



Journal
of the Illinois State
Historical Society



**UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS PRESS**

The Southern against the South: The Chicago Conspiracy in the 1932 Negro Southern Baseball League

Author(s): Thomas Aiello

Source: *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1998-), Spring, 2009, Vol. 102, No. 1 (Spring, 2009), pp. 7-27

Published by: University of Illinois Press on behalf of the Illinois State Historical Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27740146>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Illinois State Historical Society and University of Illinois Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1998-)

The Southern Against the South: The Chicago Conspiracy in the 1932 Negro Southern Baseball League

Thomas Aiello

The “major” Negro league before and after 1932 was the Negro National League, but depression and declining revenues forced the circuit to close operations that year. In its absence rose the Negro Southern League (NSL) and the East-West Colored League, and the former included the small-town Monroe Monarchs, the team’s first and only year of major league baseball. The Monarchs were a “minor” Negro league baseball team in the early 1930s, owned by Fred Stovall, a white oil magnate.

Monroe was a town of twenty-six thousand in the northeast corner of Louisiana, the hub of a poor cotton-farming region in the Mississippi Delta approximately seventy miles from the river and forty from the Arkansas border.¹ Though the Monarchs won more and lost fewer games than the Chicago American Giants in that 1932 season, the League pennant was denied them. Chicago’s victory has subsequently been mentioned in each of the brief statistical notations of the 1932 Negro Southern League without comment. The confusion of the season and the collapse of the National League have created unexamined assumptions about the outcomes of the year’s black baseball. Twenty-first century Monroe, for example, still stands by the team’s victory. No eyewitness testimony or reflective confession exists to prove that Monroe’s pennant was stolen by its own league, but existing evidence casts doubt on the legitimacy of the standings printed in every baseball reference book that includes the 1932 Negro Leagues.

Fred Stovall wanted his Monarchs to be part of a new league in 1932, rather than the 1931 Texas League, which his team won. That organization was not headquartered in Monroe, nor was it a “major” league, and the success of Stovall’s team the previous year led the owner to make an attempt for one or the other. A white Dallas native, Stovall came to Monroe in 1917, and by 1932 owned both the Stovall Drilling Company and the J.M. Supply Company, among other enterprises, allowing him to found his black baseball team with drilling employees in 1930. He never



The 1932 Monroe Monarchs. This photo was doctored by a later archivist or fan. There was no National League in 1932. The front row, from left to right, depicts Zollie Wright, Red Parnell, Chuffie Alexander, W.L. Walker, and Harry Else. The back row, from left to right, depicts Elbert Williams, Barney Morris, Porter Dallas, Dick Matthews, Frank Johnson, Sam Harris, Leroy Morney, and Augustus Saunders. Special thanks to Paul J. Letlow of the Monroe News Star for help with player identification.

Picture from the Ouachita Parish Digital Archive, part of the Special Collections of the Ouachita Parish Public Library, Monroe, Louisiana.

incorporated the team, even after its success led him to hire veteran professionals. By 1932, his Monroe Black Drillers acted as a company team while the Monarchs tended largely to baseball. His first move of the 1931-1932 intercession was to hire business manager H.D. "Doug" English from the Shreveport Sports, a fellow Texas League team the previous season, to administer both the team and a possible league. He then called a meeting of potential owners in Monroe, with representatives from New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Shreveport, and Alexandria from Louisiana, Little Rock, Hot Springs, Pine Bluff, and El Dorado from Arkansas, and Vicksburg, Natchez, and Jackson from Mississippi. The Tri-State League, as the potential aggregation would be called, met on January 22. "There seem[s] to be a change coming up the road," wrote Pitman E. Nedde, sports editor and columnist for the *Shreveport Sun*, "but don't get glad too quick—it's a little too early."²

From that first meeting came the possibility of recruiting the much more prominent Memphis Red Sox for the new league. The Kansas City Monarchs, Cuban Giants, Pittsburgh Crawfords, Indianapolis Black Caps, and Chicago American Giants—all large market franchises—were considered potential associate members (a sort of honorific that would ensure the teams barnstormed through the new circuit). Monroe, New Orleans, Little Rock, and Jackson, known as the "Big Four," formed the nucleus of the potential league, and each team chose a representative to scout the region surrounding its city to investigate the conditions of other applicant towns. The *Louisiana Weekly* reported, "Many prominent white men seem interested in this movement and appear willing to help put this project over." However, by mid-February, the smaller market, originally-invited teams could not meet the monetary guarantee and the franchise purchase requirement, leaving only the larger area cities to field teams. Though the proposed amount of the Tri-State guarantee is unknown, the payment served as a membership deposit that protected players and owners in the event of forfeits, poor attendance, and games called on account of weather. The monetary guarantee was necessary for all Negro Leagues, as player pay and owner profit were based solely on gate receipts. Those payments would be made at a two-day meeting in Monroe on February 7 and 8 to determine the final four members of the new endeavor.³

Two weeks later, no news from the meeting had reached the two principal Louisiana black newspapers. Nedde and the *Shreveport Sun*

seemed content. The sports editor's familiarity with English, combined with the uncertain status of the Shreveport Sports' application to the league, kept angry editorials from the sports page. The New Orleans-based *Louisiana Weekly*, however, was overtly suspicious of the Monroe dealings. Neither the paper nor Peter Robertson, owner of the New Orleans Black Pelicans (and supposed member of the Tri-State League) had made contact with English, nor with anyone else in the Monroe organization. "Since that last session," the paper reported, "Robertson has sent letters by special delivery and long distance messages but at this writing has not received a reply." The *Weekly* described the Pelicans' owner as anxious and dubious. "So Pete's theme song these days runs something like, 'Oh, Gee, How I'd Love One Sweet, Sweet Letter From You!' and it is pointed at English up in Monroe."⁴ English's silence, however, was not the result of incompetence. His February was consumed with an effort to achieve Stovall's other goal for his Monarchs—membership in a "major" league.

Due to the collapse of the Negro National League and the unsteady formation of the new East-West League, the NSL was poised to be the most talented baseball league of 1932. The East-West was the brainchild of Cumberland Posey, owner of the Homestead Greys and Detroit Wolves, and largely served to earn money and prestige for Posey himself. Its exclusion of potentially profitable teams, combined with general mismanagement and probable corruption, led the league to cease operations in June. But the Southern would survive. On January 23, the Negro Southern League met in Birmingham, including representatives from Atlanta, Birmingham, Memphis, Montgomery, Little Rock, and Nashville. At the meeting, league president Reuben Bartholomew Jackson spoke of the need for a moral center in baseball. He noted the exigencies of the depression and the resulting requirement that the NSL improve its product to remain solvent. The need for greater attendance loomed over the meeting as the most dire of requirements. Tom Wilson, owner of the Nashville Elite Giants, followed Jackson with another speech on the history of baseball and the prospects for the season. The group made an official declaration of congratulations to the new league forming in Monroe, and offered an invitation to a Tri-State League representative for the NSL's next meeting.⁵

At that next meeting on February 24 in Nashville, concessions were made to allow NSL teams to play larger independent clubs such as the

Cuban Stars and House of David. Keeping with Jackson and Wilson's insistence on the necessity of greater attendance, the league courted the large-market but decidedly non-Southern Pittsburgh Crawfords, Indianapolis Black Caps, and the Chicago American Giants, under the new ownership of Robert Cole. Louisville, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Chicago were invited to a March 10 Louisville meeting to determine membership status in the league. English attended the Nashville meeting, as well, but not solely as a representative of the Tri-State League. English, in fact, successfully lobbied for Monroe's inclusion in the NSL, and even managed to win the position of league statistician. The action destroyed the possibility of the Tri-State League, but reaction from the Louisiana black weeklies was begrudgingly congratulatory rather than overly critical. "You can't blame 'em for jumping," wrote *Louisiana Weekly* sports editor Earl M. Wright. "Nevertheless the other clubs that had contemplated joining the proposed league are in a very uncomfortable position." Pittman Nedde's column in the *Shreveport Sun*, never very confident in the ability of other Louisiana towns (including his own) to produce consistent baseball organizations, described Monroe's action as "a wise step in the management of the Monroe Monarchs, who seemingly know how to maneuver out an approaching baseball upset."⁶

The Louisville meeting of the NSL in early March, however, proved that not all greeted Monroe's new affiliation with such favor. "Chief among the problems and issues discussed were the fates of Louisville, which city did not choose to enter league baseball, and the attempt of Monroe, La., to force its way into the body over the protest of the other teams," reported the *Atlanta Daily World*. "Argument against Monroe was that its location made travel from the other cities too much of a financial burden. While this battle was going on Chicago changed its plans and moved in as a regular member instead of merely associating with the group as was first planned." The anti-Monroe faction was not disclosed in newspaper reports, but the available evidence points to Wilson and the Nashville faction being the principal instigator. Atlanta, Birmingham, Chicago, Indianapolis, Little Rock, Louisville, Memphis, Montgomery, Monroe, and Nashville were voted franchises. Little Rock, Memphis, and Montgomery had reasonable journeys to Monroe and played the Monarchs more than any of the remaining NSL clubs. Indianapolis had long distances to travel for all Southern

games. Louisville was a late inclusion into the league, as was Chicago. Birmingham, Atlanta, and Nashville were each far from northeast Louisiana, and each could have complained about the trip. Though the Birmingham Black Barons were voted a franchise, however, the *Birmingham Reporter* and team officials could not discover word from the League office on their status for weeks. They did not have a manager until late March. Atlanta was never even given a complete first half schedule of games. Both of these teams left the league in June before the first half was ever completed.⁷

This left Nashville. The previous year, the Monarchs “won the title of champions of the south,” an unofficial minor league championship also called the Dixie World Series, by defeating the Nashville Elite Giants.⁸ Jackson, NSL president, had stressed the need for a boost in attendance and actively courted big name out-of-south teams like the Chicago American Giants, a club which became the most widely reported of all the NSL squads. Monroe was by far the smallest of the included cities and could have been seen as a potential detriment to the League’s “major” status.

Jackson lived in Nashville. Born in Sparta, Georgia, he had been a college football star at Morris Brown before attending Meharry Medical College in Nashville. He took an MD in 1926, becoming a general practitioner and establishing an office at 1123 1/2 Cedar Street. Jackson drifted in an out of the historical record. He began his life after medical school with a clear plan for success, marrying Bertha L. Allen, establishing a general practice, and buying a home on Nashville’s Second Avenue—a comfortable situation he maintained throughout his year-long tenure as NSL president and through 1937. In 1932, he also served as medical examiner for the Nashville Colored City Schools. In 1934, he began a venture with fellow doctor Henry C. Floyd, the Ever Ready Service Station, which survived until 1941. When this business is considered along with his ventures in sports, Jackson appears to be a man of many interests (and, subsequently, many streams of income). In 1938, however, Jackson’s general practice office moved, and the doctor was boarding with a widow named Cleo D. Moore. By 1940, he was absent from Nashville. He returned in 1942, and remarried in 1946. Dr. Floyd died that year, but Jackson did not actively participate in the funeral. In 1958, he drifts from the record forever. All those Jackson came in contact with through his tenure in Nashville—and particularly

through his early success—eventually fell away. Whether Jackson’s sins caught up to him or hard luck drove him away is impossible to know, but Floyd’s death prompted a two-page obituary in the *Nashville Globe* chronicling the community’s admiration for him (an accolade his former business partner certainly never received). Jackson’s \$8,500 in 1933 taxable real estate holdings fell to \$1,080 dollars by 1948, and the taxes of the latter were delinquent. Throughout, however—and particularly in those early years—Jackson maintained an active interest in sports.⁹

That interest and his early rising status in the community led to his relationship with Thomas J. Wilson, owner of the Nashville Elite Giants. The son of two medical doctors, Wilson grew to become a “numbers man,” a gambling magnate, along with his dealings in baseball, football, hotel, and nightclub ownership. In 1918, he created the Nashville Standard Giants, a semi-pro baseball team, and in 1921 attempted to raise the team’s profile by changing its name to the Elite Giants. In 1928, he built Wilson Park, the Elite Giants ballpark, but also staged games at the white park, Sulphur Bell, when Wilson’s almost 8,000-person seating capacity threatened to be inadequate. Wilson’s Elite Giants joined the Negro National League in 1930, and the NSL when the National folded. This was the logical move for Wilson, as his friend and business partner was president of the new league. Together Wilson and Jackson also owned the Nashville Elite Giants professional football team. As did their Negro Southern Baseball League, their Negro Southern Football League featured Jackson as president and Wilson as treasurer. NSL football meetings took place in Jackson’s medical office, as the two decided on franchises to be awarded. In the NSL baseball meetings, Jackson’s presidency and Wilson’s position as treasurer acted as bookends to the newly-awarded vice presidency of Robert Cole, new owner of the Chicago American Giants and cash cow to the infant league. The Negro Southern League was a for-profit business emanating from Nashville, Tennessee, and there was not much profit in a small town team in northeast Louisiana.¹⁰

No record exists disclosing how the dispute was resolved, but it was, and Monroe received its franchise in the NSL.¹¹ If indeed Nashville was the principal opponent to Monroe’s entry, Little Rock, Memphis, and Montgomery probably came to the Monarchs’ defense. Little Rock and Memphis had both been strongly considering membership in the Tri-State

League. Montgomery, like Monroe, was making its first jump into “major” league baseball. Though Jackson’s league could have functioned without Monroe, it could not have functioned with only five teams.

Jackson and Wilson had reason to worry about the possible stability and profit-potential of a new baseball league. Declining revenues had caused the Negro National League, the primary institution of “major league” black baseball prior to the depression, to collapse. League officials agreed to close operations for 1932, with plans to renew the National the following year. The NSL, in its earlier form, was a feeder league for the “majors,” but became the main attraction after its predecessor’s loss of solvency. Another new “major” league in 1932, the East-West League opened in controversy, acting as a vehicle for Cumberland Posey, owner of the Homestead Greys. Posey did what Jackson and Wilson could not do—exclude teams that did not serve his financial or political interest. Homestead was a Pittsburgh team, but the rival Crawfords were not included in the league. The Detroit Wolves, another team owned by Posey, became a member, but the New York Black Yankees did not. The contentious circumstances that opened the league continued, and the East-West collapsed by the middle of June.¹²

Before its collapse, however, the problems of the East-West League seeped into the Southern, foreshadowing later controversy and serving as an example of the confusion of the 1932 season. An early May series between the East-West Detroit team and the Southern League’s Chicago American Giants narrowly avoided cancellation when Posey, serving as president of the East-West League, “failed to comply with a request to have Andrews, a left-handed pitcher, returned to the Indianapolis ABC’s of the Southern League.” Only a series of long-distance telephone negotiations between Posey, R.B. Jackson, and Dave Malarcher, manager of the American Giants, kept the games scheduled. “Both Posey and Jackson,” reported the *Chicago Defender*, “have let it be known that they do not care for war with the toughest season in years confronting them.” The following week, Posey claimed that Rap Dixon and Josh Gibson of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, formerly of Hilldale and Homestead, respectively, truly belonged to their original teams. He argued that two Chicago players, Davis and Thompson, were also East-West players. “Posey pulled a fast one in the series just closed when both Thompson and Davis were permitted to play for the

Giants against Detroit only under assumed names. Davis played as "Williams" and "Jones" is the name attached to Thompson. By doing this, Posey proved his point that he is seeking to have the two men return east to fulfill contracts he says they had signed." Sportswriter Al Monroe of the *Defender* wrote that it "looks like the war is just around the corner." A week later, the *Defender* reported that Jackson "declared off" all games between the Southern and East-West leagues, due to Posey's refusal to return Andrews, now described as "a hard hitting outfielder." To ensure his directive would be followed, Jackson put W.A. "Gus" Greenlee, owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords and Posey's chief rival, "in charge of booking Southern league clubs in the East." Robert A. Cole, owner of the American Giants and vice president of the NSL, stated, "Posey should be a man of his word and not show signs of getting there at any cost." This would not be the only time that organizational instability caused confusion for league teams, and it would not be the only time that Jackson's solution to league administrative problems would include "declaring off" games. From early June to mid-July, he would collude with Wilson to steal a pennant from the Monroe team that neither wanted in the league to begin with.¹³

On June 3, R.B. Jackson released a statement to the major black weeklies and dailies describing the state of the league. Games between teams not using officially sanctioned league baseballs were declared forfeited. All of Atlanta's games were eliminated for this reason. The statement also suggested that the Memphis Red Sox would be dropped from the NSL. "The trouble, one gathers from the telegram," reported the *Chicago Defender*, "came through the Tennessee nine's failure to return players, unnamed, taken from other teams in the same organization." In other words, the player contract disputes that caused the rift between the Southern and East-West Leagues weeks prior were replayed by teams within the NSL. Memphis's misdoings remained unnamed, but May 3 *Memphis World* reported that Homer Curry, the Memphis manager, expected several new additions to sign up before the team's return from a road trip. Nine days later, the Red Sox signed "Shifty" Jim West, a Birmingham first baseman who had impressed the manager in exhibition games between the teams. Also, the *World* reported, "Manager Curry has been in communication with several other stars who will likely join the team before they finish their next home series." The *Pittsburgh Courier*

described “an embarrassing situation” with the Memphis team. “West is now the property of Memphis since he has been properly released from his former owner which was Birmingham.” Monroe was 33-7 on the Fourth of July. Chicago’s nine losses and thirty wins kept them slightly behind the Monarchs. Two of the American Giants losses were to Memphis.¹⁴

“All is not well in the Southern League,” opined the *Defender*. Two weeks after his initial telegram, Jackson ruled that some of Memphis’s games were invalid, due to its use of players claimed by other teams. The ruling, naturally influenced by the Posey troubles from earlier in the season, called for more than simple forfeit, however (which would have kept Monroe in first place). Jackson ruled that Memphis’s two wins against Cole’s American Giants would be counted as losses, a decision that conveniently gave Chicago one less loss than Monroe.¹⁵ The Negro Southern League worked, as did many leagues of the era, on a split schedule. The first half of the season continued until the beginning of July, at which time the league declared a winner of the first half pennant. Then the teams began a second half with a clean slate, playing until a second half winner emerged. The two pennant holders would then play each other for the league championship. Jackson’s decision to change losses to wins (rather than void the games) came at the final administrative meeting of the first half of the season, thus taking the pennant from Monroe, and handing it to the large-market revenue vehicle in Chicago.

Initially, however, the majority of the black press ignored the ruling and declared the Monarchs winners of the first half. The *Louisiana Weekly* acknowledged the league ruling on the games, but declared Monroe the victor anyway, listing the team’s 31-7 record as superior to Chicago’s 31-9. The paper’s coverage noted the protests mailed to the league office by Monroe fans, arguing that the NSL attempted “to give the Chicago nine something they have not rightfully won. All the southern papers as well as some of the northern and eastern papers carry the standing just as it is with Monroe leading and naturally, the fans are not fooled.” The *Atlanta Daily World* listed Monroe’s 31-7 and Chicago’s 31-8 as the “official standing” of the League in its July 8 edition. It described the NSL’s final administrative meeting in depth, including attendance prizes, umpire status, franchise transfers, and player acquisitions. Monroe, it reported, won the first half pennant.¹⁶

Two weeks later, however, the *Daily World* reprinted a letter from president Jackson, released following a League meeting with Robert Cole in Chicago. It read as follows:

Ending the first-half of the split season around July 4, we were faced with a very complex decision, that is, a statement in regards to which team really attained the highest percentage of the close of the first half. All of the clubs connected with the Southern League have played good ball. Most of the clubs are featuring real baseball artists, naturally such qualifications are to be considered. However, there are ideals yet to be cultivated for the preservation of good organized baseball. This year has been one of depression for the clubs to carry on both morally and financially with success. Those composing the league have managed to strain and keep up. The fans apparently are well satisfied at seeing the baseball attractions. To be frank and without prejudice, one or two teams are fooled, little chesty. Maybe a bit of over-confidence and their test for ability is yet unforeseen. Organized baseball is just now in its making and will take some time for the game to return to the old standard which it once held. There are many ideals to be adjusted, however, they all are very simple. For example, the most of our teams do not pay, do not give attraction, [are] not managed correctly, franchise [sp] and registration fee are too limited, moral conduct of players overlooked, league affiliations not guaranteed, inefficient umpires, zoning and distant [sp] problem, and a number of other details not mentioned but with cooperation and organization these few obstacles can be easily cleared away.

Cole's American Giants are winners for first-half, this team played and won more games, presenting the best attraction qualities, and above all, their individual respect for league affiliation is unsurpassed. In the output (Beginning of season) all laws made by league members were approved and especially those guarding the rules

governing the title winner for league honors. When the test came for a show-down, Cole's American Giants have qualified. This telegram, and every form of communication, have flooded the office of the president requesting information and filing protest[s] concerning the right standing, but until [sp] every inch of the rules had been met with and a general check-up made of all games won and lost, there was no release of official standing. However, some few sport writers have over-zealously accepted reports of games won and averaged a percentage for publication. Some things to be considered in averaging a team's percentage, especially two or [sp] more clubs averaging about the same number of games won: the use of the official league ball, using disqualified players, clubs missing their schedule dates, clubs giving a breach to some of all rules in baseball. Thus this official percentage standing was somewhat delayed. An official trip to Chicago for pacific business, purposely to adjust such affairs was necessary. The schedule for second-half has been released and every team will be expected to carry on. In the event any club finds it impossible to meet the requirements of the league, especially the engagements as to schedule, said club automatically eliminate[s] itself WITHOUT A VOTE.

All of the clubs have played good ball as mentioned before, but such clubs as the Monroe Monarchs, Nashville Elite Giants, Memphis Red Sox, Indianapolis ABCs, Montgomery Grey Sox, and the Louisville Black Caps are in the run for winning honors for the second half.¹⁷

Jackson's letter subtly distorts the nature of his decision, and some specific passages merit consideration. "This year has been one of depression for the clubs to carry on both morally and financially with success." In this sentence, Jackson acknowledges the financial burden of the league, in what sounds almost like an initial apology for everything that follows. The list of generic problems with teams leaves almost infinite room for an official to maneuver in his ruling on the merit of games. In his declaration

of Chicago's victory, Jackson cites wins, "the best attraction qualities," and "respect for league affiliation" as reasons for the pennant. While this seems suspicious on its face, it also functions as an agent of misdirection. "This team played and won more games," he writes. But in an era where night baseball was rare, and games sometimes ended in ties due to darkness, the pennant came to the team with the highest winning percentage, *not* the team with the most wins (notice that Chicago also *played* more games). Jackson later cites "using disqualified players" in final calculation of winning percentages, among a long list of vague factors for meriting a *true* win. He also mentions the "distant problem" (distance problem) as a factor in League decisions. Distance, of course, was precisely the Nashville argument against Monroe in March. Finally, and possibly most incriminating, is, "Thus this official percentage standing was somewhat delayed. An official trip to Chicago for pacific business, purposely to adjust such affairs was necessary."

No more about this meeting with Robert Cole is known, but it was prompted by a threatened protest of the Monarchs by Cole's team. Cole was the owner of Chicago's Metropolitan Funeral System Association when he took over the American Giants in 1932. Like Nashville's Wilson, however, he was also a gambler, a participant in the illegal "numbers" racket. The following season, Cole and Wilson combined with Gus Greenlee, owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, to start the East-West All Star game, which would become a staple of the newly revived Negro Leagues. But the relationship between the two began in 1932. Later in the year, Cole would field an American Giants football team in Jackson and Wilson's professional league. Regardless, his position and continued participation, along with his team's prominence, were more than helpful for Jackson and Wilson's entrepreneurial endeavors.¹⁸

"The decision worked wonders with Cole's American Giants of Chicago," reported the *Defender*, "who now move back into first place as a result." The immediate addition of two wins and subtraction of two losses pleased the columnists of the *Defender*, but Monroe, who played and defeated Memphis more than any other team, did not receive the benefit of loss reversals. The *Monroe Morning World* described the Memphis situation as the result of the president's dubious motives. "Monroe has won more games and lost less than Chicago but in order to give the Chicago team the

break it was ruled to throw out some of the games Chicago lost.” The *Defender* described the frustration of both teams at not being able to have a head-to-head series to decide the winner, as well as its frustration with the Monarchs taking on extra games with Memphis to compensate for the League ruling. “The schedule called for Monroe and Memphis playing three days, July 2, 3 and 4, but through some queer arrangement the extra games were played,” complained the *Defender*. “This thing of scheduling four games and playing five and six is all rot...So why not remove all doubts by drawing up a schedule and holding the teams to it...Let’s wake up and do this thing in a business way. What say?” Cole’s threatened protest of the Monarchs resulted from the extra Monroe games, but his concerns found an easier remedy through the Nashville-based administration, which miraculously realized that two games with Louisville had been previously postponed. After winning those games, the Giants claimed the pennant. This was a four-game swing for Chicago in a forty-game first half—a full ten percent of the season artificially constructed to give Cole’s team the championship.¹⁹

After the disputed early-July Memphis series, the *Monroe Morning World* announced, “The victories gave the Monarchs undisputed possession of the first half of the Negro Southern League.” The paper also reported that the team protested the decision to reverse two of Chicago’s losses to Memphis. A just forfeit for Monroe fans would have given “neither team credit for them. Even though the games were thrown out, Chicago would have won twenty-six and lost seven with a percentage of .787, thirty-eight points behind the Monarchs.”²⁰ For the remainder of 1932, both the *Morning World* and *Monroe News Star* would refer to the Monarchs as champions of the Southern League.

The Monarchs organization responded by offering an unsuccessful protest to the league concerning the American Giants’ use of unofficial baseballs in a series with the Montgomery Grey Sox. A week after the first-half press release, president Jackson made a statement concerning the official ball: “We have rules which each team must respect, especially the rules governing regular scheduled series which are to be played with the official league baseball as long as we have an organized league. As it appears now, only a few of the clubs are using the official ball, namely, Chicago, Nashville, Louisville and Monroe.” The team, however, did not

submit their protest in writing. "Had Monroe complied with this request there is no telling what would have happened in the flag race," commented the *Defender*.²¹

Dual reports of the first half standings led to uncertainty. The *Defender's* first half standings gave Chicago first place with thirty-four wins and seven losses, while Monroe had thirty-three wins and seven losses.²² The *Morning World* reported that the Monarchs' thirty-three wins and seven losses trumped Chicago's twenty-eight wins and nine losses.²³ "The Monarchs won the first half of the Negro Southern League and will coast along until time for the play-off in September," claimed the *Morning World*. "The Monarchs have been granted permission to play any teams they desire in the second half and the fans of Monroe will see the Monarchs in action with teams of other leagues until the play-off." But the scheduling initiative also disagrees with other competing accounts. Both the *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier* list a full schedule for the second half of the season. As of mid-August, the remainder of the Southern League season seemed in doubt, with Monroe (according to the *Defender*) not playing any league games, and Chicago canceling a scheduled trip to Memphis. Montgomery, Atlanta, Little Rock, and Birmingham had already abandoned league play. "Nashville is just now going along in first place," the *Defender* announced, "and eyeing the chance to play Chicago or Monroe in the round robin to be staged after the season. Another series in prospect, but unlikely to materialize, would bring the Pittsburgh Crawfords, Chicago and Monroe together and the winner to meet Nashville. The latter is the plan sent out by pro-Monroe fans."²⁴

In August, the *Defender* reported that the Monarchs were preparing to play either Chicago or an eastern team in what the team presumed to be the World Series. Stovall added several thousand seats to Casino Park for the anticipated championship. The people of north Louisiana, west Mississippi, and south Arkansas "kept up with the Monarchs and the records of all the teams in the Southern league, and know the games actually won and lost in the first half, and no news item from any papers in the country could make them believe that Monroe did not win the first half of the Southern league. A series may be played in Monroe with some outstanding team of the country to satisfy the fans of the South."²⁵

Monroe's outstanding opponent was the Pittsburgh Crawfords, a

series billed in most black newspapers as the World Series. Nashville took the second half of the Southern League season, earning the right to play Chicago for the NSL championship. Southern League representatives Chicago and Nashville began referring to the NSL championship as the only championship, as did league president R.B. Jackson. The black community of both New York and Los Angeles, however, reprinted Pittsburgh coverage that declared the series with Monroe as the 1932 championship. The *Pittsburgh Courier* referred to the NSL series as the Dixie World Series, and the Crawfords' contest with the Monarchs as the World Series. The paper assumed the winners of the two series would meet for a season-ending world championship, but the games never occurred. Though Chicago defeated Nashville four games to three to take the "Dixie World Series," the Monarchs held a Negro Southern League pennant raising ceremony prior to the opening inning of the first home game against Pittsburgh. The Crawfords won the series five games to one, with one tie.²⁶

The confusion was not unprecedented. Though the New Orleans Black Pelicans defeated the Houston Black Buffaloes for the 1930 championship of the Texas-Louisiana League (known as the Dixie Series), and though the winners of that series intended to play the Chicago American Giants (not then owned by Cole), champions of the Negro National League that year, in a Negro World Series, the Pelicans never arrived in Chicago. Instead, the Buffaloes faced the American Giants in a losing effort, with four of the New Orleans players added to the roster. During the NSL fiasco of 1932, the largest white minor league organization in the South, the Southern Association, experienced similar problems. With the Chattanooga Lookouts winning percentage behind that of the Memphis Chicks by a very slim margin, Chattanooga argued that it should be allowed to make up a game with Knoxville. League president John Martin (no relation to the owner of the Memphis Red Sox) ruled that the game should be played, but the league's Board of Directors vetoed his decision. The Lookouts, though, appealed to Kennesaw Mountain Landis, the commissioner of Major League Baseball, who ruled in Chattanooga's favor. The game was played, the Lookouts won and eventually secured the pennant, though Memphis finished the season with more wins and fewer losses than its rival.²⁷

Furthermore, the 1932 season would not be last time either Cole or

Wilson proved their willingness to manipulate situations to suit their own ends. In 1934, the championship series between the Chicago American Giants and Philadelphia Stars ended in controversy, with league commissioner Rollo Wilson refusing to suspend Philadelphia players for striking umpires after questionable calls. The ire of manager Dave Malarcher and owner Robert Cole was complete, their retribution swift. Acting dually as owner and Negro National League treasurer, Cole used his power to oust the commissioner.²⁸

Following this season, Wilson proved his own devotion to his financial sustenance, moving the Elite Giants from Nashville to Detroit, hoping to become more accessible to the east coast-based NNL (since it was larger and more profitable than the NSL). Stadium problems in Detroit moved the team to Columbus, Ohio for a year—a town of just over 30,000. The next year he moved the team to Washington, DC. In 1936, that Washington team had another first half controversy. Wilson's Elites scheduled two makeup games with the Philadelphia Stars in order to makeup games on the first half leader, but when Stars losses put them in second place behind Washington, Wilson refused to play. When league commissioner Ferdinand Morton ruled the games to be necessary, and Washington subsequently lost, Wilson claimed that the game's immediacy limited his ability to field a proper team. Wilson's protest succeeded, and a September makeup game gave Washington the first half pennant. The controversy angered many, but it proved a valuable case study of Wilson's willingness to manipulate the rules to bring himself success. In 1938, Wilson moved the team to Baltimore.²⁹

Historian Neil Lanctot describes Wilson as "usually low key" and "usually silent," and Phil Dixon and Patrick J. Hannigan portray "a long time Negro league backer."³⁰ But Wilson was driven, powerful, and sometimes corrupt. His association with Jackson and Cole in the 1932 Negro Southern League season produced an illegitimate first half pennant winner and deprived Monroe, Louisiana of its rightful place in baseball's historical memory.

The confusion of the 1932 season and the lack of historiographic continuity as to the season's outcome has caused a vacuum of historical scrutiny into the circumstances surrounding the first half pennant. Cole's American Giants and Wilson's Elite Giants played on into Negro League

Baseball immortality. The Monroe Monarchs resumed Dixie League play the following season and dissolved by 1936. The historical timeline at the Negro League Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Missouri runs from the Reconstruction era to 1931. Then it stops. And begins again at 1933, the start of the “golden age” of Negro Leagues baseball.³¹ Whether or not Monroe could have become a part of that golden age with an official major league championship can never be known. But the evidence exists in the space of that timeline gap, circumstantial as it may be, that league action—collusion between Reuben Bartholomew Jackson, Thomas T. Wilson, and Robert Cole—artificially prevented Monroe from gaining that championship and, possibly, that larger opportunity.

Notes

1 *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*, vol. III, part I, Alabama-Missouri (US Government Printing Office: Washington, 1932), 979.

2 Use of commas was sporadic in newspaper coverage of the 1932 season and subsequently throughout this paper. Bracketed commas would serve only to unnecessarily interrupt the paragraphs and will not be included. Similarly, newspapers sporadically capitalized “Negro,” and the newspaper’s choice has been maintained. “Tri-State League Being Organized for Coming Season,” *Shreveport Sun*, 2 January 1932; Pittman E. Nedde, “Sporting News,” *Shreveport Sun*, 23 January 1932; “Monarchs Takes One ‘Exhibition Feast’ From Crawfords,” *Shreveport Sun*, 16 April 1932; and “Prospects Bright for Tri-State League in Southland,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 9 January 1932.

3 “Prospects Bright for Tri-State League in Southland,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 9 January, 1932; “Proposed Tri-State League May Be Organized Jan. 22,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 16 January 1932; “Applications of Four Clubs Are Accepted,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 30 January 1932; “League Heads to Be Elected; Deposit Monies Requested,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 6 February 1932; “Tri-State Baseball League Hold Successful Meeting,” *Shreveport Sun*, 30 January 1932; and Pitman E. Nedde, “Sporting ‘Em Up,” *Shreveport Sun*, 20 February 1932.

4 “Pete Has a Theme Song,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 20 February 1932.

5 “Negro Southern League Men Are In Big Meeting,” *Atlanta World*, 3 February 1932.

6 “Southern Group Plans Big Slam During 1932 Go,” *Atlanta World*, 11 March 1932; “Monroe Jumps Tri-State for Southern,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 5 March 1932; and Pitman E. Nedde, “Sporting ‘Em Up,” *Shreveport Sun*, 19 March 1932.

7 Monroe was 153 miles from Little Rock, 215 miles from Memphis, 315 miles from Birmingham, 339 miles from Montgomery, 394 miles from Nashville, 452 miles from Atlanta, 532 miles from Louisville, 601 miles from Indianapolis, and 687 miles from Chicago. Richard Downs, “Black Crackers Voted Southern Loop Franchise,” *Atlanta*

Daily World, 20 March 1932; "Southern Loop Schedule Is Announced," *Atlanta Daily World*, 22 March 1932 (On 14 March 1932, the *Atlanta World* became a daily, changing its name to *Atlanta Daily World*. All references to the paper after 14 March carry the revised title.); "Monroes Open With Crawford March 25," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 March 1932; William J. Moore, "Sports," *Birmingham Reporter*, 12 March 1932; William J. Moore, "At It Again," *Birmingham Reporter*, 26 March 1932; and "Southern League to Open Here April 14," *Birmingham Reporter*, 2 April 1932.

8 Pitman E. Nedde, "Sporting'Em Up," *Shreveport Sun*, 16 April 1932.

9 Certificate of Marriage, Reuben B. Jackson and Bertha L. Allen. 16 June 1926. Marriages, Davidson County. Vol. 45, 1925-1926. Roll 509. page 459; *Marshall-Bruce-Polk Co.'s Nashville (Tennessee) City Directory, 1928* (Nashville: Marshall-Bruce-Polk Co., 1928), 704; *Polk's Nashville (Davidson County, Tenn.) City Directory, 1935* (St. Louis: R.L. Polk and Co., 1935), 1272; *Polk's Nashville (Davidson County, Tenn.) City Directory, 1938* (St. Louis: R.L. Polk and Co., 1938), 483; *Polk's Nashville (Davidson County, Tenn.) City Directory, 1941* (St. Louis: R.L. Polk and Co., 1941), 1234; *Polk's Nashville (Davidson County, Tenn.) City Directory, 1942* (St. Louis: R.L. Polk and Co., 1942), 430; *Polk's Nashville (Davidson County, Tenn.) City Directory, 1957* (St. Louis: R.L. Polk and Co., 1957), 493; Trustee Tax Books, Davidson County, A-K State, County, School, Etc., 1933, roll 1764, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 571; Trustee Tax Books, Davidson County, Inside E-K, 1948, roll 1779, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 497; "Professional and Business Colum," *Nashville Globe*, 4 March 1932; "School Physician Fatally Injured In Car Crash Jan. 25," *Nashville Globe*, 4 February 1946; and "Philadelphia Sportswriter Named the 'Judge Landis' of Colored Base Ball," *Nashville Globe and Independent*, 16 March 1934. With thanks to Sheila Lewis in the Registrar's Office and Ty Blackburn in the Alumni Affairs Office of Morris Brown College; and Barbara Grissom in the Registrar's Office and Benetta Waller in the Alumni Center of Meharry Medical College.

10 Whether Jackson's relationship with Wilson continued after Jackson's fall is uncertain. Wilson eventually moved his team to Baltimore and became president of the much stronger Negro National League. In 1934, his team's last year in Nashville, Wilson negotiated with his current National League to allow teams from Jackson's Southern League to buy, sell, and trade interleague. After 1934, the connection between the two is enigmatic if existent. "Philadelphia Sportswriter Named the 'Judge Landis' of Colored Base Ball," *Nashville Globe and Independent*, 16 March 1934; "Dr. R.B. Jackson, Southern League Baseball Prexy, Plans to Start Southern Football Circuit," *Atlanta Daily World*, 16 September 1932; "Atlanta Bears Get Started; Join Southern Pros," *Atlanta Daily World*, 2 October 1932; "Nashville Elites In Pro Go with Atlanta Bears," *Atlanta Daily World*, 21 October 1932; Phil Dixon and Patrick J. Hannigan, *The Negro Baseball Leagues: A Photographic History* (Mattituck, NY: Amereon House, 1992), 150; and Leslie Heaphy, *The Negro Leagues, 1869-1960* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003).

11 "Black Crackers Voted Southern Loop Franchise," *Atlanta Daily World*, 20 March 1932.

12 "Baseball Heads Discuss Chance of New Circuit," *Atlanta World*, 27 December 1931; "Owner of Great Crawford Bunch Makes Reaction," *Atlanta World*, 28 February 1932; "Big-Time Ball Club Owners in Session," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 January 1932; and "Crawford Contract Binding, Claim," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 February 1932.

13 James A. Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues* (New York:

Carroll and Graf Publishers, Inc., 1994), 415; "Southern Loop Calls Off E-W Tilts," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 14 May 1932; "Baseball War Threatens," *Chicago Defender*, 30 April 1932; "Leagues Prepare for War," *Chicago Defender*, 7 May 1932; and "South Cancels East's Games," *Chicago Defender*, 14 May 1932.

14 Some accounts have this initial count at twenty-nine. For more on the historiographical discrepancy in League win-loss totals, see notes 22 and 23. "On the Diamond," *Memphis World*, 3 May 1932; "Red Sox Secure First Sacker," *Memphis World*, 13 May 1932; "Southern League May Drop Memphis," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 4 June 1932; and "Shakeups In Dixie Ball Meet," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 9 July 1932.

15 "May Drop Memphis from Southern League," *Chicago Defender*, 4 June 1932; and "Here Is Balance of Schedule for 1st Half Season," *Chicago Defender*, 25 June 1932.

16 "Monroe Monarchs Take 3 From Memphis; Protest League Ruling," *Louisiana Weekly*, 9 July 1932; and "Monroe Takes First Half of Southern," *Atlanta Daily World*, 8 July 1932.

17 "American Giants Lead League," *Atlanta Daily World*, 22 July 1932.

18 Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 14, 22-23; "Dr. R.B. Jackson, Southern League Baseball Prexy, Plans to Start Southern Football Circuit," *Atlanta Daily World*, 16 September 1932; and "Nashville Pro Football Outfit Books Good Tilts," *Atlanta Daily World*, 7 October 1932.

19 "Giants Figure First Half of Race Settled," *Chicago Defender* 11 June 1932; "Monroe Beats Montgomery; Leads League," *Chicago Defender*, 18 June 1932; "Here Is Balance of Schedule for 1st Half Season," *Chicago Defender*, 25 June 1932; "Monroe Wins 5 Games from Memphis 9," *Chicago Defender*, 9 July 1932; "Monarchs Ready For Opening Here Friday," *Monroe Morning World*, 4 May 1932; "Monarchs Open Final League Series Today," *Monroe Morning World*, 2 July 1932; "Memphis Red Sox Will Open Series With Monroe Today," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 30 April 1932; "Monroe Team Beats Red Sox in Negro Pro League Tilt," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 1 May 1932; "Red Sox Win Two Games From Monroe; End Series Today," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 2 May 1932; and "Monroe Team Beats Memphis Red Sox," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 3 May 1932.

20 "Monroe Wins 5 Games from Memphis 9," *Chicago Defender*, 9 July 1932; "Monarchs Down Red Sox in Eleventh, 6-5," *Monroe Morning World*, 3 July 1932; and "Local Monarchs Win First Half," *Monroe Morning World*, 6 July 1932.

21 Al Monroe, "Who Won the First Half? You Tell Us," *Chicago Defender*, 23 July 1932; and "Louisville Quits Southern League," *Chicago Defender*, 30 July 1932.

22 This is the formula generally repeated in historical accounts. Robert Peterson's *Only the Ball Was White* sets the standings as follows: Cole's American Giants, 34-7, .829 winning percentage; Monroe Monarchs, 33-7, .825 winning percentage. The account of Dick Clark and Larry Lester is the same for the two front-running teams. John Holway's *The Complete Book of Baseball's Negro Leagues* offered a season total for the Southern League teams, and wrongly noted that "Nashville was awarded the first half, Chicago the second.": Chicago American Giants, 52-31, .627 winning percentage; Monroe Monarchs, 26-22, .542 winning percentage. Al Monroe, "Who Won the First Half? You Tell Us," *Chicago Defender*, 23 July 1932; Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White: A History of Legendary Black Players and All-Black Professional Teams* (New York: Oxford University Press), 269; Dick Clark and Larry Lester, eds., *The Negro Leagues Book* (Cleveland: Society for American Baseball Research, 1994), 164; and John Holway, *The*

Complete Book of Baseball's Negro Leagues: The Other Half of Baseball History (Fern Park, FL: Hastings House Publishers, 2001), 288, 292-3.

23 According to the *Morning World*, the first half standings looked like this: Monroe, 33-7, .825 winning percentage; Chicago, 28-9, .756 winning percentage. The *Pittsburgh Courier's* first half standings as of July 3 tallied *eight* losses for Chicago: Monroe, 31-7, .816 winning percentage; Chicago, 31-8, .795 winning percentage. In contrast to Holway's twenty-six wins and twenty-two losses for the season, the *Courier* tallied Monroe's total as *sixty* wins and twenty-two losses. "Local Monarchs Win First Half," *Monroe Morning World*, 6 July 1932; "Shakeups In Dixie Ball Meet," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 9 July 1932; and "Craws May Play Elites and Chi," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 September 1932.

24 "Monarchs Open Home Series On Saturday," *Monroe Morning World*, 28 July 1932; "Southern Loop's 2nd Half Setup," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 16 July 1932; "Monroe and Giants Tied," *Chicago Defender*, 9 July 1932; and "Monroe Asks Chicago for Title Series," *Chicago Defender*, 13 August 1932.

25 "Southern League May End Season," *Chicago Defender*, 13 August 1932.

26 "Title Playoff Opens Here," *Chicago Defender*, 20 August 1932; "Giants Score Trio of Wins; Eye Title," *Chicago Defender*, 27 August, 1932; "Chicago Gets First 3 Games This Saturday," *Chicago Defender*, 3 September 1932; "Giants One Game From Title," *Chicago Defender*, 1 October 1932; "Giants Crush Nashville," *Chicago Defender*, 8 October, 1932; "Craws to Engage In Fall World Series," *New York Amsterdam News*, 24 August 1932; John L. Clarke, "Our Series," *New York Amsterdam News*, 14 September 1932; Charles Isaac Bowen, "A Peep Into the Sport World," *California Eagle*, 16 September 1932; "Southern League Plans Big Dixie World Series," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 20 August 1932; "Craws To Meet Monroe In Series," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 27 August 1932; "Giants, Elites Prep for Dixie Title Series," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 27 August 1932; "Craws Swamp Monroe in Battles," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 17 September 1932; "Negro Series To Open Here Today," *Monroe Morning World*, 10 September 1932; "Darkness Halts Negro World Tilt," *Monroe Morning World*, 11 September 1932; "Crawfords Take Fourth Contest," *Monroe Morning World*, 12 September 1932; and "Pittsburgh Wins From Local Team," *Monroe News Star*, 12 September 1932.

27 "Colored Baseball Series Begins At Biedenharn Park Today," *Shreveport Sun*, 27 August 1930; "Black Buffs And Black Pels To Play Dixie Series In S'port," *Shreveport Sun*, 30 August 1930; "Black Pels Win Negro Dixie Series," *Shreveport Sun*, 6 September 1930; "Last Section Negro World Series Begins In Houston Today," *Shreveport Sun*, 27 September 1930; and Marshall D. Wright, *The Southern Association in Baseball, 1885-1961* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), 1-4, 289-90.

28 Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 35-8, 43-4.

29 Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 46, 51, 53, 72.

30 Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 89, 283; and Dixon and Hannigan, *The Negro Baseball Leagues*, 197-8.

31 "Monroe Monarchs Play Marshall Team Today," *Monroe News Star*, 12 July 1936; "Monroe to Return to Cotton States League," *Monroe News Star*, 21 December 1936; "Casino Park Repair Work to Begin Soon," *Monroe News Star*, 5 January 1937; and "The Golden Years," Kansas City: Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, 1997.