December 24, 1920.

10. Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas 1865-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 166-71; Paul E. Wilson, *A Time To Lose: Representing Kansas in Brown v. Board of Education* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 60-61; Ronald Walters, "Standing Up in America's Heartland," *American Visions* 8 (February-March 1993): 20-23; "For The Good of The People," *Negro Star*, January 21, 1921.

6. Ribowsky, *Don't Look Back*, 129.

7. *Ibid.*, 329, 346-52.

8. *Ibid.*, 351; "Officers Blamed For Tulsa Riots," *Wichita Beacon*, June 2, 1921.

chitans lived in "squattertowns" on the edges of the city. Those African Americans who had adequate employment still faced housing discrimination that led to a concentration of black residents and consequently a black community separate from that of white citizens. In 1924 an interracial conference examined the status of African Americans in Wichita and questioned "whether school segregation resulted in equal education and whether black institutions . . . were getting enough aid and attention from the city." As a result of its study, which also questioned "whether blacks were treated fairly in hiring in the city police and fire departments as well as in private industry," the interracial conference concluded that Wichita did "have a negro problem."¹¹ Thus, discrimination in Kansas largely mirrored the prevailing trend of racial separation that existed throughout the country.

Racial segregation and the resultant constraints on African American access to white-dominated social institutions led black Americans to create parallel social institutions. As a reaction to black exclusion from professional major league baseball, Andrew "Rube" Foster, a former star pitcher for the Cuban Giants at the turn of the century, organized the Negro National League (NNL) for professional black baseball. Foster wanted an organized black professional league that provided stability and structure similar to the white majors. Foster understood that the league would be dependent on the support of black fans and thus targeted cities with large black populations. In the inaugural season of 1920 the league had representatives in Chicago, Cincinnati, Dayton, Detroit, Kansas City, and St. Louis. Foster's motivation for separation was based on Booker T. Washington's ideas of advancement through self-help. "In all things purely social," Washington declared in 1895 in his famous Atlanta exposition address, "we can be separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."¹² Organizing a successful

league comprising black players and black owners would serve two purposes. First, the league would provide black men the opportunity to participate in professional baseball. Second, and most important, Foster and the other black owners believed that if they could prove professional black baseball was economically successful and had a quality standard of play comparable to that of whites, eventually segregation would be broken.¹³ Thus Foster's ultimate goal was more integration than separation.

The Negro National League became black America's counterpart to the white major leagues. Under Foster's direction the NNL turned a profit immediately. In 1923 the league drew more than 400,000 fans and grossed approximately \$200,000 in attendance. The Chicago American Giants, owned by Foster, grossed approximately \$85,000 a game in 1924. Foster's success in creating a separate professional league for black players motivated other African Americans throughout the country to organize leagues. The Eastern Colored League formed in 1923, joining the NNL that same year. The Southern Negro League (SNL) also emerged in the 1920s. Comprising the top southern independent teams, these organizations drew from a talented pool of players in the large black population areas of the South. Satchel Paige was just one of many athletes who played in the SNL. In addition, the Texas Negro League blossomed in the 1920s serving as a minor league way station for future Kansas City Monarch's pitcher Hilton Smith.¹⁴

Along with being segregated from playing with white professional teams, African American baseball players in the Midwest also were geographically isolated from the all-black leagues in the North and South. Possessing the same desire to play baseball as did their counterparts elsewhere in the country, black players from Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Mis-

11. Craig Miner, *Wichita: Magic City* (Wichita: Sedgwick County Historical Museum Association, 1988), 170-71.

12. August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1800-1915: Radical Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 121; Arna Bontemps, *100 Years of Negro Freedom* (New

York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1961), 171-72; Janet Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 13. Bruce's book is the most complete examination of the Monarchs. In her study she traces not only the sporting aspects of the Monarchs and the Negro leagues but also offers an interesting view of the social conditions African American teams encountered in the Jim Crow era.

13. Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 33.

14. *Ibid.*, 5, 44, 46; Ribowsky, *Don't Look Back*, 48-49, 68.

souri organized the Western League of Professional Baseball Teams (Colored Western League). The nine-team league, representing Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Omaha, St. Joseph, Coffeyville, Topeka, Independence, Kansas City (Kansas), and Wichita, began play on June 4, 1922. In the first league game in front of "a large number of enthusiastic fans of both races," the Wichita Monroviaans beat the Tulsa Oilers eight to one.¹⁵ The Monroviaans, named for the capital of the African nation of Liberia, were a strong organization apparently operated solely by black Wichitans. Prior to the organization of the Colored Western League, the Monroviaans had been in Wichita the previous two years under the name Black Wonders. In 1922 the Monroviaans secured its own ballpark in Wichita at Twelfth and Mosley. The field allowed the Monroviaans to schedule league games on its field and host games with black teams throughout the Midwest.¹⁶

The Monroviaans played outstanding baseball its first season, winning the Colored Western League. No exact record for the entire season has survived, but the *Negro Star* reported at the end of July that after sixty games the Monroviaans were fifty-two and eight.¹⁷ In addition to enjoying success in league play, this team, as was customary for black teams throughout the country, played games outside its league schedule. The Monroviaans scheduled such games against the Arthur Gosset Post American Legion team and the Hutchinson Aces Up team—both black—because they provided additional opportunity for income. In these nonleague affairs, teams might play for a percentage of the gate receipts or put up a monetary forfeit with the winner taking all. The majority of the time each team received something, win or lose.¹⁸



Andrew "Rube" Foster, a former star pitcher for the Cuban Giants, organized the Negro National League for professional black baseball.

The Monroviaan Corporation, which had a state charter with capital stock valued at ten thousand dollars, appears to have become one of the leading social forces of Wichita's small black community.¹⁹ The Monroviaan baseball park provided black Wichitans a place to socialize and be comfortable among other blacks without feeling the stinging pain of racism. Whites who attended the games were more likely to be less openly prejudiced toward black Wichitans than the mass of the city's population. The games became social events with black families and couples attending; women sometimes received free admission when accompanied by ticket-buying escorts. In addition to providing a friendly atmosphere of entertainment, the Monroviaan organization participated in the Kansas Black Elks convention and also utilized its

15. "Colored League Organized," *Wichita Beacon*, May 5, 1922; "New Players May Help Monroviaans in Colored League," *ibid.*, June 20, 1922; "Colored Western League Opened and Tulsa Lost," *ibid.*, June 4, 1922.

16. "Double Header Here Sunday," *Wichita Eagle*, May 5, 1922. In 1820 the American Colonization Society arrived in Liberia on the African continent to resettle former American slaves. The capital city, Monrovia, was named for United States president James Monroe in 1824.

17. *Negro Star*, July 20, 1923.

18. "Colored legion will play game at Monrovia park," *Wichita Beacon*, June 6, 1922; "Monroviaans Play Hutchinson Team This Afternoon," *ibid.*, June 25, 1922; "Monroviaans Win," *ibid.*, June 21, 1923. Arthur Gosset was an African American soldier killed in France during World War I.

19. "Monroviaans Get Charter," *Negro Star*, August 11, 1922.

popularity to help raise money for the Phillis Wheatley children's home in the black community.²⁰ The active role that the Monrovia organization assumed in assisting Wichita's black community was part of the same self-help motivation that led the Monroviaans to join the Colored Western League.

Unfortunately, the Colored Western League collapsed following its inaugural season. No articles appeared in the Wichita papers indicating the details of the demise; likely it resulted from managerial squabbles that occurred during the first season.²¹ The collapse of the league, however, did not doom the Monrovia organization. Although the black league provided a stable organized schedule for the Monroviaans, its survival was not dependent on the league. Following the collapse, the Monroviaans returned to playing Wichita teams and barnstorming throughout the state, playing both black and white teams.

Amid the racial turbulence of the early 1920s interracial baseball was prevalent at the same time that social interaction between African Americans and whites was virtually nonexistent. Although inconsistent with the pervasive segregation throughout the country, including Kansas, the Monroviaans' custom of playing white teams was not uncommon in Wichita. The Monroviaans' doubleheader victory over the all-white Campbell Merit Bread Company team in August 1922 (which, according to the *Wichita Beacon*, was played before "one of the largest crowds to ever attend a game at Monrovia Park [and] which consisted of both white and colored fans") suggests that baseball at the local level did not follow the norms of segregation.²² The paradox of local toleration of interracial baseball is evidenced by the following advertisement in the *Wichita Beacon*: "The Southwest Cracker company would like to establish their claim

to the city championship by meeting the best baseball club in the city. The Gold Medal Boys have an open date at the league park . . . and will play any club in the city . . . [f]or a purse or for the gate receipts. This pertains to all comers, white or black."²³ No black team reportedly filled the open date; nonetheless, that this white team openly stated its desire to play black teams represents the tolerance some Wichitans had toward interracial baseball.

Despite white Wichitans' apparent attitude of toleration for interracial baseball, interracial participation did not extend into organized city league play. Among five leagues comprising thirty-eight teams in the city in 1924, not one team was black. In 1925 the trend continued with no black team represented in any of the eight leagues, collectively comprising forty-nine teams. In fact, between 1920 and 1935 no black team played organized city league baseball among white teams in Wichita. Considering the precedent that teams such as the Monroviaans had established playing against white teams such as the Kirke Tire Company, the absence of black teams among Wichita city leagues seems unusual. Yet the Monroviaans' absence, at least, is explainable: the team did not play because it was a professional team. Participation in nonprofessional city leagues would have prevented the players from touring throughout Kansas and surrounding states, and stops in small towns were essential because they provided the bulk of the players' salaries. The absence from city leagues of other black teams such as the Gray Sox and the ABCs, who won the 1920 Wichita "Colored Championship," raises questions about the inconsistency between league and nonleague practices.²⁴

Although Wichitans frequently engaged in interracial ball games it remains unclear why all-black teams were absent during city league play. Although no official written policy forbade black teams from participating in Wichita's city league, their absence raises questions. Were black teams excluded because whites felt threatened by the possibility of crowning a

20. "Coffeyville Nine Beat Monroviaans and Tied up Count," *Wichita Beacon*, July 20, 1922; "Monroviaans Play Hutchinson Team This Afternoon," *Wichita Beacon*, June 25, 1922; "Monarchs Play Here," *ibid.*, June 27, 1923; Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784) was a former slave who became a Latin scholar and the first recognized African American poet in the United States.

21. "Colored Western League Having Some Bad Trouble," *ibid.*, July 20, 1922. The league president's removal of the secretary of the league and subsequent refusal to give details about the league's financial status to the respective organizations may have contributed to the league's collapse.

22. "Monroviaans Won Two Games From Campbell Bread," *ibid.*, August 28, 1922.

23. "For City Title," *ibid.*, August 9, 1921.

24. "Alabama Bloomers Return to Wichita For Another Game," *ibid.*, May 29, 1920; "Cudahy Puritans," *ibid.*, July 20, 1920.

black city league champion? White teams could easily justify losing individual games to black teams as simply bad luck or an "off" day. However, crowning a black team as city champions, which was determined over several months with an established schedule, would have forced white teams to acknowledge that the black team was better. That possibility could have potentially threatened the idea of white racial superiority. Crowning a black city champion also would have left white Wichitans vulnerable to verbal assaults from white Kansans about the teams' inferior showing. Despite hypothetical rationales, the absence of black teams does not necessarily mean they were excluded by white teams. It is plausible that black teams did not play simply because they did not want to. Considering nonleague practices, however, it seems unlikely that black teams collectively had no desire to compete for the city championship. Regardless of the possible explanations, the absence of black teams demonstrates that limitations remained in interracial baseball participation in Wichita.

Outside the city leagues, interracial games continued. The Monroviaans maintained its practice of playing the best teams in the city, including a 1924 contest against the Wichita Advertisers, the leading team in the city's Industrial League. The newspapers did not publish the contest results, not an uncommon occurrence when games involved black teams. Cudahy Rex, an all-black team sponsored by the Cudahy packing company, played three games against white teams in 1926, all of which were announced in the *Wichita Beacon*. Despite the newspaper's announcement, only the white team's victory over the Rex team appeared in print.²⁵ Why the newspaper did not report the other games is uncertain, but it is possible the results were

omitted because the Rex team was victorious. Although the *Wichita Eagle* and the *Wichita Beacon* journalists did not appear prejudiced in their articles, they may have expressed their attitudes about African Americans by omitting stories in which the all-black teams proved victorious. Not all black victories over white teams were excluded from the paper, but their defeats of top white teams, which could have undermined the idea of white racial superiority, frequently lacked follow-up stories with game results.

The Ku Klux Klan is one of the leading symbols of American white racial superiority. Originally designed to destroy Republican political power in the Reconstruction-era South, the Klan reemerged in the 1910s with an expansion of its hatred to include, in one historian's words, "Jews, Catholics, bootleggers, adulterers [*sic*], atheists, and others who offended against the Klan's vision of a racially morally pure America."²⁶ In 1921 the new Klan's national leader, William Simmons, sent a representative to Wichita. The representative claimed that the Klan was present in at least ten Kansas cities and stated that the Wichita membership included "native-born, white, gentile, American citizens who believe in the tenets of the Christian religion and owe no allegiance to any nation other than the United States, either civil, political, or ecclesiastical."²⁷ Such a message was popular in Kansas. In early 1922 the *Wichita Eagle* reported that membership in the Wichita Klan totaled five thousand. By 1924 the Klan was present in almost every town in the state and its statewide membership approached one hundred thousand. The Kansas Klan of the 1920s was an ultra-patriotic organization concerned less about white supremacy than perpetuating anti-Catholicism. Although the Kansas Klan's antipathy focused primarily on Catholics, the organization by no means ignored African Americans.²⁸

25. "Play Monroviaans," *ibid.*, August 9, 1924; "Game Sunday," *ibid.*, June 26, 1926; "Interesting Clash of Cudahy's Teams: Rex and Puritans Will Scrap it Out," *ibid.*, July 11, 1926; "Cudahy Rex Beaten," *ibid.*, July 20, 1926. The reporting of scheduled games and the results of others involving all-black teams appear sporadically throughout the Wichita newspapers. In contrast, the announcements of upcoming games of white teams as well as their results regularly appeared in print. The differences in coverage may stem from the fact that white teams played in the city leagues and the public wanted to know when these teams played. The newspapers also may have ignored black teams because African Americans, who represented less than 5 percent of the city's population, quite possibly were not major buyers of newspapers. African Americans likely chose to read the *Negro Star*.

26. Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1992), 115.

27. "Ku Klux Klan Active All Over State," *Wichita Beacon*, July 24, 1921.

28. Charles Williams Sloan Jr., "Kansas Battles the Invisible Empire: The Legal Ouster of the KKK From Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Autumn 1974): 393; Lila Lee Jones, *The Ku Klux Klan in Eastern Kansas During the 1920's*, Emporia State Research Studies 23 (Emporia: Emporia Kansas State College, 1975), 5.

Among the tenets of the Wichita Klan, as printed in the *Wichita Eagle* in November 1922, was the repression of African Americans in the city. The local Klavern "support[ed] Jim Crow laws; the abolition of secret societies among Negroes; . . . [and] no employment of Negroes under any circumstances."²⁹ In 1923 the Montgomery County Klan also used violence to intimidate African Americans. According to historian Paul Franklin Harper, white attackers shot Sam Stevens (a black man) in the leg on his way home because some white citizens did not want Stevens's children "to attend the same school with their white children."³⁰ The malicious violence directed at Stevens and others prompted *Emporia Gazette* editor William Allen White to charge that the "Klan [was] directing terror at honest law abiding citizens, Negroes, Jews, Catholics," and indicates that the Kansas Klan intimidated African Americans in its attempts to create a "racially morally pure" state.³¹

Although the Wichita Klan expressed anti-Negro sentiments among its tenets, apparently black and white participation on the baseball field was not a problem. In fact, the Wichita Klan Number 6 baseball team played a game against the all-black Wichita Monroviens in 1925. The failure of baseball—and the Klan—in Wichita to follow the general trends of a segregated society was exemplified by this game. In the article announcing the game, the anomalous—and unpredictable—quality of Klansmen playing against African Americans is visible:

Strangle holds, razors, horsewhips, and other violent implements of argument will be barred at the baseball game at Island Park . . . when the baseball club of Wichita Klan Number 6, goes up against the Wichita Monroviens, Wichita's crack colored team.

The colored boys are asking all their supporters to be on hand to watch [the] contest . . . due to the wide difference of the two organizations. . . . The novelty of the game will attract a large crowd

of fans altho [sic] both teams say that all the fans will see is baseball.³²

As the teams predicted the game was played without any hint of violence before a large interracial crowd, even though the Monroviens prevailed ten to eight.³³ The almost inexplicable presence of an all-black team playing against the historical archenemy of African Americans suggests that Wichitans were developing an attitude of toleration toward African Americans in the area of baseball that was inconsistent with the pervasive racist segregation that dominated American society. Although it is unlikely many whites in Wichita were completely race tolerant, their participation and attendance at the game indicates the degree to which white Wichitans accepted limited black and white interaction on the baseball field.

As the end of the decade drew near, Wichitans witnessed increasing numbers of interracial baseball games. As the Monroviens began to fade from the sports pages, other black teams emerged to fill the void. Cudahy Rex proved capable of succeeding the Monroviens as the best black team in Wichita. The team frequently battled its white rivals, the Cudahy Puritans, splitting two games in 1927.³⁴ The continuation of interracial baseball between the two Cudahy teams, although important, illustrates the limitations in baseball's ability to challenge segregation. Separate teams from the same company shows the breadth of division in the 1920s. The Puritans played in the city league and participated in numerous nonleague games, while the Rex team did not play city league ball; rather, it scheduled games against small-town and individual city league teams. Despite the tolerance of interracial baseball in the late 1920s, white Wichitans' views on racial integration probably would not allow Cudahy to have one integrated team. The company's willingness to sponsor a separate team exclusively for black em-

29. Sloan, "Kansas Battles the Invisible Empire," 396; "Seeking Full Roster of Ku Klux Members," *Wichita Eagle*, November 25, 1922.

30. Paul Franklin Harper, *Surely It Floweth With Milk And Honey: A History of Montgomery County, Kansas to 1930* (Independence, Kans.: Independence Community College Press, 1988), 286.

31. Sloan, "Kansas Battles the Invisible Empire," 403; Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 115.

32. "Only Baseball Is On Tap At Island Park," *Wichita Beacon*, June 21, 1925.

33. "With the Amateurs," *ibid.*, June 23, 1925.

34. "Cudahy Rex Defeats Puritans," *ibid.*, June 13, 1927; "Cudahy Puritans Meet Rex," *ibid.*, July 17, 1927.

ployees, however, suggests an acceptance of baseball as a limited sphere of toleration.

Although black teams such as the Monroviaans and Cudahy Rex were important in exposing Wichitans to interracial baseball, the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro National League expanded the practice and introduced thousands more Wichitans to talented black baseball players. In 1926 the Monarchs drew three thousand fans to its game in Wichita. In 1927 the Monarchs' return prompted the local promoter to sell advance tickets for the two-day event. Featuring Joe "Bullet" Rogan, who was considered one of the greatest pitchers in baseball during the 1920s, and T.J. Young and Newt Joseph, both former members of the Monroviaans, the Monarchs drew a collective six thousand fans in its two victories over the white Wichita Advertisers team.³⁵

The appeal of the Monarchs crossed racial lines in Wichita and elsewhere. As the leading stars of the Negro National League, black players were heroes to the black communities they visited. The presence of local black Wichitans on the Monarchs team who were exalted as stars likely created great excitement among the Wichita black community. African American fans no doubt enjoyed the Monarchs' regular victories over its white counterparts. Its reported record of 577 wins and three losses against semi-pro teams (black and white) provided a source of pride for many.³⁶ African Americans, moreover, likely recognized the irony of segregation as the Monarchs, prohibited from playing in the white major leagues or even from dining with whites, methodically beat white teams before thousands of spectators in mixed crowds. The Monarchs' appeal was broad and included a large number of whites who flocked annually to the ballpark to witness the great talents of the professional black players.

In 1928 the Wichita fans were again exposed to the talents of professional black baseball when the Cuban Stars of the NNL came to town. Along with playing in the NNL, the Stars also played winter baseball in Cuba, winning the championship of the

35. "Monarchs To Play in City," *ibid.*, June 10, 1927, 18; "Monarchs To Play Ad Men," *ibid.*, July 10, 1927.

36. "Joe Rogan to Pitch Here," *ibid.*, July 25, 1927.

ONLY BASEBALL IS ON TAP AT ISLAND PARK

Klan and Colored Team to
Mix on the Diamond
Today

Strangle holds, razors, horsewhips, and other violent implements of argument will be barred at the baseball game at Island Park this afternoon when the baseball club of Wichita Klan Number 6, goes up against the Wichita Monroviaans, Wichita's crack colored team.

The colored boys are asking all their supporters to be on hand, to watch contest, which beside its peculiar attraction due to the wide difference of the two organizations, should be a well played amateur contest. On the side of the colored boys is the fact that they have had a ball team here for several years.

Although the Ku Klux Klan expressed anti-Negro sentiments, the Wichita Klan Number 6 baseball team played the all-black Wichita Monroviaans in 1925. The game came off without a hint of violence.

Cuban winter league in 1928. The Stars' appearance in Wichita demonstrated the prevailing attitudes about race. Although most Americans regarded race in simple terms of black and white, Cuban players, like many African Americans, were not uniform in the color of their skin. The players' skin hues ranged from dark brown to what was considered nearly white. Yet, despite their Cuban ethnicity, white Wichitans categorized the players by the racial concep-

Thousands of
Wichitans
were intro-
duced to the
talents of the
Kansas City
Monarchs,
and the pres-
ence of local
blacks on the
team likely
created much
excitement in
the Wichita
community.



tions they understood, white and black. Of the fourteen Cubans who played in Wichita in 1928, thirteen were termed black and one was termed white. The thirteen dark-skinned players participated in the NNL, while the lone light-skinned player received a contract in the Boston Red Sox organization.³⁷ Although the players were Cuban, in America they could not escape the prevailing divisions of the color line. Consequently, the players' shared history and the cultural connections they maintained as Cubans were overshadowed by an American concept of race that classified people by skin color.

It is uncertain whether Wichita's black community accepted this prevailing racial view or placed more emphasis on the Cubans' ethnicity.³⁸ But considering its shared experiences with oppression and segregation, black Wichitans likely viewed the Cubans as black. Such distinctions notwithstanding, the Stars

were a talented team. In a doubleheader against an all-star team of Wichita's best white players, the Cuban team pummeled the locals fifteen to two and twenty-three to five.³⁹

By the end of the 1920s Wichita was a regular stop on the Monarch's midwestern tours. Unlike the Cuban Stars, who humiliated opponents, the Monarchs appear to have kept the contests fairly close. Recognizing the financial importance of the tours, the Monarchs used public relation schemes to drum up fan interest and make the games appear competitive. In 1929 the Monarchs issued an ultimatum to Henry's Clothiers, its scheduled opponent in Wichita. If the Henry's team did not defeat the Wallenstein-Raffman all-girls team in July, the Monarchs threatened to cancel its game in August.⁴⁰ Henry's four to zero victory over the girls' team ensured that its game with the Monarchs would be played. The Monarchs' ultimatum was probably a calculated move to generate in-

37. "One Cuban White Here With Stars," *ibid.*, August 17, 1928; "Fast Colored Team at Island Park Today," *ibid.*, August 19, 1928.

38. For a detailed examination of the status of mulattoes in the black community, see Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1980).

39. "Cubans Beat Wichita Club," *Wichita Beacon*, August 20, 1928.

40. "Henry's Must Defeat W-R Girls or Cancel Game With Kansas City Monarchs," *ibid.*, July 17, 1929.

terest for the game and help boost attendance. Different rules were adopted in the game to make it appear more competitive. Similar to match play in golf, the winner of each inning, rather than the final tally of runs, determined the score in the game. For example, if the Monarchs scored ten runs in the first and Henry's scored only one run, the Monarchs would win the first inning one to nothing. Whichever team won the previous inning would bat first in the next inning. The different rules were used to avoid lopsided victories and help keep the game competitive with the maximum points a team could score being five.⁴¹ Unfortunately, newspapers did not report the game winner. The different format illustrates that the Monarchs understood the importance of the illusion of competitiveness for fan interest.

In the 1930s interracial baseball was increasingly common in Wichita. In 1930 the Monarchs made its seasonal trek to the city, bringing with it night baseball. At a reported cost of fifty thousand dollars, the Monarchs traveled with generators and temporary lights that could be assembled quickly. The lure of the Monarchs and the intrigue of night baseball drew more than three thousand fans.⁴² In the same season, local African American teams such as the Wolverines, Grays, Blue Devils, and Black Sox all played on Wichita's baseball fields. New teams of all hues sprang up yearly, including the Aztecs, an all-Mexican team. The Aztecs played white and black teams in Wichita and also traveled to surrounding cities to battle other Mexican teams.⁴³ Baseball served as a vehicle to expose people of different backgrounds to each other. Wichitans who attended baseball games regularly witnessed people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds competing on the diamonds. The ballpark engendered an arena for social interaction that existed nowhere else in the city's segregated corridors.

By 1932 a dozen years of interracial social interaction had paved the way for the appearance of minority teams in official city league contests. The first nonwhite group to play city league baseball, however, was not black. Despite more than a decade of local competition between black and white teams, two all-Mexican American teams, with only a two-year playing history in Wichita, became the first minority group in city league play. The Mexican Midgets played in the Wichita junior league, and the Aztecs played in the adult city league.⁴⁴ Why Mexican Americans were the first minorities to play in the city league is unclear—possibly because their skin color was not dark enough to be considered black. Not being black, and consequently not completely subjected to racial segregation, Mexican Americans likely were the beneficiaries of the established tradition of black and white baseball in the city. Although white Wichitans were not yet ready to compete with black players in the city league, the atmosphere of tolerance relative to baseball had broadened to allow Mexican Americans to participate. The limited racial toleration that surrounded baseball in Wichita was slowly expanding.

Unable to break the color line of city league play in 1932, African Americans appeared that year for the first time in the Kansas state semi-pro championship tournament. The Colored Devils from Wichita, with the aid of players recruited from Oklahoma, won its initial game of the state tournament against the Reformatory Boys, a team of delinquents.⁴⁵ Despite losing its next two games and being eliminated from the tournament, the Devils and the black community of Wichita and Kansas logged a victory by their very participation. Since the Devils previously had been denied the opportunity to play organized baseball with whites, its participation was the first change regarding the status of African Americans and baseball in the city.

41. "Novel Game in Store For Fans When Monarchs Play in Wichita," *ibid.*, August 11, 1929.

42. "Monarchs May Play Night Tilt At Cudahy Park," *ibid.*, May 19, 1930; "Strong Team Will Face K.C. Monarchs," *ibid.*, May 29, 1930; "Monarchs Win From Wichita All Pros," *ibid.*, June 3, 1930.

43. "Mexican Aztecs Defeat Wichita White Sox, 16-10," *ibid.*, July 1, 1930.

44. "Mexican Midgets Meet Title Team," *ibid.*, June 10, 1932; "City League Baseball Standings," *ibid.*, July 17, 1932.

45. "Fast Colored Team Entered In Baseball Tourney," *ibid.*, July 30, 1932; "Record Entry List For Baseball Tourney Here," *ibid.*, July 31, 1932.

In 1933 Wichita newspapers openly discussed allowing an all-black team to play in the city league. T.J. Young, former Monrovia and Monarch catcher, attempted to organize an all-black team for city league play, but his efforts proved unsuccessful. With the presence of several all-black teams in Wichita, Young undoubtedly found enough talented black men to play in the league. The absence of Young's team was more likely a result of white resistance than lack of black support. Despite the failure of his effort, Young achieved an important, albeit limited, victory when he was allowed to play for the Mulvane team of the Oil Belt League.⁴⁶ Participation of a single black player in the city league was not insignificant. Young had cracked the color line, an indication that toleration of African Americans in baseball was continually expanding.

In the state tournament held in Wichita in 1933, black baseball in Kansas achieved its first official organized success. Although only two teams out of forty were black, their abilities proved unmistakable. The Ninth Cavalry team of Fort Riley and the Beavers of Arkansas City both had established themselves as top teams in the Midwest. The Ninth Cavalry was considered second only to the Monarchs, and the Beavers had proved its abilities by defeating four Class A white minor league teams in 1933.⁴⁷ Although the Ninth Cavalry team did not live up to its billing and was ousted early in the double elimination tournament, the Beavers performed well. The team easily won its initial contest behind forty-two-year-old Army Cooper, former pitcher for the Monarchs, against the Dickey Oilers of McPherson twelve to two in front of three thousand fans. The victory set up a game between the Beavers' "most hated rivals," the Arkansas City Dubbs, whom the Beavers had beaten four of six times during the 1933 season. The trend continued as the Beavers defeated the Dubbs by a single run in extra innings before forty-five hundred fans. Wichita Water dealt a punishing blow to the Beavers' drive for the championship with a seven to

three defeat.⁴⁸ Despite the setback, the Beavers were determined to win the championship. The team's right fielder and coach, Hurley McNair, a veteran of the NNL, expressed its attitude: "Listen[,] you just tell the boy's [*sic*] there's going to be plenty of smoke behind our next game. And we're going to rap that fence so hard out there that the game will have to be called in the second inning on account of no fence. By losing to the Wichita Water team our confidence and desire to win the tournament has increased one hundred percent."⁴⁹ Despite the Beavers' determination the team was eliminated in the semi-finals by the Shell Dubbs eleven to ten. The Beavers' fourth-place finish served notice that black teams would have to be taken seriously in the future.

The state tournament of 1934 featured several strong black teams. Joining the returning Ark City Beavers were the Kansas City Colts, Wichita Wolverines, Topeka Darkies, Colored Stars, and Wichita Elks. The extreme competitiveness of the tournament and the compulsion to produce a winner led some cities to hire professional teams to play for them during the tournament. The Topeka Darkies actually were the Cuban All Stars, now hired by white merchants from Topeka to represent their city. Apparently no teams objected to Topeka's actions since most were guilty of hiring minor league professionals to play with their teams. The Wichita black community hired a Texas team to represent it in the tournament.⁵⁰ Despite an opening round loss to the Topeka team, the Wichita Elks battled back to finish third and collect \$887.74. The Topeka contingent also fared well, finishing fourth and collecting \$591.83, while the Kansas City Colts finished fifth and took home \$295.93. Three all-black teams were represented

48. "Record Breaking Throng Will See Favorites in Action," *ibid.*, August 9, 1933; "Expect Record Crowd For Games," *ibid.*, August 13, 1933; "Undefeated Clubs Will Clash in Feature Game Tonight," *ibid.*, August 14, 1933.

49. "Cambridge Heads Tourney Program," *ibid.*, August 15, 1933; "Tournament Notes," *ibid.*

50. "Topeka Admits Identity of Club Entered in Tourney," *ibid.*, August 2, 1934; "Negro Nine Clash in Feature Tilts of Saturday's Games," *ibid.*, August 4, 1934. The Topeka team originally was referred to as the Darkies in *ibid.*, July 27, 1934, and remained so until August 15 when it was referred to as the Dodgers. Why the name change occurred is unclear, but the following year the same Topeka team returned as the Darkies.

46. "Young To Catch," *ibid.*, May 21, 1933.

47. "Outstanding Colored Team to Enter Baseball Tourney," *ibid.*, July 9, 1933; "Forty Teams Will Battle For State Title," *ibid.*, July 30, 1933.

among the top five places. The tournament's two-week duration exposed thousands of fans to interracial baseball. Following the tournament fans also witnessed an integrated all-star game with three black players, including Army Cooper, who was unanimously selected to be the starting pitcher in the charity game against the all-white state champion Arkansas City Dubbs.⁵¹

The continual evolution of racial tolerance on the baseball field was present in the 1935 state tournament. This gathering in Wichita witnessed the return of the Kansas City Colts and Topeka Darkies (again, actually the Cuban All Stars). The Elks club of Wichita once more secured a professional team from Texas (Dallas Steers) to represent the black community of Wichita. African Americans in Fort Scott did the same, hiring the San Angelo Shepherders to represent their community. Unlike the previous year, only the black contingent representing Fort Scott fared well in the tournament. Its third-place finish was important because it helped expose black baseball to the forty-one thousand fans who attended the tournament, and it qualified the team for the National Semi-pro Baseball Tournament.⁵²

The dominating performance of the Bismarcks in the National Semi-pro Baseball Tournament symbolizes the progress Wichitans had made regarding racial tolerance on the baseball field. The integrated Bismarcks represented the culmination of the previous fifteen years of interracial participation on the baseball fields of Wichita. From the Monroviens of the early 1920s to the integration of black teams into the state tournaments in the early 1930s, the citizens of Wichita generally accepted African Americans in baseball in an era when black people gained access to few other realms of white society. The failure of baseball to follow the established norms of racial segregation in Wichita focuses the attention on the prevailing ideas about race in America.

51. "Kansas Baseball Champs to Meet All Star Team," *ibid.*, August 20, 1934; "Army Cooper Is Chosen To Pitch In Ice Fund Game," *ibid.*, August 22, 1934.

52. "State Meet Briefs," *ibid.*, July 10, 1935; "Wichita Watermen State Champions," *ibid.*, July 29, 1935.

The complexities of racial segregation in Wichita derive their inconsistencies from the incongruent racial concepts inherent in American life. America's legacy of slavery, which once separated slaves and masters on the premise that black Africans were inferior because of their skin color, engendered a pervasive ideological construct of race based largely upon color.⁵³ Historian C. Vann Woodward contends that "the long experience of slavery in America left its mark on the posterity of both slave and master and influenced relations between them more than a century after the end of the old regime."⁵⁴ America's history of treating African Americans as inferiors because they were not white offered a foundation for the emergence of Jim Crow attitudes that dominated all parts of America. In her examination of social relations in the American West, historian Patricia Limerick contends that "race . . . was the key factor in dividing the people of Western America." Similarly, historian Robert Hine in *The American West* states that "sources of prejudice were not sectional or urban, western or rural. They lay deep in the National experience."⁵⁵ Wichita's maintenance of racial segregation reflects how deeply embedded was this ideology in which white residents viewed African Americans as a separate and inferior race.

Yet, despite Wichita's general conformity to the prevailing national racist ideology, regional factors peculiar to the Midwest contributed to an attitude of limited racial tolerance in baseball. According to historian Barbara Fields, "ideology is a vocabulary for interpreting social experience . . . [and thus] ideology must convey different meanings to people having different social experiences."⁵⁶ The social experience of whites in Wichita, confronted with only a small number of black citizens, was certainly a different so-

53. Barbara Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143-69.

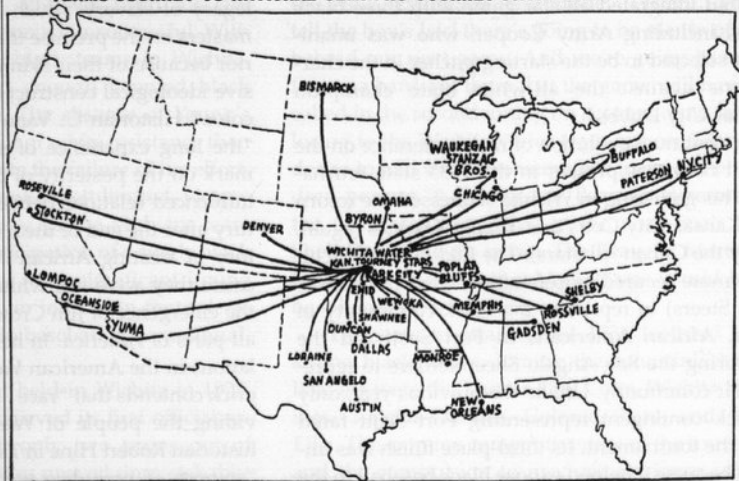
54. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3d rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 11.

55. Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of The American West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1987), 280; Robert V. Hine, *The American West: An Interpretive History* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1984), 228.

56. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," 155.

The August 11, 1935, Wichita Eagle includes this map illustrating that teams across the nation traveled to Wichita to compete in the first National Semi-pro Baseball Tournament.

TEAMS JOURNEY TO NATIONAL SEMI-PRO TOURNEY FROM ENTIRE NATION



cial experience than in the cities of the South and East, or even to those in parts of the Midwest more affected by the Great Migration. In Chicago in 1930 one hundred thousand African Americans were spreading into white neighborhoods, while black Wichitans totaled just 5,623 and represented only 3.7 percent of a 111,110 population.⁵⁷ African Americans were considered a threat to whites in Chicago, but the small segregated black community in Wichita largely was not. Thus the social experiences of Wichita whites, faced with only a small number of blacks, allowed whites to view black and white interaction somewhat differently than did whites in the East and South. There white citizens in cities such as Baltimore and New York were confronted daily with black populations ranging from 140,000 to 220,000, respectively.⁵⁸

Thus the disparity in population contributed to varying regional social experiences and spawned different local attitudes about race.

In the 1920s and 1930s the Midwest was the scene of thousands of interracial baseball games. Lacking regional major league teams, people in small towns openly accepted black teams on their baseball fields. Why did midwesterners seemingly as racist as their eastern counterparts initially accept interracial games and finally integrated teams? An examination of Kansas, Colorado, and North Dakota, where integrated baseball first occurred, shows the common denominator to be that African Americans represented only a fragment of the total population. In Kansas in 1930 African Americans totaled 66,344 and represented 3.5 percent of the population. In Colorado, where Denver hosted the region's first tournament with an integrated team, African Americans totaled 11,828 and represented 1 percent of the population. In North Dakota, where integrated baseball flourished with an

57. John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr., *From Slavery To Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 7th. ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 350; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1934), 58.

58. U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Negroes in the United States*, 745, 779.

entire league of integrated teams, the black population totaled only 377 and represented one-tenth of 1 percent of the state's total population.⁵⁹ In these sparsely populated areas, interracial and integrated baseball not only existed but flourished because the presence of black and white players on the baseball field together would not threaten the segregated relationship outside the lines. In Bismarck, North Dakota, Satchel Paige, whose team owner paid him four hundred dollars a month and gave him a car, slept in an abandoned freight car with his wife in the lone black section of the town because he could not find available lodging elsewhere.⁶⁰ Despite the inconsistency of baseball relative to social relations, black citizens in the Midwest, lacking in numbers and isolated because of their skin color, were powerless to successfully change the notions that gave credence to Jim Crow.

Although racial segregation was still prevalent in the 1930s, baseball in the Midwest provided an arena for social interaction that previously was nonexistent for black and white citizens. Interracial baseball in the Midwest served as the vehicle for bringing whites and African Americans together as equals on a consistent basis. The experience helped modify and expand the racial tolerance of midwesterners relative to baseball. When Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier of major league baseball in 1947, many Kansans had already grown accustomed to witnessing integrated baseball and were surprised with the attention surrounding the event. Historian Larry G. Bowman fondly recalled the

six years he lived in McPherson, Kansas, during the mid-1940s when his father took him to see Wichita tournaments that boasted numerous integrated teams. Bowman stated, "I would sit with a group of men with . . . my father and I never recalled hearing a derogatory remark made about the black players." When Robinson broke into the majors Bowman vividly remembered wondering what the excitement spreading across the country was all about. According to Bowman, his experience viewing interracial and integrated baseball in Wichita helped shape his view as a young adolescent that interracial interaction in baseball and other areas was normal.⁶¹

Consequently, the numerous fans who attended games in Wichita and other parts of the Midwest where interracial and integrated baseball was played developed attitudes that were inconsistent with prevailing racist segregation. Admitting African Americans on the playing fields made it easier to break down other segregationist barriers in the ensuing decades. The acceptance of African Americans in baseball—first by Midwesterners, later by people in the East, and last of all by the South—opened some of the first doors of the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. Players such as Satchel Paige, who have been correctly acknowledged both for their athletic talent and their impact on race relations, should not completely overshadow the heroic efforts of men such as T.J. Young and other members of the Monroviaans who bucked the restrictions of Jim Crow segregation in the 1920s and 1930s to play interracial baseball on the dusty fields of Kansas. (KH)

59. *Ibid.*, 9, 14.

60. Ribowsky, *Don't Look Back*, 113–14.

61. Larry G. Bowman, University of North Texas, telephone interview by author, July 1, 1996.