

“The Price of Admission” Daddy Black, Big Dan Whitehead, and the Money Game

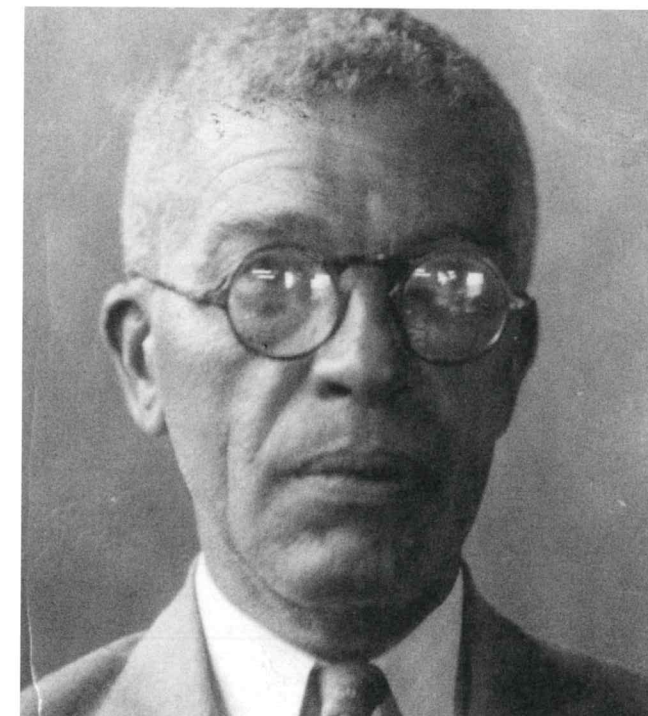
DURING THE JIM CROW ERA, baseball, the national pastime, mirrored and reinforced the prevailing racial climate, but it also challenged the dominant construction of race, simultaneously reflecting and informing the formation of racial identity. This essay complements a growing body of popular literature that finds racial attitudes and boundaries were more fluid and less ingrained at the local sports level than they were nationally.¹

Scholarship centered on professional black baseball, as played in the well-known Negro Leagues (1920–1960), unintentionally narrowed the dialogue and excluded a broader examination of the multifaceted and sometimes contradictory experiences present at the community level. Focusing on the local game reveals an alternative narrative that demonstrates the variety of ways African Americans negotiated the boundaries of racial identity and paved the way for integration, not just on the playing field, but even by owning and operating local white teams. White owners and promoters historically controlled the financial interests of white teams, but Providence, Rhode Island, provides a noteworthy exception. In Rhode Island, the fluid nature of local sports integration during the 1920s also resulted in the presence of select white players on previously black teams and thus provides an evocative alternative to the traditional narrative on integration. Two men, Arthur “Daddy” Black and Daniel “Big Dan” Whitehead, demonstrate that baseball and integration at the local level deserve more attention than they have received to date.

During the early 20th century, many African Americans left their southern farms to follow opportunities found in northern cities. The Great Migration intensified during World War II and markedly influenced racial identity in urban areas that included Providence. Baseball capitalized on the influx of newcomers and expanded to become one of the black community’s most popular social and economic institutions. Although African Americans in Providence were never immune to the indignities of forced racial segregation, they did experience different degrees of separation and discrimination. By the 1920s, public recreational space, especially baseball fields, represented contested ground where African Americans renegotiated the boundaries of exclusion in favor of recognition and inclusion.²

With this migration came two archetypal figures, Black and Whitehead, both baseball men, both representing different styles to promote and finance the game. Black, known as “The Lottery King” in 1920s Providence, used his control of the numbers racket to profit himself and to boost the segregated economy when white political and financial institutions ignored the interests of black Americans.³ It should be noted that Black’s source of income was not unique in African American baseball. Gus Greenlee in Pittsburgh, Alex Pompey in New York City, and Abe Manley in Newark operated teams with money acquired in the numbers game.⁴ In 1924, Black partnered with the white owners of the Cleveland Colored Giants and formally incorporated the team in Rhode Island.⁵ Two

Arthur James Black, born in 1881 (one generation from slavery), came to Providence as a child with his mother Phebe and siblings Charles, Mary, and Anna. Not satisfied with life in Providence by 1899 he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. For the next 20 years he learned the skills of a machinist, reaching the rank of Chief Machinist Mate. He earned commendations, respect, and promotions as he traveled the world from China to the Caribbean, where he immersed himself in Cuban Culture and its national passion for baseball. He married Louella Timberlake: their daughter Alma was born in Virginia. He returned to Providence in 1921 with his family and found that his experiences, helped forge business, political, and union relationships as he navigated the racially complex world of Prohibition Rhode Island. He worked as a machinist on the Mt. Hope Bridge and Industrial Trust Building, carried favor with Republican Party leaders, invested in the sports world (owning both white and black baseball teams in New England), and as was the case in so many black communities across the nation, became a source of black financial capital as he operated the numbers game in Providence. He was the “Lottery King” of Hoyle Square in Providence, but in the community he was Arthur “Daddy” Black, a man to be respected. (photo courtesy of Providence Police Archives)



On August 21, 1921, the Providence Independents battled the Cleveland Colored Giants at Rocky Point. The Giants, formerly of the Continental League, eventually found a new home in Providence under the ownership of James Gibbons and Arthur Black. The Independents started Lizzie Murphy, Rhode Island’s premiere female baseball player, at first base. (*Providence Journal*, August 20, 1921).

years later, he became the sole owner of the Monarchs, a mostly Irish team from Providence’s West Side neighborhood.⁶ Black reached the pinnacle of his baseball career in 1931 when he purchased and restructured one of the most dominant African American teams in New England, the Providence Colored Giants. Black desired a professional team that included seasoned professional black ballplayers. He set his sights on Oliver “Ghost” Marcelle and Clifford Carter, both looking to sign with teams after the Great Depression resulted in the demise of the National Negro League.⁷ Both men accepted Black’s generous salary offers to play in Providence.

Whitehead’s affiliation with the game predated Black’s and lasted a lifetime. He created the Provi-

THE ROY W. MILLER CHAPTER
Disabled American Veterans of the World War
Wish to thank the players, umpire and the Athletic Association at Coats for donating their services at Coats Field last evening.
SUNDAY AT ROCKY POINT
The PROVIDENCE INDEPENDENTS Will Play the CLEVELAND COLORED GIANTS
Lizzie Murphy will play first base for the Independents and will try to catch a ball dropped from an aeroplane.

dence Colored Giants in 1905 and remained active in the game until his death in 1933. He played, managed, and promoted games for a host of teams, including the Providence Colored Giants, Providence All-Stars, and Cleveland Colored Giants. He also organized contests between black teams as part of the community’s Emancipation Day celebrations held annually at Rocky Point on August 1.⁸

Whitehead’s relationship with baseball extended beyond local teams and embraced regional black professional clubs. These teams included squads from the newly formed Eastern Colored League (1923–1928), independent traveling teams such as the Brooklyn Royal Giants, and competitive nearby outfits such as the Boston Tigers.⁹ Whitehead carded many of these

April 1-1906
Prov. R. I.

Dear sir,

I was talking with Fred R. Sherman about a position on your team, as I have not signed with any Club yet.

He told me about the suits and about the team going for practice at Palace Gardens I am unable to report - for practice on April 1st on April 8th you can find me with at Rocky Point Grounds on the

Diamond with Providence Players I am well - acquainted with all the players as I was with them at Melrose Park all last Summer.

I am colored 21 years old. Height 5 ft 5 inches. Weight 151 1/4 pounds.

These are the Clubs I played with.

1903-4 Season The Warwick R. I. Base Base Club

1904- Season The Crack Colored Cuban Giants of Brooklyn New York

Captain P. P. Watkins
94 Rockwell Place
Brooklyn New York

1905-Season Providence - Colored Giants in April 2-1906 Telegram or Tribune in you will find the picture of the Providence Giants

I am looked to play First Base for the Boston Colored Giants but I guess I will stay home this season.

If there is any doubt of anything in this letter you can inquire.

I play any position but catcher.

I would like you to write me a definite

answer and all about it.

yours truly
Harry Fearson
Care 16-D-Street
Providence,
R. I.,

games at Providence's Kinsley Park, the city's premier sporting venue.¹⁰ Black teams frequently played against white teams, and that arrangement drew an integrated audience. According to the *Providence Journal*, Whitehead alone "books colored baseball teams for this section throughout the season."¹¹ At the time

ABOVE: The Harry Fearson letter establishes the absence of a tightly drawn color line in local baseball and the diversity of teams that sought and acquired his services. He addressed the letter to Ralph Lockwood who managed the Suits, a white team that practiced and played at Palace Garden. Fearson's career included stops in Brooklyn, Providence, and Boston where he played on white and black teams at both the professional and semi-professional levels. In 1905, he pitched and played shortstop for the Providence Colored Giants during the team's inaugural season. He remained an active player on the Giants roster until 1911. (author's collection)

of his death, these connections earned him the title "sports mogul" of black baseball in Rhode Island.¹²

Whitehead was forever the dreamer. A small-market city like Providence never hosted a baseball team in the professional Negro Leagues, but that hardly meant money could not be made. When Whitehead arrived in the early 20th century, black baseball already had taken root in the city and throughout the state, but little money exchanged hands, and few paid for tickets. Whitehead changed all that. In 1905, he boldly announced in the *Providence Journal* that he had established a team of local and regional stars and coaches worth "the price of admission."¹³ Whitehead's Colored Giants opened their 1905 campaign before 1,700 paying fans.¹⁴ In the following year, he scouted and then added professional players from the Philadel-

phia Giants, Cuban Giants, and Georgia Professionals to his ball team.¹⁵ Despite some notable successes, Whitehead's repeated attempts to attract and retain quality ballplayers and to schedule games with black professional ball clubs ultimately proved unsuccessful. He lacked Black's money and connections. For Whitehead, opportunities seemed to come and go. A life-long baseball man, he influenced every facet of African American baseball in Rhode Island between 1905 and 1933. The decisions he made, the options he exercised, and the opportunities he created converged at critical moments in the game's history.

The story of these men spans the years between their birth in the late 19th century and death, one year apart, in 1932 and 1933 and includes two historic games that serve as bookends for their story. The first

game, promoted by Whitehead and played at East Providence's Crescent Park in 1914, witnessed a local black team that secretly "imported" Rube Foster, the father of American black baseball, for a game against the Major League St. Louis Cardinals. At the time, Foster was considered the finest black pitcher in baseball, and his arm was available for hire.¹⁶ The Cardinals had a weekend series against the Boston Braves, with games scheduled on Friday, Saturday, and Monday. Whitehead took advantage of Boston's restrictive Sunday Law that prohibited baseball on the Sabbath to stage the game in East Providence. According to Armando Perry, sportswriter for the *The Boston Chronicle*, the Cardinals reportedly welcomed "the opportunity of killing an afternoon by making some easy money."¹⁷ Whitehead secured bets against the local

team, composed of semipro and collegiate players, and takers gladly accepted the odds. Perry wrote that the bettors' "grins of satisfaction gradually faded with each inning as Foster enjoying one of his best days simply mowed down the opposition with his famous 'cannonball' and tantalizing sinkers and curves." Whitehead recalled that he made almost \$4,000 that day, of which \$2,800 was pure profit. He paid Foster a flat fee of \$150, but in appreciation of Foster's splendid pitching, "Dan added another \$50 to the ante."¹⁸

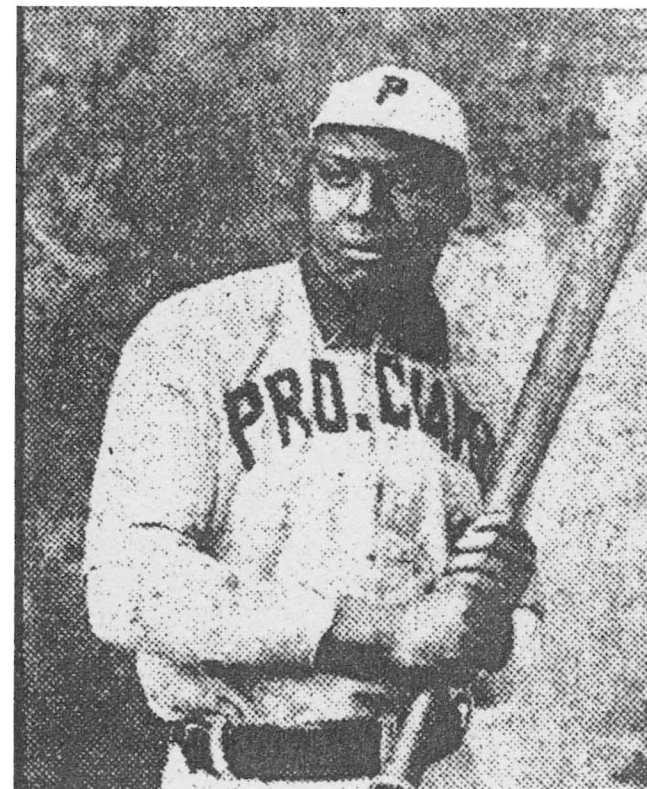
The Crescent Park game showcased several important themes. By 1914, Whitehead had demonstrated the talent to book and promote quality baseball games that paid handsomely. Black baseball was emerging as one of the city's most successful African American businesses, but it also invited gambling as money exchanged hands in the stands among fans. In contrast, neighborhood baseball teams remained true to the amateur ideal and fielded players reflecting black middle-class sensibilities and representing local churches, athletic clubs, fraternal organizations, and civic associations. Commercialized sport leaned heavily on gambling, promotion, sales, and profitability to keep Whitehead and his teams in business. Both brands of ball, amateur and semiprofessional, existed side by side and attracted similar fans. The city's black elite, however, sanctioned the local amateur game but scorned the moneymaking game as counterproductive to the community's welfare and respectability.

The other illustrative game, one played at Kinsley Park in 1932, signaled the collapse of commercial black baseball under the combined weight of the Great Depression and the departure of Black and Whitehead



Oliver "Ghost" Marcelle served as captain of Daddy's Black's Colored Giants in 1931. Regarded as a fierce competitor, he propelled Providence to the championship of Boston's highly competitive Twi-Light League. Marcelle also led his team in non-league contests against traveling teams like the Cuban House of David that featured rookie pitching phenomenon Luis "Bravo" Tiant. Black considered Marcelle a franchise player and offered him a lucrative contract to play in Providence after the Brooklyn Royal Giants released him in 1931. The Brooklyn team suspended operation in 1931 due to the Depression and did not return until the 1933 season. Marcelle, pictured in Cuba during the offseason as a member of the Santa Clara team, earned a reputation as one of the best black third basemen ever to play the game. (photo courtesy of the Baseball Hall of Fame)

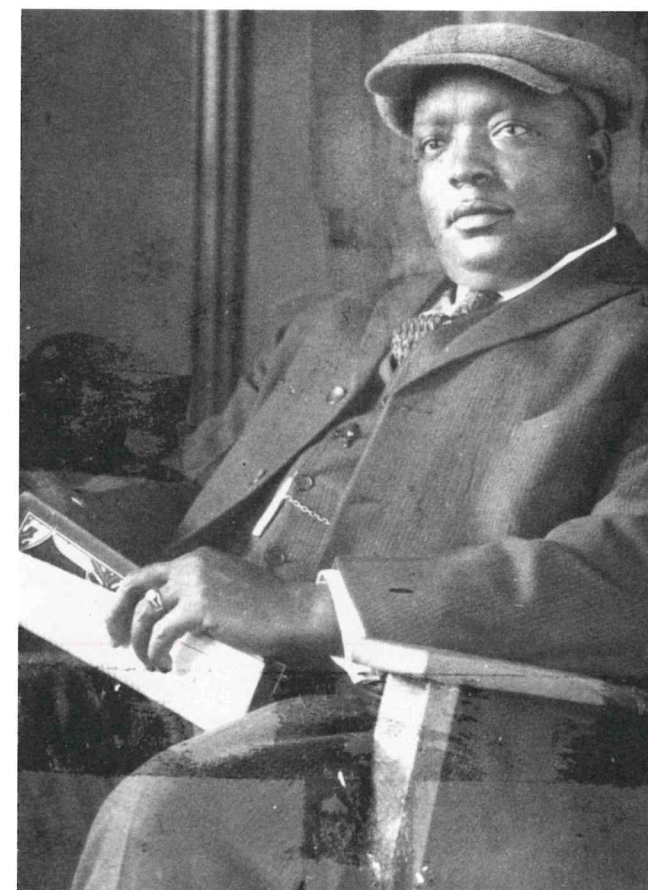
from the game. In 1931, Black acquired the Providence Colored Giants from Whitehead. The Depression triggered Whitehead's financial downfall, and he sold the team to Black, whose numbers operation netted an estimated \$5,000 a day in 1932.¹⁹ Black successfully acquired several professional Negro League players recently released from their contracts following the bankruptcy of the league. He reportedly signed them to contracts that paid \$40-\$60 a week, a hefty sum for the time.²⁰ During the season, Black arranged for



Daniel Whitehead earned recognition as the czar of black baseball in Rhode Island for the power and influence he wielded over the black game. Whitehead's innovative and lengthy association with baseball permitted him to realize several accomplishments during his lifetime. By 1904 he lived in Providence and the following year he established the Providence Colored Giants, the first commercially successful African American team in the state. He developed the finest black baseball players and won several state and regional championship titles. In 1926, his team integrated Providence's Suburban League and, during the season, he incorporated white players on the team. As a promoter, he negotiated with legendary sports agents like Nat Strong to bring the best black traveling teams to Providence. (This photography has been reproduced before. It originally appeared in the *Providence Journal* in 1908.)

his team to travel to New York City to play the Harlem Stars, owned by entertainer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. The Stars, later to become the New York Black Yankees, defeated the Giants in a doubleheader played at the Polo Grounds, by scores of 6-4 and 8-1.²¹ Black believed his team had failed to play professional-level ball. Later, he concluded that his team never reached its full potential or merited its heavy payroll.

Black turned the Colored Giants back over to Whitehead in 1932, with disastrous results. The local



Andrew "Rube" Foster established the Negro National League in 1920 and served as president until his death in 1930. He entered the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown in 1981 for his executive leadership, playing talent, and managerial success. Known as the "Father of Negro Baseball," sport historians agree that Foster exerted the greatest national influence on the black game. In 1914, Foster, then a member of the Chicago American Giants, pitched against the major league St. Louis Cardinals in a game at Crescent Park arranged by Daniel Whitehead. The game secured Whitehead's reputation as the region's foremost promoter of black baseball. The Giants beat the Cardinals. (photo courtesy of the Baseball Hall of Fame)

black press reported, "Mutiny on the high seas had nothing on the episode which took place Sunday afternoon, April 24, at Kinsley Park in the city of Providence when members of the newly formed Providence Colored Giants flatly refused to go on with a twin bill against the East Side All-Stars and Boston Collegians, composed of former big leaguers and semipro." ²² The players expected weekly salaries, but when it became apparent that they would split gate receipts with their opponents, they refused to play. Spectators

demanded their money back, and a near riot ensued at the box office. On the following day, several players left town, looking to sign contracts elsewhere in Boston, New York, and Baltimore. Providence had witnessed “the finis” of commercialized black baseball in that city.²³ Whitehead told friends that he was through with baseball forever. “If he carries out this threat,” wrote sportswriter Armando Perry, “Providence will undoubtedly lose one of the most colorful figures in baseball.”²⁴ Whitehead kept his word and “severed his relationship with his one-time love.”²⁵ The promise of the Foster game in 1914 ended in despair following the riot game in 1932.

Within a year after the riot game, Whitehead and Black were dead. Perry chose his column in *The Providence Chronicle* to eulogize the lives of his two close friends.²⁶ He had written extensively about their careers and contributions to black baseball in Rhode Island, but after their deaths, he tried hard to understand how their lives had led them to two very different fates in two very different places.

Black died on September 24, 1932, from gunshot wounds suffered at his home in Providence’s West End neighborhood. Rival gangsters ended Black’s life after he refused to surrender his territory to Italian competitors.²⁷ Whitehead died on December 27, 1933, in a flophouse on Burgess Avenue, of an aneurysm of the aorta.²⁸ Black died with money on the table with his wife and daughter in the family dining room below. Whitehead died penniless and alone, his body discovered by apartment-house caretaker Flora Banks. Perry remembered Whitehead as a true baseball man, a former player, manager, owner, and promoter of

TOP: Joe Gomes (first on the left) led the East Providence High School baseball team to a state championship in 1928 and garnered all-state recognition for his efforts. After high school, John McGraw, manager and co-owner of the major league New York Giants, approached Gomes with a plan that would send the talented right-handed pitcher to Cuba for a season or two with the idea that he would later join the Giants as a Cuban player. Gomes affirmed his heritage as a Cape Verdean and declined the offer. Instead, Gomes played both baseball and football at Providence College. He later joined Daniel Whitehead’s newly configured Providence Colored Giants in 1932, but quickly departed the team after the riot game. Gomes successfully landed in Philadelphia as a member of Passon’s Bacharach Giants. The team was a member of the league of Independent Clubs that included the Kansas City Monarchs, Pittsburgh Crawfords, and New York Black Yankees.

BOTTOM: Red Smith (front row, second from the left) pitched for the Colored Giants during the team’s final season in 1932. Afterwards, he became Providence’s premier manager and promoter of amateur African American teams. During the 1930s and 1940s, his Providence Eagles dominated the local amateur black baseball circuit. His rise to prominence reflected the end of commercialized black baseball after 1932 and the rise of amateur teams connected to neighborhoods, churches, and civic organizations. (Photo courtesy of Raymond Venter)

the game. He was the “father” of black baseball in Rhode Island.²⁹ Black was a numbers kingpin and past owner of the professional Cleveland Colored Giants and Providence Colored Giants. Black may not have known much about the game, but he knew how to make money.³⁰

Like many African Americans who arrived in Providence during the Great Migration, Black and Whitehead had decisions to make. Moving north represented an initial step in a process of endless movement and constant resettlement, as well as an incessant struggle for economic survival. Both men drew upon skills and lessons from their baseball experiences to inform their choices, but each held a distinctive set of talents and skills. Their lives reflected the multifaceted and complex differences that existed among newcomers and emphasized divergent paths to attain success, both personal and professional. What initially brought them together and eventually drove them apart was baseball and the lure of easy money.



ENDNOTES

1. Representative works include Darrell J. Howard, "Sunday Coming": *Black Baseball in Virginia* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002); Rob Fink, *Playing in Shadows: Texas and Negro League Baseball* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2010); Frank M. White, *They Played for the Love of the Game: Untold Stories of Black Baseball in Minnesota* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2016); and Todd Peterson, *Early Black Baseball in Minnesota* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010). For a New England focus see Robert Cvornyk, "The Color of Baseball: Race and Boston's Sporting Community," *Black Ball: A Negro Leagues Journal* (Volume 6, 2013), 70–106.
2. Lawrence D. Hogan, *Shades of Glory: The Negro Leagues and the Story of African-American Baseball* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006), 127 and 153–156, and Sarah L. Trembanis, *The Set-Up Men: Race, Culture and Resistance in Black Baseball* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 22.
3. George P. Hassett and Robert Cvornyk, "Who Killed Daddy Black?" *The Providence Phoenix*, (March 30, 2012), 8–11.
4. Jules Tygiel, "Unreconciled Strivings: Baseball in Jim Crow America," in *The American Game: Baseball and Ethnicity*, ed. Lawrence Baldassaro and Richard A. Johnson (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 83.
5. The Cleveland Colored Giants incorporation papers are located in the Rhode Island State Archives C#0179. Rhode Island Secretary of State, *Original Articles of Non-Business Corporation, 1924* (Volume 7), 89.
6. *Providence Journal*, April 19, 1926, 6.
7. Lawrence D. Hogan, *The Forgotten History of African American Baseball* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014), 164–165, and Michael E. Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs: The Negro National and Eastern Colored Leagues, 1902–1931* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 412–425. For an economic overview of black baseball after 1931, see Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
8. Robert Cvornyk, "Touching Base: Race, Sport, and Community in Newport," *Newport History*, Volume 85 (Spring 2016), passim.
9. Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs*, 271–308.
10. *Providence Journal*, August 20, 1924, 7.
11. *Providence Journal*, June 19, 1925, 7.
12. *Providence Chronicle*, December 30, 1933, 1. For additional information on Whitehead's role as a promoter, see *Providence Journal*, July 5, 1923, 6; July 15, 1923, 15; July 17, 1923, 6; August 15, 1924, 6; and August 16, 1926, 13.
13. *Providence Journal*, April 2, 1905, 6.
14. *Providence Journal*, May 29, 1905, 7.
15. *Providence Journal*, June 18, 1905, 3.
16. For an overview of Foster's career as a player, manager, and founder of the National Negro League, see Robert C. Cottrell, *The Best Pitcher in Baseball: The Life of Rube Foster, Negro League Giant* (New York: NYU Press, 2004); Larry Lester, *Rube Foster in His Time: On the Field and in the Papers with Black Baseball's Greatest Visionary* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012); and Phil S. Dixon, *Andrew "Rube" Foster: A Harvest on Freedom's Fields* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2010).
17. Sportswriter Armando Perry provides the history of the 1914 game in his "Baseball Memoirs" located in the *Boston Chronicle*, May 9, 1936, 6.
18. *Boston Chronicle*, May 9, 1936, 6.
19. *Providence Journal*, July 9, 1932, 2.
20. "Baseball Ramblings," *Boston Chronicle*, April 8, 1933, 6.
21. *New York Age*, July 25, 1931, 6; *New York Amsterdam News*, July 7, 1931, 13; and *Providence Journal*, July 16, 1931, 9.
22. *Boston Chronicle*, April 30, 1932, 7, and *Providence Journal*, April 25, 1 and 5.
23. *Boston Chronicle*, April 30, 1932, 7.
24. *Boston Chronicle*, April 30, 1932, 7.
25. *Boston Chronicle*, May 9, 1936, 6.
26. See, for example, "Sports Mogul Dead: Big Dan Was Well-Known in Sporting Circles," *Boston Chronicle*, December 30, 1933, 8, and "20,000 File by Bier of 'Daddy' Black," *Boston Chronicle*, October 1, 1932, 1.
27. Hassett and Cvornyk, "Who Killed Daddy Black?" 8–11.
28. The details of Whitehead's death are found in Rhode Island Public Health Commission, "Certificate of Death," State File Number 254, December 27, 1933, located in the Rhode Island State Archives.
29. *Boston Chronicle*, March 18, 1933, 6.
30. *Boston Chronicle*, April 8, 1933, 6.
31. Gomes is one of three Rhode Islanders to play professional black baseball. Gideon Spence Applegate, another all-state athlete from East Providence High School, played professionally for the New York Cubans and New York Black Yankees. He debuted under the name "Spearman" for the New York Black Yankees on June 22, 1945 while still a high school student. Spence would later desegregate the Boston Braves organization as a top prospect in their minor league affiliate in the Canadian Border League. Charles Thomas enjoyed a successful professional career with the Newark Eagles playing for Hall of Fame owner Effa Mandle during the War years from 1941 to 1943. With the Eagles, he played alongside Hall of Fame members Larry Doby and Monte Irvin. The *Providence Chronicle* newspaper characterized Thomas as a well-known New England athlete who starred in football, basketball, and baseball and played semi-professional football for the Providence Steam Rollers.

In July 1931, Daddy Black's Colored Giants traveled to New York City aboard the team's private bus to participate in an elimination series for the Colored Baseball Championship of the East. The Giants opened the contest in a double-header at the Polo Grounds against entertainer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson's Harlem Stars. The Stars defeated the Giants 6-4 and 8-1. Black expressed disappointment that his team did not perform to expectations. The Giants roster included several highly paid players recently released from their contracts because the Great Depression caused the collapse of the Negro League. Black's roster included notable players such as Oliver "Ghost" Marcelle, Robert "Highpockets" Huds-peth, Elmore "Scrappy" Brown, and Peter "Tubby" Johnson. The *New York Age* advertised the game at a reduced grandstand admission rate that "resulted in a much larger attendance." (Advertisement in *New York Age*, July 18, 1931, 6)

BASEBALL

POLO GROUNDS

SUNDAY, JULY 19th

TWO GAMES

Bill (Bojangles) Robinson

Harlem Stars

v s.

Providence

Giants

FIRST GAME 2 P. M.

REDUCED PRICES

ENTIRE GRANDSTAND

50Cents