

BASEBALL FROM BELOW: HOW AMERICA'S PASTIME BECAME A
HEMISPHERIC CULTURAL PHENOMENON

by

Michael Warren Gallemore

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Approved by:

Dr. Gregory Weeks

Dr. Jurgen Buchenau

Dr. Benny Andres

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ABSTRACT

MICHAEL WARREN GALLEMORE Baseball from below: how America's pastime became a hemispheric cultural phenomenon (Under the direction of DR. GREG WEEKS)

The game of baseball has rarely changed since its beginnings, and its resultant ascent to the United States national pastime has done little to change the fundamentals of the sport. However, there have been significant shifts in the demographics of Major League Baseball. Latino players have seen their numbers jump up to 26.9% (2012) from single digits in the 1960s, while African-American players peaked at 18.5% two decades after desegregation, but has since fallen to the current (2012) level of 7.2%.

The goal of this research project is to determine the cause for the rise in the numbers of foreign-born Latino baseball players appearing in the United States' top baseball league. Previous historiography on the subject has suggested that U.S. neocolonial patterns led to baseball's wild spread across parts of Latin America; consequently, these patterns contribute to the significant influx of foreign-born Latinos debuting in Major League Baseball. What has not been examined extensively is the effect economic factors have on the rise and fall of the number of players moving to Major League Baseball. Data was compiled to produce a database through SPSS (IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) that tested this possibility; consequently, it was determined that economic health does not have a significant effect on the number of debuts of foreign-born players in Major League Baseball. While economic factors cannot be ruled out, it is not a significant enough standalone variable to explain the migration of foreign-born Latino baseball players to the United States.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A popular trend in the historiography of this subject suggests that the popularity of the game amongst Latino players stems from U.S. foreign policy over the last century. Neocolonial trends from the executive side of Major League Baseball have contributed to the importation of a labor commodity (Latino players) to the detriment of the players' respective domestic leagues. The establishment of baseball academies by MLB franchises in Latin American countries has also been used to emphasize this point of domination.¹ Another key development is the loss of the African-American players, as their population has slowly dwindled from a high of 18.5% two decades after desegregation to the current (2012) rate of 7.2%. Latino players have seen their numbers jump up to 26.9% (2012) from single digits in the 1960s.²

This goal of this research is to determine what affected the rise or fall in the number of Latino players debuting in MLB and what the history of Latino players in the U.S. forecasts for the possible end of communist rule in Cuba. A country-by-country analysis will be completed for the five major Latino baseball-producing areas - Cuba,

¹ Samuel O. Regalado, "Latin Players on the Cheap: Professional Baseball Recruitment in Latin America and the Neocolonialist Tradition," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*.; Angel Vargas, "The Globalization of Baseball: A Latin American Perspective," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*.; Rob Ruck, *Raceball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*, p. 206.

² Mark Armour and Daniel R. Levitt, "Baseball Demographics, 1947-2012" <http://sabr.org/bioproj/topic/baseball-demographics-1947-2012>. This source is an aggregate database of demographics for all of baseball. The database created specifically for this research project will focus directly on foreign-born Latino players coming from the five areas involved in the case studies.

Dominican Republic, Mexico, Venezuela and the commonwealth of Puerto Rico - to determine the cause for the demographic shift in baseball. This research is not intended to be the final authority for this topic; instead, it is envisioned that this research will be used as the basis for further investigations into what causes these changes in the demographics of baseball.

Methodology

The time period for this study ranges from 1939-2014; the reason being this is the period with the best-recorded data for the case studies involved. The first debuts for Latin American players came in 1939. This allowed insight into the changes Major League Baseball and Latin American winter and summer leagues have endured over a long period of time. Data from Major League Baseball is unavailable for the current year 2015, as of this writing the season has just begun.

The data collection process for this research started with the compilation of baseball demographics from every country that is associated with Latin America and has had at least one Major League Baseball player debut since the league began in the 1880s. This information is readily available via MLB supported archival sites, such as Baseball-Almanac.com. The data collected (date of birth, country of birth and debut year) was compiled into an SPSS database to be compared with two variables. The independent variable is gross domestic product percentage change every year; the dependent variable is the number of foreign-born players debuting (playing in their first game) per year for each respective area involved in the case studies.

For the graphs that were created with data from baseball-almanac, I used the number of debuts per year by players from each area instead of overall roster presence in

the league for baseball statistician reasons. Relying on Opening Day roster information does not allow for an adequate measure of the amount of players in Major League Baseball due to the variance of rosters throughout the season. I have decided to use the number of debuts to track developing patterns because a player may be called up during the summer, after Opening Day, or be sent back to a minor league farm team if their performance does not hold up to standards or if roster changes had to be made in case of a trade or free agent signing. Measuring by active roster causes greater variance, while tracking debuts only allows for incremental increases on a year-by-year basis, allowing for better tracking of patterns over time.

My hypothesis is that a decline in the percentage change of gross domestic product will result in a greater number of foreign-born baseball players leaving their respective areas for Major League Baseball, thus resulting in an inverse relationship. The null hypothesis is that there is no significant correlation between changes in the percentage change in GDP and the number of baseball players from their respective country debuting in Major League Baseball. Because of the wide variance between how long a foreign-born Latino player leaves a baseball academy or their country and after passing through the necessary minor league levels before reaching Major League Baseball, there will be a likelihood that the relationship and significance could change depending on how the time frame is lagged. I have set the average length at two years, which is a compromise between the lagging of the economic data and the estimated time frame for a player to reach the top level of Major League Baseball.

Debuts in this research and in the original database from which the following data is pruned is defined as the act of a single player taking at least one at-bat or fielding one

out in at least one game in the entirety of their career. A player can only have one debut, regardless of how many times they are promoted or demoted from the Minor League Baseball divisions. These countries and territories included (2014): The Bahamas (6), Brazil (2), British Honduras (1), Colombia (14), Cuba (183), Curacao (14), Dominican Republic (618), Honduras (1), Jamaica (4), Mexico (114), Nicaragua (13), Panama and Panama Canal Zone (53), Puerto Rico (246), Venezuela (321), and the Virgin Islands (11).³ This totals roughly 1600 players that were foreign-born Latinos that debuted in Major League Baseball (exact numbers for this may be near impossible to come by, as there are numerous players with unknown countries of origin near the beginning of Major League Baseball). Since the purpose of this study is to determine why Major League Baseball is seeing an uptick in the number of Latino players debuting in its league, it is necessary to create stricter case selection criteria, since one player from Honduras over 100 plus years does not allow for a suitable comparison to the Dominican Republic, a country that has produced 618 players.

Instead, the criteria for selection for this study will rest on a minimum of 100 players contributed to Major League Baseball. This leaves five countries/territories: Dominican Republic (618), Venezuela (321), Puerto Rico (246), Cuba (183), and Mexico (114). Mexico was the cutoff for case selection for this study because there is a significant drop off in the number of players that have debuted in Major League Baseball after Mexico – from 114 to Panama’s 49. It would be very difficult to determine a statistical significance or correlation for Panama over a 100-year range for fewer cases than there are years in the study.

³*Baseball Almanac*, “Major League Baseball Players by Birthplace,” <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/players/birthplace.php>.

Unique to this research will be the usage of several datasets compiled and analyzed through the software program SPSS. The datasets are combinations of statistics pulled from MLB sources and World Bank economic data to create graphs that help visualize the growth of Latinos in Major League Baseball. While timelines of these statistics have been created and used in past source material, this project presents the data and the comparisons of the debuts of players in Major League Baseball to economic data in a way that has - at the time of this writing - not been presented yet.

The numbers from the created database were plugged into SPSS to determine if there was a significant correlation between an area's GDP percentage change and the number of Latino players debuting in Major League Baseball from their respective area of origin. A correlation matrix was created to determine this significance for each of the five areas.

Limitations

Nowadays, Major League Baseball is known for its meticulous record keeping of player, coach, management, and franchise statistics, spawning new fields of study in statistics. However, it was not always this way, as record keeping in the early epochs of MLB was not as detailed.

A major limitation for this study comes from the possibility of research bias. The vast majority of the documents and sources collected for this study are from U.S. repositories or are from U.S. baseball archives such as Baseball-Reference, Baseball Almanac, and Major League Baseball itself. What would possibly add further merit to this study is the inclusion of data pertaining to the number of U.S. born players going to play in Venezuela or elsewhere in Latin America to truly create a linkage between the

two. At the time of writing, this data is not easily found in an accessible format. Further study of this topic will allow greater in-depth analysis of the Latin American perspective of baseball and related foreign policy decisions and interactions.

The eventual goal of this research is to include minor league baseball data from the United States as well as amateur league data from Latin American countries. Currently, data from players debuting at the highest level of organized baseball in the United States is the only public source of information on foreign-born players. The ambition then is to eventually incorporate minor league data with major league data to create a comparison of the two, detailing just how many players from each country failed to ever make it to the majors as well as the timelines and longevity of each. Combining minor league data with already readily major league data will allow a more accurate picture. For the purposes and time limits of this project, however, I must work with the data that is readily available.

Data and Sources

The types of data that will be used in this research will include graphs that chart the influx of Latino players; to calculate this increase, I will use data from baseball-almanac.com, a database that contains the birth date and country of origin of every known player that debuted in Major League Baseball since the late 1800s. I have chosen to use the statistic of debuts to track foreign-born Latino player participation instead of active roster players because of the nature of the U.S. system and the role of the minor leagues as well as the international free agency system. Foreign-born prospects do not have to enter into a draft like players coming out of high school or college, thus allowing teams to negotiate directly with the player. Teams are assigned international free agent

signing pool slots based on a reverse relationship to their previous season's finish; this means that the teams with the worst records receive the largest international free agent slots (available money to use on a new player). This process will often allow for a speedier rise in the ranks by foreign-born players since they will often have promotion stipulations written in their contracts, thus increasing the number of debuts.

This project will include various types of sources; raw data from the above-mentioned baseball-almanac has been converted into graphs that track the rise and fall of foreign player debuts into Major League Baseball. Secondary sources include previous historiography that either support or dismiss the notion that the shared heritage of baseball between the Latino countries and the U.S. stems from heavy-handed tactics of foreign policy to bring Central and South America under the U.S.'s sphere of influence.

Regarding source material, the statistics mentioned above are drawn from several sources: 1) MLB database archives available online through MLB.com; 2) Online databases containing player information (date of birth, country of origin, teams played for, season-by-season statistics, awards, etc...) partially funded and supported by Major League Baseball or SABR (Society for American Baseball Research). I have chosen these sources for the basis of the player side of research due to the legitimacy of statistics pruned from official MLB record keeping. The bookkeeping of baseball has revolutionized over the last ten years with the introduction of sabermetrics, and data for the most recent batch of players is more in-depth than ever, allowing analytical organizations such as the Baseball Writers' Association of America and Elias Sports Bureau to provide greater evaluation. Economic data is pulled from the World Bank

country statistics databank; the World Bank could be considered a neutral entity without an agenda, being a United Nations financial institution.

Literature Review

The primary motivation for this work stems from an attempt to guide current research towards alternative explanations of why the demographics of Major League Baseball and the popularization of the game in Latin America have shifted significantly in the last thirty plus years. The intent is not to completely disregard U.S. imperialism as what caused the rapid spread of the game or its use as a tool, but to examine other avenues presented by previous literature as to what has caused the spike in Latino players over the last thirty plus years.

The question of this research project stemmed from readings of Rob Ruck's *Raceball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game* and Robert Elias' *The Empire Strikes Out: How Baseball Sold U.S. Foreign Policy and Promoted the American Way Abroad*. These two works each present a different perspective of what could be similar arguments. *Raceball* attempts to examine the development of baseball in Latin America through racial lens, while *Empire Strikes Out* endeavors to pin aggressive, interventionist U.S. foreign policy to the spread of baseball as part of a neocolonial paradigm, much in the same light that Rob Ruck discusses the baseball academies in the Dominican Republic. While this thesis is not a counterargument to Ruck and Elias' works, it will incorporate their suggestions and provide what could be considered additional reasons for the growth of Latinos in baseball. Elias' thesis is that baseball has not only evolved as a part of American society and therefore taken on the color of main currents of life in the United States, but that baseball symbolically explicates

international policy.⁴ While U.S. foreign policy has been far from the saving grace of the country's diplomatic reputation, the author attempts to tie baseball to efforts by the U.S. government to spread democracy and create cultures more reflective of the U.S., painting baseball into an unfriendly category of aggressive neocolonialism. Elias has tied baseball to the theme of U.S. imperialism, a type of neocolonialism that is rooted more in economic and cultural domination, with the occasional military intervention. Elias believed that the United States Department of State and multitudes of succeeding presidential administrations used baseball as a form of cultural domination over Central and South American countries in an attempt to further American neo-imperialism.⁵

Alan M. Klein, professor of Sociology-Anthropology at Northeastern University, brought this discussion of cultural dominance to the forefront of dialogues on baseball (and sport in general) as promoting cultural hegemony in two different articles: "Baseball as Underdevelopment" (1989) and "Sport and Culture as Contested Terrain" (1991). His 1991 article, titled "Sport and Culture as Contested Terrain: Americanization in the Caribbean" examines the prevalence of baseball in Spanish-speaking nations as "one of the more obvious cultural manifestations of Americanization in the region."⁶ Through his research of previous literature, he found that political-economic relations and systematic Euro-North American domination of developing countries in the Caribbean was undeniable and thoroughly analyzed, although the causes and machinations of the exploitation differed. His contribution centered around the discussion of baseball as a part

⁴ Robert Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out: How Baseball Sold U.S. Foreign Policy and Promoted the American Way Abroad*, Kindle, n.p.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Alan M. Klein, "Sport and Culture as Contested Terrain: Americanization in the Caribbean," *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 1991, p. 80.

of what he called a contested terrain, where nationalism and cultural dominance intersect and baseball becomes something of a celebration for U.S. citizens and a necessity for natives of the Caribbean. Tim Wendel's *The New Face of Baseball* (2004) supplements this point, that Latinos may have loved the game more than those that created it, as his work brings out the needed appreciation of what Latinos have done for the game, as opposed to what they did to survive in and with the game.⁷ This political-cultural dominance bled into the economics side, with Klein noting that Major League Baseball's franchises and interests operated much in the same patterns of non-governmental organizations that took advantage of the inherent hegemony of the region. Klein's discussion naturally leads towards MLB's multilayered dealings with Latinos, both at home and abroad.

My hypothesis for this research originates from Joseph Arbena's call for additional research on international migration in sport, which he discusses in a chapter of John Bale and Joseph Maguire's edited work *The Global Sports Arena: Athletic Talent Migration in an Interdependent World*.⁸ The chapter, entitled "Dimensions of International Talent Migration in Latin American Sports," examines what Arbena terms 'in-migration, out-migration and intra-Latin American migration'.⁹ For the purposes of this study, a particular focus was made towards 'out-migration' due to the research question previously proposed. Out-migration refers to migration out of Latin America by

⁷ Tim Wendel, *The New Face of Baseball: The One-Hundred-Year Rise and Triumph of Latinos in America's Favorite Sport*, 2004.

⁸ John Bale and Joseph Maguire, ed. *The Global Sports Arena: Athletic Talent Migration in an Interdependent World*, 1994.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

athletes, with North America and Europe being the top recipients.¹⁰ Before the Cuban Revolution, baseball players coming to the United States and thriving were hailed as heroes back in their home country. After 1959, Castro-led Cuban government used these heroes as a sign of an “elitist sports system” that exploited players of color from lower social classes.¹¹

Arbena, Klein (1991) and Elias have all put forth notions of exploitation of hegemony by nearly every party involved with the migration process, from recruitment and scouting to filling out the paychecks and agent representation. Through each step of the process, the power of the foreign-born player is diminished until they are reduced to a lower class, bargain-bin worker (in Mexico before the 1980s, an entertainer) that, due to the academy system, the international free agency system, and the nature of the amateur draft, naturally begin at a lower status and a lower pay grade than their U.S. high school and college counterparts.

To many historians and researchers, it was U.S. businesses that led the charge of neocolonialism across Latin America, only involving the US government when a venture didn't turn out the way they planned (banana republics should come to mind). Samuel O. Regalado, in his article “Latin Players on the Cheap,” notes that many MLB scouts, such as Washington Senators' scout Joe Cambria, recruited Latino baseball players because they were inexpensive and were not burdened by extensive labor laws.¹² Regalado compared Major League Baseball techniques in Latin America with the business

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 101-102.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Samuel O. Regalado, “Latin Players on the Cheap: Professional Baseball Recruitment in Latin America and the Neocolonialist Tradition,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, p. 9.

practices of U.S. private enterprises. Katherine E. Baird further expands this point by suggesting that baseball is pushed by capitalist market forces in the United States, and consequently Puerto Rico, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic see the effects of lax labor regulations where academies are allowed to flourish.¹³ However, in an area like Cuba, politics overrides these market forces and Major League Baseball doesn't hold as much sway.

While Elias suggests baseball's neocolonial tradition begins with U.S. government and military connections,¹⁴ Regalado looks closer to the U.S.'s own borders. He suggests that while other historians point towards the Spanish American War as the origin of the U.S. neocolonialist enterprises, the United States was already heavily involved in the Caribbean and Mexico, to the point that during the Porfiriato (1876-1910) "Mexico, mother of foreigners, stepmother of Mexicans" was a popular phrase.¹⁵ The scouting system (discussed in Chapter Two) used by Major League Baseball, seen in Mexico, Venezuela, Dominican Republic and others, is perceived as a microcosm of the U.S.'s historic relationships with Latin America.

A crucial perspective that is not often discussed by U.S. sports media is the Latin American perspective. Angel Vargas – at the time of publication of his article – was the president of the Venezuelan Baseball Players Association and had served as the General Secretary of the Caribbean Baseball Players Confederation. Vargas' article "The Globalization of Baseball: A Latin American Perspective" provides a necessary

¹³ Katherine E. Baird, "Cuban Baseball: Ideology, Politics, and Market Forces," p. 164.

¹⁴ Robert Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out: How Baseball Sold U.S. Foreign Policy and Promoted the American Way Abroad*, Kindle, n.p.

¹⁵ Samuel O. Regalado, "Latin Players on the Cheap: Professional Baseball Recruitment in Latin America and the Neocolonialist Tradition," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, p. 10.

examination of what really goes on in the baseball academies littering the Caribbean. While the influx of Latino players is not necessarily a problem in Vargas' mind, his attention is focused on how Major League Baseball recruits these players. He analyzes four steps in the process between Major League Baseball and the recruited talent: 1) How MLB franchises contact the teen and his family; 2) the terms of the initial contract; 3) the academy experience as a training ground; 4) the U.S. experience for the player that successfully makes the leap from academy to minor or major league team.¹⁶ The neocolonialism, according to Vargas, begins with MLB teams preying on poor families who see the prospect of a baseball contract for their child as a means out of economic hardship. Vargas would suggest that the rise in the number of Latino players is a result of the academy process and the animal-like poaching that occurs.

The historical narrative in this study falls closely in line with Vargas. While integration created the system in which light and dark-skinned Latinos could play without hindrance and thus allow for the existence of the baseball academies, it does not seem to be the single greatest factor in the shift of demographics. Rob Ruck's *Raceball* points towards integration as the culprit for the destruction of Latin American domestic leagues and the disappearance of African-American players from Major League Baseball. Vargas looks squarely at the academies. Arbena and Klein see the resultant migration as a mix between a sense of pride and nationalism and a loss of human capital by the respective country or commonwealth.

What is clear after reading this perspective amongst others of the Latin American perspective, is that there is a difference of opinions on what plagues baseball, both in the

¹⁶ Angel Vargas, "The Globalization of Baseball: A Latin American Perspective," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, p. 22-23.

United States and in the Caribbean and Latin America at large. While figures such as Regalado and Vargas contribute much of the hardship faced by Latino baseball players to racial and cultural differences and discrimination before, during and after their playing careers, others attribute the problems faced by Latinos to the neocolonial narrative. Neither one of these perspectives are mutually exclusive, and both tie in together to form a broader narrative of severe missteps by Major League Baseball and its constituent franchises.

My contribution to this historiography, along with the introduction of new visualizations of data from existing player-birthplace databases for the countries involved in this study, is a desire to refocus the research question of one that merely repeats the narrative, and instead examines this overarching narrative in the framework of statistics. Whereas previous research has become firmly entrenched in the neocolonial narrative, I ask if there are economic factors that aren't necessarily the full responsibility of interests pertaining to the United States and instead a product of the respective countries of the foreign-born Latino players migrating to the United States. In essence, does the health and well being of each area's economy contribute in a significant way to the plight of foreign-born players that they are more likely to seek a living elsewhere? Did economic crashes force families to send off their young boys to the baseball academies in Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, thus result in the surge of foreign-born Latino players in Major League Baseball? It appears there is a consensus amongst previous literature that neocolonial traditions have continued, albeit in different forms. This research will serve to examine the neocolonial patterns that are exhibited throughout baseball's history in a new light, adding to what is a growing list of possible grievances

against Major League Baseball. The mere fact that there are numerous perspectives and visions of what Major League Baseball – and baseball in general – has done in the U.S. and in Latin American can serve as an indictment against it. As the research in this study will conclude, it will be very tough for any researcher to pin-point one single factor that contributed to this great shift in baseball demographics and the degradation of domestic leagues, thus allowing for the creation of a very large web of criticisms against the past and present of Major League Baseball.

Structure

The first section will introduce the narrative of the impact and place of Latinos in Major League Baseball – and the sport in general – from the late 19th century to the present day. Within this narrative will be introduced the key factors, as presented in the thesis statement, that ultimately spurred the growth of participation of Latino baseball players in MLB. It starts with the formation of the Havana baseball clubs and the clash of cultures between the Spanish and United States during the Spanish American War; the narrative then switches towards the breaking of the color barrier and its impact on Latinos in the Negro Leagues, Cuba, and Major League Baseball before reaching the era of Fernando Valenzuela and ‘Fernandomania’. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the creation and spread of the baseball academies in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic and what these academies meant to the development of baseball, in the United States and in Latin America.

The second section will examine the research questions from an econometrics perspective through case studies of the five selected areas. I will take socioeconomic and economic factor data from the World Bank country database and compare such factors as

GDP percentage growth and youth unemployment to the number of foreign-born debuts in Major League Baseball. The goal with this section is to determine if there is a significant correlation between socioeconomic factors and the migration of Latino baseball players into Major League Baseball.

The final section will re-focus the narrative towards one of reflection and introspection towards what the future holds for Major League Baseball and Latin America. U.S. foreign policy and economic dealings (or rather the lack thereof) with Cuba means Cuban players do not have a legal means through which to enter the international free agency market without first defecting from Cuba. Since the current U.S. policy situation with Cuba is in flux and quickly changing, an analysis will be provided on the basis of the available policy changes and information that is readily available. Further dramatic shifts in U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba could have an incredible impact on the makeup of Major League Baseball and dramatically change baseball's international free agent market, causing a cascade of Cuban players to flow directly into the Major and Minor League systems in the U.S. and the creation of baseball academies in Cuba.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Baseball's importance to Latin America is often understated; it may be considered America's pastime and part of the Americana experience, but for many in Central and South America and the Caribbean, it has become a way of life. Baseball was brought to Latin America primarily through Cuba. From 1864-1877, several Cubans studying in the United States at Fordham University brought back bats and balls and a set of rules to Havana. The result was the formation of the Habana Baseball Club and its eventual rivals, the Almendares Baseball Club. Eventually the Cuban Winter League was formed and would survive until 1961, when Cuban President Fidel Castro abolished the League.¹⁷

Harkening back to the colonial period under Spanish rule in Central and South America, Latinos have been subjected to alternating versions of *limpieza de sangre*, which in a racial context meant that one drop of blood would change your standing within society. While Latinos haven't faced the exact same systematic segregation that African-Americans did, it is important to note that in sports, Latinos faced nearly the same problems. Even to this day, with the declining population of African-Americans in the game, Latinos have taken the brunt of criticisms, with rookies, new to the United

¹⁷ José Luis Villegas and Tim Wendel, *Far From Home*, p. 27-28.

States, being portrayed as uncultured and the “other.”¹⁸

Latinos faced heavy racial barriers before integration occurred in 1947; throughout the early 20th century, only light-skinned Cubans were able to gain a foothold in Major League Baseball.¹⁹ Adolfo Luque, a light-skinned Cuban, became the first Latin star playing in the top U.S. league, staying there for almost thirty seasons as a player and manager. The early 1930s experienced a small surge in Latin players in Major League Baseball when the Washington Senators, an American League team, signed several prospects. Like earlier years, however, these players were almost entirely Cuban. Several other teams followed suit, such as the Chicago Cubs, Philadelphia Athletics, Philadelphia Phillies, and Boston Red Sox. The first two Mexican players to play in the majors, Baldomero Almada (1933) and José Gómez (1935), were signed during this period, though their careers only covered a handful of games.²⁰

In 1934, Miguel Angel González, a Cuban who had played in the majors for 17 years, was hired as a coach for the National League’s St. Louis Cardinals. Four years later, he became interim manager for the Cardinals, officially becoming the first Latino manager in Major League history.²¹ Gonzalez was also instrumental in influencing the development of Cuban baseball, as he held significant influence (including managerial positions) over the team from 1914 to 1961. Adolfo Luque, one of the great Latino

¹⁸ Maria Elena Martinez, “Nobility and Purity in the República de Indios,” in *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico*, 91-123.

¹⁹ Peter C. Bjarkman, *Baseball with a Latin Beat*, p. 45-46.

²⁰ Roberto González Echevarría. “Latin Americans in Major League Baseball Through the First Years of the 21st century.” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/910675/Latin-Americans-in-Major-League-Baseball-Through-the-First-Years-of-the-21st-Century>.

²¹ Peter C. Bjarkman, *Baseball with a Latin Beat*, p. 9.

players from the previous decades, became a coach during this time as well. It is believed that the respect Luque commanded as a coach and the fear he imparted on much of Major League Baseball with his infamously fiery temper helped pave the way for Jackie Robinson to break the color barrier in the MLB and allow for a great influx of Latinos into the game.²² Luque and González were the first two Latino players to have significant off-the-field success. Because of players like Luque and González, players and owners alike could look at Latino players as success stories, opening the path for the rise of Latinos in the game once integration occurred.

Baseball was finally desegregated in 1947 when Jackie Robinson and other African-Americans broke the color barrier and provided the way for Latino players to take their place amongst the game's elite. Jim Crow laws still had an incredibly profound effect in the U.S. South, Due to this segregation of peoples of color, African-American and Latino players had to seek alternative forms of professional sporting. This led to the creation of several Negro Leagues, with the most successful one, the Negro American League, being formed in 1937.²³ While Latino players did participate in these leagues, African-American owners and players overwhelmingly supported them. The Negro leagues still existed for several years into the latter part of the 1950s, although at a greatly diminished capacity. Latino players faced many of the same problems that African-Americans faced, mainly due to their play in the Negro Leagues and what could be called "guilt by association" that developed.

Baseball became the favorite pastime in the Caribbean countries just as it had in the US. There was something about the game that captivated young Latinos. "Just like

²² Lou Hernández, *The Rise of the Latin American Baseball Leagues, 1947-1961*, p. 12.

²³ Bo Smolka, *The Negro Baseball Leagues: The Story of the Negro Leagues*, p. 22.

any kid in the Dominican Republic - then and now - this bug, or whatever it is about the game, runs in the veins of every Dominican boy," said Felipe Alou.²⁴ Alou and his brother Matty dominated the National League throughout the 1960s. They played despite growing up in devastating poverty, using odds and ends such as broomsticks or sugar cane for bats.²⁵

Walter O'Malley, the owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers - and one of the men responsible for their move from Brooklyn to L.A. - from 1950 until his death in 1979, was perhaps baseball's first executive at the forefront of expanding the game to Latinos in the western United States. The Dodger's Hall of Fame Spanish language radio broadcaster Jaime Jarrin spoke at length about O'Malley's contributions to not just the Dodgers, but also the Latino population in Southern California.²⁶ O'Malley made it a personal mission of his, and a business one for his team, to study the demographics of the area and then tailor his franchise to fit the community. O'Malley wanted to find the "Mexican Sandy Koufax" to fulfill this vision.²⁷ While he would not live to see it fulfilled (he would pass away in 1979), he did usher in a generational player in Fernando Valenzuela, a Dodger's legend that sparked a Latino revolution in baseball.

The 1980s saw the explosive growth of Latino players, led by the phenomena of "Fernandomania." In 1981, 20-year-old Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Fernando Valenzuela emerged from the Mexican leagues as a star. "With the arrival of Valenzuela,

²⁴ Lew H. Freedman, *Latino Baseball Legends: An Encyclopedia*, Kindle p. 241.

²⁵ Lou Hernández, *The Rise of the Latin American Baseball Leagues, 1947-1961*, p. 70-72.

²⁶ Jaime Jarrin, "Walter O'Malley Enshrined In National Baseball Hall Of Fame Ceremony - What They're Saying About O'Malley," <http://www.walteromalley.com/omalley-hall-of-fame-ceremony-quotes.php>.

²⁷ Jorge Martin, "25 Years After Fernandomania" <http://m.dodgers.mlb.com/news/article/1616342/> August 18, 2006.

[thousands] of Spanish-speaking residents of southern California were finally able to identify fully with their own true homegrown superstar and ethnic folk hero."²⁸ In his first eight starts of the 1981 season, Valenzuela compiled an incredible eight wins, seven complete games (four of those shutouts) and four earned runs over 72 innings. Valenzuela would become the first player ever to win the Rookie of the Year and the Cy Young awards in the same season, beating out Hall of Famer Tom Seaver with more innings pitched, more shutouts, a significantly greater amount of strikeouts and a lower earned run average.²⁹ The 1981 season was strike shortened due to issues between players and owners over free agency compensation, but was nonetheless a record breaking one for Valenzuela. He would eventually lead the Dodgers to victory in the 1981 World Series, throwing an incredible 147 pitches in the third game. Valenzuela became an instant star.

The impact of Fernandomania is heavily understated, as baseball experienced a substantial influx of Latino players in the years following his debut and during his career. Latino players registered around 11.1% of the total player base in 1981; by 1990, that number was up to 14.8%, and by 1995 it had reached 19.2%.³⁰ While Valenzuela was a homegrown Mexican star, he had a very significant impact on the game inside and out of Mexico. As the case study on Mexico will demonstrate, the highest spikes of Mexican born player debuts comes at the tail end of Valenzuela's pitching career, which ended in 1990. Mexico and the other four areas in this study saw increases in the number of players debuting in Major League Baseball during and after Valenzuela's career. A major

²⁸ Peter C. Bjarkman, *Baseball with a Latin Beat*, p. 268-269.

²⁹ Vic Wilson, "Fernandomania" *SABR* 2011, <http://sabr.org/research/fernandomania>.

³⁰ Mark Armour and Dan Levitt, "Baseball Demographics, 1947-2012" <http://sabr.org/bioproj/topic/baseball-demographics-1947-2012>.

impact Valenzuela had off the field was the encouragement of executives and Major League Baseball to find the *next* Valenzuela; they attempted to achieve this through the development of the academies.

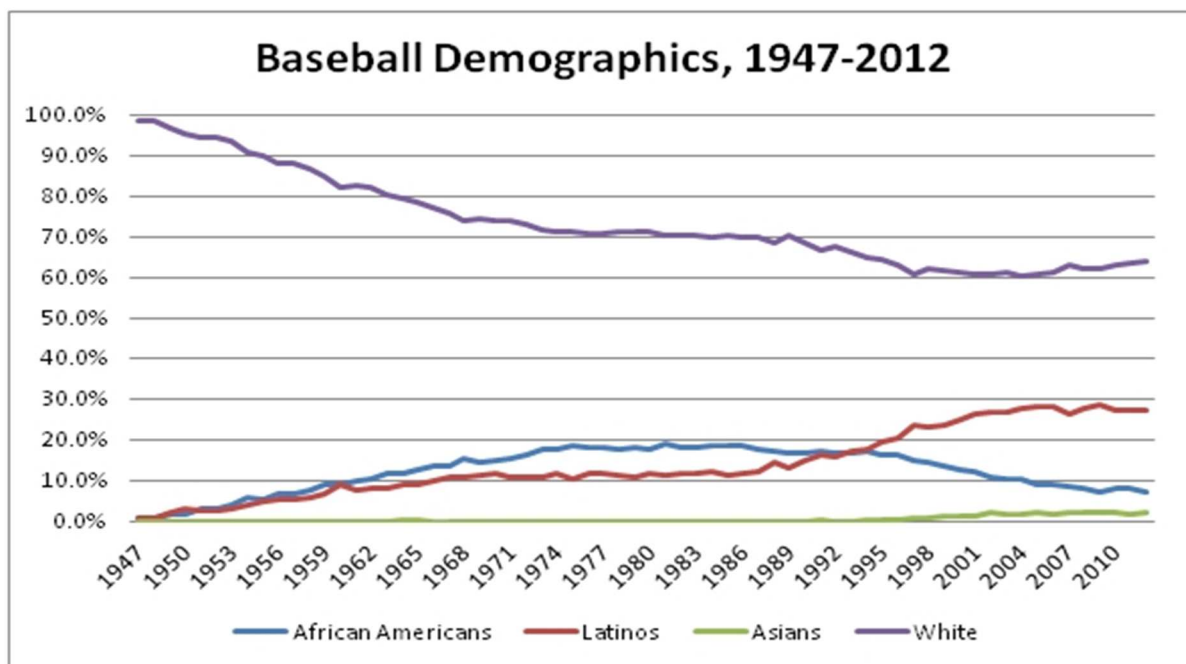


Figure 1.1. Baseball Demographics, 1947-2012, from Mark Armour and Daniel R. Levitt, Society for American Baseball Research.

Following this historical narrative, it's simple to tell from figure 1.1 that from integration in 1947 until the late 1960s, there was a gradual increase in the percentage of Latino players in Major League Baseball. The number of African American and Latino players increased in tandem until the 1980s. At this point, the two groups diverged onto different paths; the Latino population in MLB jumped from just above 10% in 1986 to about 25% in 2000, while the African American population, reaching its apex in 1986, fell below 10% by 2005. On the 1999 Opening Day rosters, 17.4 percent of the 841 major league players were born in Spanish-speaking countries outside of the United States. They came from the Dominican Republic (66), Puerto Rico (31), Venezuela (25), Mexico

(12), Cuba (8), Panama (6), Colombia (3), and Nicaragua (1).³¹ With 17.4% of the Latino population foreign-born, this left roughly 8% of Latino players being born in the United States. What this chart demonstrates is the tangible rise of Latino players in *America's* pastime. The case studies that follow in the next chapter speak to this rise in Latino players in MLB with a focus on the significant increase in foreign-born Latino players in the United States' top league. The next section will discuss what is arguably the single greatest factor in the increase of foreign-born players coming into the United States.

The Academies in the Caribbean

A little known, somewhat dirty secret of Major League Baseball is the prevalence of baseball academies. At first glance, the average reader would not see a baseball academy as having much to do with racial discrimination or the development of race relations between the United States and Latin American nations. However, the academies are at the crux of new debate regarding fair labor practices and new forms of racial discrimination that echo neocolonial trends experienced throughout the western hemisphere, with the United States as its spearhead.

Baseball academies in the Caribbean did not play a grand role in the development of baseball until the mid-1980s. Rob Ruck, author of *Raceball*, points to 1986 as the year everything changed. Before 1986, most players (Dominican for the purposes of this subject) were born out of the rich tradition of baseball in the region. However, in 1986, Major League Baseball began a concerted effort to systematize and develop young talent in the Dominican Republic. The Los Angeles Dodgers were at the forefront of this new movement, establishing Campo Las Palmas in 1987 between San Pedro and Santo

³¹ *Ibid.*

Domingo. By 2000, nearly every MLB franchise plus the Hiroshima Toyo Carp (Japan) maintained year-round facilities to house and drill their youngest prospects.³²

To date, there are currently thirty youth academies across six different cities (Boca Chica, San Pedro de Macoris, Guerra, El Toro, Villa Mella, and Najayo San Cristobal) in the Dominican Republic. The academies, which often include dormitories for players and coaches, also feature playing fields, weight room and training facilities, clubhouses, classrooms and recreational areas for participating players.³³ Per Major League Baseball: “While the primary focus remains preparing these players for professional careers, the academies, often in partnership with the MLB's central office in the Dominican Republic, have implemented education-based programs that also help prepare prospects for life after their playing careers have ended.”³⁴ Boys must be at least 16 and half years old to get signed by an academy. The academies will often pay players a bonus between \$5,000 and \$25,000 (U.S.) to sign the contract. These signing bonuses can sometimes be more than \$2,000,000; however, large contracts are extremely rare with only one player ever receiving more than two million. While in the academies, all the baseball players receive the same monthly salary, ranging from \$600 to \$1,000 depending on the organization.³⁵

What made these baseball academies so unique is that when considered where they were built (which was alongside sugar cane fields), the traditional could be seen mixing with the new. Old imperialist tendencies, such as the great demand for sugar cane

³² Rob Ruck, *Raceball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*, p. 198.

³³ MLB.com, “Academies” <http://mlb.mlb.com/dr/academies.jsp>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

that had driven the Caribbean economy for centuries, was still in full bloom, except this time from a North American market. The issue of race comes into play when considering the culture of agriculture present in the Dominican. The Dominican Republic had experienced a wave of immigration from the nearby Lesser Antilles due to few Dominicans willing to do the backbreaking work on the sugarcane plantations. These new immigrants, who eventually became known as *cocolos*, were dark-skinned, English-speaking Protestants. They would experience discrimination while working in the fields and at home, often being relegated to shanty villages near the sugarcane they cut. Ruck believed that this is where the beginnings of Dominican baseball began, as the *cocolos* would turn to sports during their free time. This first started with cricket during the early 1980s but would quickly become overpowered by the prevalence of baseball, which Ruck believes helped the *cocolos* become Dominican in spirit and custom, where quality would bring respect and mobility. The *cocolo* youth were provided a tangible path to success and out of the sugarcane fields by the baseball academies.³⁶

Major League teams were not the only benefactors of these academies; the youth who were so intent on making the cut for a Dominican Winter League roster, would also receive a meal every day, something that they sometimes could not get on their own.³⁷ However, the competition for spots in the academies were hard to achieve as is, it was only increasingly difficult to be seen and recruited by MLB scouts. Communication and networking did not exist as it does today, so the youth were often left at the mercy of the scout overseeing the instruction and development at their respective academy.

³⁶ Rob Ruck, *Raceball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*, p 202.

³⁷ Murray Chass, "A New Baseball Strategy: Latin American Bargains," *New York Times*, March 22, 1998.

Young Dominicans were subjected to the immense pressure of attempting to field a tryout from academies before they reached the age of 16. Young player handlers, known as *buscones*, would often game the system or take advantage of the lack of regulatory policies or oversight from Major League Baseball. A few *buscones* went so far as to inject their sponsored players with steroids and human growth hormones to increase the likelihood of the youngsters pulling in a larger signing bonus because they could run faster, hit farther, and throw harder. This kind of Wild West mentality reeked of an economic imperialism by MLB franchises, taking advantage of racial and cultural differences between the Caribbean winter leagues and the amateur system in the U.S.³⁸

Foreign-born baseball players are not required to go through the drafting process. What this means is that players born in the U.S. can only negotiate with the team that drafts them, whereas players not born in the U.S. can sign as a free agent for any team (usually the highest bidder). This creates a perception of unruliness in regards to how baseball academies handle young prospects that show great potential. This portrays a racial divide as the mostly white U.S. amateur system has a potentially greater chance to place a non-Latino born player into a MLB franchise's minor league system (farm system).

Foreign-born Latino players faced greater competition and a greater chance of completely missing out on the development of a professional career or a childhood sincerely focused on education. This can be blamed on the lack of regulatory oversight for what could almost certainly be deemed a legalized trade and importation of racially motivated and specialized youth development. Major League Baseball teams sought to

³⁸ Jorge Aranguré Jr. & Luke Cyphers "It's Not All Sun And Games." <http://sports.espn.go.com/espnmag/story?id=3974952>.

develop talent as cheaply as possible. By many accounts and metrics the academies served their purpose and achieved exactly what they were created to do: sending thousands of young Latino players into the major and minor leagues at a fraction of the cost to sign and develop players in the United States.³⁹ This is a significant factor in the number of players debuting in Major League Baseball, as more minor league players are brought over from these academies, the greater chance there is of foreign-born Latino players making it to the majors.

But a decade of scandals has brought to light the *buscones*: “middlemen in a festering, corrupt hellhole who lie about players' ages, keep them out of school, inject them with animal steroids, then take most of their signing bonuses, sometimes without their knowledge.”⁴⁰ Major League Baseball started investigating scouts and executives in collusion with *buscones* for allegedly skimming signing-bonus money not just from players but also from the teams themselves.⁴¹

However, this does not reveal the whole truth of Dominican baseball. These training academies resembled low-rent communist sports schools driven by unregulated capitalism. The system is ruthlessly effective at finding, developing and producing pro baseball prospects. More than 100 active major leaguers hail from the DR, and nearly all signed their first contract for much less than a comparable U.S. draft choice gets. But that could be changing. In the wake of the latest round of scandals, some MLB clubs are reexamining how they operate in the country. And more and more *buscones* are operating

³⁹ Rob Ruck, *Raceball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*, p. 206.

⁴⁰ Jorge Arangur  Jr. & Luke Cyphers “It's Not All Sun And Games,” *ESPN*, March 13, 2009. <http://sports.espn.go.com/espnmag/story?id=3974952>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

like legitimate agents and trainers and realizing that the talent they find doesn't have to come so cheap.⁴²

As Ruck points out in his more specific Dominican book *The Tropic of Baseball*, a capitalist system used in the context of baseball academies creates contradictions that greatly affect the young Latino players: "Some of the buscones are really jackals and squeeze whatever they can from the players. But others are maximizing the chances of kids who do not have ideal alternatives."⁴³ The academies in the Caribbean have contributed significantly to the influx of foreign-born Latino players into the United States; however, is there something else drawing the youth of Latin America to a game that many say colonized them?

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Rob Ruck, *The Tropic of Baseball*, p. 115.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDIES

Venezuela

Baseball in Venezuela is thought to have originated with entrepreneurial ventures from U.S. companies and Venezuelan students studying in the United States. Oil and cigar companies operated in and around Caracas, with employees bringing the game of baseball with them and students taking the sport to the younger generations. By May 1895, Amenodoro Franklin and his brothers Emilio, Gustavo, and Augusto established the first organized Baseball Club, “Caracas BBC”.⁴⁴

Venezuela’s entry into baseball follows what occurred in Cuba. Students studying in the United States, mostly in the U.S. South, brought back the game and its rules, bats, gloves and balls to their respective cities of origin and began spreading the game through high society social clubs. For a sport that had its beginnings as part of elite circles, its incredible ascent across Latin America to a national sport for many suggests a sense of historical irony.

⁴⁴ Guillermo Becerra M., *Baseball in Caracas*, 1996.

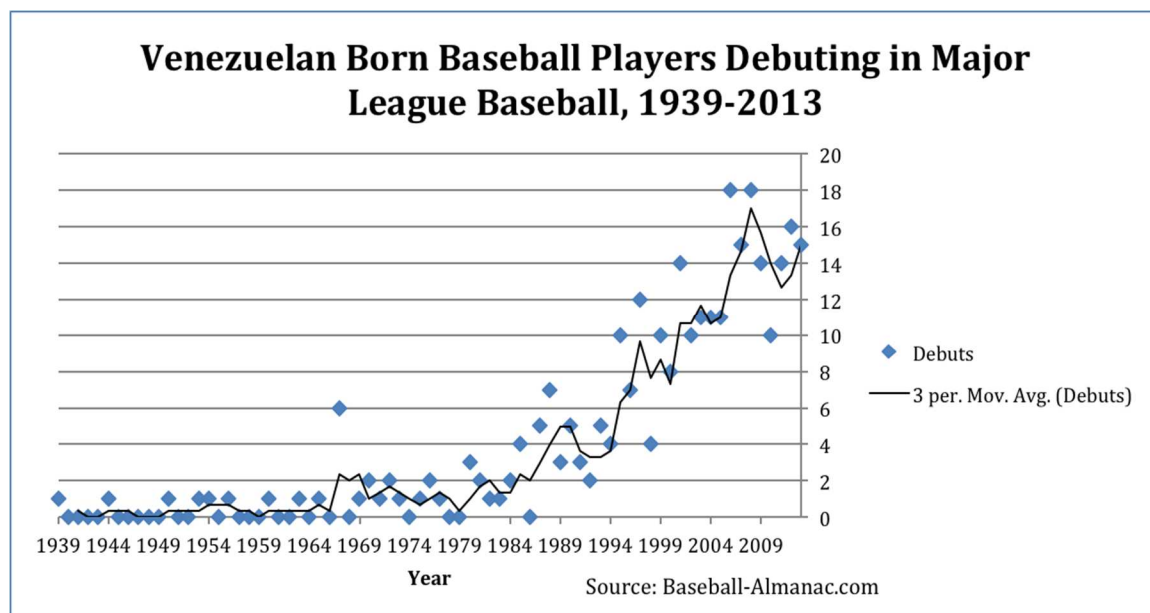


Figure 2.1. Venezuelan Baseball Players Debuting in Major League Baseball, 1939-2013, from Michael Gallemore via Baseball-Almanac.com.

Over 300 players have made the transition to playing at the highest level of organized baseball in the U.S. As Figure 2.1 denotes, Venezuelan players began the shift to Major League Baseball starting in 1939. However, there was not a significant presence of Venezuelan players until the early to middle 1980s. The objective then for Venezuela as a case study is to determine why there was this sudden influx of players in the 1980s and if there were any external influences at work.

Beginning with the Houston Astros in 1989, Major League Baseball franchises built up baseball academies and scouting departments that worked in conjunction with the winter and summer league Venezuelan teams. By 1998, half of all major league clubs had opened an academy in Venezuela and participated in the summer league.⁴⁵ The Astros' general manager at the time, Gerry Hunsicker, outlined the team's decision to go into

⁴⁵ Rob Ruck, *How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*, p. 211.

Venezuela as a financial one: “For what we’ll spend on one high draft pick [in the United States], we can run our academy and sign 10 to 12 players a year.”⁴⁶ According to figure 2.1, from 2000-2009 there was significant growth in the number of players debuting in the majors from Venezuela, showing the efforts of baseball franchises to tap into the Venezuela talent pool.

However, present-day Venezuela faces an exodus of major league baseball teams for various reasons. Only six teams have retained year-round baseball scouting academies. Homegrown violence, coupled with political instability during Chávez’s stay in office and repeated attempts by the Venezuelan government under Chavez to nationalize the sport and its two leagues, created an environment that many Major League Baseball franchises did not wish to participate in.⁴⁷ This creates an interesting question then of how Venezuela has been able to retain its spot as the second largest producer of baseball talent being exported to the United States while losing the vast majority of its Major League Baseball relationships.

In order to answer this question and observe the current growth of exportation of Venezuelan players to the United States, we must first take a brief look at the political climate of Venezuela since 1939. From 1948 to 1958, a military dictatorship led by Pérez Jiménez maintained a generous relationship with the U.S. It could be argued that this relationship was maintained through Cold War aspirations of the United States in its quest for containment of communism. The CIA had just sponsored a successful overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala with more possible interventions on the

⁴⁶ Murray Chass, “A New Baseball Strategy: Latin-American Bargains,” *New York Times*, March 22, 1998.

⁴⁷ P.G., “Baseball in Venezuela: Not-so-sweet home,” *The Economist*. November 11, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/gametheory/2011/11/baseball-venezuela>.

horizon. Venezuela would transition towards democracy in 1958 when Pérez Jiménez fled the country after a bloodless coup attempt. However, relations between the United States and Venezuela began to soften a bit after popular riots that occurred during then U.S. Vice-President Richard Nixon's visit to Caracas.⁴⁸ Hugo Chávez was popularly elected in 1999, just seven years after being imprisoned after a failed coup attempt against Pérez Jiménez.

The relative peace in Venezuela up to 1992 allowed for the MLB to be heavily involved in the scouting and development of Venezuelan players. Ironically, the political climate began to change in 1999 with the popular election of Hugo Chávez. Chávez was a huge proponent of baseball, even dreaming of one day playing for the San Francisco Giants, following in the footsteps of his childhood hero, Venezuelan pitcher Isaiás Chávez. Hugo Chávez also played baseball with the *Criollitos de Venezuela*, playing in the 1969 Venezuelan National Baseball Championships.⁴⁹ He even went so far as to join the Venezuelan armed forces so he would be eligible to play in the military baseball leagues popular in the country.⁵⁰

Baseball was popular throughout Latin America, especially in Venezuela, since the turn of the 20th century. However, it was not until 1987 that Major League Baseball experienced a substantial influx of talent from Venezuela. As figure 2.1 suggests, 1987 brought with it a sudden rise in the number of players debuting at the top U.S. league. As

⁴⁸ The Nixon Library and Museum, "The Vice President," *The Life*: <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/thelife/apolitician/thevicepresident.php>.

⁴⁹ BBC News, "Profile: Hugo Chávez," <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-10086210>.

⁵⁰ Richard Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*, p. 35.

was mentioned previously, Major League Baseball teams, beginning with the Houston Astros, began to set up academies in the baseball hotbeds throughout Venezuela.

Baseball in Venezuela took on a truly national characteristic during Chávez's time in office. The relationship between the U.S. and Venezuela began to deteriorate after a failed coup against Chavez in 2002, in which he believed that the United States allegedly played a role in its backing. What is unique about this situation, as opposed to what happens in Cuba, is that relations between the two remain open, if tenuously at times. Figure 2.1 shows the number of players debuting at the Major League level only increased during his tenure as president, increasing from eight players in 1999 up to eighteen in 2008.

More recently, however, Venezuela has been plagued by a crime wave that has greatly affected the political, social, and economic conditions there. The high crime rates prevalent in some parts of Venezuela have occasionally affected those involved with baseball. In November 2011, Washington Nationals catcher Wilson Ramos was kidnapped while home to play for his Venezuelan winter league team, Tigres de Aragua. Two days later he was rescued unharmed by police commandos in the mountains of Carabobo state. Eight people were arrested in connection with the kidnapping.⁵¹

⁵¹ *ESPN*, "Wilson Ramos rescued after kidnapping," http://espn.go.com/mlb/story/_/id/7222317/wilson-ramos-washington-nationals-found-alive-well-kidnapping.

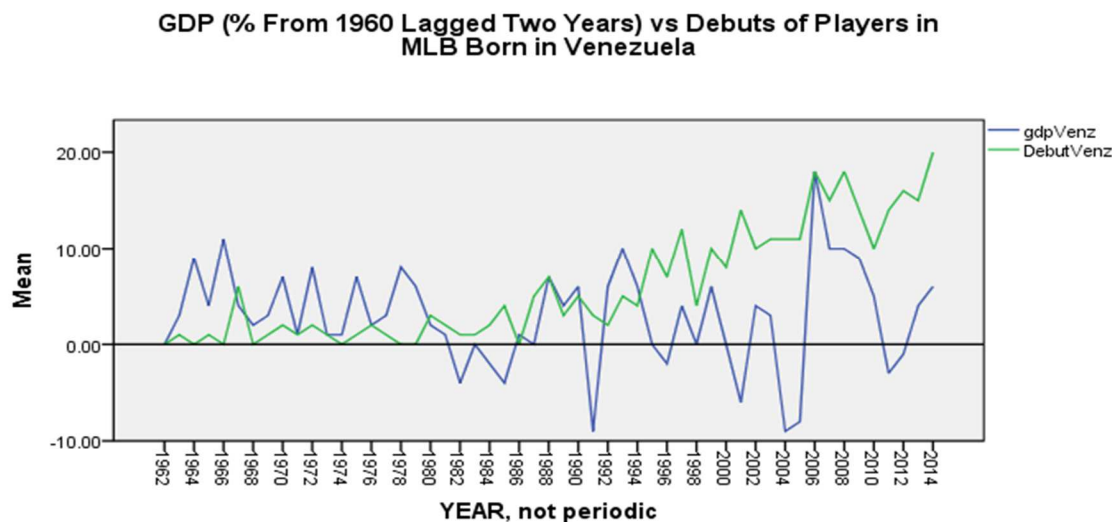


Figure 2.2. GDP (% From 1960 Lagged Two Years) vs Debuts of Players in MLB Born in Venezuela, from Michael Gallemore via World Bank Database.

When examining the effects of economic factors on the growth rate of Venezuelan players coming into Major League Baseball, it's not obvious that there is a correlation between the percentage change in GDP and the number of Venezuelan players debuting in Major League Baseball. Figure 2.2 examines the changes over time for the variables GDP percentage change every year and the number of debuts of Venezuelan players in MLB. The GDP and the number of debuts increase or stay positive from 1960 until around the 1980s. During this period, Venezuela fielded a strong oil exportation operation, filling the coffers and allowing for the government to undertake ambitious social welfare and public works programs. However, the GDP crashed in the 1980s due to the collapse of oil prices around the world. Venezuela, as a major oil exporter, suffered significantly, seeing the economy contract and inflation levels increasing to a peak annual rate of 84% in 1989.⁵² While Venezuela's economy is consistently declining and GDP

⁵² Michael McCaughan, *The Battle of Venezuela*, 2004, p. 31.

percentage is fluctuating wildly throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the number of Venezuelan players debuting in Major League Baseball steadily increases every year, creating a culminating effect that creates a large pool of Venezuelan players on active rosters in the most recent years.

When the data behind figure 2.2 is plugged into SPSS and regressions are run, we see a similar outcome. The correlation matrix, figure 2.12 of the appendix, notes a Pearson correlation coefficient of .070, there is a very weak positive relationship between the two variables. With a significance level of .620, there is also a very strong possibility (62%) that any correlation can be chalked up to coincidence. With this in mind, we cannot reject the null hypothesis. On the flip side, there is a very high correlation between GDP per capita and debuts; however, since GDP per capita naturally increases in each of our case studies and is can be considered a constant, I have chosen not to include said economic factor in this study. From this data, one can infer that while an economic collapse could very well spur a Venezuelan to join a baseball academy (or international free agency via a Dominican academy) and pursue a life in the United States, in the case of Venezuela it is not a significant enough of a factor by itself.

Cuba

"His fastball has long since died. He still has a few curveballs which he throws at us routinely." — Nicholas Burns, United States State Department Spokesman⁵³

Cuba, the 4th highest producer of baseball players to MLB in Latin America (178 since 1911), has experienced a vastly different method of development for the game of baseball inside its own country and the professional players it produces. Baseball came to

⁵³ Peter C. Bjarkman, "Fidel Castro," Society for American Baseball Research (SABR): <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/1a0bb6af>

Cuba in much the same way it made its way to Venezuela: through high class social clubs created by university students returning from the United States. The first Cuban War of Independence against Spain prompted authorities in 1869 to ban baseball in Cuba as a result of its ties to the United States and the fact that bullfighting was Spain's sport of choice.⁵⁴ The ban prompted Esteban Bellán to join the semi-pro Troy Haymakers; he became the first Latin American player to play in a major league in the United States.⁵⁵ Bellan started playing baseball for the Fordham Rose Hill Baseball Club, while attending Fordham University (1863–1868). After that he played for the Unions of Morrisania, a New York City team. Bellan played for the Haymakers until 1862; in 1861 it joined the National Association, which became the National League in 1876. The Haymakers later became the New York Giants, now the San Francisco Giants.⁵⁶

What ultimately makes Cuba different from Venezuela as well as the rest of Latin America is its history with the United States. The game of baseball came to Cuba in the 1880s, which was the time period in which Cuba was still under the sphere of influence of the dwindling Spanish empire. It wasn't until the United States first intervened and declared war on Spain in 1898 that the ruling sphere of influence began to change.

In regards to baseball, Fidel Castro was almost a mirror image of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, insofar as both loved the sport and were rumored to have been scouted by Major League Baseball organizations. Castro remains the most dominant self-perpetuating myth of the second half of the 20th century, and this claim is equally valid when it comes to the Cuban leader's longtime personal association with North America's

⁵⁴ Peter C. Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball, 1864–2006*.

⁵⁵ Fordham University Libraries, "Cuban Baseball: Esteban Bellan," http://www.library.fordham.edu/cubanbaseball/E_Bellan.html.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

self-proclaimed national game. Rare indeed is the ball fan who has not heard some version of the well-worn Castro baseball tale: that Fidel once owned a blazing fastball as a teenage prospect and was once offered big-league contracts by several eager scouts (especially one named Joe Cambria working for the Washington Senators) whose failures to ink the young Cuban prospect unleashed a half-century of Cold War political and economic turmoil.⁵⁷

The similarities seem to stop here though, as Fidel's communist background would ultimately lead to his deconstruction of professional baseball in Cuba. In 1959 the Cuban Revolution ushered in fundamental changes in how Cuban baseball was organized. The revolutionary government made baseball a symbol of excellence and used it to encourage nationalism. Shortly after the revolution, victorious guerrilla leaders demonstrated their Cuban spirit by engaging in exhibition baseball games that included symbolic gestures reinforcing the notion that baseball would be an integral component of post-revolution Cuba.⁵⁸

In 1961, the Cuban government replaced the former professional baseball system with new amateur baseball leagues, most prominent among them the Cuban National Series.⁵⁹ The reorganization aimed to organize the sport based on a socialist model of sports driven by national ideals rather than money.⁶⁰ Revolutionary officials believed that under capitalism sport is corrupted by the profit motive. The perversion of sport was

⁵⁷ Peter C. Bjarkman, "Fidel Castro and Baseball." <http://sabr.org/bioproj/topic/fidel-castro-and-baseball>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Katherine E. Baird, "Cuban baseball: Ideology, politics, and market forces." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, p. 169.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

believed to result in the exploitation of the masses.⁶¹ Castro disbanded the Cuban Winter League in 1961, citing the Communist Party's ideology that professional sports were too closely associated with capitalist economic ventures. As a result, amateur baseball became king in Cuba. However, baseball players were ill equipped during economic shortfalls, specifically the period during the Soviet Union's collapse. Teams did not have enough baseballs, players were using old gloves and sharing bats, and catchers often didn't have proper equipment.⁶²

Having Fidel Castro in power greatly changes the type of regime and foreign policy response towards baseball and the United States. The Cuban Revolution, notwithstanding any reaction by the United States, took the initiative to reduce the presence of professional baseball. This caused a chain-reaction within Cuba's leagues that would ultimately cause many to seek employment outside of the Cuban system or seek an alternative route to the United States. The type of regime identified in Cuba played a greater role in the development of baseball in Cuba and the exportation of players to the United States league system than any other factor.

⁶¹ GERALYN PYE, "The Ideology of Cuban Sport." *Journal of Sport History*, p. 125.

⁶² ROB RUCK, *Raceball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*, p. 272.

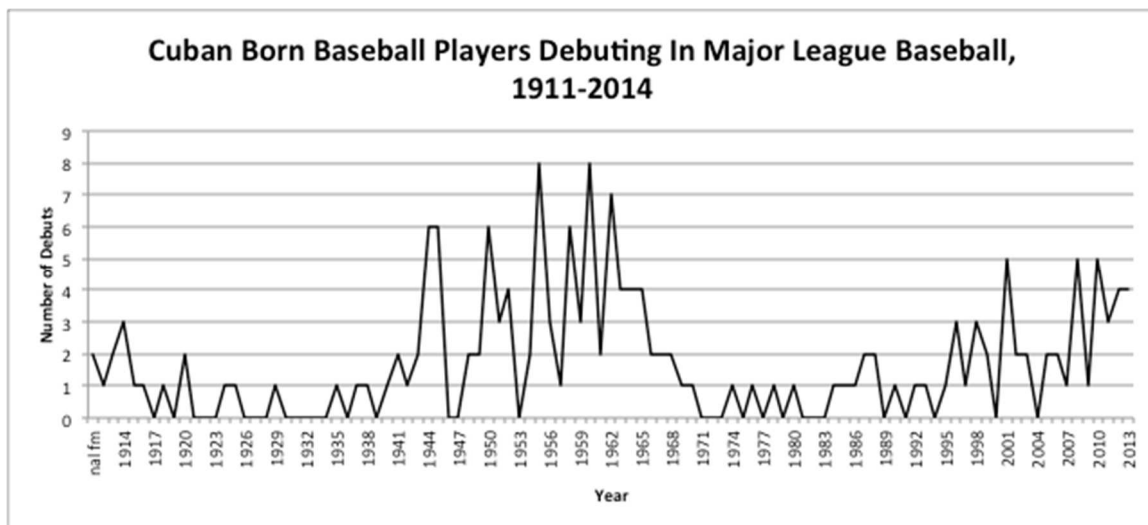


Figure 2.3. Cuban Born Baseball Players Debuting in Major League Baseball, 1911-2014, from Michael Gallemore via Baseball-Almanac.com.

Immigration policy has a unique role in the relationship between baseball and U.S. foreign policy. The United States placed a commercial, economic, and financial embargo on Cuba on October 19th, 1960, almost two years after the Cuban Revolution disposed of the Batista regime. This made travel between the two countries nearly impossible. Immigration was even further restricted in 1996 with the passing of the Helms-Burton Act, which placed even more restricted United States citizens from doing business in or with Cuba.⁶³ This directly affected Major League Baseball, as Cuban players had maintained a very noticeable presence in the U.S.'s highest league since the Second World War. Cuba maintained a high export of players that made their debut in the MLB up until around 1962-1963, when the first sanctions went into effect. The result was a tremendous drop in the number of Cuban players debuting in the United States. We would not see the same number of debuts again until the late 90s and early 2000s, with a

⁶³ Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act of 1996, 22 U.S.C. ch. 69a § 6021.

potential boom of Cuban players being experienced in the last 2-3 years. Even then, the numbers did not return to pre-Revolution levels, although current trends are looking more positive for Cuban players.

It is too easy to blame the United States foreign policy decisions for the decline in Cuban players debuting in the league. With the abolishment of professional baseball in Cuba, the players were relegated to the amateur leagues, which did not pay well nor were properly equipped. Cubans are now willing to go through tremendous struggles to reach the U.S. and a potential contract with a major league club, as evidenced by Yasiel Puig's journey.⁶⁴

The original burst of player imports from Cuba can be attributed to the first U.S. intervention in Cuba in 1898 that resulted in prolonged cordial relations between the two, even going so far as U.S. administrations inquiring about the possibility of annexing Cuba. There was a prolonged period of growth of the exportation of players to the United States up until the 1960s that could be pinpointed to the need to replace U.S. players drafted into service for the Second World War.

⁶⁴ Tim Keown, "What's Next for Yasiel Puig?" *ESPN the Magazine*. Interview (February 5th, 2014): http://espn.go.com/mlb/story/_/id/10377026/next-los-angeles-dodgers-star-yasiel-puig-espn-magazine

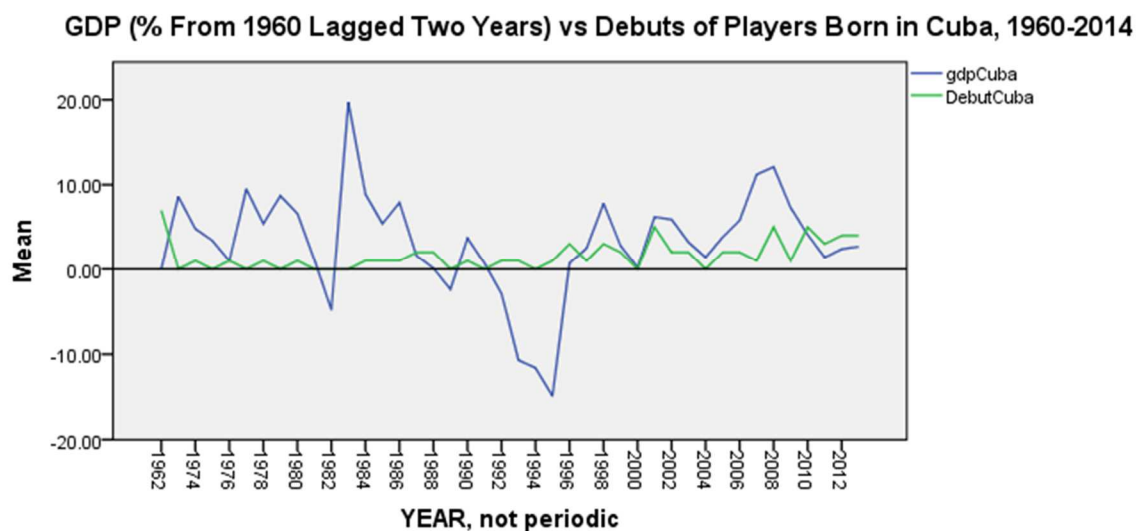


Figure 2.4. GDP (% From 1960 Lagged Two Years) vs Debuts of Players Born in Cuba, 1960-2014, from Michael Gallemore via World Bank Database.

Again, when the data is regarding GDP % change and debuts are run through a correlation matrix, we get the same results as Venezuela and Cuba. Figure 2.12 demonstrates that the two variables in Cuba have a Pearson correlation coefficient of .081 with a significance of .609. Not all GDP data was reported for every year involved in the study by Cuba (42 years versus 53), but the result coming up the same as the previous two case studies reveals that the additional cases may not change the outcome. As seen in figure 2.4, there is wild variance in the GDP data, but a relatively constant number of debuts (there are large spikes through the 1940s-1950s, but the GDP data collection began in the 1960s). Three times during this timeframe, the GDP spiked along with a bump in the number of debuts (1997-1998, 2000-2002, and 2004-2008).

Cuba cannot be solely ascribed to the notion that U.S. imperialism led to the decline or rise of baseball prospects coming to the U.S. or even the popularity of baseball in general. Rather, the presence of Cuban players in Major League Baseball can be

attributed to Cuba's embracing of the game and Fidel Castro's desire to turn it into a national sport, regardless if it lacked the professional side. This bolstered the game's presence in Cuba, as well as hastened the process of many young Cubans attempting to flee what could be seen as a repressive system, especially in regards to those that played the sport.

Dominican Republic

ESPN the Magazine compiled a survey of 100 foreign-born Latin American ballplayers in early 2011. Several personal questions were asked of the players, but three in particular stood out: 1) Does fame make you a target for criminals in your native country...when you retire will you live in the US or your native country; 2) which team scouts Latin America the best; 3) are performance-enhancing drugs easier to get in Latin America or the United States?⁶⁵

For the first question, 64.7 percent answered yes, with several players admitting that they had been a mark of kidnappings or violence. Consequently this high percentage explains why 52 percent of those polled suggested they would stay in the United States rather than return to their home countries.⁶⁶

The answer to the second question might not come as a surprise. 19.7% of respondents mentioned the Dodgers as the top scouting franchise, followed by the Yankees at 9.5%.⁶⁷ This isn't surprising due to the pioneering nature of the Dodgers franchise after it moved from Brooklyn to Los Angeles. The Dodgers were the first franchise to establish a baseball scouting academy in the Dominican Republic. This,

⁶⁵ Jorge Arangure Jr., Anna Katherine Clemmons, Ian Gordon and Molly Knight, "Latin American Confidential," <http://sports.espn.go.com/mlb/news/story?id=6247850>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

combined with the incredible effect of *Fernandomania*, lead one Dominican player to note how important the academy was in getting him into Major League Baseball, and that “everybody wanted to grow up and be a Dodger.”⁶⁸

The third question should also not come as a surprise. 84.3% of foreign-born Latino players picked their respective countries. Conversely, the remaining that picked the United States stated that they didn’t even think about steroids until they saw “American stars” all doing it.⁶⁹ What these statements point to is a Wild West mentality that at least in the Dominican Republic spurred an incredibly growth of the game in the DR and of the number of players moving to the United States.

Baseball was brought to the Dominican Republic via Cuba after Cuban refugees fleeing the Ten years War (1868-1878) introduced it to the natives in the DR.⁷⁰ By 1921, four teams (The Tigers, Easterns Stars, Eagles and the Lions of the Chosen One) were established in the creation of the Dominican Republic’s professional baseball league. In 1930, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo led a coup and takeover of the island and turned baseball into a strong nationalist and political weapon. He eventually merged the Lions and Tigers into one team called the Trujillo Dragons. However, due to the inflation of salaries for the teams involved, the league was forced to fold.

The Dominican Winter League that many diehard baseball fans recognize today was created in 1951, and with the addition of two teams and successful runs by Dominican teams in Caribbean tournaments and the national team in international tournaments, the DR became a hotbed of attention.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ “History of Baseball in the Dominican Republic.” mlb.mlb.com/dr/history.jsp.

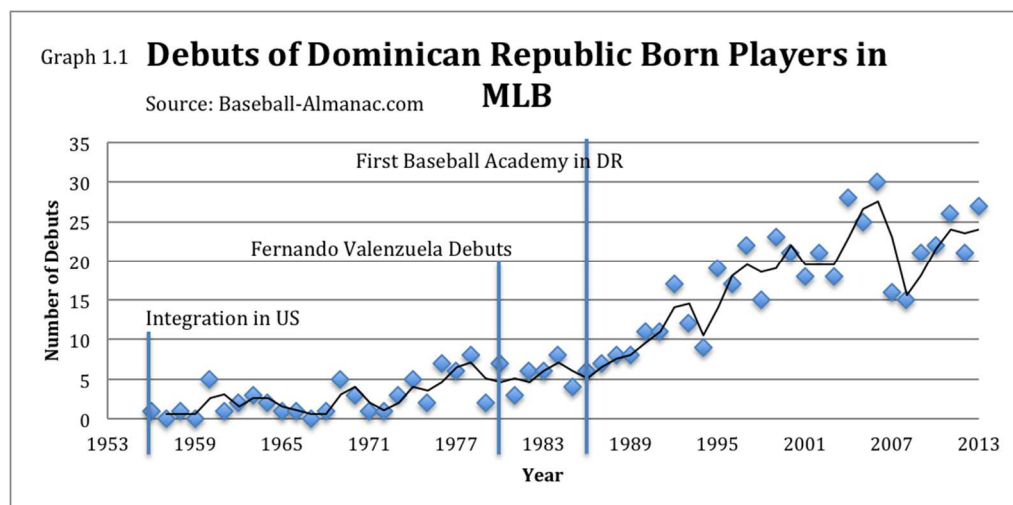


Figure 2.5. Debuts of Dominican Republic Born Players in MLB, from Michael Gallemore via Baseball-Almanac.com

As figure 2.5 demonstrates, the Dominican Republic had consistently low numbers of home grown talent debut in Major League Baseball until the middle of the 1980s, when the first baseball academy came to the country. After the Dodgers moved in, the number of debuts began to increase steadily, peaking in the 2013 and 2014 seasons at twenty-seven individual debuts each year. To what can we attribute this significant increase in the number of debuts? On paper, it appears the introduction of the baseball academies to the Dominican Republic is the responsible party.

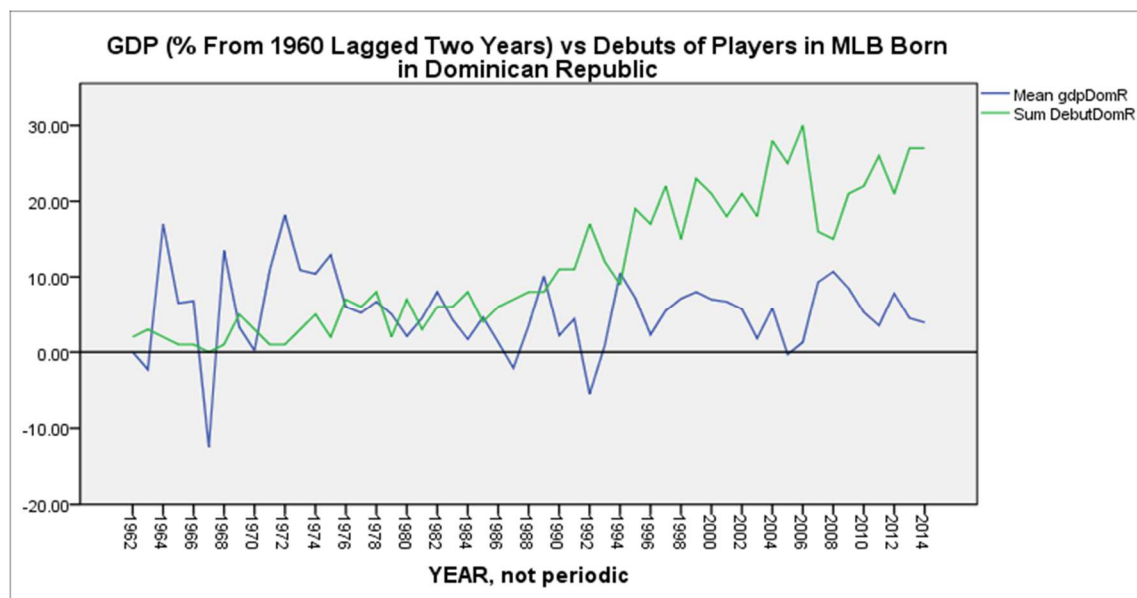
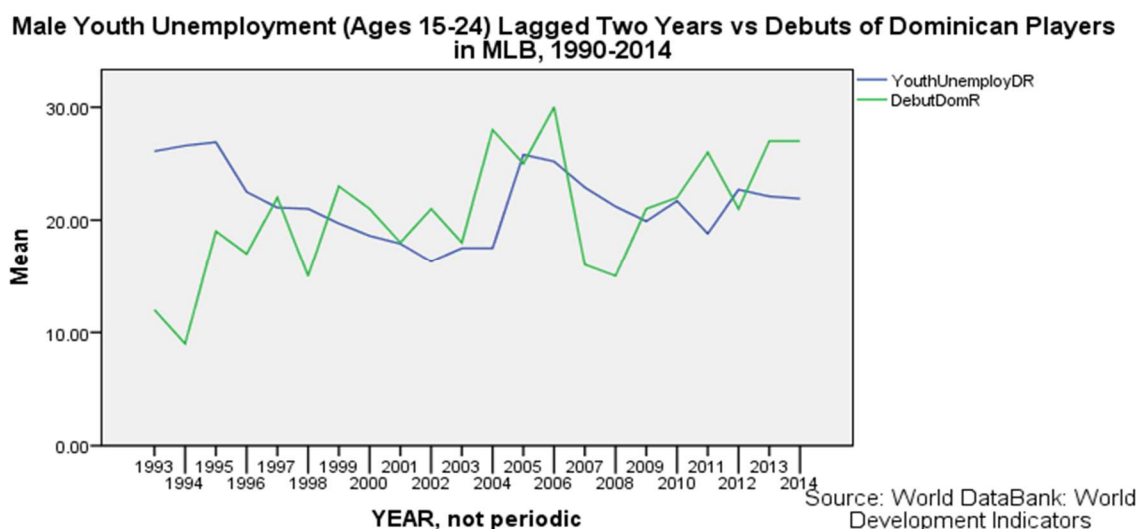


Figure 2.6. GDP (% From 1960 Lagged Two Years) vs Debuts of Players in MLB Born in Dominican Republic, from Michael Gallemore via World Bank Database.

The figure 2.6 charts the percentage growth of gross domestic product in the Dominican Republic from 1960 until 2014. The Dominican Republic produces a curious result when comparing the two variables. When the GDP drops, two years later (the same year on the graph) there is corresponding increase in the number of debuts by Dominican players in MLB. For example, the GDP% in 1990 was -5.5%. Once this number is lagged two years to compensate for the estimated time for a baseball player to reach the top MLB level, it corresponds to a jump in the number of players from the Dominican Republic to a then record amount of seventeen. However, according to figure 2.12, it came out the same as Venezuela; the Pearson correlation is $-.104$, indicating a weak negative relationship, and the significance level is $.463$, meaning there is a 46% chance the relationship is accidental or coincidental.



Fi. 2.7. Male Youth Unemployment (Ages 15-24) Lagged Two Years vs Debuts of Dominican Players in MLB, 1990-2014, from Michael Gallemore via World Bank Database.

When discussing young baseball players and their moves to the United States, it would seem prudent to also examine the unemployment rates of the respective countries from which they came. One would expect a positive relationship between youth unemployment and the number of debuts (players leaving); the higher the unemployment rate, the more potential players entering the baseball academy and eventually leaving their respective country, thus more debuts in Major League Baseball and an eventual lowering of the real unemployment rate, as the youth baseball players are then removed from the labor force when they enter the minor leagues of the United States. However as the graph above demonstrates, there is not an obvious pattern, even without lagging the data, outside of the 2003-2006 period. The Dominican Republic presented the best opportunity to use youth unemployment as a factor, as opposed to the other four case studies, because of prevalence of data and the sheer volume of the number of academies

in the country. However, youth unemployment remained high, even after the academies moved in.

Puerto Rico

The island of Puerto Rico provides a unique research opportunity. Due to its relationship with the United States as a commonwealth, Puerto Rico could almost serve as a control group against the other four countries. Baseball came to Puerto Rico in a more direct way than Cuba or Venezuela and has possibly more neocolonial ties than any other area in this study. Puerto Ricans travelling to and from the United States introduced the game to the island; however, it was after the end of the Spanish-American war, in which the United States acquired Puerto Rico as a territory that the game took on a national character. U.S. soldiers stationed in Puerto Rico were playing club games against local teams by 1900, and Puerto Rican teams began travelling to places such as Brooklyn to play local chapters of the Knights of Columbus and semi-professional teams by the 1920s.⁷¹ Baseball in Puerto Rico really took off after native Roberto Clemente rose to fame playing for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1955. He won numerous awards while playing in the United States, and during the off-season played in the Puerto Rican Winter League. His charity work was well noted, and every time he went back to his home, he would be greeted by scores of supporters and fans of the game.⁷²

⁷¹ "History of Baseball in Puerto Rico" http://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/History_of_baseball_in_Puerto_Rico#Early_history_.281897-1938.29.

⁷² Paul Rober Walker (1988). "Beat 'Em, Bucs!". *Pride of Puerto Rico: The life of Roberto Clemente*, Kindle, n.p.

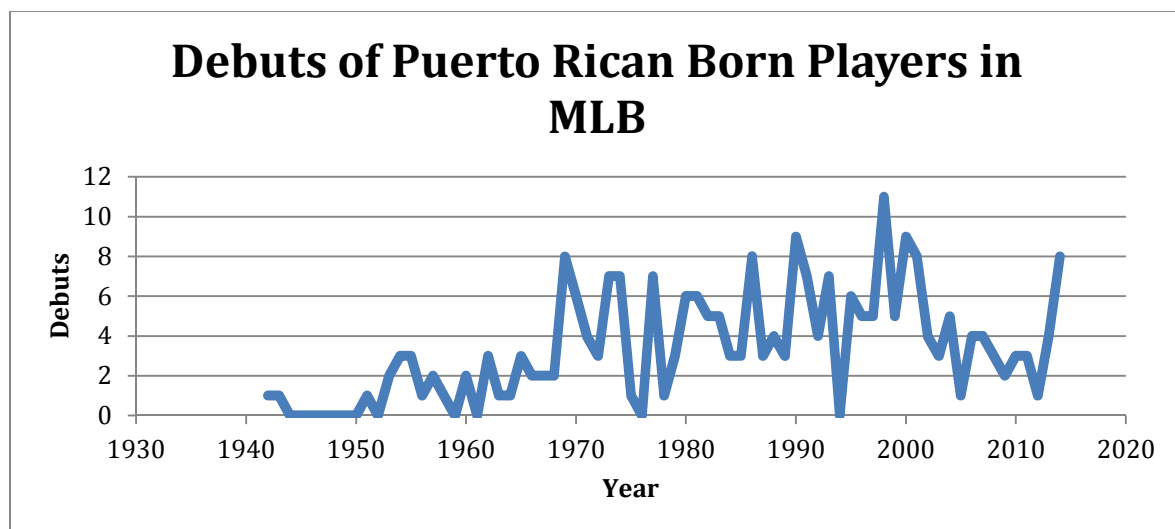


Figure 2.8. Debuts of Puerto Rican Born Players in MLB, 1942-2014, from Michael Gallemore via Baseball-Almanac.com

As is demonstrated in the chart above, Puerto Rico has had a mixed bag of increases and decreases in the number of debuts in MLB. The peak came in 1998, but the last two years have seen a marked increase from one to eight (and rising). Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States provides it a unique place within this study, as it has the least restrictive access for players to reach the United States in terms of immigration policy. It's clear there is a growth in the number of players debuting in MLB between the late 1960s and the 1980s, a growth that could be attributed to Roberto Clemente's legacy and impact on the game, much the way Fernandomania shaped Venezuela's growth in players in the late 1980s-1990s.

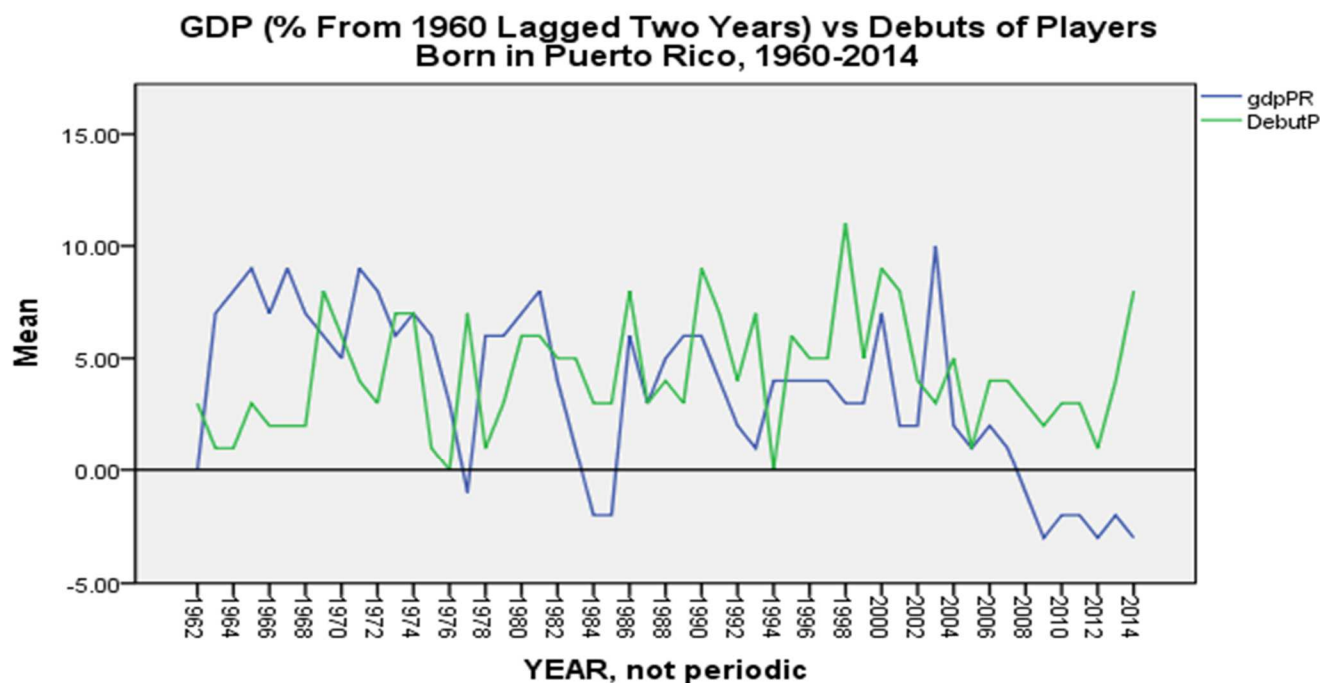


Figure 2.9. GDP (% From 1960 Lagged Two Years) vs Debuts of Players Born in Puerto Rico, 1960-2014, from Michael Gallemore via World Bank Database.

When comparing the change in GDP over time versus the number of debuts of Puerto Rican players, we see a pattern come out clearer than what we may have seen in the Dominican Republic. The numbers begin to align from the early 1970s until the early 2000s, with dips in lagged GDP percentages corresponding with subtle or large dips in the number of players debuting in Major League Baseball. Figure 2.12 shows that, just as with the other cases, Puerto Rico's Pearson correlation coefficient was .028 with a significance factor of .841, meaning a weak positive relationship. Puerto Rico is in a similar boat as Mexico, in that economic standing with the United States largely shapes socioeconomic factors. Puerto Rican players have greater ease of access than any other area in this study, as all that is required is a photo ID to traverse between the two. No work visa is needed for MLB franchises to sign a Puerto Rican prospect, thus lowering

the time and effort needed to recruit players. Puerto Rican players also have the option of going through the amateur draft system, providing a greater chance at getting into the top levels.

Mexico

Mexico, like Puerto Rico, has a unique baseball and political relationship with the United States. Much like Cuba and Venezuela, baseball reached Mexico sometime in the middle of the 1800s. The *Liga Mexicana de Béisbol* was formed in 1925 with six teams, all located in Mexico City.⁷³ During the 1930s and 1940s, the Mexican League served as a prominent playground for African-American baseball players, as the color barrier was not broken until 1947 and the Mexican League generally offered higher salaries and better playing conditions.⁷⁴ Such Negro League greats as Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson dominated the league and set multiple records during their time in the Mexican League. Jorge Pasquel, a Mexican businessman, attempted to create a rival to Major League Baseball by convincing around twenty white MLB players to head south, enticing them with greater salaries than those offered in the US⁷⁵. In response to a flight of talent heading to Mexico, MLB commissioner Happy Chandler threatened a lifetime ban for any player that went to the Mexican league. Eventually, the white players recruited by Pasquel returned home, avoiding a greater conflict between Mexico and Major League Baseball.⁷⁶

Mexico has also had its share of labor issues that could have affected the number of players reaching the U.S. Before the 1980s, Mexican baseball players were not well

⁷³ Lou Hernández, *The Rise of the Latin American Baseball Leagues, 1947-1961*, p.7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9-10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

received and were treated poorly by the government and the owners, who saw them as entertainers and not workers. In 1980, the baseball players in Mexico's domestic league went on strike to demand many of the same rights that their counterparts in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela enjoyed: 1) Status as a worker, which included the right to organize; 2) improved accommodations, transit and food while traveling with a team. Players would organize before the strike to form the Asociación Nacional de Beisbolistas (ANABE). ANABE was not successful in its attempts to unionize and would eventually falter; however, the resultant negotiations and strife between the government, owners and players partially stabilized the league, providing pension plans and life insurance programs as well as the enforcement of a cap limiting teams to 10% of its roster to foreign-born players.⁷⁷

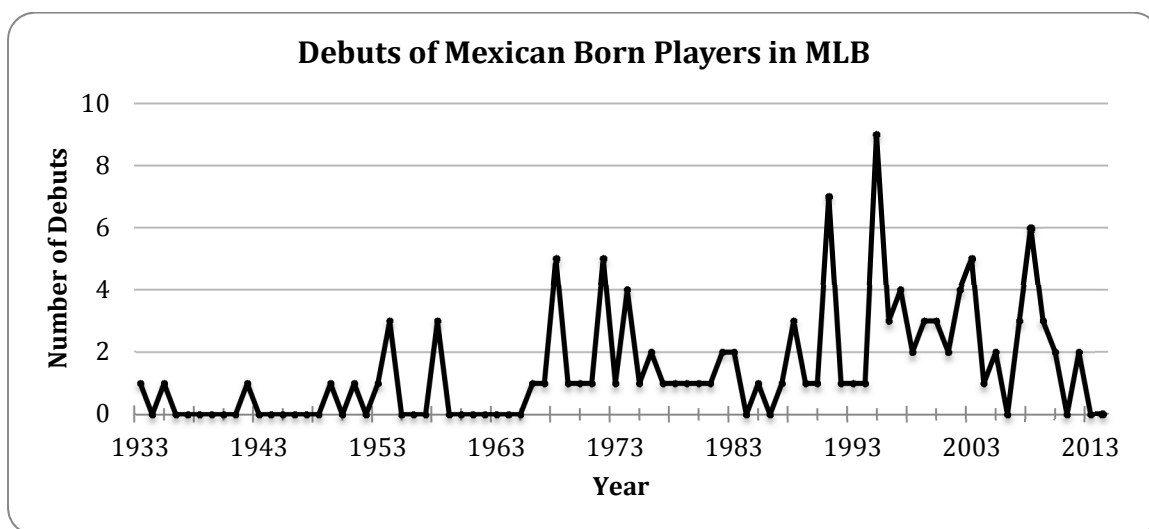


Figure 2.10. Debuts of Mexican Born Players in MLB, 1933-2014, from Michael Gallemore via Baseball-Almanac.com

⁷⁷ David G. LaFrance, "Labor, the State, and Professional Baseball in Mexico in the 1980s," in *Sport in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Joseph L. Arbena et al., Kindle, n.p.

Mexico makes up the lowest number of debuts in Major League Baseball out of all the case studies. This might seem contradictory to the fact that Mexico has the third largest population in Latin America (behind the US and Brazil) with roughly 122 million people and has the United States right on its doorstep and possibly a greater chance at acculturation than any other Latin American country. However, as the data will demonstrate, there has not been an obvious two-way street of league development in Mexico as with Venezuela or Puerto Rico. The number of Mexican players making their debuts peaked at nine in 1995 but has since seen a large drop off in the last decade. There have been spikes, but not a significant or constant rise or fall in the number of players debuting. From this data, it is apparent that two things are probable: 1) Baseball is not a top choice for Mexican athletes (the top sport as recognized by Mexico's own statistics is association football); 2) Fernando Valenzuela's meteoric rise in Major League Baseball had a decade long effect on not just the Mexican player base that began focusing on baseball because of Valenzuela's popularity, but also the management and scouting departments of many of Major League Baseball's franchises. According to Figure 2.10, while the effect is pronounced between the early 1990s and the mid 2000s, there has since been a steady drop off as the next generation of Mexican players have either stayed home or not been as successful, unable to rise above the top minor league levels.

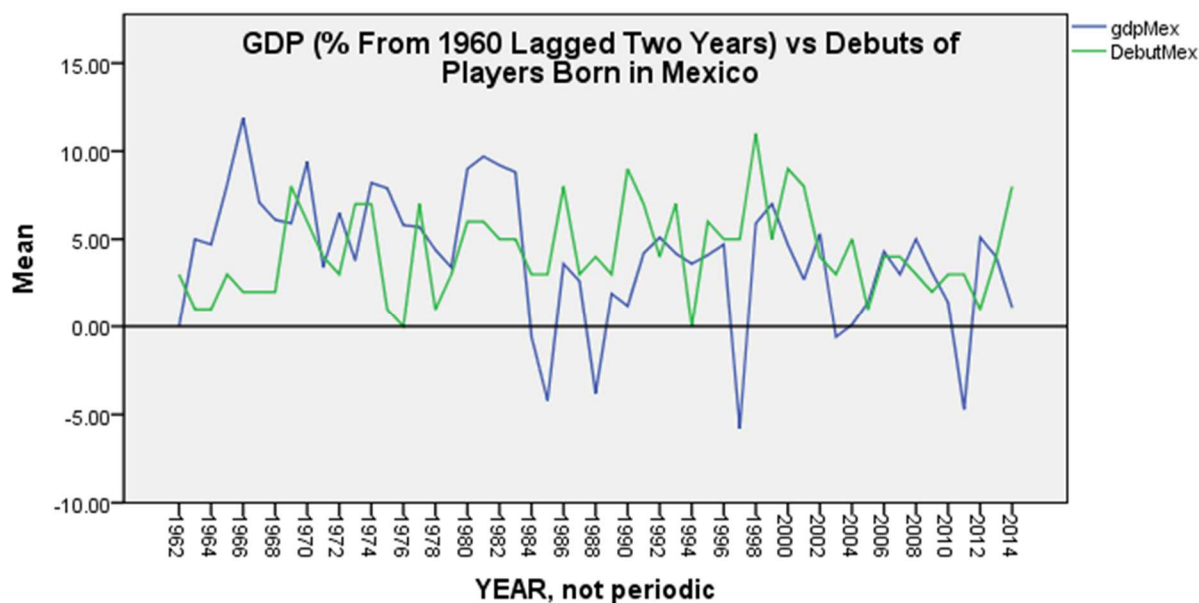


Figure 2.11. GDP (% From 1960 Lagged Two Years) vs Debuts of Players Born in Mexico, from Michael Gallemore via World Bank Database.

Mexico has experienced consistently *average* debuts by Mexican born players in MLB since the 1960s. In 1982, Mexico defaulted on its foreign loan debts. What followed was an economic collapse, the removal of the import substitution industrialization economic model, and a significant decline in real wages and an increase in unemployment and inflation. In the ten years following the crash, the number of debuts increases to its peak of nine players before dropping again to the consistent level of around two to three debuts per year. Because of this level of *inconsistent* consistency, Mexico, along with Puerto Rico and Cuba, don't produce a large enough sample size – given the long time frame of study – to produce anything of significance. Mexico's Pearson correlation coefficient of .057 and a significance value of .686 lump the nation in with the other four case studies, that economic health isn't the sole or most important driving factor behind the number of debuts.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

At the time of this writing, U.S. President Barack Obama had just completed the handshake heard 'round the world. What has transpired in the last few months has been nothing short of a diplomatic miracle and a blessing for those who sought an end to the sixty plus year relic of the Cold War: the U.S. embargo on Cuba and the thawing of diplomatic relations. On December 17, 2014, President Obama and Cuban President Raúl Castro announced that the process to normalize relations between the two countries had begun. The actual U.S. embargo of Cuba can only be ended by the U.S. Congress, leading President Obama to take executive action to ease restrictions on travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens and a loosening of restrictions on the import and export of goods.⁷⁸

Baseball executives did not wait for Congress; Major League Baseball Commissioner Robert Manfred (in his first year since the retirement of Bud Selig) announced that the MLB was likely to play an exhibition game in Cuba sometime in early 2016. Major League Baseball has not played a sponsored game in Cuba since 1999. “It’s a great source of talent,” Manfred said. “We’ve seen the level of interest that quality Cuban players have generated among major-league clubs. And secondly, Cuba is a country where baseball is part of the culture, like it is here in the United States, and we love markets like that.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “FACT SHEET: Charting A New Course On Cuba,” 2014.

⁷⁹ Brian Costa. “MLB Likely to Play Exhibition Game in Cuba”
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/mlb-likely-to-play-exhibition-game-in-cuba-1426808609>

Baseball executives see the opening of Cuba as something analogous to manna falling from the skies during a biblical drought. Angel Vargas, on the other hand, might not. Major League Baseball recorded the seventh best attendance total ever in 2014. MLB attributed the rebound in ticket sales to the addition of the extra wild card in 2012 and competitive balance throughout the league.⁸⁰ With the league growing and continuously pumping out financial gains and increased ticket sale growth, there is a substantial need to bolster the product in order for the game to compete with the likes of the NFL and NBA. Unless Major League Baseball takes the necessary steps to allow Cuba greater control and access to any baseball academies that find their way to the island nation, Vargas would fear a repeat of the domination of culture experience in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

Venezuela and Cuba could be deemed as exceptional cases in regards to the U.S. foreign policy effects on the export of Latin American baseball players. The two countries, ranked second and fourth respectively in terms of baseball players retired or active in Major League Baseball born in Latin America, share a common thread in that they both have been able to resist the United States overreaching presence in the region. The U.S. was heavily involved in Cuba, intervening several times, physically putting boots on the ground in attempts to dislodge unfavorable governments. However, Venezuela escaped direct involvement by the United States, maintaining its own baseball independence, even with the advent of baseball scouting academies. The game prospered

⁸⁰ Press Release, “MLB records seventh best attendance total ever in 2014” <http://m.mlb.com/news/article/96990912/mlb-records-seventh-best-attendance-total-ever-in-2014>.

in both countries and has seen the gradual increase of players coming into the U.S. to play at the Major League level.

Baseball wouldn't exist in Latin America if not for its obvious beginnings in the United States. The U.S. State Department and multiple administrations have tried to use baseball in some fashion as a way to exert soft power over its supposed sphere of influence, but rarely has it gone past boardroom discussions and conversational documents now held in collections. Fernandomania was the novel starting point of the mass influx of Latino players, and led to baseball become an international sport. However, it also provided the impetus for the development of baseball academies in the Caribbean, serving as an ironic twist of fate that would allow Latinos greater access to mobility, while placing them within a system of discrimination and instability.

Often, we forget the impact of domestic developments on foreign leagues. Major League Baseball brought about the destruction of the Negro Leagues with integration; it also severely damaged the ability of Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic to field thriving summer and winter leagues. By opening the top flights of organized baseball in the United States to the world, Latino players have been stewarded into systems that will not always provide stability and living wage. It seems only Venezuela has been able to resist the somewhat destructive forces of Major League Baseball, as a few franchises in the United States send AAA (Triple A) and major league level talent to Venezuela's winter league to hone their skills and receive more game time. With these Caribbean leagues struggling to stay afloat due to the talent drain, Major League Baseball, by integrating and setting up baseball academies, has paradoxically caused significant harm to foreign leagues. The degradation of the Caribbean winter

leagues has led to an even greater focus from youth in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Puerto Rico to seek out the baseball academies as a path out of poverty or destitution.

In conclusion, according to the data presented, it appears that economic factors such as GDP and GDP per capita do not have a significant effect on the number of foreign-born players debuting in Major League Baseball. There is not yet enough data on youth unemployment between the five cases studies to warrant an analysis outside of the past 15-20 years. The lack of significance does not mean that it doesn't have an effect, but rather that economic health alone does not determine the number of foreign-born players debuting in the MLB. Further research on socioeconomic factors such as income inequality and education levels could yield additional hypotheses regarding the growth of foreign-born Latinos in Major League Baseball.

It does seem, after concluding this study and with the factors considered, that introduction of the baseball academies in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic is the leading candidate to explain the current trend, as these two countries experienced significant growth in the export of players to the United States. Cuba, already a country with high numbers, could see the same spike if relations are completely normalized. The x-factor for Cuba is how closely the government controls the push from Major League Baseball executives to enter the country. If the Castro government sticks to its previous mantra since the revolution, U.S. baseball interests may not make any serious in-roads into the country, if at all. However, if the Castros completely open up the country, there is a great potential for Cuba to be the next wild west of baseball and another monumental shift in the demographics of America's pastime.

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APPENDIX: SPSS DATA OUTPUT

**Figure 2.12 Correlations Between GDP % Change Annually from 1960 and Foreign-Born
Debuts From Five Countries/Commonwealths**

| | | DebutMex | DebutCuba | DebutVenz | DebutPR | DebutDomR |
|---------|---------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| gdpMex | Pearson Correlation | .057 | | | | |
| | Sig. | .686 | | | | |
| | Cases | 53 | | | | |
| gdpCuba | Pearson Correlation | | .081 | | | |
| | Sig. | | .609 | | | |
| | Cases | | 42 | | | |
| gdpVenz | Pearson Correlation | | | .094 | | |
| | Sig. | | | .504 | | |
| | Cases | | | 53 | | |
| gdpPR | Pearson Correlation | | | | .028 | |
| | Sig. | | | | .841 | |
| | Cases | | | | 53 | |
| gdpDomR | Pearson Correlation | | | | | -.110 |
| | Sig. | | | | | .433 |
| | Cases | | | | | 53 |